

GOOD COMPANIES LOOK FOR DIVERSITY. GREAT COMPANIES FIGHT BIAS:

FIGHTING BIAS IN HIRING

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Abstract

Implicit bias, unconscious attitudes that influence decision-making, remains a critical barrier to achieving Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) goals (Stephens et al., 2020). Despite evidence linking diversity to organizational performance (Hunt et al., 2015), racial and ethnic minorities continue facing higher unemployment (Wanberg et al., 2020). This disconnect suggests that DEI strategies may lack integration or fail to address embedded biases in hiring (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016).

Using a multidisciplinary lens and an inductive qualitative approach, this study investigates current strategies for mitigating hiring bias by examining evidence-based employers' post-COVID practices and the biases job seekers reported to have encountered. Key findings reveal misalignment and inconsistencies such as limited bias recognition despite strong DEI awareness, subjectivity in recruitment practices, and bias manifestations like accent bias and undervaluation of international experience affecting immigrants and newcomers. The research offers actionable insights to address these vulnerabilities, promoting equity and inclusivity in recruitment.

Keywords: *bias, implicit bias, candidate experience, decision-making, diversity, equity and inclusion, employers, employment, hiring, job seeker, interventions, interviews, race and ethnicity, recruitment, résumé, social inequality,*

Dedication

To my beloved mother, whose memory continues to light my path.

To my father, who, while living with Alzheimer's, gracefully endured the time and attention my studies required.

To my incredible friends, whose encouragement, kindness, and thoughtful support made this journey more meaningful.

And above all, to God, for being my constant source of strength, guidance, and peace.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgment.....	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Background or Context of the Study	1
Why Hiring.....	2
Statement of the Problem	3
Purpose of the study	4
Justification of the Study	6
Conceptual-Theoretical Framework.....	7
Nature of the Study	8
Research Question and Objectives.....	8
Audience.....	9
Definitions of Key Terms.....	10
Summary	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	14
Introduction	14
Conceptual-Theoretical Framework.....	15
What is Implicit Bias.....	16
Implicit Bias in Hiring.....	17
A Catalogue of Bias: List of Common Types	18
Bias in Traditional Recruitment: Its Presence Across Stages	25
Biases and The Paradox of Meritocracy	30
Best Practices in Bias Mitigations: Insights from the Literature	32
Inclusive Practices and The Candidate Experience.....	39
Summary	41
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	42
Research Methodology and Design.....	42
Population and Sampling	44

Data Collection.....	45
Data Analysis	47
Ethical Considerations.....	47
Summary	48
Chapter 4: Findings	49
Trustworthiness of the Data	50
Participants	52
Results	54
I. THEME 1: Limited Bias Recognition Amid Stronger DEI Awareness	56
II. THEME 2: Insufficient Structured Practices in Organizational Interventions	57
III. THEME 3: Persistent Subjectivity in Recruitment Practices	63
IV. THEME 4: Varied Perceptions of Interventions’ Fairness and Effectiveness	70
V. THEME 5: Candidate Reporting Experiencing Biases in Hiring	75
VI. THEME 6: Positive Candidate Experience as a Reflection of Inclusive Hiring	84
Evaluation of the Findings	94
Summary	96
Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendation, and Conclusion	98
Strengths and Limitations of the Study	99
Implications for Theory and Practice	100
Recommendations for Practice.....	101
Recommendations for Future Research	114
References.....	117
Appendix.....	133
Appendix A: List of Participants, Job Seekers’ Composition (JS)	133
Appendix B: List of Participants, Employer’s Composition (P).....	137
Appendix C: Flyer to Attract Job Seekers.....	141
Appendix D: Flyer to Attract Employers	142
Appendix E: Interview Questions Employers	143
Appendix F: Interview Questions Job Seekers	145
Appendix H: York University Application Approval (including Amendment Approval)	149

List of Tables

1: Recommended interventions from academic literature	38
2: Total participants interviewed including employers and job seekers	52
3: Employer' demographic profile of participants (42 participants)	53
4: Industry breakdown and practioners capacity (role title)	53
5: Job seekers' demographic profile (40 participants)	54
6: List of organizational interventions (from the most to the least used)	63
7: List of interventions in traditional recruitment (41 participants).....	69
8: Biases perceived by job seekers (67 mentions)	82
9: Job seeker's ideal practices	90
10:Impact of good candidate experience as described by job seekers.....	93

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background or Context of the Study

The focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has gained renewed urgency in the wake of the George Floyd movement and the post-pandemic world. These pivotal events have spurred global awareness, compelling organizations to reassess their commitment to equitable workplaces. As DEI evolves into a critical business imperative, companies face mounting pressure to implement systemic changes that address inequalities and foster inclusion in today's socio-economic climate.

Despite ongoing efforts, bias remains a persistent barrier to workplace equity (Stephen et al, 2020). Scott (2021) shows that racialized individuals, women, and other underrepresented groups still face disproportionate barriers to employment. Even with diversity initiatives gaining traction, meaningful progress remains elusive. Although intentions may be good, progress has been slow, revealing that surface-level efforts are insufficient to achieve a meaningful transformation. The entire system of how companies hire, promote, and evaluate employees' needs a complete rethink. This research focuses on hiring practices, uncovering gaps, and identifying opportunities to build systems that reflect true inclusion.

Moreover, the pandemic has accelerated the use of digital technologies by seven years, transforming business operations (O'Toole et al., 2020). This acceleration has propelled a change in recruitment and hiring strategies with social media platforms becoming even more crucial in the era of remote work and digital connectivity (Mallik, 2024). While this study will not delve deeply into technology, it will integrate how employers and job seekers utilize digital tools for recruitment and examine the implications for hiring practices.

Why Hiring

The hiring process is a pivotal determinant of employment opportunities, with decisions made during this stage significantly influencing labor market dynamics. These decisions can perpetuate and exacerbate societal inequalities, where certain groups are systematically disadvantaged in the job market.

Hiring is especially vulnerable to bias because early candidate interactions offer limited information. This scarcity can lead to reliance on stereotypes or snap judgments, often unconscious, that quietly influence hiring decisions. As Quillian et al. (2017) highlights, discrimination in hiring is notoriously hard to detect, often occurring in ways that evade accountability. The cumulative impact of such bias is significant, both at the individuals and societal level. Wanberg, et al, (2020) notes, millions of people engage in job searches each year, repeating the process multiple times over their lifetimes. Given this frequency, the effect of bias in hiring are not isolated incidents but recurring obstacles that shape long-term employment trajectories. For candidates from underrepresented backgrounds, these repeated barriers compound over time, further limiting access to fair opportunities.

While human resources (HR) professionals are at the center of recruitment and often well-versed in best practices, they are not immune to bias. In fact, Thomas and Reimann (2023) suggest that HR professionals may perceive themselves as less biased than their colleagues, a belief that may prevent them from recognizing and addressing their own unconscious biases.

The combination of limited candidate information, widespread job search activity, quick decision-making, and overlooked biases within HR professionals makes hiring particularly susceptible to unconscious discrimination. This underscores the urgent need for vigilant bias mitigation strategies focused on recruitment.

For clarity, the terms "hiring" and "recruitment" are used interchangeably throughout this paper to denote the full process, from attracting candidates to the final selection, while the writer acknowledges that these terms may differ in meaning in other contexts when further dissected.

Statement of the Problem

Recruitment is often perceived as a straightforward task: identify the best candidate for the role. Unfortunately, this oversimplification overlooks the complex reality of hiring, where implicit biases permeate. As Gladwell's (2005) concept of "thin slicing" illustrates, people make snap judgments within seconds, often without realizing the extent of these judgments on their actions. These biases are not only hard to detect but difficult to dismantle.

Bias in recruitment does not manifest at a single point or moment; rather, it infiltrates every phase of the hiring process. From the first glance at a résumé to the final handshake, implicit biases around gender (Rothchild, 2014; Dias 2017), skin color (Dias, 2017, Hunter 2017), age (Derous and Decoster 2017), race and ethnicity (Quillian et al, 2017), accent (Spence et al, 2024) or name (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004, Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016) shaping decision-making that mostly affects underrepresented groups.

Many organizations proudly embrace DEI initiatives, yet a critical barrier remains, such as workplace bias (Stephens et al, 2020). While DEI is widely celebrated, data reveal a stark contrast. By mid-2020, racialized women in Canada had an employment rate 8.2 percentage points lower than their non-racialized counterparts (Scott, 2021). Similarly, the RBC Economics (2021) reported that during the pandemic crisis, this disparity in unemployment grew wider, with an unemployment of 16.3% for visible minorities compared to 9.3% for non-visible minorities.

This pattern of disadvantage extends beyond the Canadian case. It is a global challenge, reflecting persistent inequality for marginalized groups, even within DEI-focused environments.

These figures emphasize the need to address underlying biases that hinder genuine progress toward equal opportunity.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to examine what biases manifest most frequently in recruitment and evaluate employers' efforts to address them. Through qualitative, inductive methods, the research examines the practices and experience of key stakeholders, including HR professionals, business owners, recruiters, hiring managers, and job seekers. The study is structured to answer the overarching research question: "What practices should organizations adopt or maintain to mitigate or interrupt bias in the hiring process?"

To tackle this issue, the study examines perceived biases and biased practices that commonly surface during recruitment processes. It also compiles bias mitigation strategies currently employed by organizations, assesses their effectiveness, and identifies gaps with evidence-based recommendations grounded in existing literature.

The findings aim to provide actionable recommendations to assist organizations in implementing more inclusive recruitment, thereby fostering equitable systems that benefit both employers and job seekers. Each step of this research is systematically designed to offer practical solutions and deepen understanding of bias mitigation in hiring.

Significance of the Study

The study's findings seek to increase awareness of the pervasive impact of biases in hiring, emphasizing the importance of implementing mitigation strategies, while recommending feasible and practical solutions. By promoting equitable hiring practices, this research strives to

contribute towards an equitable society, support organizational effectiveness, and enhance individual well-being.

Reducing bias in hiring is a critical step toward fostering an equitable society where all individuals have the opportunity to reach their full potential. This process involves actively prioritizing candidates' competencies and skills, rather than passively allowing stereotypes tied to characteristics such as skin color, accent, gender, or name to influence decisions. Recruitment practices that embrace diverse contributions play a pivotal role in addressing systemic inequities and bridging unemployment gaps. By embedding equity-focused principles into hiring processes, organizations support the creation of a more inclusive workforce.

Organizations benefit greatly from addressing bias in hiring that leads to diversity. As Hunt et al. (2015) highlight, diverse teams achieve better financial performance, drive innovation, and foster a culture of inclusivity, key factors in ensuring long-term growth. An intentionally de-biased hiring process becomes a strategic and powerful tool for building diverse teams, enhancing competitiveness, reducing turnover, improving employee satisfaction, and bolstering organizational resilience in an increasingly diverse market.

Inclusive hiring practices have a profound impact on candidates' attitudes and behavior, which are linked to their well-being, particularly for individuals from marginalized backgrounds, for whom the hiring process can often be a source of stress and uncertainty. Wanberg et al. (2020, p.323-324) affirm that *“when job seekers reported their experience with demographic discrimination, or their feelings that some companies and recruiters were biased against them for issues such as their gender, age, ethnic background...such experiences still let to feeling of helplessness, frustration, discouragement and reduce self-worth”*.

When candidates perceive fairness and inclusivity within the recruitment process, it can

significantly mitigate negative emotional responses, while simultaneously enhancing confidence and fostering trust in the organization. A positive candidate experience, coupled with perceived fairness in selection practices, exerts a profound influence on individual performance, enabling job seekers to demonstrate their abilities more effectively. This shows how the selection process extends their impact beyond job acquisition, influencing candidates' self-esteem, and perceived self-worth (Bauer et al., 2020).

Although this study primarily focuses on hiring practices in Ontario, Canada, it incorporates insights from the United States and Peru. These perspectives are selectively included to showcase how different regions approach equity in their recruitment mitigation strategies. While not the central focus, these views enrich the analysis, providing a more informed understanding of the topic.

Justification of the Study

Extensive research has revealed the influence of implicit biases in hiring decisions, with numerous studies recommending evidence-based interventions. However, a gap remains in understanding the perspective of both the job seekers and the employer. It is important to understand job seekers' perceived biases throughout the recruitment cycle along with insights on effective bias-mitigating interventions employed by practitioners to address them.

In response to this challenge, this research offers a holistic analysis of how employers are addressing the potential bias that permeates recruitment and how job seekers are experiencing the hiring process. By adopting a dual-lens approach, this study seeks to answer the research question “What practices should organizations adopt or maintain to mitigate or interrupt bias in the hiring process?” The conversations here reveal more than just data; they uncover patterns, challenges, and solutions for creating a recruitment process that values inclusivity.

Although grounded mostly in Ontario, Canada, the findings have implications that stretch far beyond. COVID-19 has propelled a global conversation about DEI, making this research relevant to organizations worldwide as they work to create equitable hiring practices. This study does not just bridge theory and practice; it offers a roadmap for building a recruitment system that is as inclusive in practice as it is in principle.

Conceptual-Theoretical Framework

Implicit bias is not a singular issue; it is a complex, multi-dimensional problem that cannot be captured by a single perspective. This study adopts a flexible framework, blending three theoretical lenses to examine the nuances of bias in recruitment that will be further detailed in chapter two. First, **the Contingency Perspective** (Adamovic, 2022) emphasizes that bias is not static as it is influenced by moderators and boundary conditions (i.e. organizational size, the recruiter's ethnicity, and the type of job) suggesting that the degree of bias responds to its context. Next, **the Bias Cycle Theory** (Stephens et al., 2020) captures bias as a multi-level phenomenon, proposing pair interventions at both, the individual and systemic levels. Finally, **the Social Dominance Theory** (Wilson, 2018) examines how structural inequalities and power dynamics are reinforced by institutional practices, including recruitment. While Wilson critiques the notion of implicit biases as the sole account for inequalities, it complements the other frameworks by offering a systematic perspective on hierarchies.

By synthesizing these three theoretical lenses, this study constructs an adaptable framework that facilitates a comprehensive analysis of hiring biases from contextual, multilevel, and structural lenses while remaining open to emerging insights that may expand or challenge them. The integrative approach enables a multidimensional understanding of hiring bias and interventions, one that evolves as the story of the data unfolds.

Nature of the Study

This study adopts a qualitative, inductive research design to capture the perspectives, and experiences of job seekers and hiring decision-makers, including HR professionals, recruiters, business owners, and hiring managers. This approach is particularly well suited for uncovering the complex and subjective aspects of recruitment practices. Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on predefined variables, this qualitative design uses open-ended inquiry to uncover novel insights emerging from participant narratives.

Three foundational theories provide the initial conceptual framework to guide the exploration and interpretation of findings. However, the inductive nature of this research allows insights from the data to confirm, challenge, or expand these frameworks. This flexibility fosters the emergence of theoretical perspectives that may more accurately capture the realities of recruitment bias and interventions.

By centering on participant-driven insights, this study delivers a dynamic analysis of recruitment processes, biases, and mitigation strategies. Emphasizing discovery over hypothesis testing, it builds theories grounded in observed themes and relationships within the data. This adaptive approach ensures the research remains receptive and responsive to unexpected dynamics as they emerge.

Research Question and Objectives

RQ1: “What practices should organizations adopt or maintain to mitigate or interrupt bias in the hiring process?”

This central question is supported by specific inquiries that deepen the exploration:

- What evidence-based strategies or interventions are currently the most and least used by employers to tackle biases in hiring?
- How effective are existing interventions in achieving fairer hiring outcomes?
- What specific biases tend to surface most often during recruitment, as reported by job seekers?
- How do job seekers' observation of recruitment practices shape their candidate experience, and what does this reveal about opportunities for equitable hiring and bias mitigation?

The questions above establish a robust framework, facilitating a thorough examination of current recruitment practices. They guide the identification of biased-prone tools or processes; the assessment of interventions and their effectiveness; and the impact on the candidate's experience.

The insights gained will support the development of practical, evidence-based recommendations to enhance bias mitigation efforts, fostering individual well-being, organizational success, and contributing to the creation of a more equitable society through inclusive practices.

Audience

This research is designed for organizational leaders, academic researchers, DEI and recruitment practitioners, offering practical, evidence-based strategies to create inclusive and equitable recruitment processes that leverage the competitive advantages that diversity brings to organizations. It holds interdisciplinary relevance across human resource management, organizational behavior, business studies, social psychology, and equity studies. By integrating diverse theoretical perspectives and employing an inductive, qualitative approach, the study

provides a comprehensive framework that enhances academic understanding of bias with practical insights.

Ultimately, this research benefits anyone committed to fostering inclusive, equitable, and effective hiring practices bridging theory and practice to enhance efforts in recruitment and organizational development.

Definitions of Key Terms

Applicant Tracking System (ATS)

An ATS is a software tool that automates recruitment tasks like résumé screening, tracking applicants, storing applicant information, automating communication, scheduling interviews, and onboarding (Williamson, 2023).

Bias

“Bias, generally, is a prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in an unfair or negative way” (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2022, p.4).

Bias Cycle Theory

Bias Cycle Theory views bias as a cyclical process at individual and organizational levels, requiring interventions at both to mitigate it (Stephens et al., 2020).

Candidate Experience

“An applicant's overall cognitive and affective perceptions based on multiple interactions with a hiring organization over the course of the entire recruitment and selection process” (McFarland et al., 2024, p.1428)

Contingency Perspective

The contingency perspective suggests that contextual factors (i.e. size of the organization, the applicant, the recruiter) influence the degree of ethnic discrimination in recruitment practices (Adamovic, 2022).

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

The Government of Canada, Interdepartmental Terminology Committee (2022), describes these terms separately. For instance;

Diversity is referred to as “*the variety of identities found within an organization, group or society*” noting that “*diversity is expressed through factors such as culture, ethnicity, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, language, education, ability, family status or socioeconomic status*”. (Government of Canada, Interdepartmental Terminology Committee, 2022, D section). while

Equity is referred to as “*the principle of considering people's unique experiences and differing situations, and ensuring they have access to the resources and opportunities that are necessary for them to attain just outcomes*” (Government of Canada, Interdepartmental Terminology Committee, 2022, E section) and lastly,

Inclusion as “*the practice of using proactive measures to create an environment where people feel welcomed, respected and valued, and to foster a sense of belonging and engagement*” noting that “*this practice involves changing the environment by removing barriers so that each person has equal access to opportunities and resources and can achieve their full potential*” (Government of Canada, Interdepartmental Terminology Committee, 2022, I section) which is the intend of this study.

Implicit Bias

“*The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner*”. (Staats, 2016, p. 1)

Intersectionality

A framework for understanding how multiple social identities, such as race, gender, and class, intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination or bias (Crenshaw, 1989).

Recruitment

Recruitment refers to the process of searching and attracting the best candidates for job opportunities (Adeosun et al., 2020).

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat is the anxiety individuals feel when they risk confirming negative stereotypes about their social group, potentially affecting their performances (Steele, 1997).

Structured Interviews

Levashina et al. (2014) describe the structured interview entails the creation and intentional implementation of predefined rules for questions, observations, and evaluations.

Social Dominance Theory

Social dominance theory examines how systemic hierarchies, such as race or gender, perpetuate bias in hiring and workplace dynamics (Wilson, 2018).

Social Inequality

Social inequality refers to the unequal distribution of opportunities or resources, often based on characteristics like race or socioeconomic status, influencing hiring practices (Wilson, 2018).

Unconscious Hiring Bias

Interviewer bias occurs when inconsistent and unfair standards are used to evaluate candidates for hiring or promotion. This partiality can result in overlooking high-potential candidates in favor of less qualified hires. The hiring bias often is driven by gut feelings or intuition that overlooks evidence and critical thinking (Barber, 2024).

Summary

Chapter 1 situates the rising emphasis on DEI within the broader context of global events, notably the George Floyd protests and the COVID-19 pandemic. These events have intensified calls for social justice, prompting organizations to reevaluate their commitment to equity and inclusion. Despite widespread DEI initiatives, implicit biases embedded within recruitment processes continue disadvantaging underrepresented groups, underscoring a persistent gap between intentions and outcomes.

To address this gap, this study seeks to answer the question: What practices should organizations adopt or maintain to mitigate or interrupt bias in the hiring process?” The research adopts a dual-perspective approach, analyzing the recruitment process from both the job seekers and the employers’ viewpoints. This approach enables a thorough examination of current talent acquisition strategies, and efforts to mitigate the often-overlooked biases that silently manifest in stages of hiring. The study aims to identify best practices and gaps with research, providing actionable recommendations to foster a more equitable hiring practice.

This study employs a qualitative, inductive methodology and while guided by three theoretical perspectives: the Contingency Perspective, the Bias Cycle Theory, and the Social Dominance Theory, these frameworks serve as lenses to inform and contextualize the analysis, without constraining the discovery of emergent themes or insights.

In conclusion, Chapter 1 establishes the foundation for examining bias in recruitment and sets the stage for a deeper analysis. The following chapter will present a comprehensive literature review, delving into existing research on bias in recruitment while detailing the theoretical frameworks and their recommended strategies for equitable hiring.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents an in-depth literature review on hiring biases, mapping their pervasive influence across recruitment stages, from job postings to final hiring decisions. These biases, while often subtle, systematically distort perceptions of fairness and inclusivity, adversely affecting both candidates' experiences and organizational diversity. Even recruitment models designed to prioritize competency, such as merit-based systems, can inadvertently reinforce systemic inequities, highlighting the need for a critical evaluation of traditional hiring practices.

To structure this analysis, this chapter adopts a multi-theoretical framework. Social Dominance Theory (SDT) examines structural hierarchies that perpetuate exclusion and privilege, Bias Cycle Theory (BCT) explores how biases recur at both individual and systemic levels, and the Contingency Perspective (CP) emphasizes the role of contextual factors, such as recruiter behavior, job type, and organizational culture, in shaping discriminatory practices. These frameworks anchor the exploration of how biases manifest, persist, and intersect with hiring practices, while also informing strategies to mitigate them. However, given the inductive nature of this research, the data analysis remains flexible, allowing for the identification of additional patterns, gaps, and alignments beyond the guidance of these frameworks.

This literature review identifies common biases in hiring such as confirmation bias, halo effect, racial bias, and affinity bias; and examines their impact on recruitment outcomes. The review also evaluates publicly available research and academic literature recommended interventions including but not limited to multilevel interventions, anonymized résumés, clear metrics, and cultural training, highlighting how interventions play a dual role in reducing bias

and enhancing the candidate experience, a critical determinant of perceptions of fairness and organizational appeal.

Finally, the chapter critically examines the paradox of meritocracy, revealing how competency-focused recruitment models can unintentionally perpetuate inequities in the absence of equity-driven interventions. By establishing a foundation for understanding hiring biases and their impact, the chapter paves the way for reimagining recruitment practices that align inclusivity and equity with broader organizational objectives.

Conceptual-Theoretical Framework

A multi-theoretical approach is essential for understanding the complexities of implicit bias in recruitment. SDT, BCT, and the CP provide unique perspectives, offering valuable insights into how biases manifest and persist within hiring practices.

SDT examines power dynamics, who holds power, and who is excluded from it. This theory illustrates how race, gender, and socioeconomic status form structural barriers, locking marginalized groups out of opportunities while reinforcing the dominance of others. SDT reveals that the challenges faced by underrepresented candidates in recruitment are not simply due to individual shortcomings, but from systemic inequalities designed to maintain these hierarchies, making it exceptionally difficult for marginalized candidates to overcome them (Wilson, 2018).

BCT reminds us that bias does not operate in isolation. It manifests at both the individual and organizational levels, and the key to mitigating bias lies in addressing both layers simultaneously. This theory emphasizes that organizations must implement interventions that tackle bias holistically (Stephens et al., 2020). BCT provides a critical framework for analyzing and addressing bias interventions within current recruitment practices.

CP highlights the importance of context, boundary conditions, and moderating factors in

shaping ethnic discrimination within recruitment processes. Key variables such as applicant, job, recruiter, hiring organization, country, and ethnic group characteristics significantly influence the extent of ethnic discrimination in hiring. For instance, Adamovic (2020) notes that applicants with higher language proficiency can reduce ethnic discrimination in recruitment. Conversely, Derous et al. (2017) highlight that roles involving high levels of customer interaction often amplify ethnic discrimination. By examining these variables, CP provides valuable insights into the underlying mechanisms that shape recruitment practices associated with the degree of racial bias (Adamovic, 2022).

These frameworks provide a foundation for understanding the systems, levels, and contexts in which biases emerge, guiding the examination of implicit bias and its influence on recruitment processes.

What is Implicit Bias

Implicit biases are unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that subtly influence our perceptions, actions, and decisions (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Staats, 2016). These biases operate beyond our conscious awareness yet are deeply rooted in human cognition and emotions and often affect evaluations of others based on characteristics such as race, gender, or ethnicity. In Eberhardt's (2019, p.6) words "*Implicit bias is a kind of distorting lens that's a product of both the architecture of our brain and the disparities in our society.*" Understanding the cognitive mechanisms and emotional triggers behind this susceptibility is crucial to explaining why even well-intentioned individuals are prone to unconscious bias.

At a cognitive level, implicit biases stem from the brain's reliance on mental shortcuts, or heuristics, to process vast amounts of information quickly. Kahneman's (2011) dual-system theory explains this tendency by distinguishing between two modes of thought: *System 1*, which

is fast, automatic, and emotionally driven, and *System 2*, which is slower, deliberate, and analytical. Implicit biases are largely a product of System 1 thinking, as the brain unconsciously categorizes information and draws on learned associations, many of which are shaped by cultural narratives and stereotypes. While System 2 has the capacity to override these biases through careful reasoning, it requires significant cognitive effort, meaning that in most real-world situations, System 1 dominates. As a result, implicit biases can influence decisions without individuals consciously recognizing their impact.

Further reinforcing this automaticity, neuroscience highlights the role of the amygdala, a brain region central to emotional processing. Research indicates that emotions such as fear or anxiety, particularly when encountering social differences, can unconsciously activate stereotypes and biases (Dalton and Villagran, 2018; Kubota, 2024). This interaction between automatic cognitive shortcuts and emotional responses underscores the persistence of implicit biases, even among individuals committed to fairness.

Implicit biases are powerful precisely because they operate invisibly, inconspicuously affecting the fairness of decision-making. With this understanding, we can now examine their pronounced effects on the recruitment process.

Implicit Bias in Hiring

Implicit bias is a pervasive and often hidden influence that shapes every stage of recruitment, affecting hiring outcomes. Key stages such as résumé screening, interviews, and final evaluations become decision points where implicit bias can lead to unequal opportunities and frequently disadvantage candidates from underrepresented groups.

Kahneman's (2011) dual-system theory offers insight into this phenomenon by emphasizing the role of System 1 thinking, a fast, intuitive, and automatic mode of decision-

making. Recruiters and hiring managers often rely on this type of thinking, which is shaped by implicit associations and stereotypes. As a result, even highly qualified candidates from marginalized backgrounds may be overlooked, as System 1 thinking bypasses the conscious deliberation required for fair evaluations.

Broadening this perspective, Reynolds et al. (2021), in their work *Dual Pathways to Bias*, focus on the role of emotionally driven ideological beliefs in shaping hiring biases. Their findings suggest that elitist perspectives are associated with a preference for white candidates, while egalitarian viewpoints may favor black candidates. This highlights that biases in hiring are not only cognitive but also rooted in ideological and emotional frameworks, offering a complementary lens to understand how implicit bias manifests in decision-making.

These biases are not abstract or trivial; they have real, lasting impacts. When implicit biases infiltrate recruitment, they create systemic barriers for marginalized candidates. Understanding the common types of biases that emerge during recruitment is critical to developing fairer, more equitable hiring practices.

A Catalogue of Bias: List of Common Types

There over a hundred types of biases in the academic literature and available research, to deepen understanding this paper offers the most prevalent biases in recruitment, which include affinity bias, age bias, beauty bias, blind spot bias, confirmation bias, conformity bias, gender bias, groupthink, halo/horn effect, in-group bias, racial and ethnic bias, accent bias, name bias, and skin-tone bias or colorism.

Affinity Bias (Similarity Bias): refers to the natural human tendency to be drawn to individuals who share similar physical characteristics or traits, leading us to favor those who resemble ourselves (Dalton and Villagran, 2016). Watson (2024) notes that this bias subtly

influences social and professional contexts, including hiring decisions, often going unnoticed. In recruitment, it manifests when decision-makers unconsciously prioritize candidates who reflect their own experiences, cultural backgrounds, or personality traits (Rivera, 2012). By excluding diverse perspectives and skills, affinity bias perpetuates inequalities and stifles organizational growth and innovation.

Age Bias: also known as generational bias, affects both older and younger candidates due to stereotypes about their abilities. Older workers are often seen as resistant to change or technologically challenged, while younger workers are perceived as inexperienced or unreliable (McIntosh, 2020). These misconceptions create an unfair hiring environment where candidates are overlooked based on age rather than qualifications.

Age discrimination affects both, younger and older. Yet older workers are affected at greater degree. For example, “63% of seniors aged 66+ say they have been treated unfairly or differently due to their age” (Human Resources Professional Association [HRPA] 2022, para. 4)

Beauty Bias: refers to the cognitive tendency to favor individuals who are perceived as physically attractive, often attributing traits such as more competence, intelligence, and socially skilled regardless of their actual qualifications (Dion et al., 1972). This bias frequently surfaces in recruitment, where attractive candidates may be viewed more favorably, despite potentially lacking the necessary qualifications.

However, Johnson et al. (2010) observed a contrasting dynamic noting that in roles typically associated with masculine traits, attractive women are sometimes perceived as less competent. A notable example is found in *Legally Blonde* (2001), where Elle Woods, a highly capable law student, encounters bias rooted in assumptions about her femininity and appearance in the traditionally male-dominated field of law (Lee et al., 2024). This highlights the complexity

of beauty bias, where attractiveness intersects with societal expectations and stereotypes.

Blind Spot Bias: refers to the tendency to recognize biased thinking in others while assuming one's judgment is impartial (Pronin et al., 2002). This cognitive distortion undermines decision-making by reducing the motivation to self-correct (Scopelliti et al., 2015). Thomas and Reimann (2023) identified blind spot bias among HR professionals, who often overlook their susceptibility to biases such as confirmation bias, the halo effect, and stereotyping. Notably, male HR professionals exhibited this bias more prominently than their female counterparts. This unacknowledged bias challenges efforts to create fair hiring processes, as it prevents individuals from addressing their prejudices.

Confirmation Bias: is the tendency to favor information that aligns with preexisting beliefs while neglecting contradictory evidence (Nickerson, 1998). In recruitment, confirmation bias manifests as selectively interpreting data that supports initial impressions of a candidate, rather than conducting a balanced evaluation. Dalton and Villagran (2016) noted that decision-makers have this tendency to seek information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs or assumptions.

Conformity Bias: refers to the tendency to align judgments with the majority of the group without voicing a difference in opinion (Prestia, 2019). In group settings, this bias could overshadow independent evaluations in favor of consensus. Asch's (1956) experiments demonstrated its impact, with participants conforming to incorrect majority opinions despite knowing the right answer. Prestia (2019, p.562) offers an example of conformity bias that can skew assessments, suppressing genuine opinions and leading to unfair decisions e.g., *"I agree, as a single parent, he may call off frequently."*

Gender Bias: refers to the unfair treatment or behavior that favors one gender over

others, most often disfavoured women and/or girls (Rothchild, 2014). In the employment context, this means when there is a different treatment of applicants based on their sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation, not all gender discrimination and intentional or explicit (Equal Rights Advocates, 2022). Rooted in societal stereotypes, it often manifests as assumptions about women's commitment to their careers due to potential family obligations (Lee, 2021; Chen, 2023).

Recent research reveals that gendered language in job advertisements, especially in male-dominated fields discourages women from applying, reinforcing existing disparities (Seong and Parker, 2024). Even when women overcome these barriers, they frequently face discrimination; 78% of women in mostly male workplaces reported experiencing gender-based bias (Funk and Parker, 2018). This bias is further amplified when a woman is the sole woman in the candidate pool, her chances to be hired are zero (Johnson et al., 2016).

Groupthink: Groupthink theory is a term coined by Janis (1971). It refers to the tendency of cohesive groups to prioritize consensus over critical evaluation, often at the expense of objective decision-making. Janis (1973, p. 20) stated *“I use the term “groupthink” as a quick and easy way to refer to the mode of thinking that group members engage when they are dominated by the concurrence-seeking tendency, when they striving for unanimity override their motivation to appraise the consequence of their actions.”*

In the context of hiring, according to Tarki (2019), without deliberate planning and oversight, hiring committees are equally susceptible to flawed decision-making processes. The prevailing method of collaborative hiring debriefing, where the hiring manager gathers a team and solicits opinions on candidates in a roundtable format, is especially vulnerable to groupthink which can bias the decision-making outcomes.

Halo/Horn Effect: the halo effect occurs when an individual's positive attribute (e.g., attractiveness) influences evaluators to assign favorable qualities in unrelated areas, such as intelligence or competence. Prestia (2019, p. 562) describes the halo effect as “*creating esteem for an individual based on a singular achievement*” and provides an example of a Harvard graduate who is assumed to be good at everything. Conversely, the horn effect arises when a single negative characteristic leads to the assumption of broader deficiencies (Thorndike, 1920; Noor et al., 2023).

These biases distort objective evaluations, particularly in recruitment, where an initial impression, positive or negative, can shape subsequent judgments about a candidate's overall suitability for a role.

In-Group Bias: refers to the tendency to favor individuals who are perceived to belong to one's group over those from out-groups (Carrarini and Mengel, 2016; Hewstone et al., 2002).

In recruitment, in-group bias often manifests as favoritism toward candidates who share traits such as age, gender, professional interests, or cultural background. Finkelstein et al. (1995) found that younger managers frequently rated younger candidates higher, perceiving them as more capable. Rivera (2012) revealed that hiring committees often prioritized cultural similarities over objective qualifications. This preference for familiarity can exclude more qualified candidates, reducing diversity and undermining the effectiveness of hiring decisions.

Race and Ethnic Bias:

Naicker and Nunan (2023) define racial bias as a distortion arising from systemic, institutional, interpersonal, or individual manifestations of explicit or implicit prejudice towards individuals or groups grounded on socially constructed notions of race and ethnicity. Extensive research (e.g., Zschirnt and Didier, 2016; Quillian et al., 2017, 2019; Adamovic, 2022)

underscores the prevalence of ethnic discrimination as a significant issue affecting recruitment practices globally. Zschirnt and Didier (2016), for instance, found that minority applicants are, on average, 49% less likely to receive interview invitations than majority applicants, a stark indication of systemic disadvantage.

Racial bias often manifests through categorizations that include name bias, accent bias, and skin-tone or colorism. All the manifestations of racial bias mentioned are detrimental to minority groups, particularly in the context of hiring. In Ontario, for example, visible minorities experienced a 7.8% unemployment rate compared to 5.2% for non-visible minorities in February 2024 (Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, 2024). These disparities illustrate the persistent challenges racialized communities face in employment, underscoring the need for equitable hiring practices.

Accent Bias: verbal interviews are one of the most commonly used assessment methods in recruitment, where how a candidate speaks plays a key role in determining their hireability (Spence et al., 2022). According to Spence et al.'s (2022) meta-analysis, recruiters demonstrate a notable preference for candidates with standard accents, underscoring how speech patterns significantly impact hiring decisions. Similarly, Levon et al. (2020), in the Accent Bias in Britain Report, noted that accents often evoke stereotypes linked to region, culture, age, gender, and social class. These associations can subtly influence assessments, often penalizing candidates based on speech rather than qualifications or experience. Complementing this view, Jackson and Denis (2024) examined accent bias in hiring within the Greater Toronto Area found that local Canadian English speakers received average expression scores compared to extra local (non-Canadian) English speakers. O'Brien et al. (2024) further emphasized that non-native accents are frequently associated with a negative perception of trustworthiness, intelligence, and likability.

These findings confirm that perceptions of accent bias remain entrenched, significantly limiting opportunities for qualified candidates and perpetuating inequities in recruitment.

Name Bias: occurs when assumptions about a candidate are made based solely on their name, leading to discrimination before even their qualifications are assessed. Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) found that résumés with traditionally African American names, such as “Lakisha,” received significantly 30-50 percent fewer callbacks than identical résumés with white-sounding names like “Emily.” Unfortunately, Kang et al. (2016) noted that job seekers from racial minorities are aware of this discrimination in the labor market and often choose to selectively share their identities on the résumés based on the signals they perceive from employers.

Besides its association with race, name bias can intersect with age discrimination. Barber (2024) found that traditional names like “Edith” or “Eugene” may lead recruiters to infer an older age, disadvantaging these candidates compared to those with contemporary names like “Juniper” or “Jaxson.” These findings highlight how unconscious assumptions tied to names can shape first impressions, disadvantaging candidates before their true qualifications are even considered.

Skin-Tone Bias (Colorism) colorism, or skin color stratification, is a form of bias that privileges light-skinned individuals over those with darker skin in areas such as income, education, housing, and marriage opportunities. It is deeply interconnected with the broader system of racism in the United States and globally (Hunter, 2007).

Deros et al. (2017) emphasized that darker-skinned applicants are consistently rated lower in job suitability compared to their lighter-skinned counterparts. This finding underscores the importance of considering skin tone effects during the early stages of recruitment, particularly as

phenotypic information has become increasingly accessible to recruiters through the growing use of e-recruitment platforms, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, as well as video résumés.

Bias in Traditional Recruitment: Its Presence Across Stages

Bias in recruitment can emerge at multiple stages in the hiring process, from the initial job posting to the final decision-making. Recognizing how biases appear at each stage allows organizations to critically examine their practices, identify potential barriers to inclusivity, and implement changes that promote diversity. Based on well-documented scholarly articles, the following section outlines key stages in recruitment where bias commonly manifests.

Recruitment Channels: Where It All Begin

Recruitment channels shape the initial candidate pool, influencing who engages with job opportunities and who is ultimately considered. Among these channels, *LinkedIn* stands out as a prominent platform, connecting employers with diverse candidates through its vast professional network. However, despite its potential, LinkedIn is not immune to biases. Blaies (2023) highlights the prevalence of similarity bias in LinkedIn profiles, wherein recruiters are drawn to candidates who appear similar to themselves.

Another source to attract candidates is employee referral programs, often praised and valued for their efficiency and cost-effectiveness. By leveraging the networks of current employees, these programs can streamline the hiring process. However, they also carry inherent risks, such as perpetuating workforce homogeneity, as referrals may reflect the existing composition of the workforce, thereby limiting opportunities for underrepresented groups. Pedulla and Pager (2019) observe that employees frequently refer individuals with similar backgrounds, reinforcing existing demographics. Beaman et al. (2018) further demonstrate that such programs disproportionately benefit men, creating barriers for women.

While other channels, such as online job boards, campus recruitment, and headhunting services, play a role in the recruitment process, the focus on LinkedIn and employee referral programs provides a lens through which to examine the intersection of technology, networks, and equity in hiring. With an understanding of these recruitment channels, the discussion shifts to job postings, where the language and criteria used can discreetly influence who feels invited or not to apply.

Job Postings: Signaling Who Belongs

Recruitment begins well before résumés are reviewed. Job postings serve as foundational communication tools that attract candidates. The language used in these postings plays a critical role in shaping perceptions of inclusion and accessibility, ultimately influencing who feels encouraged to apply. Sella et al (2023) found that in a radiology setting, the majority of imaging job advertisements were feminine-coded while leadership roles showed a higher prevalence of masculine-coded language. Commonly used female-coded words are “support”, “committed” “compassionate”, and male-coded words are “competitive”, “leadership”, and “active.”

In addition to language, the specificity of job requirements has a profound impact on the composition of the applicant pool. Inflated or overly rigid requirements can discourage capable candidates who may feel they do not meet every listed qualification. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced along gender lines. Research demonstrates that women are less likely to apply unless they meet all qualifications, whereas men are more likely to apply even if they meet only 60% (Mohr, 2014). Such disparities highlight how job criteria can perpetuate inequalities in hiring by discouraging certain groups from entering the application process.

It is also important to recognize that linguistic adjustments alone are not sufficient to address these disparities. A recent study by Somers (2023) provides evidence that both men and

women respond similarly to gendered and neutral language, suggesting that a sole focus on language may not lead to significant improvements in diversity. Instead, fostering inclusivity requires a more comprehensive approach. This includes re-examining the entire recruitment process to identify and address biases embedded in job criteria, outreach methods, and broader organizational practices.

Résumé Screening: Judgments at a Glance

Résumé screening, as described by Deros and Ryan (2019), is the first stage of the hiring process and is particularly susceptible to bias. Biases in this stage often stem from identity-based cues such as names, also from employment gaps, perceptions of qualifications, and even minor details like email addresses. These factors collectively shape impression formation, within ten seconds (Toorenburg et al., 2015). Such quick assessments enable subtle yet impactful biases to take hold.

Names are a primary source of bias (Deros & Ryan, 2019). Studies indicate that individuals with non-Western or ethnically identifiable names often face disadvantages, despite their qualifications (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). For example, Barnerjee et al. (2018) reported that applicants with Chinese, Indian, or Pakistani names were 28% less likely to receive callbacks compared to Anglo-Canadian applicants with the same qualifications. These findings reveal how ethnic perceptions can overshadow merit in the screening process.

Similarly, employment gaps, are viewed as red flags, as are often perceived as indicators of instability or lack of commitment (Kristal et al, 2023). Deros and Decoster (2017) observe biases against older applicants are based on cues such as older-sounding names or outdated extracurricular activities.

Professional immigrants encounter further challenges, Deros and Ryan (2019) highlight

that their qualifications may be undervalued, suggesting that ethnic discrimination is often rationalized under proxies unrelated to ethnicity itself such as concern about language skills.

Even minor details, like informal email addresses, can influence bias. Back et al. (2008) showed that email addresses shape personality judgments, and Toorenburg et al. (2015) found that informal emails lower hireability ratings compared to formal ones.

Job Interviews: Navigating Bias in Real Time

Job interviews have long been a cornerstone of the hiring process, remaining one of the most widely employed selection tools over the past century, but it is also a bias minefield (Levashina et al., 2014). During these interactions, interviewers face the task of discerning and prioritizing relevant information while filtering out the irrelevant. Failure to do so effectively can lead to biased judgments, where undue weight on unimportant details contributes to hiring discrimination. Wingate et al. (2024) suggest that interviewers may inadvertently focus on irrelevant characteristics, such as a candidate's gender, ethnicity, physical attractiveness, or weight, rather than job-relevant competencies.

Adding to these challenges, cultural biases further complicate the interview process. Chan et al. (2006) argue that interviewers may unconsciously operate within a culturally biased framework, favoring behaviors and communication styles aligned with their cultural norms. This dynamic intersects with common biases such as confirmation bias, affinity bias, age bias, colorism, and the halo and horn effect, which can distort interviewers' judgments. These biases divert attention from evaluating candidates' skills and suitability for the role, eroding the objectivity and fairness of the hiring process.

To address these concerns, structured interviews emerge as a critical tool in reducing bias and improving fairness. Among various interview formats such as structured, unstructured, and

semi-structured interviews; structured interviews stand out for their ability to reduce subjectivity. Levashina et al. (2014) emphasize that structured interviews provide a standardized process that enhances fairness. Evidence from twelve meta-analyses supports their effectiveness in producing more equitable hiring decisions. By providing a clear framework, structured interviews help mitigate the influence of irrelevant characteristics, enabling interviewers to focus on the candidate's qualifications and alignment with the role.

Despite their advantages, structured interviews faced valid criticism for potentially overlooking cultural nuances. Chan et al. (2006) caution that the rigid structure of these interviews may not fully capture the culturally coded behaviors of candidates from diverse backgrounds. For instance, non-verbal communication styles or culturally specific expressions may not align with the standardized evaluation criteria, leading to unintended bias in assessment. Complementing Chan et al. (2006) view, Derous (2017) adds another layer of complexity, noting that cultural variations in impression management strategies can influence candidates' responses in structured interviews. These strategies, such as self-promotion or ingratiation, often differ across cultures and may not be adequately captured or valued within a rigid interview framework. As a result, structured interviews may still fail to fully neutralize cultural biases, underscoring the need for ongoing refinement to balance fairness and inclusivity.

In contrast, Bohnet (2016) observed that unstructured interviews, characterized by their conversational nature and flexibility, permit interviewers to delve into topics they find pertinent or intriguing. While this approach is often seen as a way to gain a deeper understanding of the candidate, it remains one of the least effective methods for predicting future job performance, despite its popularity among hiring managers.

Another model, between structured and unstructured formats, is semi-structured

interviews which attempt to balance flexibility and consistency. While semi-structured interviews provide a more systematic alternative to unstructured formats, their flexibility can still open the door to personal biases to influence their evaluation, and decision-making process (Blanco, 2023).

Given the evidence, structured interviews remain the preferred format for reducing bias and ensuring fairness in hiring.

Panel Decision Making: Finalizing the Choice

The final decision-making stage, where candidates are evaluated collectively, is a critical stage of the hiring process. This stage is particularly prone to biases such as in-group bias and groupthink, which often play out during panel debriefings. While early in this section those biases have been discussed individually, their collective impact becomes most evident when panelists synthesize their evaluations to finalize decisions. During debriefing, panelists may unconsciously favor their evaluations for candidates who share similar backgrounds, reinforcing a preference for in-group characteristics (Hewstone et al., 2002) or engaging in unanimity leading to groupthink (Janis, 1973).

These dynamics can lead to decisions that favor candidates who align with the group's implicit expectations while suppressing dissenting opinions that could enrich the decision-making process.

Each stage of recruitment carries vulnerabilities that allow biases to manifest. Recognizing these biases and implementing interventions to address them is a crucial step toward creating a more equitable hiring process.

Biases and The Paradox of Meritocracy

Meritocracy as the principle of selecting individuals for positions based solely on

qualifications, skills, and achievements, appears fair in theory. However, in practice, this approach often conceals biases that lead to unintentional inequities. While inclusive recruitment practices aim to create a diverse workforce, the paradox of meritocracy complicates this pursuit.

Merit and Biases in Recruitment Models

Despite the ideal of meritocracy, unconscious biases remain deeply embedded in hiring processes. Castilla and Benard (2010) highlight that merit-based evaluations, intended to prioritize qualifications, often unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities, showing greater bias in favor of men. Williams (2023) highlights disparities in talent scouting within the NBA, where white players are overrepresented compared to Black and Latino players. This raises a critical question: Why do systems designed to evaluate merit often produce imbalances? Bielby (2000) explains that even recruitment systems intended to be impartial can fail by not preventing unconscious biases from influencing decisions. These biases often favor individuals from dominant social groups, increasing inequality. Wilson (2018) offers some insights from the Social Dominance Theory lenses of this phenomenon, showing how societal hierarchies, like race or class, continue to shape hiring practices and preserve power among privileged groups.

Castilla and Benard (2010) further contend that organizations relying exclusively on merit-based systems may inadvertently amplify bias. The assumption that merit guarantees fairness can create a false sense of objectivity, leading recruiters to neglect necessary interventions to counteract bias. Without proactive measures, recruitment practices risk becoming more susceptible to biased decision-making, allowing inequalities to persist under the guise of impartiality.

Traditional Recruitment and Talent Scouting

Traditional recruitment and talent scouting illustrate the challenges organizations face in

achieving a truly meritocratic hiring process. Both methods aim to evaluate candidates based on their qualifications, yet biases embedded in these systems often hinder their ability to ensure genuine fairness.

While traditional recruitment processes, such as posting a job, reviewing résumé and conducting interviews, are designed to promote objectivity by hiring the most talented candidate, they remain vulnerable to biases, as recruiters may unconsciously rely on stereotypes or personal preferences, undermining the intended fairness of these systems (Mokhtech et al., 2022).

Talent scouting adopts a different approach, with scouts actively identifying standout candidates. This method offers flexibility and the potential to discover exceptional talent. Lawlor et al. (2021) examine scouting in professional football arguing that that despite more availability of data, the reliance on gut feeling and intuition can lead to subjective decisions unintentionally overlooking highly qualified candidates outside their established networks.

These limitations highlight the paradox of meritocratic systems. While both traditional recruitment and talent scouting are designed to assess candidates fairly, they fall short of achieving equity unless the biases inherent in their practices are actively addressed.

Best Practices in Bias Mitigations: Insights from the Literature

This section synthesizes research addressing bias in hiring, focusing on interventions recommended in the academic literature. Drawing on Bias Cycle Theory (BCT), Contingency Perspective (CP), and Social Dominance Theory (SDT), this analysis identifies effective strategies for mitigating bias at individual, organizational, and systemic levels. Additional interventions such as implicit bias training, cultural training, and nudges are also acknowledged for their relevance in addressing recruitment bias.

I. Bias Cycle Theory: Individual & Systemic Level

Stephens et al., (2020) through BCT, explain how bias perpetuates through reinforcing cycles at the individual (e.g., hearts & minds) and systemic levels (e.g., organizational policies and procedures). They provide recommendations to break these cycles with targeted actions across both levels:

Individual Level Interventions

1. ***Diversity Training***: increases awareness of personal biases, using real-world scenarios.
2. ***Increasing Intergroup Contact***: facilitates positive interactions with individuals from different groups, intergroup contact reduces biases. For example, Mousa (2020) demonstrated this through shared activities, such as sports, between Iraqi Christians and Muslims, which fostered harmony.
3. ***Countering Stereotypes***: exposure to diverse role models broader perspectives and reduces stereotypes, examples of women in leadership positions (Blair et al., 2001).
4. ***Encouraging Perspective-Taking***: activities such as virtual reality, encourage empathy allowing individuals to “step into others’ shoes” and reduce biases against outgroups (Banakou et al., 2016).
5. ***Finding Common Ground***: reframing outgroups as part of a shared identity can foster inclusion. Riek et al. (2010) showed that emphasizing a collective “American” identity can reduce partisan biases.
6. ***Leveraging Social Influence***: leveraging social norms that emphasize fairness, can shape employee behavior to align with these standards (Goldstein et al., 2008; Paluck et al., 2021).

Organizational Level Interventions

1. ***Diversifying Opportunities:*** expanding recruitment to include diverse institutions, such as historically Black colleges and universities, can widen the candidate pool. Structured mentoring systems also support greater inclusivity (Dobbin et al., 2015; Kalev et al., 2006).
2. ***Increasing Transparency:*** making job postings and requirements accessible and transparent ensures equitable access to opportunities. For example, formal posting systems, rather than informal referrals (Baron & Bielby, 1980; McDonald, Lin & Ao, 2009).
3. ***Creating Accountability:*** establishing accountability measures, such as requiring employees to report and justify hiring decisions, fosters more deliberate and less biased behavior. For instance, an equity committee can set specific diversity goals, such as increasing Black representation from 2% to 4% over two years, to guide hiring decisions and monitor progress (Kruglanski & Freund, 1983; Castilla, 2015).
4. ***Making Evaluation More Systematic***
 - a. ***De-Biasing Evaluative Tools:*** structured interviews minimize bias by providing all candidates with the same set of questions, reducing the influence of stereotypes or subjective “fit” (Huffcutt, 2011).
 - b. ***De-Biasing Evaluative Procedures:*** pre-established evaluative criteria ensure that assessments focus on job-relevant skills and prevent selective assessment, (Biernat & Vescio, 2002).

This proposed multilevel strategy for reducing bias encourages organizations to evaluate both past and present efforts, identifying areas that require the most attention, such as hiring. By doing so, organizations can address gaps and strengthen existing initiatives.

II. Contingency Perspective: Context Matter

Adamovic (2022) presents CP as an extension of prior research on ethnic discrimination in recruitment. The author notes that cultural minorities frequently experience discrimination, indicating considerable variation in its extent. CP identifies the boundary conditions and mediative factors such as applicant characteristics, job type, recruiter attributes, organizational environment, country, and ethnic group that impact the degree of ethnic discrimination. This perspective provides nuanced insights to mitigate bias across these varied contexts.

CP offers a valuable lens in this qualitative, inductive research, highlighting how context can significantly shape the levels of bias observed. Although the strategies are aimed at curbing ethnic discrimination, they also have broader potential to address other types of implicit bias.

1. ***Anonymous Résumés:*** A practical strategy for HR managers to mitigate ethnic discrimination is to implement anonymized résumés. By removing cues related to ethnicity, this approach helps recruiters concentrate solely on qualifications, such as educational background, relevant work experience, and skills, while limiting the influence of characteristics like ethnicity, gender, and/or age, ensuring that hiring decisions are based on job-relevant credentials rather than personal identifiers.
2. ***Providing Additional Candidate Information:*** Quillian et al.'s (2019) field experiment suggests that ethnic discrimination in recruitment tends to be lower in German-speaking countries. Their view is that this reduction may stem from additional application requirements, such as reference letters and comprehensive work histories, that provide recruiters with context beyond ethnic identifiers. Based on these findings, HR managers might consider requesting more detailed information about applicants' work experience and qualifications to support a fairer evaluation process.

III. The Social Dominance Theory: Call for Diversity

Wilson (2018) acknowledges that implicit bias hinders diversity but asserts that the picture is incomplete. She offers the Social Dominance Theory as a framework to understand the systemic nature of bias and exclusion. For example, Wilson critiques the “pipeline problem” for failing to address the broader structural issues behind diversity shortfalls in top organizations. She noted Facebook’s declared commitment to diversity, with a workforce that still lacks broad representation, a pattern seen across elite law firms, universities, and other prominent corporations. The author suggests that while acknowledging implicit bias is useful, it overlooks larger structural factors that keep exclusionary practices in place. SDT proposes targeted interventions with a pronounced emphasis on rethinking and reshaping institutional norms that include:

1. ***Mindfully Assess Evaluation for Hiring:*** Many organizations rely on “neutral” metrics like grades which often reinforce existing hierarchies and unintentionally disadvantage minority groups known as (hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths or HELMS). To promote fairness, organizations can shift toward hierarchy attenuating legitimizing myths (HALMS) by creating alternative screening methods for candidates. For example, placing less emphasis on grades, and focusing more on concrete criteria such as mock trial performance evaluation.
2. ***Examine Cultural Barriers and Inclusivity within Institutions:*** SDT emphasizes that cultural practices within organizations can often discourage the retention of minorities (Wilson, 2018). Interventions here might include assessing workplace culture, offering structured mentorship for minorities, and addressing potential biases in performance evaluations.

3. **Precise Diversity Goals and Accountability Measures:** Organizations can establish diversity goals that align with equity outcomes and track progress. For example, companies might set explicit targets for minority representation and create transparent mechanisms to measure achievement.

A Summary of the Frameworks

The literature provides key lenses to approach hiring bias. The *Contingency Perspective* addresses early recruitment stages, emphasizing contextual factors and recommending anonymized resumes. *Bias Cycle Theory* serves as an umbrella framework that expands to workplace interventions, targeting both individual and systemic bias loops. *Social Dominance Theory* adds a systemic lens, advocating structural changes and inclusive evaluation practices.

Together, these frameworks offer a foundation for understanding and mitigating bias, from specific hiring stages to organizational change. Supplementary strategies like cultural training, nudges, and habit-breaking interventions further enrich this multi-level approach.

- IV. **Interviewers Cultural Training:** Chan et al. (2006) propose a cultural training policy with a focus on cultural awareness and improving cross-cultural communication as it would improve understanding of cultural similarities and diversities during hiring evaluations. This approach aligns with organizational-level intervention under BCT.
- V. **Nudges:** Sunstein & Thaler (2008) described nudges as subtle behavioral prompts that can effectively influence decision-making processes. The principle can be applied to recruitment practices. For instance, Thaler and Sunstein (2008) explore how default options and reminders can guide individuals toward more beneficial choices. In the context of recruitment, implementing a system where recruiters receive pre-interview reminders to assess candidates based solely on objective qualifications could serve as a nudge toward

more equitable hiring decisions This strategy can be considered an organizational-level intervention under BCT.

VI. Bias Habit Breaking Intervention based on Cognitive Behavioral Techniques (CBT):

CBT is one of the oldest and most widely applied behavioral change frameworks, and it has been extensively validated in decades of experimental studies. The versatility of CBT is especially useful for DEI efforts, given that there are infinite forms of diversity, and therefore bias, to consider (Limaka et al, 2021). Habit-breaking strategies based on CBT, this tool is to encourage recruiters to challenge their own unconscious biases, helping foster more inclusive practices. (Devine et al., 2012). CBT can be considered an individual-level intervention under BCT.

Table 1 - Recommended Interventions from academic literature

Theory Intervention Level	Literature Recommended Intervention
BCT Individual at the Workplace	Diversity Training
	Increasing Intergroup Contact
	Countering Stereotypes
	Encourage Perspective-Taking
	Finding Common Ground
	Leveraging Social Influence
BCT Organizational at the Workplace	Diversifying Opportunities
	Increasing Transparency
	Creating Accountability
	Making Evaluation More Systematic
CT	Anonymous Résumés

	Providing Additional Candidate Information
SDT	Assess Mindfully Evaluation for Hiring
	Examine Cultural Barriers and Inclusivity
	Precise Diversity Goals and Accountability Measures
Other literature interventions	Interviewers Cultural Training
	Nudges
	Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (habit breaking)

Inclusive Practices and The Candidate Experience

Recruitment practices extend beyond the transactional process to fill vacancies, they serve as a mechanism for creating equitable and impactful interactions. Grossman and Schoolderman (2022) argue that the candidate experience is shaped by every interaction a candidate has with an organization, and these interactions cumulatively influence their perception of fairness. Perceived fairness, in turn, determines key outcomes, including candidate sentiment, future application likelihood, and organizational reputation. As Burton and Wilson (2023) note, negative candidate experiences, especially those perceived as unfair, may result in the loss of top talent, including candidates from underrepresented populations. Thus, fairness emerges as a critical determinant of a successful candidate experience.

Efforts to mitigate bias are essential to promoting fairness in recruitment. Hunt et al. (2020) argue that merely emphasizing representation is insufficient; organizations must ensure that candidates perceive equity and fairness throughout the hiring process. This perspective underscores the importance of moving beyond surface-level diversity metrics to address the deeper systemic factors that shape candidates' experiences. Such interventions ensure that

candidates feel valued, respected, and equitably evaluated, fostering trust in the organization's commitment to inclusivity.

Bias reduction in recruitment aims to promote fairness and equity, while the candidate experience provides valuable insights into how applicants perceive fairness and inclusivity at each stage of the hiring process. Thoughtful implementation of bias mitigation strategies not only addresses systemic inequities but also reinforces an organization's commitment to inclusivity, ultimately enhancing the overall candidate experience. Deady (2024) emphasizes the intrinsic connection between an inclusive hiring process and fostering a positive candidate experience. This perspective aligns with the broader goal of ensuring that fairness and inclusivity are embedded not only in the process but also in perception.

A foundational understanding of what constitutes a positive candidate experience is necessary for integrating inclusive practices into recruitment. Carpenter (2013) identifies key factors defining a positive candidate experience, including honesty, transparency, respectful communication (e.g., timely callbacks), efficient application processes, and constructive feedback. Fanning (2023) builds on this and highlights that prioritizing candidate experience is a strategic approach that directly influences talent acquisition, employer branding, and business growth. Fanning further underscores the importance of intuitive and streamlined application processes, with Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) playing a critical role in facilitating seamless interactions.

To ensure a positive candidate experience, organizations must integrate bias mitigation strategies with practices that promote transparency, inclusivity, and respect. Candidates notice and assess these efforts, often forming opinions about the organization's values and culture based on their interactions throughout the hiring process. By addressing inequities at every stage

through clear communication, accessible technology, and equitable evaluation methods, organizations can uphold their commitment to equity while enhancing their employer brand. Prioritizing candidate experience signals strong organizational values, fostering trust and engagement among applicants from diverse backgrounds.

Summary

Chapter 2 explores the pervasive impact of biases in hiring, from job postings to final decisions, and critiques traditional merit-based systems for unintentionally reinforcing inequities. Using Social Dominance Theory (SDT), Bias Cycle Theory (BCT), and the Contingency Perspective (CP), it examines how structural, systemic, and contextual factors sustain these biases.

The chapter highlights the most common bias (i.e., name, colorism, and accent), interventions (i.e. structured interviews, anonymized résumés, and implicit bias training), emphasizes the paradox of meritocracy, and showing how equity-driven approaches are essential to fostering fairness.

Finally, it underscores the importance of the candidate experience, advocating for transparent communication, fair evaluations, and inclusive technology to promote equity and trust, setting the stage for the study's methodology in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Overview of Research Approach

This section provides a clear and structured overview of the guiding elements of the research. It starts by outlining the research methodology and design, which rely on an inductive, qualitative approach to capture the subtle complexities of hiring bias. The methodology also describes the literature review process, detailing the comprehensive collection of relevant sources. Subsequently, the section describes the participant population and sampling strategy, focusing on the recruitment of a diverse range of stakeholders in the hiring process. Following this, an explanation of data analysis through thematic analysis is offered, showing how themes were identified from the data. The section concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations, emphasizing participant consent, anonymity, and preferences.

Research Methodology and Design

This study explores unconscious bias in hiring and the strategies currently in place to mitigate its effects. The research adopts a dual perspective by examining the practices of employers as decision-makers and the lived experiences of job seekers as participants in the hiring process.

From the employer's perspective, the study explores the extent to which organizations implement strategies or interventions to reduce bias in hiring decisions. Specifically, it examines the most and least utilized interventions and evaluates their perceived effectiveness. This focus highlights the role of employers in shaping equitable hiring outcomes and addresses the critical question: *What approaches have organizations adopted to mitigate bias, and how effective are these interventions?*

From the job seeker's perspective, the study delves into whether biases are perceived during the hiring process and, if so, identifies the most frequently encountered types. Moreover, job seekers contribute valuable insights by highlighting recruitment practices that positively influence their experiences. They also propose recommendations for an ideal hiring model that organizations could adopt to enhance fairness and inclusivity.

By synthesizing these perspectives, the study aims to answer the overarching research question: *What practices should organizations adopt or maintain to effectively mitigate or interrupt bias in the hiring process?*

The study uses a qualitative and inductive approach, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than be guided by pre-existing theories. A qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate for this topic because it enables an in-depth exploration of how job seekers *perceive* and *experience* bias, while also analyzing how employers *approach* the hiring process to foster fairness and inclusion. Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on frequencies or statistical patterns, qualitative research seeks to understand participants' perspectives, experience, opinion, in other words, to understand the way participants perceived their reality (Sampieri et al. 2010). This approach helps surface subtle forms of exclusion that may otherwise be overlooked in survey data.

To enhance validity, the research incorporates perspectives from employers and job seekers, capturing a broad range of experiences to reflect the complex nature of unconscious bias in hiring.

By exploring these dual perspectives, this study provides a holistic understanding of how and when biases could manifest in the hiring process. The balanced approach not only highlights the experiences and practices of each group, painting a complete picture of the hiring process but

also reveals opportunities to improve the integrity and inclusivity of hiring practices.

Before collecting data from participants, an extensive literature review was conducted across multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, ProQuest, Web of Science, Business Source Complete, EBSCO, and Elsevier. This review aimed to establish a comprehensive perspective on hiring bias. Key search terms included and were not limited to “implicit bias”, “hiring or recruitment”, “bias mitigation or interventions” “candidate experience”, “and “diversity, equity, and inclusion”. This literature review informed the selection of three theoretical frameworks from management, equity, and organizational behavior, offering a good set of lenses to this research. Additional material recommended by the authors of two of these frameworks further enriched the theoretical foundation, enhancing the study's initial analytical perspectives.

Population and Sampling

At the core of this study are the individuals who shared their unique perspectives. 82 individuals who contributed to the research (75% females, and 25 % males) were categorized into two distinct groups: 40 job seekers, people who had or are currently navigating the uncertain terrain of the modern job market trying to find employment opportunities, and 42 employers composed by human resources professionals, recruiters, business owners, and/or hiring managers, who are the architects of opportunities, playing the role of deciding who gets or does not get the job offers.

Among the job seekers, 78% self-identified as female, 20% as male, and 2% chose not to disclose their gender. Employers presented a similar gender distribution, 71% self-identified as female, and 29% as male. Furthermore, many of the employers (79%, 33 companies) and job seekers (85%, 34 participants) were located in Ontario, (5%, two companies) outside of Ontario,

one in British Columbia, and one in Quebec. In comparison (9%, four companies) were headquartered in the US, (5%, two companies) in Peru, and (2%, one company) was fully remote.

To reach this diverse group, various outreach methods were employed including reaching out to my immediate professional network, employing the snowball sampling technique by gently encouraging initial participants to refer others, and using professional social media. LinkedIn, the social platform employed, played a crucial role in amplifying the efforts, turning professional networks into a powerful recruitment tool.

Calls for participation were posted, shared, reposted, and discussed by friends and colleagues. Beyond this, professional associations such as the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), Ontario Non-profit Network (ONN), Hispanotech, Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto (MNLCT), and other associations like Toronto North Local Immigration Partnership (TNLIP) NotWorking2Networking, Tellent Social Enterprise, and TALK Talent were approached for support. This strategy proved both practical and effective, ensuring that the final sample was not just large, but representative of the diversity needed for this study involving both sides of the hiring equation, the job seekers and the employers.

Data Collection

Given the sensitive nature of unconscious bias, being tasked with understanding individuals' experiences cannot be done solely by posing questions. The researcher needed to ensure creating a safe space where the participant can trust to open up. For this reason, interviews were not video recorded but rather took the form of notetaking. Moreover, participants were provided with the questions in advance to make sure they felt comfortable with the questions asked. They could also choose their preferred communication channel for the

interview: phone, Zoom video, or in-person interviews.

In addition, to ensure the reliability of the study, consistent methods were applied across all interviews. Although the questions were open-ended, semi-structured conversational, they followed the same order for everyone, allowing for easy comparison while still leaving room for reciprocal clarification, probing deeper into the individual experiences, and promoting mutual understanding between the interviewer and interviewee. The questions were designed to be as accessible and gave employers and job seekers the opportunity to narrate their stories in their own words. Each interview session typically lasted about 60 minutes, though some exceptions extended from two to four hours, depending on the depth of the conversation while others required rescheduling to continue. A separate set of questions was used for employers and job seekers to capture their unique perspectives.

Now, for some participants, articulating comfortably and without language limitation was key. Spanish-speaking participants were given the option to express themselves in their preferred language. The researcher is fluent in English and Spanish and was able to listen, take notes in the language selected, and transcribe. This offer was to ensure participants could express themselves fully, leaving the interview feeling understood. For consistency in the analysis, their responses were then translated into English, ensuring the essence, emotions, and experiences remained intact, making sure nothing got lost in translation.

Special attention was paid to how the questions were framed, starting with general topics before moving into specifics, to avoid influencing answers early on. To further safeguard against biased or leading questions, all interview questions were reviewed by the dissertation supervisors before use.

Data Analysis

The interview was transcribed live, ensuring that every nuance was captured. Once each interview session was completed, the transcripts underwent a meticulous review and clean-up process in MS Word. Following this, the clean refined data was entered into MS Forms to consolidate all information in an Excel spreadsheet or CVS file for its initial coding and thematic analysis. Once all data was accurately captured in two different MS Forms surveys, it was exported to Dedoose, a qualitative research software where coding and categorization were conducted. By performing thematic analysis, across the two projects uploaded on Dedoose, distinct patterns, and themes emerged in the employers' practices and job seekers' experiences. On the employers' side, the focus was on their hiring strategies, common practices, evaluation processes, organizational interventions, and their ideal bias-free recruitment model. On the job seekers' side, the analysis revealed perceptions of bias in the job search process, the identified bias points, the experience as a candidate, the impact from that experience, and ultimately, their ideal bias-free job search model.

Throughout the process, the researcher was conscious of her own potential biases, particularly confirmation bias, reflecting on her own identity (i.e. gender, ethnicity), and her personal and work experience (i.e. HR, recruiter, employment counselor, and job seeker) which could affect this research. To minimize those, the researcher intended to approach the data with an open mind, suspending any pre-existing assumptions letting the themes emerge organically respecting the participants' narratives, and allowing the data to speak for itself.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical rigor was paramount in this study, approved by the Office of Research Ethics

under Ethic Approval Certificate STU 2023-153. Every participant was fully informed of the research purpose, and the majority signed a digital consent form through SignNow. This method was chosen to ensure that participants, regardless of their location, could conveniently access and sign the necessary documents with ease.

For those participants who were more comfortable answering in Spanish, a Spanish version of the consent form was provided. This ensured that every individual, regardless of language, had a clear understanding of their rights and the research process, ensuring clarity. These measures maintained ethical integrity and fostered trust throughout the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 reiterates the research purpose, delineates the methodology and design, and describes the study's population and sampling approach, procedures, data collection, and analysis methods. Additionally, this chapter addressed the assumptions and ethical considerations of the research. Chapter 4 aims to present the study's findings, particularly highlighting the most employed bias interventions among employers and recommending additional strategies to mitigate bias in hiring based on academic research. Insights were drawn from interviews with 82 participants who shared their perspectives and experiences on bias within the hiring process

Chapter 4: Findings

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global economies, bringing entrenched social inequalities to light, especially in the workforce, where underrepresented groups faced amplified obstacles. This period prompted a surge in DEI initiatives, as organizations publicly committed to addressing these disparities. However, implicit bias continues to undermine DEI efforts (Stephens et al., 2020). Data reveal a stark reality: racialized individuals still experience significantly higher unemployment rates than majority groups (Wanberg et al., 2020).

The purpose of this inductive qualitative research was to explore current bias mitigation strategies and identify the most common perceived bias. By conducting interviews with key stakeholders, hiring decision-makers, and job seekers, the study investigates the use and effectiveness of existing hiring bias-reduction strategies. Insights from job seekers illuminate what bias influenced their recruitment experience. The analysis identifies emerging themes that suggest areas for improvement, ultimately aiming to create a more inclusive and equitable recruitment environment for everyone.

The initial three chapters establish the research context, offering an in-depth literature review that details three theoretical frameworks alongside relevant concepts, types of implicit bias, recommended mitigation strategies, and employed research methodology, while this chapter presents findings from the data gathered, an analysis of emerging themes, and integrates these insights with the three conceptual frameworks. It addresses the central research question: What practices should organizations adopt or maintain to mitigate or interrupt bias in the hiring process?

This study seeks to equip employers with actionable strategies to foster equitable and inclusive hiring practices, offering practical tools for implementation. It also provides scholars with valuable insights, contributing to the broader societal goal of fairness in recruitment.

Trustworthiness of the Data

In qualitative research, establishing data trustworthiness is essential for ensuring rigor. This study employed several methods to enhance trustworthiness, following the criteria of credibility, conformability, dependability, and transferability as outlined by Sampieri et al. (2010).

First, to ensure credibility, Sampieri et al (2010) recommend reflecting on what the researcher has gathered, understanding the participants' lived experience, and concepts. The researcher believes to have gathered the sentiments, emotions, experiences, and opinions of participants. In fact, to ensure participants could express themselves at their best, the interviewer offered to participants who spoke their native tongue, to interview in their native language if preferred.

Triangulation was also employed to identify consistencies across participants' responses and ensured the data collected was accurate. Interview responses were compared with each other and with related literature to strengthen validity. Participants were intentionally recruited through a broad range of channels, trying to diversify the sample as much as possible to capture multiple voices and perspectives. This approach, combined with prolonged engagement, helped provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of participants' views.

To enhance conformability, recommendations from Elo et al. (2014) were implemented, including providing quotations from participants that are relevant and linked to the data, ensuring the findings reflect participants' voices ensuring objectivity. Also, meticulous review

and corrections of all 82 transcripts to eliminate errors and validate coding consistency. An audit trail was maintained to document coding decisions and was regularly reviewed to confirm accuracy and consistency.

The researcher carefully designed interview questions to explore bias mitigation interventions and job seekers' perceptions of those processes while avoiding emotional distress. Although one question (i.e., “Have you ever felt any type of bias in favor or against you when competing for a job. Can you elaborate?”) had the potential to evoke emotions, participants showed no signs of distress. The researcher maintained reflexivity, actively examining personal influences and approaching each participant’s perspective with empathy and curiosity.

To ensure dependability, the data collection, procedures, and analysis were rigorously in place and are well-documented. Active communication with the supervisory committee chair took place with the committee supervisory members, who were engaged in the process, as per the requirements of the program.

Elo et al. (2014) note the value of ensuring high-quality results in reporting by providing clear descriptions of culture, context, selection, and characteristics of participants to ensure the reader can judge if the report is transferable. Following their recommendation, this paper includes information on participants with demographics and context to allow readers to look for alternative interpretations. Given the universal presence of implicit biases, the transferability of findings could be broad. However, the recommendations should be adapted to account for the socio-historical and cultural differences unique to each region and organization. Thick descriptions were integrated to convey the study’s themes in rich detail, allowing for a deeper understanding of participants’ viewpoints and the context of their experience.

To meet ethical guidelines and confidentiality, participant anonymity was preserved by coding identifiers. Ethical considerations extended to the interview process, ensuring questions were thoughtfully framed to avoid distress. Assurances of confidentiality were also given to minimize social desirability bias, enabling participants to share sensitive insights openly.

This study received ethical approval from York University’s Ethics Review Board. Documents such as the ethics approval letter, informed consent forms, and recruitment materials are provided in the appendices section.

Participants

Participants were recruited through a combination of outreach strategies, including leveraging the researcher’s network, snowball sampling, and word-of-mouth referrals on social media platforms such as LinkedIn. Additionally, organizations were invited to share calls for participation on their LinkedIn pages. The sampling strategy focused on engaging primary stakeholders of the recruitment process, including HR professionals, recruiters, business owners, and job seekers. Over 80% of participants were primarily located in Ontario, Quebec, and BC, Canada combined, with the vast majority in Ontario, a minority of participants were in the United States, Peru, and Spain.

Table 2: Total participants interviewed including employers and job seekers

Total Participation by Gender			Employer		Job Seeker	
Female	61	74%	30	71%	31	77.5%
Male	20	25%	12	29%	8	20%
Prefer not to say	1	1%			1	2.5%
Total # Participant	82		42		40	

Table 3: Employers' demographic profile of participants (42 participants)

Age Group			Gender			Highest Level of Education			Country of Origin		
18-25	2	4.8%	Male	12	28.6%	Graduate	16	38.1%	Canada	12	28.6%
26-35	9	21.4%	Female	30	71.4%	Bachelors	23	54.8%	Colombia	1	2.4%
36-45	16	38.1%				College	2	4.8%	Dominican Republic	1	2.4%
46-55	12	28.6%				Some University	1	2.4%	Egypt	1	2.4%
56-64	3	7.1%							England	1	2.4%
									France/Guinea	1	2.4%
									India	1	2.4%
									Jordan	1	2.4%
									Mexico	2	4.8%
									Nigeria	1	2.4%
									Nigeria/United Kingdom	1	2.4%
									Pakistan	1	2.4%
									Trinidad	1	2.4%
									USA	3	7.1%
									Peru	9	21.4%

4: Industry breakdown and practitioners' capacity (role title)

Role Title	#	%	Type of Organization	#	%	Company Size	#	%	Location	#	%
Hiring Managers: Executive Director/CEO	3	7.1%	Government	4	9.5%	1-50	10	23.8%	Canada, ON	33	78.6%
Hiring Manager: Managers, Senior Managers	5	11.9%	International Corporation	13	31.0%	51-200	11	26.2%	Canada, BC	1	2.4%

Hiring Manager: Owners	5	11.9%	International Non-Profit	1	2.4%	201-500	3	7.1%	Canada, QC	1	2.4%
Hiring Manager: Others	5	11.9%	Local Corporation	13	31.0%	501-1000	4	9.5%	Peru, Lima	2	4.8%
HR/TA Director	7	16.7%	Local Non-Profit	8	19.1%	1000-5000	6	14.3%	Remote	1	2.4%
HR/TA Generalist/Adm/Officer	11	26.2%	Other	3	7.1%	5001+	8	19.1%	USA, California	3	7.1%
Manager/Lead/Coordinator	6	14.3%							USA, Philadelphia	1	2.4%

Table 5: Job seekers' demographic profile (40 participants)

Gender			Age Group			Highest Level of Education			Ethnic Background		
Female	31	77.5%	18-25	1	20.0%	Graduate	13	32.5%	African Origins	2	5.0%
Male	8	20.0%	26-35	13	35.0%	Bachelors	21	52.5%	Black	1	2.5%
Prefer not to say	1	2.5%	36-45	14	32.5%	College	2	5.0%	Caribbean	2	5.0%
			46-55	8	10.0%	Secondary	2	5.0%	European	3	7.5%
			56-64	4	2.5%	Other	2	5.0%	Latin American	22	55.0%
			65+	-	-				Mixed (Chinese/Italian)	1	2.5%
									North American	1	2.5%
									South Asian Origins	4	10.0%
									West Asian Origins	3	7.5%
									Prefer not to say	1	2.5%

Results

The objective of this study is to examine current practices used by organizations to mitigate or interrupt bias in hiring, evaluate their effectiveness, and propose actionable

recommendations. This investigation is guided by the research question: *What practices should organizations adopt or maintain to mitigate or interrupt bias in the hiring process?* The study draws on semi-structured interviews with 82 participants, including 42 professionals in human resources, recruiters, business owners, and hiring management, alongside 40 active and passive job seekers.

The interviews reveal a scarcity of interventions specifically targeting bias in hiring despite organizations prioritizing broader DEI initiatives. In other words, this limited focus on bias-specific strategies creates a misalignment with DEI frameworks, undermining their effectiveness.

Another key finding is the absence of interventions at critical stages of the recruitment process. Many organizations continue to rely heavily on intuition with manual résumé screening often conducted without any type of intervention. Moreover, structured tools, such as standardized scorecards, remain limited, and blind résumé screening, are almost nonexistent. Only one organization, located outside Canada reported using collaborative voting on resumes as a strategy. This lack of a structured framework leaves these critical early stages of hiring highly vulnerable to implicit bias.

Similarly, decision-making processes lack the consistency and structure necessary to interrupt biases. Only 26% of organizations reported using scoring rubrics while only a couple of organizations conduct independent evaluations to guide their decisions. Instead, the majority relied solely on conversational debriefs, which are particularly susceptible to groupthink and in-group bias, further compromising objectivity in candidate selection.

Despite these shortcomings, a small number of organizations have adopted promising practices that demonstrate the potential for reducing bias in recruitment. These practices are discussed and can serve as a foundation for actionable recommendations.

Research Question

***RQ1:** What practices should organizations adopt or maintain to mitigate or interrupt bias in the hiring process?*

This research question guided the inquiries of this study, focusing on exploring organizational strategies to address bias in recruitment through semi-structured interviews with 42 participants. Discussion focused on how their company evaluates applicants during the talent acquisition process, emphasizing interventions and practices designed to ensure fairness, objectivity, and bias-free hiring. These exploratory discussions revealed the first few themes of the research.

I. THEME 1: Limited Bias Recognition Amid Stronger DEI Awareness

This study reveals a pronounced contrast in respondents' awareness of biases compared to DEI. Only 23% of participants, from the employer sample, spoke or reflected about biases or bias interventions in the hiring process, while DEI was mentioned at a higher frequency, with over 50% of participants. This relatively low percentage, 23%, suggests that bias awareness remains limited among personnel responsible for hiring, suggesting many may not fully recognize that biases could deter their practices or understand effective strategies to address them. This gap poses challenges to achieving a truly equitable hiring process.

Among the few respondents who acknowledged biases, it was an opportunity for self-reflection and recognition of the need for practical tools for decision-makers. Participant P1

noted, *“The training on unconscious bias has been helpful, but we need more practical steps to ensure these biases are minimized in our processes.”* Her insights underscore the importance of awareness but the need for actionable solutions, highlighting the necessity for more than one intervention, as the BCT recommends.

In the context of a government organization, Participant P24, a hiring manager, with a strong commitment to DEI, acknowledged a previous bias-favoring candidate from France, stating, *“I was biased in favor of people from France.”* This candid admission highlights the existence of in-group and similarity biases, where shared cultural markers influence decision-making processes even in organizations with well-structured hiring systems like those in government settings.

Rivera's (2012) study emphasizes that cultural similarities between employers and job candidates could influence hiring decisions, in phenomenon known as cultural matching.

Participant P24's candid reflection illustrates the importance of recognizing and addressing personal biases to foster equitable hiring practices. Such self-awareness is crucial in mitigating the influence of unconscious preference, which is one of the goals of this research. Dalton and Villagran (2018) underscore that acknowledging these biases is the first step toward mitigating their impact in professional settings.

II. THEME 2: Insufficient Structured Practices in Organizational Interventions

Tackling bias in hiring requires intentional strategies that bridge the gap between aspirations and action. Many employers reported lacking structured practices, making it challenging to address biases effectively. This section examines current key strategies from employers' practices, publicly available research, and academic literature, highlighting gaps and aligning their practices with recommended evidence-based methods. The analysis begins with

the most commonly used organizational interventions such as diversity policies and DEI training, followed by organizational culture, interviewers training, mentorship programs, and accountability mechanisms.

Diversity Policy: the presence of a formal diversity policy is widely recognized in the academic literature as a cornerstone for consistent DEI implementation. In this study, 57% of organizations interviewed reported having a formal diversity policy, signaling a structured approach to embedding DEI principles into their operations. Research indicates that such policies are more common in larger organizations, which are better positioned to allocate resources toward formal DEI frameworks. This is reflected in the data: 43% of organizations without a diversity policy are small, with 1 to 50 employees.

From the SDT lens, institutional structures like diversity policies play a critical role in either reinforcing or attenuating hierarchical dynamics (Wilson, 2018). Diversity policies, when effectively implemented, provide a framework that challenges entrenched power structures and promotes equitable representation. Participant P35, an HR Director at a large U.S.-based international organization, explained: *“We have a policy where recruiters need to ensure 20% of candidates are diverse, and the same applies to the interview panel, where we ensure representation of women, gender, ethnicity, and disability.”* This structured approach reflects how policies can help disrupt biases by institutionalizing accountability and inclusivity across recruitment stages.

DEI Training: while 57% of organizations in the sample have DEI policies in place, only 33% of the organizations provided DEI training, revealing a significant gap in implementation. Without such training, employees might lack the tools and framework needed to

foster equitable, inclusive, and unbiased practices, potentially undermining the impact of diversity policies.

The literature on DEI training is divided: some studies highlight its effectiveness in reducing bias, while others question its long-term impact. According to BCT, DEI training serves as a multilevel intervention, that is most effective when integrated with structured practices, such as standardized interviewing. This theory underscores that embedding DEI training within a broader bias-mitigation framework can enhance both individual and systemic efforts toward equitable hiring practices.

Mentorship Program: Only 19% of organizations provide mentorship programs, leaving 81% without this critical intervention. Despite its limited adoption, mentorship has shown promise in fostering career development, building professional relationships, and promoting inclusivity. Participant P20 described their “Heart to Heart” program, which pairs senior professionals with junior talent to align with their organization’s culture. Similarly, P21 mentioned a “speed mentoring” program tailored to fast-paced environments.

Smaller organizations are beginning to adopt more intentional mentorship efforts. Participant P22, an HR director at a small Ontario-based non-profit, shared plans for a mentorship program focusing on underrepresented staff: *“We are launching a formal mentorship that is more intentional for inclusion, providing structure and better understanding the needs of individuals.”* These efforts highlight mentorship’s growing role in advancing equity and inclusion.

Equity Programs for Talent Building: only 17% of the companies interviewed have equity programs designed to cultivate talent from underrepresented groups. These programs include scholarships, partnerships with newcomer organizations, mentorships for women and

girls in STEM, and recruitment strategies for neurodiverse talent. For example, Participant P20 spoke about a program where her employer, a small media advertising agency, offers \$20,000 scholarships to underrepresented communities, providing critical financial support to individuals facing structural barriers and opening a pathway for them to enter the advertising field.

Another example is a program designed to integrate neurodiverse talent, Participant P17 explained, *“I, for example, have a person who is neurodiverse; the role was created thinking to support a person from this group.”*

These examples reflect innovative approaches to fostering inclusion and challenging traditional recruitment norms. Although still emerging, such practices offer meaningful insights into how systemic barriers can be addressed through intentional initiatives. These initiatives can be considered as a multilevel intervention under the BCT lenses as its diversity opportunities and increased intergroup contact.

Monitoring & Accountability Approximately 14% of the companies interviewed actively monitor their DEI goals, using a diversity matrix or general diversity targets. Monitoring efforts are often compliance-driven, influenced by regulatory frameworks like the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws and Canada’s Federal Employment Equity Program.

Participant P36 described a compliance-oriented approach: *“The goals are monitored by the DEI lead, aligned with the Affirmative Action Plan.”* Others, like participant P26, described compliance with federal contractor requirements for annual DEI monitoring: *“The program is monitored by the DEI committee. They do a survey every year to measure perception... and self-identification”* aligning with Canada’s Federal Employment Equity Program mandates.

Some organizations adopt an advisory approach to DEI monitoring, as illustrated by Participant P2, who stated, *“They want gender 50/50, and it is monitored, not enforced. It can be*

added to your performance review.” This approach recognizes DEI progress in reviews without enforcing strict quotas, allowing for flexibility while still tracking gender equity goals.

Accountability structures for DEI vary. Participant, P21 described a hierarchy of DEI accountability, explaining, *“The VP of talent and culture is the sponsor of DEI. The full accountability falls on his plate. The DEI dean is also responsible, and she reports to HR. The VP of HR reports to the COO, who is accountable.”* In contrast, Participant P22’s organization uses a more decentralized model of shared accountability: *“We are identifying the accountability; the head of DEI works on this. Everyone is accountable,”* encouraging a collective responsibility among all employees.”

These examples illustrate diverse DEI monitoring and accountability practices, ranging from centralized oversight to shared responsibility. While some organizations balance regulatory compliance with internal efforts to foster an inclusive culture, the absence of structured accountability or monitoring in 86% of companies points to significant gaps and opportunities for improvement.

Interviewer Training: 88% of organizations do not provide interviewers with bias or cultural training, this is an unexpected shortfall, given that research consistently highlights interviews as a highly subjective stage in hiring. Among the limited 12% that do implement this training, most are US-based 60%, and 40% in Ontario, suggesting a regional disparity in prioritizing this intervention, considering US-based organizations comprise only 9% of the sample.

Participant P6 recounted his experience in a large Ontario government organization: *“Our hiring panel members go to equity training to be qualified enough to interview, so you do not seem or perceived or subconsciously biased to the people you are interviewing.”* Another

Participant, P35's organization, mandates a certification process, requiring interviewers to complete their "*(company name) Interview Certification*." Similarly, P36, a talent acquisition director at a US-based firm, described their comprehensive approach: "*There is training everyone in the recruitment team and hiring manager needs to attend. All have to go to interview training to learn about the interview process and criteria rating against each of those. We train them on how to assess, interview guide, questions to use and how to submit feedback, different bias training, conformity bias, etc... This training was created by the talent acquisition team.*"

Organizational Culture: just 10% of Ontario-based organizations highlighted organizational culture as a primary tool for fostering DEI and reducing bias. Participant P20 described their culture as one rooted in "belonging" with initiatives designed to "*encourage and promote a sense of inclusion for all individuals... so that people feel they belong.*" To reinforce this culture, Participant P20 mentioned specific practices such as facilitating "fire chats" for open conversations, continuous DEI education, a comprehensive DEI strategy, and a DEI committee focused on community learning. These efforts demonstrate how a strong cultural foundation can create safe spaces for addressing biases.

Similarly, participant P21, a talent acquisition manager at a non-profit, discussed fostering a "*culture of inclusion*," with a DEI strategy, collective DEI responsibility, inclusive job descriptions, social media engagement, potluck gatherings, ERGs, DEI newsletters, and policies that support an inclusive environment. By embedding DEI principles into everyday activities, P21's organization integrates bias reduction into its cultural framework, emphasizing the importance of shared responsibility.

Participant P35 reported a "*Conscious Culture*" that prioritizes educating employees on identifying and addressing biases. P35 explained, "*We have a culture called Conscious Culture*

that educates everyone on breaking biases. It is a reaction program based on actions.” this program includes initiatives such as ERGs, targeted DEI education, supportive policies, and a dedicated DEI committee.

Even smaller organizations are taking meaningful steps. Participant P16, a talent acquisition professional at a small recruitment agency in Lima, Peru, highlighted inclusivity and belonging as core aspects of their organizational culture, further validated through external certification. *“We have earned certification affirming our supportive work environment for the LGBT community.”* P16 noted, reflecting the agency’s commitment to creating a welcoming environment for diverse groups.

Strengthening organizational culture efforts and connecting broader DEI strategies to hiring could significantly enhance bias reduction and foster sustainable change.

Table 6: List of organizational interventions (from the most to the least used)

Intervention	Utilization Rate
DEI Policies	57%
DEI Training Programs	33%
Mentorship Programs	19%
Equity Programs	17%
Accountability Measures	14%
Interviewer Training	12%
Organizational Culture	10%

III. THEME 3: Persistent Subjectivity in Recruitment Practices

Of the 42 organizations interviewed, 41 rely on the traditional recruitment model, with only one adopting a talent scouting approach. The analysis below focuses on the traditional recruitment framework, examining key stages where subjectivity and biases emerge.

The Message and the Medium: Job Posting and Recruitment Channels:

Organizations exhibit varying levels of DEI commitment in their job postings. Common

interventions include DEI statements (14 employers, 33.3%) and salary for transparency purposes (10 employers, 23.8%), signaling efforts toward equity and inclusivity in their messaging. Gender-neutral language is adopted by 19% of employers, though only a few, 2 participants explicitly referenced using tools like gender decoders to ensure neutrality. Additionally, (8 employers, 19%) focused on realistic job requirements aligning job postings with essential skills to avoid unnecessary barriers and another 19.0% spoke about accommodation statements as an intervention, which is a practice mandated in Ontario under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Notably, 9.5% of employers acknowledge overlooking the broader impact of their postings on fostering inclusivity and equity, noting an area for growth.

Regarding recruitment channels, LinkedIn is the most utilized 78.6%, 33 mentions, followed by Indeed 45.2%, 19 mentions. Mallik (2024) notes the high attraction of LinkedIn for job seekers and recruiters as the site has already 187+ million members globally. While these platforms offer broad audience reach, LinkedIn's features, such as profile photos and network visibility, may inadvertently introduce biases related to appearance, ethnicity, age, or connections, potentially disadvantaging underrepresented candidates. For instance, Blaies (2023) speaks about similarity bias on LinkedIn while Simon et al. (2023) identify gender bias in LinkedIn profiles.

Community organizations and employee referrals are each used by 23.8% of employers. Community organizations provide opportunities to attract candidates from underrepresented groups, while employee referrals provide efficiency in hiring but risk reinforcing homogeneity if not managed carefully (Pedulla and Pager, 2019) The near-equal usage of these two channels

highlights growing recognition of community-based recruitment's value, though both require intentional strategies to align with diversity objectives.

Social media platforms like Instagram (6 mentions, 14.3%) and Facebook (4 mentions, 9.5%) are less commonly used for recruitment. The most underutilized channel remains DEI hiring programs (2 mentions, 4.8%), as the one that includes initiatives targeting neurodiverse talent. These programs represent a missed opportunity to implement deliberate diversity strategies within recruitment efforts.

Résumé Submission Channels and Screening Methods: Among the 41 companies employing traditional recruitment methods, 70.7% (29 companies) utilize a centralized Applicant Tracking System (ATS), while 29.3% (12 companies) rely on email submissions or job board portals. Despite the widespread adoption of ATS for resume tracking, manual screening remains the predominant filtering method, with 92.7% (38 companies) reporting reliance on human recruiters, HR personnel, or designated staff to read every received résumé. This dual approach reflects a trust in centralized systems for candidate management but skepticism regarding the effectiveness of fully automated filtering methods.

Manual screening introduces inherent vulnerabilities to subjective decision-making and implicit biases. Recruiters and HR professionals could assess factors such as “job hopping”, “local experience”, “location” and even subtle details such as the email address which can inadvertently exclude qualified individuals, especially when names or other identifiers (e.g., ethnicity) are considered. Meanwhile, 4.9% of participants (2 companies) reported using keywords or Boolean filtering methods, and 2.4% (1 company) utilized knock-out questions. These findings suggest that despite the advancement of technology, many recruiters lean toward

their instincts, reflecting a mix of trust in their judgment and skepticism in automated filtering methods.

Résumé Evaluation and Decision-Making: when evaluating résumés, 90.2% (37 participants) admitted to relying on intuition as their primary method. Only a small proportion, 7.3% (3 participants), reported using structured scorecards, while 2.4% (1 participant) employed blind résumé screening practices. Interestingly, the sole organization is a third-party recruitment agency, based in Lima, Peru. However, this is done only when presenting candidates to their clients, after they have screened applicants including the use of video methods. This practice of blind résumés is used also in Canada and the US but for specific programs rather than regular recruitment. For instance, an organization in Ontario hires neurodiverse candidates via a third-party agency, which provides them with blind résumés. As Participant P17 indicates *“We get the résumé without names or genders but only the initials with the skillset. The résumé includes where they study, and their work. We have to rate which one is your preferred candidate by number 1-2-3.”*

The overwhelming reliance on intuition underscores the risk of implicit bias, as unstructured evaluations often lack accountability and rigor. Structured scorecards and blind résumé screening, despite a good amount of research noting their effectiveness in reducing bias, remain critically underutilized.

When asking participants about their criteria for longlisting, practices varied, with 31.7% (13 participants) indicating they assess factors such as hobbies, job hopping, employment gaps, direct experience, location, and perceived “fit”, while the majority emphasized a match with the job description. Yet, the subjectivity involved highlights a constraint to equitable candidate evaluation.

When considering who does the longlisting, the responsibility for initial résumé screening predominantly falls to HR professionals or recruiters, as reported by 85.4% (35 participants). Hiring managers, in contrast, assume this task in only 12.2% (5 participants) of cases. A notable exception is a collaborative voting system of 2.4% (1 company), where hiring managers collectively vote on résumés. In this system, candidates advancing to subsequent stages require majority approval.

This division of responsibility suggests a centralized reliance on HR personnel for initial résumé screening, emphasizing the critical role HR plays in shaping the candidate pool. However, without standardized protocols, such processes risk perpetuating bias, especially when decision-making is overly dependent on subjective judgment.

Overall, the data reflects a reliance on traditional, intuition-based methods for screening résumés, with limited integration of objective, bias-reducing tools. While manual screening remains prevalent, it risks perpetuating implicit biases, especially in the absence of systematic interventions. The findings emphasize the need for more structured and inclusive approaches in early-stage résumé evaluation to mitigate biases and enhance fairness in recruitment.

Interview Practices: From Panel Members to Hiring Decisions: the interview process is a pivotal phase in recruitment, where cognitive and social biases can influence outcomes even before verbal interactions occur. These biases deeply rooted in perceptions and judgments, shape impressions, interactions, and evaluations, potentially undermining equitable hiring practices. This section examines tools and practices used during interviews, based on insights from 42 participants, highlighting areas where implicit biases might emerge and affect outcomes.

Pre-Interview: Tools and Practices

Preparation is essential to minimize bias during interviews. However, findings suggest limited adoption of preparatory tools. For instance, only 5% (2 participants) reported using interview guides to prepare panelists, reflecting a broader lack of systematic preparation at the organizational level. This deficiency leaves panelists without clear frameworks for consistent evaluations and increases the likelihood of intuitive, subjective judgments influencing decisions. Academic literature emphasizes the importance of pre-interview preparation to decrease bias in the hiring process (Gallegos et al., 2022) yet this remains a significant area for improvement.

During the Interview: Tools and Practices

The initial moments of an interview are particularly vulnerable to biases such as beauty bias, age bias, and skin tone bias, which can unconsciously influence how candidates are perceived and evaluated. These biases often overshadow objective assessments of candidates' qualifications. Among the participating employers, 45% (19) utilize structured interviews, citing their ability to standardize evaluations and reduce subjective judgment. Conversely, 14% (6) favored semi-structured formats, which they believed allowed greater flexibility to explore candidates' expertise. However, semi-structured interviews also rely heavily on panelists' discretion, increasing the potential for subjective interpretations.

As interviews progress, additional biases can emerge, including the halo or horn effect, affinity bias, and accent bias. The halo or horn effect results from overgeneralizations based on a single trait or response, potentially overshadowing a candidate's overall performance. Affinity bias and accent bias manifest when panelists unconsciously favor candidates with whom they share similarities or penalize those with unfamiliar accents. Despite the risks associated with these biases, mitigation efforts are limited. Only 14% (6 participants) reported including diverse panelists, a practice that could counteract affinity bias by introducing varied perspectives.

Similarly, another 5% (2 participants) noted pre-sending interview questions to candidates, acknowledging this strategy as beneficial for reducing stress and supporting neurodivergent individuals. This finding indicates a lack of widespread adoption of bias mitigation practices, leaving candidates vulnerable to subjective evaluations and inconsistent standards.

After the Interview: Tools and Practices

The decision-making phase remains the most critical and bias-prone aspect of the interview process. Authority for final hiring decisions predominantly rests with hiring managers, as reported by 71% (30 participants). Furthermore, 74% (31 participants) preferred conversational evaluations during panel debriefings, a practice that lacks structure and increases the likelihood of biases such as in-group bias, groupthink, and conformity bias. These dynamics often lead panelists to align their assessments with dominant opinions, suppressing independent evaluations.

Structured decision-making tools, such as scoring rubrics, were used in only 26% (11 participants) of cases, while independent scoring was reported in just one instance. The absence of these tools fosters intuitive decision-making, which is prone to subjective influences and inconsistent evaluations. Malhotra (2019), Kahneman et al., (2021) suggest independent assessments prior to group discussion as this will prevent groupthink, conformity bias, and unwanted variability in judgment and the decision-making process.

Table 7: List of interventions in traditional recruitment (41 participants)

Category	Intervention	Use
Resume Evaluation	Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)	29 (70.7%)
Interviews	Structured Interviews	19 (45%)
Job Postings	DEI Statement	14 (33.3%)

Post-Interview/Decision Making	Rubrics	11(26%)
Recruitment Channels	Working with Community Organizations	10 (23.8%)
Job Postings	Gender-Neutral Language	8 (19%)
	Realistic Job Requirements	8 (19%)
Interviews	Diverse Panels	6 (14%)
	Interviewer Training	5 (12%)
	Guides for Interviewers	2 (5%)
	Interview Questions in Advanced	2 (5%)
Resume Evaluation	Scorecards for Résumé Screening	1 (2.4%)
	Collective Voting System for Résumé Evaluation	1 (2.4%)
	Blind Résumé Screening	1 (2.4%)
Post-Interview/Decision-Making	Independent Evaluation	1(2.4%)

The findings reveal that implicit biases can easily manifest throughout the interview process without panelists' awareness and lacking robust interventions to address them. Decision-making dynamics, particularly those prone to groupthink, conformity bias, and in-group favoritism, have an environment ready to allow them to exacerbate inequities and undermine the integrity of the recruitment process.

While participants expressed awareness of diversity and inclusion and advocated for equity in hiring, findings indicate that diversity and inclusion initiatives are not systematically linked to bias mitigation efforts within recruitment practices.

IV. THEME 4: Varied Perceptions of Interventions' Fairness and Effectiveness

While the first three themes or findings provide a foundation for understanding the lack of integration on DEI initiatives with bias mitigations in hiring, and the most and least employed interventions, theme 4 moves beyond identifying practices to evaluating their effectiveness, it asks a crucial question: *How effective are existing interventions in achieving fairer outcomes?* By addressing this, theme 4 bridges the gap between intention and impact, exploring how perceptions of fairness and effectiveness align, or fail to align, with the realities of workforce

diversity and inclusion. The transition from practices to outcomes reflects a natural progression in the inquiry, examining whether current practices deliver the equitable results they aim to achieve.

When examining the efficacy of interventions, two significant and interrelated themes surfaced: a mixed concept on the understanding of fairness and an optimistic view on the effectiveness of their bias interventions.

Subjectivity in Defining Fairness

When participants were asked whether they considered their hiring processes fair, a vast majority, constituting 75%, affirmed the fairness of their procedures. However, their definitions of ‘fairness’ varied widely, reflecting personal values, organizational priorities, and DEI objectives. Participants’ responses to the question on fairness highlighted its subjective and multifaceted nature. For instance, participant P1 emphasized internal priorities, *"Fairness was not about the candidate but about existing employees."* Another participant, P2, in contrast, expressed tensions with DEI mandates *"My definition of fairness is not aligned with HR."* while participant, P30, offered a nuanced view, noting *"You might have to be unfair to be fair."* This variability quickly saturated the discussion, prompting a shift to a more targeted question: *"Do you think the interventions mentioned are effective at mitigating biases?" Please elaborate. What would you change?* This redirection uncovered nuanced insights into both the perceived effectiveness of their interventions and their actual workforce composition.

Perceived Effectiveness of Bias Mitigation Interventions

While 61% of respondents (20 out of 33) expressed confidence in the effectiveness of their bias mitigation interventions, their accounts revealed discrepancies between their

perceptions and the realities of the workforce composition, compounded by a lack of robust data tracking mechanisms.

The following quotes illustrate participants who expressed confidence in their hiring practices but whose described workforce composition reveals underlying challenges. This includes homogeneity in leadership roles, demographic clustering from referral practices, minority-dominant compositions, notable racial disparities, and limited data tracking, factors that complicate their views on the effectiveness of their interventions.

Homogeneity in Leadership Composition: despite progress in diversity initiatives, leadership roles remained predominantly homogenous, reflecting the continued influence of historical structures and norms. Participant P7 noted, *“We are a diverse company, people from different countries. I would not be surprised if we were over 50% international employees or newcomers.”* Yet, this diversity did not extend to leadership as the same participant remarked *“White man at the executive level except for head of people and culture, a white woman. Directors of engineering, all of them are white men.”*

Similarly, another participant, P5, noted a gender disparity in senior ranks, *“Probably 50/50 in gender, some gaps based on legacy female roles that are highly significant on the head of the division level.”* Engineering management roles showed slightly better representation, as participant P7 described: *“Engineering managers: 1/6 female, 4/6 people of color.”*

These examples suggest that while interventions might succeed at lower levels, leadership composition continues to reflect legacy barriers, particularly in historically white-male-dominated roles.

Clustering from Referral Practices: referral programs, while supporting diversity, often lead to demographic clustering. Participant, P17 observed: *“It is very diverse. We have a*

referral program too. I can tell from my group that there are a lot of Asians. Sometimes one person attracts someone of their same group unintentionally.” Another example is from Participant P15 who shared: *“Lately we have noticed an increase of people from the same country getting hired, and they are attracting people from their same country. We know there is an issue”* These patterns may unintentionally hinder broader diversity goals.

Intentional Minority Dominant Composition: some organizations exhibited single-minority dominance, reflecting intentional hiring strategies or community alignment. Participant P19 stated: *“In my company, all are visible minority, African American.”* while, participant, P31 added: *“By far, Spanish speaking”*

While these efforts may effectively provide opportunities to historically underrepresented groups, they could also limit broader diversity by focusing on specific demographics, potentially narrowing representation across other groups.

Racial Gaps in Workforce Composition: participants' observations highlight significant racial disparities across industries, with perceived barriers tied to hiring practices and systemic factors. For example, participant P14, from an international distribution company, noted: *“80% Anglophones Canadian, 20% diverse professionals with many years in Canada,”* suggesting that hiring practices may favor profiles with longstanding local experience, thereby excluding newcomer professionals.

In creative and design fields, participant P27, a third-party recruiter, shared her impressions: *“In the industry, the creative site, design, and product industry are predominantly white males. They find it challenging to add representation,”* highlighting systemic barriers within industry networks and hiring practices that hinder diversity efforts.

Meanwhile, participant P12, from the educational sector, referred to her organization's equity survey, which provided formal data on workforce composition: *"56% self-identified as white, 32% as Asian, 7% as Black, 4% Latin, 4% Middle Eastern, 4% mixed race."* This equity survey data reveals relatively higher diversity compared to other sectors, indicating the potential effectiveness of formal equity initiatives in shaping workforce composition.

Limited Data Tracking: many organizations lacked formal mechanisms for tracking diversity, relying on informal impressions. When asked about their employee racial composition, participant P7 admitted: *"We did not track it, we looked at some patterns or tools, but the size of the organization was a time barrier."* Another participant, P6 stated *"I can't tell you definitely...we are still improving"* while participant P23 said *"Very diverse, no stats"* Without robust data, the impact of interventions is difficult to quantify.

Insights from Practitioners: What would they change?

When asked for potential improvements, 4 of the 20 participants who viewed their interventions as effective provided areas for improvement such as:

More inclusivity. Participant P7 suggested sharing interview questions ahead of time accommodating neurodivergent candidates *"In a perfect world, some companies issue questions ahead of time, providing some context on what you are looking for could reduce bias."*

Bias training to managers. Participant P31, noted the importance of equip managers to address biases, particularly those linked to informal practices: *"Train managers on understanding biases. There is a lot of word of mouth, or somebody knew somebody."*

More intentionality in addressing bias. Participant P35 advocated deliberate efforts to address unconscious biases: “*We need more intentionality, breaking those biases, and being conscious of the drivers of our decisions.*”

Making Bias Training Interactive. Participant P36 proposed a shift from workshop-style training to more interactive sessions: “*Our training was more of a workshop. I would turn off the recording and explore—tell me a time where we have these biases, like gaps in resumes, online degrees, conformity bias.*”

Theme 4 underscores the complexities surrounding fairness and the effectiveness of bias mitigation interventions in hiring practices. While many participants expressed optimism about their interventions, workforce realities highlight significant gaps. The subjective nature of fairness, compounded by legacy structures and limited data-tracking mechanisms, further complicates efforts to evaluate and achieve equitable outcomes.

Importantly, the recognition of areas for improvement, even from only 4 out of 20 participants who asserted their interventions are effective, demonstrates reflectivity and a desire to advance equitable hiring. However, the overall overconfidence of well-intended practitioners in existing interventions risks masking deeper inequities, underscoring the need for organizations to critically evaluate and refine their approaches.

V. THEME 5: Candidate Reporting Experiencing Biases in Hiring

The job search process is often framed as an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their competencies and secure roles based on their qualifications and potential. However, many job seekers report that their experiences are shaped by the interactions and perceived biases they encounter along the way. Despite the widespread belief that hiring operates as a meritocracy, this section challenges that assumption by addressing a critical question: What specific biases tend to

surface most often during recruitment, as reported by job seekers? Drawing on qualitative analysis, the data expose the enduring reality of implicit biases within hiring processes. Job seekers were asked a simple yet profound question: *“Have you ever felt any type of bias in favor or against you when competing for a job? Can you elaborate?”* Their responses offer a candid view into the various experiences and the perceived biases they navigate.

Overview of Biases

The analysis revealed a diverse range of biases felt by job seekers, highlighting recurring themes of exclusion, judgment, and inequity. The biases experienced were mostly against, with only five racialized participants acknowledging bias worked in their favor. Immigrant and newcomer biases emerged as the most prominent, marked by the preferences for Canadian credentials and work experience, alongside barriers related to accent bias, legal status, and cultural bias. These systemic challenges disproportionately affect newcomers. Additional biases, such as first impression biases, age biases, gender biases, and ethnic biases further amplified the marginalization of racialized candidates.

By examining participant narratives, this section uncovers the nuanced barriers job seekers face, shedding light on the intersectionality of biases and their compounded effects. These findings unveil a recruitment system deeply influenced by societal judgments and structural inequities.

31 out of 40 participants, reported encountering biases, with 67 total mentions, signaling that job seekers often faced multiple forms of bias during the recruitment process. For clarity, this analysis categorizes Immigrant and Newcomer Biases separately from Ethnic Biases. The rationale for this distinction lies in the nuanced nature of the biases reported. While research

indicates that ethnic discrimination is often rationalized through proxies unrelated to ethnicity such as accent or name (Derous and Ryan, 2019) a phenomenon observed in this study, the decision to maintain separate categories is intentional. This approach allows for a differentiation between racialized individuals who have not experienced biases specific to immigration status and newcomers who expressed unique challenges linked to navigating new cultural and professional landscapes. This distinction also respects job seekers' identification of the sources of bias they have encountered, thereby ensuring their perspectives remain central to the analysis. The following analysis categorizes these biases by type and highlights their impact with direct quotes from participants.

1. ***Immigrant and Newcomer Biases (37 mentions)***: this category emerged as the most reported, reflecting the systemic barriers that disproportionately affect individuals navigating a new cultural and professional landscape. While overlapping with ethnic biases, immigrant and newcomer biases are distinct in their emphasis on local work experience and credentials, accent and fluency, culture, and legal status. According to the Government of Ontario (2024, Section 6, Footnote 10) “*very recent immigrants with 5 years or less since landing had the highest unemployment rate (11.1%) ... and those born in Canada (4.1%).*” This data highlights employment challenges among newcomers and emphasizes disparities in labor market integration.

a. ***Local Work Experience Bias (12 mentions)***: many job seekers expressed frustration at the emphasis on Canadian work experience, which often excluded even the most qualified candidates. One participant, JS1, shared “It did not matter how many years of experience I had outside Canada. I have to start with junior roles” Another participant,

JS6, noted, “résumé first filter name can discriminate, experience from another country too, as is sometimes devalued.”

- b. **Accentism and Communication Biases (12 mentions):** candidates with non-native accents reported being judged. As one participant, JS11, explained, “I interviewed for customer service at a big logistics company, and I was nervous, and I have a thick accent. I feel I qualified for everything, but I felt that by the way the interview finished; you felt disqualified.” Another participant, JS24 described, “I had an interview with Service Canada and noticed “accentism”...I was not comfortable, I didn't know if they were understanding me in the interview, I didn't know if it was my pronunciation, they weren't looking at me”. Also, same participant spoke about the language used in their interview question which was not accessible to a non-native speaker “This has nothing to do with my roots, they used a slang, and I didn't understand it. And I wondered why they used a slang in one of the questions. I questioned why they used that in interviews with people who may not have been raised here, it's not accessible.”

There are cases as participant JS30, who is aware of the positive bias toward her accent “When I am interviewing, my accent sounds a bit British. People listen more and take you more seriously. Sometimes I do the accent a little bit more. Think you are smarter than you are because of your accent. I have noticed that. Give me an unfair advantage over other candidates.”

- c. **Cultural Bias (9 mentions):** misalignment with cultural norms further marginalized newcomers. One candidate, participant JS31, reflected, “Another issue is being Latina... the personality clashed with the interviewer. They are more serious, more conservative, less expressive. You realize it. that has been an issue that disqualifies one. One is all the

time measuring how serious, spontaneous, formal, informal, I have to be. I am not really able to be myself.”

- d. **Local Credential Bias (2 mentions):** international qualifications were perceived to be often devalued in favor of Canadian credentials. A respondent, participant JS6 remarked, “I feel biased when I tell them I have a master’s, it seems good, but when I tell them it is from another country, the chances decrease by 60% right there for any job.”
- e. **Legal Status Bias (2 mentions):** immigration status created additional challenges, as Participant JS31 stated, when referring to her work visa “I went to an interview with Seneca, and the first thing they asked me was when my work permit expires...the status or expiration date affects”. She also pointed at job postings on government sites, “after spending so much time looking for a job, they forget about you and one has to mark when one is not a citizen or resident... ironically after they say, we encourage all applicants.”

These biases collectively underscore how newcomers are systematically excluded or undervalued, despite their qualifications and experience.

- 2. **First Impression Biases (8 mentions):** First impressions played a critical role in shaping candidates’ experiences, reflecting societal norms about professionalism and suitability:
 - a. **Clothing Bias (2 mentions):** Attire significantly influenced perceptions, with one respondent, JS14 stating she felt biased against, “*first, when I was looking for a job, I felt like my clothing was not appropriate. I felt I was very appropriate but then I realized that my image management affected their decision then I was stressed during the interview, and I can’t speak English properly.*” Participant JS24 also addressed the topic of outfit,

indicating how employment services put emphasis on dress to impress for interviews, while participant believe that how one dress should not be evaluated as skill for the job.

- b. **Stereotype Threat (4 mentions):** Candidates feared confirming stereotypes associated with their identities, which affected their confidence and performance during interviews.

“I think it could be my language, my vocabulary, I tried to answer, then I get block... probably they were looking for someone more fluent with more Canadian. I felt like that. I thought I fit in all requirements.” Participant JS40.

- c. **Intersectionality (1 mention):** Some candidates reported feeling judged for how their cultural traits or behaviors might not align with organizational expectations. As one participant, JS21, explained about age, accent, and her appearance *“I have the opportunity to have the interview and again they can see me, and they got bias that I am immigrant.”*

- d. **First Interview Bias (1 mention):** Snap judgments made or perceptions about having a first interview. Participant JS24 explained *“I did the wrong thing by feeling confident with the interviewer... I share that it was my first interview. And I think it backfired on me, they told me that I answered everything well, but I didn't have the license and that it also wasn't good to say that it was my first interview.”*

3. Age Bias (7 mentions): Age discrimination was reported, particularly older candidates often faced stereotypes about their adaptability or productivity. One respondent, JS38 shared *“I felt that they were looking for someone more junior I felt that it was more age than anything else.”* Another participant, JS21 noted, *“Yes, first, ageism, I feel that. I don't know if I can justify that or not. What they need? Do they need just graduated professionals? Because they speak English very well.”*

4. Ethnic Biases (5 mentions): Ethnic biases intersect with other forms of discrimination, but they specifically target racialized individuals based on their identity markers:

- a. **Ethnic Name Bias (4 mentions):** Candidates display a disadvantage or advantage depending on whether their last name names reveal their ethnic identities. Yet, those that are called, don't feel they are fully invited. Participant, JS29, explained, *“I used my last name, and I may be called, ... they don't expect me, my last name is not too Latin”*. Participant JS6, a woman from Iran, described how having an ethnic name on her resume often serves as the first filter that excludes her.
- b. **Colorism Bias (1 mention):** while only a case, it was more due to the lack of representation at the interview table, participant JS30 stated *“A lot of the companies I interview, I felt,... would not say racist, but did feel I wonder if I would fit-in because of the color of my skin.”*

Ethnic biases, such as name bias and colorism, highlight the unique challenges faced by racialized individuals during recruitment. Ethnic-sounding names can disadvantage candidates through exclusion, as Participant JS6 noted. Similarly, colorism, as reflected in JD30's experience, underscores how the lack of representation at the interview table perpetuates feelings of misfit and exclusion. Ethnic biases reflect how systemic racism continues to shape hiring processes, regardless of candidates' qualifications or experience.

Note that only a few participants, just five, reported experiencing biases in their favor, which were attributed to factors such as shared culture (Spanish and French), DEI initiatives, and having a British accent.

5. Gender Bias (5 mentions): Gender biases emerged including in the form of discriminatory questions (which are no longer implicit) and assumptions: A female participant, JS29, reported perceiving skepticism of her experience. She shared, *“I worked in good companies, and they*

seem to be surprised. If I were a white male, I am sure I would not be asked twice.” Another woman participant, JS24 reported being asked *“And the lady asked me where I lived and if I had family.”*

Integration of Narratives

The participant narratives illuminate the intricate ways biases manifest throughout the recruitment stages. It is important to note that these perceptions, while impactful for job seekers, are not necessarily acknowledged or explicitly addressed by employers.

Resume Screening: racialized job seekers perceive those biases such as ethnic name bias, foreign experience, and location bias often lead to automatic disqualifications. As Participant JS6 noted, *"Resume the first filter. Name can discriminate and foreign experience is devalued."*

Interviews: biases such as accentism, first impression bias, and cultural mismatches are perceived as frequently influencing interview dynamics and impacting candidate behavior and performance. Participant JS24 shared her interview experience *"They used slang in the interview, which wasn't accessible for someone who wasn't raised here."* She referred to an idiom “storm off” which despite her fluency in the language she misunderstood its meaning.

These insights emphasize the importance of addressing bias not only at the individual level but also through structural reforms in recruitment processes.

Table 8: Biases perceived by job seekers (67 mentions)

Bias Category	Subcategories	Mentions	Percentage (%)	When it Shows
Immigrant & Newcomer Biases	Accentism & Communication Biases (12), Canadian Experience (12), Canadian Education (2), Cultural Bias (9), Legal Status Bias (2)	37	55.22%	All Stages

First Impression Biases	Stereotype Threat (4), Clothing Bias (2), Intersectionality (1), First Interview Bias (1)	8	11.94%	Interview
Age Bias	General age-related biases	7	10.45%	All Stages
Ethnic Biases	Ethnic Name Bias (4), Colorism Bias (1)	5	7.46%	Resume Screening, Interview
Gender Bias	Gender-related assumptions and inappropriate personal questions	5	7.46%	Interview, Personal Questions

The analysis of perceived biases in hiring drew from the experiences of 40 participants, 9 of whom reported not experiencing bias. The remaining 31 identified 67 instances of bias, revealing that some individuals encountered multiple forms of bias. The most common biases were immigrant and newcomer-related, reflecting systemic preferences for local experience, accents, and cultural norms. Ethnic biases, including name bias and colorism, compounded these challenges, alongside assumptions tied to age, gender, and first impressions. Although a few participants noted biases working in their favor, these cases were rare. Overall, the findings highlight a recruitment system shaped by societal judgments, where biases influence every stage, from resume screening to final interviews.

While there is extensive research addressing structural barriers faced by newcomers such as credential recognition, limited professional networks, and challenges with settlement and integration, this study does not explore those systemic issues. Instead, it specifically focuses on participant's perceptions of bias during the hiring process. The prominence of immigrant and newcomer bias in the findings reflects participants' own emphasis on these experiences, rather than a deliberate examination from a systemic barriers perspective.

VI. THEME 6: Positive Candidate Experience as a Reflection of Inclusive Hiring

This theme examines how job seekers' observations of recruitment practices shape their candidate's experience highlighting key aspects of more equitable hiring. Participants' insights suggest that good recruitment practices do more than meeting professional standards, they directly influence emotional well-being, motivate proactive job search behaviors, and foster positive perceptions of employers. In response to questions such as: "Can you share any observation on a good recruitment practice? *What makes it a good recruitment practice? How did that experience impact your job search?*", six core dimensions emerged

Notably, 5 out of the 40 participants reported not having observed any good practices in their job search.

1. Humanized Approach (14 mentions): A humanized approach to recruitment was emphasized by 40% (14 of 35) of participants, who described it through various aspects that contributed to their positive experiences. This dimension focuses on empathy, interpersonal connection, and respect for the individual beyond their résumé.

- a. **Friendly Approach** (20%, 7 mentions): participants highlighted the importance of friendliness during recruitment interactions. This included behaviors such as breaking the ice with casual conversations or showing genuine empathy. For example, one participant, JS11 noted, "*They started with a casual conversation about the company's situation, which made me feel comfortable*".
- b. **Constructive Candidate Feedback** (11.4%, 4 mentions): participants valued actionable feedback and demonstrated respect for candidates, even when they were unsuccessful. Participant JS20 mentioned how such feedback made them feel respected and supported, even if they were not selected for the role. "*The feedback I received after the interview*

helped me prepare better for the next opportunity". Providing constructive feedback reinforces a candidate-centric approach and signals respect for the applicant's effort.

- c. **Getting to Know the Candidate Beyond the Resume** (5.7%, 2 mentions): taking the time to understand candidates beyond their résumés was appreciated by a smaller portion of participants. These participants valued recruiters who explored their values, motivations, and approaches to work. Participant JS2 shared, *"The interviewer didn't just focus on questions; they tried to understand who I am."* This personalized approach made candidates feel valued and seen.
- d. **Allowing Adequate Preparation Time** (2.9%, 1 mention): a participant noted that giving adequate time to prepare for the interview was helpful. This reflected respect for candidates' readiness and contributed to their confidence.

The humanized approach transforms recruitment into an inclusive, empowering process, demonstrating that empathy and respect are integral to equitable hiring.

2) Transparent Processes (14 mentions): transparency emerged as a critical factor contributing to positive candidate experiences. In this study, 40% (14 of 35) of participants highlighted the significance of transparency in recruitment fostering trust and professionalism.

- a. **Salary Disclosure Upfront** (8.6%, 3 mentions): upfront discussions about salary avoided misunderstandings and fostered trust. Participant, JS12, remarked, *"Early discussions about salary expectations ensured the process was efficient and mutually beneficial."*
- b. **Transparency in the Hiring Journey** (8.6%, 3 mentions): candidates valued clear communication about each step of the hiring process. Participant JS38 appreciates *"when they tell you exactly how the journey will be (transparency) including tips for interview."*

Recruiters who explicitly shared steps and timelines created a sense of inclusion while also demonstrating professionalism.

- c. **Work Culture Transparency** (8.6%, 4 mentions): participants appreciated insights into team dynamics and daily work culture. For instance, Participant JS23 explained *“I like it when they tell you how is the day-to-day at work. For example, Friday we have activities, as it allows me to see how the team is, more than the work.”*
- d. **Curated Online Content including Interview Preparation Tips** (11.4%, 4 mentions): career pages with user-friendly filters, blogs, and cultural insights were highlighted by participants as valuable tools that improve their candidate experience. These resources improved accessibility and allowed for better preparation, making the recruitment process more candidate centered. Participant JS13 asserted *“I like when you go to a company website and in their career page, they have good filters, and you can enter what would you like (not everyone has them) ... when companies take time to make it easier for you and themselves”* Such resources not only simplified the job search but instilled a sense of trust in the organization. JS36 remarked that providing preparatory materials reflects an organization’s commitment to candidate success.

When employers are transparent, candidates notice as it empowers candidates and removes ambiguity. Transparency is not just part of the process; it *is* the process.

3) Timely and Proactive Communication (17 mentions): The significance of timely and proactive communication during the recruitment process cannot be overstated. 42.5% (17 of 40) of participants highlighted its significance in fostering transparency, respect, and keeping candidates well-informed. Participants described proactive communication as a crucial element,

which helps them feel informed and respected, even when not selected for a role. Technology plays a role in this theme. The key aspects include:

- a. **Timely Rejection Messages** (20%, 7 mentions): Many participants appreciated receiving timely rejection emails. These messages allowed candidates to move on to other opportunities without uncertainty. Participant JS29 shared, *“If I don’t get the job, I like to get an email saying so... they kept me posted and replied timely.”* Another participant, JS16 added, *“Even automated rejection emails help close the loop respectfully.”*
- b. **Ongoing Candidate Updates** (14.3%, 5 mentions): Participants valued regular updates. Keeping candidates informed about their application status was seen as a sign of respect. For example, Participant JS29 noted, *“They didn’t let me wait for weeks; they were in touch and provided good feedback”*. Another participant, JS33 emphasized, *“I like when they tell you if you’re still in the process and walk you through it.”*
- c. **Streamline the Process** (10%, 4 mentions): technology plays a role in facilitating timely and proactive communication. Participants praised user-friendly platforms that eliminate redundancies, such as requiring repeated input of résumé details. Respondent JS14 shared, *“I liked the website that pulled information from my résumé instead of making me re-enter everything.”* These technologies not only reduce barriers but also create a more seamless and inclusive experience for applicants.

Timely and proactive communication is a cornerstone of effective recruitment practices. It fosters transparency and respect, leaving positive impressions on candidates. By implementing efficient communication strategies and leveraging technology appropriately, organizations can create a more inclusive and seamless recruitment process. Conversely, a lack of updates or

acknowledgment created negative experiences, discouraging future applications. Clear and timely responses, even rejections, were valued as marks of professionalism.

4) Equity and Inclusion in Practice (7 mentions): equity emerged when good recruitment practices are fostered. Noted by 17.5% (7 of 40) of participants, who felt a sense of inclusion, belonging, and trust during the hiring process.

- a. **Diverse Panel Members:** participant JS30 noted how even a single minority member on the panel interview made her feel more authentic *“The only minority on the panel asked a question that embraced my authenticity, that’s why I was hired”*. This highlights the role of representation in reducing anxiety and fostering confidence.
- b. **Interview questions in advance:** show as another practice that foments equity, reduces stress, and enables better preparation, particularly for candidates facing challenges like dyslexia. Participant JS34 stated, *“Sending questions ahead of time removes stress and shows they care about making the process equitable.”*
- c. **Inclusive communication:** such as clarifying questions during interviews, helped participants feel supported. Participant JS7 remarked, *“They clarified questions I didn’t understand, which made the interview feel more approachable.”*
- d. **Mentorship programs for underrepresented groups** were identified as impactful pre-hiring initiatives, offering candidates networking opportunities and connections to hiring managers. As participant JS35 explained, *“Through mentorship at TD, I met another hiring manager, which opened new opportunities.”*

Equity in recruitment can be achieved through deliberate practices, such as fostering diverse panels, providing interview questions in advance, offering mentorship opportunities, and

ensuring thoughtful inclusive communication, aligning hiring processes with organizational values of equity and inclusion.

5) Fair Evaluation of Competencies (6 mentions): clarity about the roles, relevant interview questions, and hands-on measurement of skills were mentioned.

- a. **Open information on role and company** was essential for setting expectations, Participant JS20 shared, *“I was impressed with their job description and communication during the process.”* Another participant, JS11, valued recruiters who shared details about the company’s challenges and expectations *“They shared a bit about the company, why they are looking for the role, and the problems they are experiencing”*. Such openness enables candidates to have some agency and make informed decisions.
- b. **Tailored interview questions that reflect the role**, allowing them to focus on the competencies for the role. A respondent, JS27, explained, *“I like when they focus on how the job actually is, as opposed to general questions like how you set up your day.”* Such targeted questions create a fairer and more meaningful evaluation process, avoiding the frustration associated with irrelevant queries.
- c. **Practical, task-based assessments** were also appreciated for providing candidates with a practical way to showcase their skills. Participant JS12 recalled how interacting with children during an interview allowed her to demonstrate her suitability for the role despite language barriers: *“She noticed I got along with the kids, and she hired me. I liked it because I could show my abilities despite my English not being great.”* These practices ensure candidates are evaluated on their actual competencies and make them feel fairly assessed.

By combining clear expectations for the role, asking relevant questions, and performing hands-on evaluations, organizations can create a recruitment process that aligns with equitable principles, ensuring candidates are assessed fairly and meaningfully.

Table 9: Job seeker's observation of good candidate experience

Dimension	Key Practices	Impact
1. Timely and Proactive Communication 42.5%	Timely rejection messages, Ongoing candidate updates, use of technology to streamline the process.	Fostered transparency and respect.
2. Humanized Approach 40%	Friendly approach, constructive feedback.	Fostered trust, reduced anxiety, and validated candidates' individuality.
3. Transparent Processes 40%	Salary disclosure, clear hiring journey, work culture transparency, curated content including prep material.	Built trust and professionalism by addressing information asymmetry.
4. Equity & Inclusion in Practice 17.5%	Diverse panels, accommodations.	Enhanced belonging and mitigated systemic barriers.
5. Fair evaluation of competencies 15%	Clear job descriptions, skill-based tasks.	Aligned expectations and ensured fairness in competency evaluations.

Impact of a Good Candidate Experience

Good recruitment practices have far-reaching impacts on candidates, influencing their behaviors, emotional well-being, and perceptions of the organization. Based on insights from 35 participants, three key themes emerged: Positive Psychological and Emotional Impact, Behavioral and Engagement Impact, and Employer Attraction and Commitment. These insights underscore the transformative role of humanized, candidate-centered recruitment practices in shaping candidates' perceptions, actions, and well-being.

1. *Positive Psychological and Emotional Impact (40%, 14 mentions)*

Good recruitment practices most profoundly impacted candidates on an emotional and psychological level. These experiences instilled confidence, created comfort, and affirmed candidates' sense of worth, leaving them better equipped to navigate their job search journeys.

- a. **Building Confidence** (17.1%, 6 mentions) Many candidates reported that positive interactions during recruitment enhanced their confidence and self-esteem. For example, Participant JS21 shared, *"It gave me better self-esteem, recognized my experience even though I am an immigrant, and made me feel comfortable."* Another participant, JS5, explained, *"I feel more confident and motivated."* These examples illustrate how thoughtful engagement can motivate candidates to approach opportunities with a renewed sense of self-assurance.
- b. **Feeling Comfortable** (8.6%, 3 mentions) Empathetic interactions fostered a safe environment for candidates, allowing them to feel at ease during the process. Participant JS30 explained, *"I feel comfortable to be myself."* Another participant, JS15, shared how a positive process alleviated anxieties about entering a new industry: *"The process made me feel I didn't have to worry about being in a new industry."*
- c. **Feeling Valued** (5.7%, 2 mentions) Recruitment practices that demonstrated respect left candidates feeling genuinely valued. Participant JS22 noted, *"Providing feedback, transparency, and being valued made me feel good."* Feeling respected and appreciated during the recruitment process reinforces candidates' belief in their own abilities and worth.
- d. **Other Emotional Impact** (8.7%, 3 mentions) Beyond confidence, comfort, and feeling valued, candidates described other distinct positive outcomes such as feeling understood, being myself, and improving my mood (each with 1 mention):

- *“It made me feel connected and that the other side is human and kind. It made me feel understood”* (JS7).
- *“It builds confidence, allows me to be myself, and do better”* (JS10).
- *“It boosts my mood and motivates me to work more and allocate more hours to keep searching”* (JS1).

These emotional and psychological effects highlight the transformative nature of a recruitment process that prioritizes empathy and respect.

2. Behavioral Impact (31.4%, 11 mentions)

Beyond emotional benefits, positive recruitment practices encouraged candidates to engage more actively in their job search and build more persistence.

- Becoming More Proactive and Engaged** (22% 8 mentions) Candidates shared that respectful and transparent recruitment processes motivated them to take proactive steps in their job search. Participant JS29 explained, *“It teaches me to be proactive and follow up and be clear on the subject.”* Another participant, JS14, added, *“If the interview is good, I get energy. If the website does not have a lot of steps, I feel I can apply more.”* They also feel more comfortable asking for feedback *“When they are open, you are more encouraged to ask for proper feedback, which sometimes you don’t.”*

These comments reflect how good recruitment practices empower candidates to become more engaged, open, and confident in their efforts.

- Investing More Time and Continuing** (8.6%, 3 mentions) Participants noted that positive experiences inspired persistence in their job search. One participant, JS13, shared, *“It makes me hopeful to continue the job search on online applications and look for similar companies*

that do those things". Such moments demonstrate how equitable practices can sustain candidates' motivation, even in competitive markets.

3. **Employer Attraction and Commitment (28.6%, 10 mentions):**

Good recruitment practices positively shaped candidates' perceptions of the organization's true values fostering trust and a desire to work there.

- a. **Desire to work for the company** (20%, 7 mentions) Several participants expressed that positive recruitment experiences made them eager to join the organization. Participant JS38 emphasized, *"It generates the desire to work for that company. Branding is key from the first call."* Another participant, JS35, shared, *"I really wanted to work for TD because of the mentorship."* These comments highlight how recruitment serves as a reflection of an organization's values and culture, influencing candidates' career decisions.
- b. **Favorable Impression of Employer** (8.6%, 3 mentions) Professional and transparent processes left candidates with a strong, positive impression of the organization. As Participant JS32 noted, *"It gave me a favorable impression of the employer. Professional people on board."* Another responder, JS24, remarked, *"Good practices speak well about the company."* A favorable impression not only boosts candidates' interest in a specific role but also enhances the employer's reputation.

Table 10: Impact of good candidate experience as described by job seekers

Theme	Mentions	Percentage	Key Impacts
Positive Psychological Impact	14	40.0%	Confidence, comfort, feeling valued, mood boost.
Behavioral and Engagement Impact	11	31.4%	Proactive engagement, seeking feedback, persistence.
Employer Attraction and Commitment	10	28.6%	Desire to join, favorable impressions of the organization.

The findings underscore that good recruitment practices play a critical role in fostering equitable hiring experiences. Participants highlighted five dimensions, Humanized Approach, Transparent Processes, Timely and Proactive Communication, Inclusivity in Practice, Fair Evaluation of Skills, and Knowledge. In addressing the question “How do job seekers' observations of good recruitment practices reflect their candidate experience, and what does this reveal about equitable practices?”, the analysis shows that equitable recruitment is not just about compliance; it is a transformative process that promotes inclusivity, humanizes hiring, and advanced equity in hiring.

Evaluation of the Findings

Chapter 4 reveals a significant gap between organizations' increasing awareness of DEI initiatives and their practical efforts to reduce hiring biases. While many companies express a commitment to DEI adopting various tools and methods, they often lack specific strategies to address unconscious biases, undermining the success of DEI initiatives. This situation poses both challenges and opportunities for organizations aiming to create fairer hiring practices.

The most evident practices are diversity policy (57%) at the organizational level, and the adoption of structured tools, such as Applicant Tracking Systems (70.7%) and structured interviews (45%) in recruitment processes. These tools reflect efforts to standardize hiring processes and reduce subjectivity. However, without complementary interventions like training hiring teams, using structured rubrics, or incorporating cultural sensitivity training, these tools fall short of their potential to mitigate biases and foster equity in hiring.

Moreover, reliance on unstructured methods, such as intuitive manual résumé screening (90.2%) and intuition-based decision-making with debriefing (74%) remains a challenge. These subjective approaches continue to dominate the early and final hiring stages, introducing

opportunities for bias to influence outcomes. While blind résumé screening is recognized by many recruiters as an effective intervention, it is rarely practiced. Instead, a noteworthy alternative used by one employer (2.4%) is collaborative résumé evaluation, where multiple managers from diverse backgrounds independently vote on résumés. This method reduces individual bias by integrating diverse perspectives, a practice that could serve as a model for other organizations.

Many candidates, especially from marginalized groups, report encountering systemic biases during recruitment, such as immigrant bias and newcomer bias (37 mentions), including accent bias, local work experience, and cultural bias. First impression bias (8 mentions) and age bias (7 mentions) were also a concern. Despite the negative experiences, some job seekers have identified good practices that reflected equity and inclusion in hiring such as humanized approaches, transparent processes, timely and proactive communication, fair evaluation of competencies, and witnessing and inclusive practices. Yet, these positive experiences are inconsistent, underscoring the need for ongoing efforts to implement unbiased recruitment tools and processes and enhance the candidate experience.

Overall, while organizations are making strides with DEI policies and structured tools, there remains significant room for growth in diving deep into these efforts. By embedding evidence-based strategies, fostering accountability, and adopting innovative approaches like collaborative résumé evaluations and independent evaluations prior to group discussions, organizations can take meaningful steps toward building more equitable and inclusive hiring processes. These findings provide a strong foundation for the recommendations outlined in Chapter 5, which focus on actionable ways to close these gaps and promote fairness in recruitment.

Summary

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with 82 participants, revealing six key themes: limited bias recognition despite increased awareness of DEI; insufficient structured organizational interventions; persistent subjectivity in recruitment; varied perceptions of intervention fairness and effectiveness; experiences of exclusion due to hiring biases; and positive candidate experiences reflecting equitable hiring practices.

The study addresses the following specific inquiries to explore current practices and provide recommendations: What evidence-based strategies or interventions are currently the most and least used by employers to tackle biases in hiring? How effective are existing interventions in achieving fairer hiring outcomes? What specific biases tend to surface most often during recruitment, as reported by job seekers? How do job seekers' observations of recruitment practices shape their candidate experience, and what does this reveal about opportunities for equitable hiring and bias mitigation?

In evaluating the findings, it is evident that despite extensive research on bias and interventions up to 2024, ethnic minorities, particularly newcomers and immigrants, continue to navigate recruitment processes that they perceive as unfavorable. Organizational efforts toward DEI often lack the integration of effective bias mitigation strategies. Nonetheless, certain best practices have demonstrated positive outcomes, indicating potential pathways for enhancing equity in hiring.

The research underscores the necessity for organizations to integrate structured, evidence-based interventions to mitigate biases into their DEI initiatives. By doing so, organizations can cultivate more inclusive recruitment processes, thereby improving the candidate experience and promoting diversity within the workforce.

It is important to acknowledge that participating employers are genuinely committed to fostering diversity and inclusion within their organizations. Their intentions reflect a dedication to creating equitable workplaces, even as they navigate the complexities of effectively implementing DEI initiatives. This commitment serves as a foundation upon which more effective strategies can be built to achieve meaningful progress in bias mitigation and inclusive hiring practices.

Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendation, and Conclusion

Chapter 5 concludes the qualitative inductive research by restating the problem and purpose statements, detailing the methodology and design, and summarizing the results and limitations. The chapter examines the study's findings and their implications, guided by the central research question. Insights from participants' interviews and literature review inform recommendations for practice and future research.

This study addresses the persistent problem of implicit biases adversely affecting minority groups within hiring contexts, even in environments committed to DEI. Such biases contribute to systemic barriers that hinder equitable opportunities for these individuals. If unaddressed, these barriers not only harm minority groups but also impede organizational effectiveness and societal cohesion.

The purpose of this qualitative inductive research is to examine existing bias mitigation strategies and their effectiveness. Additionally, the study seeks to understand job seekers' perceptions of biases encountered during their job search to respond to the central research question guiding this research: What practices should organizations adopt or maintain to mitigate or interrupt bias in the hiring process?

Data collection was confined to transcripts from interviews with 82 participants, predominantly located in Ontario, Canada. This focus provides a nuanced understanding of the barriers experienced by minority groups, as the finding shows, particularly newcomers and immigrants.

Ethical approval was obtained from the York University Ethics Department, ensuring adherence to protocols that protect human subjects. Participants were informed of their right to

withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any questions without obligation. Informed consent was secured prior to interviews.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study demonstrates a significant strength in its ability to identify and compare real-world hiring practices against robust theoretical frameworks, offering a clear and comprehensive picture of the gaps in current interventions. The selective integration of frameworks such as BCT, SDT, and the CP enhances the study's depth and relevance, providing valuable insights into bias mitigation strategies.

A noteworthy strength of the study is the participant pool was significant (82 participants) helping to identify critical gaps and propose interventions for practical application in hiring practices. Participants were generous with their time and insights, allowing for a nuanced understanding of their experiences and practices. Furthermore, several organizations reflected candidly on their vulnerabilities and shared specific challenges in their hiring processes, which enriched the study's analysis.

Another strength lies in the ability to draw from organizations that are seeing measurable improvements in their outcomes. These cases provided concrete examples of effective interventions that can be adapted and scaled across different contexts, adding a practical dimension to the findings.

While this study offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. For instance, the study's reliance on self-reported data may constrain the ability to fully assess the depth and consistency of the interventions described. To address this, further research could incorporate observational methods on how these practices function in daily operations to validate self-reported data.

Additionally, a significant gender imbalance exists in both groups in the participant pool, with a predominance of female respondents among both employers and job seekers, which may have influenced their perspectives on the findings. This imbalance was not intentional but likely reflects a greater willingness among women to discuss experiences of bias and hiring practices. Moreover, the cultural composition of participants and the place of origin with 57% of job seekers and 39% of employers identified Spanish as their first language, and 7.5% of job seekers and 35.71% of employers were born in Canada or the US; introducing cultural variables that were not explicitly examined in this research, potentially influencing responses and perspectives in ways that extend beyond the study's scope.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The present findings align with scholarly discourse, underscoring that both systemic and individual biases impede the attainment of DEI aspirations within organizations. Frequently, organizations implement DEI initiatives without addressing underlying biases, thereby diminishing the efficacy of such efforts. While interventions such as diversity policies and structured interviews show alignment with theoretical frameworks like SDT and BCT, their limited scope and integration with bias mitigation strategies reduce the overall impact. For instance, the lack of blind résumé screening or alternatives such as various independent screeners, interviewer training, and/or accountability mechanisms underscores the disconnect between evidence-based practices and operational realities.

These results reinforce the need for a more integrated approach to bias mitigation, combining organizational interventions (i.e., mandatory interviewer training) with individual-level strategies (e.g., DEI training). The findings also suggest that interventions should be

tailored to the specific organizational context, as advocated by CP and BCT, to address unique challenges and opportunities for bias reduction.

Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations are derived from a comprehensive analysis of the findings detailed in Chapter 4, and their alignment with the literature review in Chapter 2, including identified promising practices. They are intentionally designed to mitigate hiring bias by addressing both theoretical and practical dimensions. Four key considerations inform their development:

1. Bridging Research and Practice, selectively drawing on insights from multi-theoretical perspective, including SDT, BCT, and CP, the recommendations address the disconnect between evidence-based best practices and current real-world organizational interventions.

2. Incorporating Practitioner-Driven Best practices, the analysis highlights practitioner-driven best practices and innovative approaches that support bias mitigation and fosters more inclusive hiring processes.

3. Tackling the Most Significant Biases Affecting Job Seekers, targeting the most frequently reported biases to ensure that proposed interventions respond to the most pressing challenges faced by underrepresented job seekers within hiring processes.

4. Enhancing the Candidate Experience, acknowledging the critical role of candidate perceptions in shaping equitable hiring outcomes, these recommendations incorporate job seekers' observations and feedback on inclusive hiring practices.

Building on these considerations, the recommendations adopt Correl's (2016) "small win" approach, which emphasizes the value of incremental changes as catalysts for broader

organizational transformation and sustained progress. Recognizing that organizations vary in resource availability and capacity, this approach is particularly well-suited for organizations operating with limited resources such as financial, time, and/or human but that demonstrate a genuine commitment to advancing inclusive practices. By focusing on scalable, evidence-based interventions, these recommendations ensures that bias mitigation efforts remain feasible and impactful across diverse organizational settings.

To support long-term impact, the proposed interventions address both organizational-level structures and individual-level behaviors:

At the **organizational level**, five key interventions are recommended:

1. Adopting blind résumé screening or collaborative voting systems,
2. Strengthening the use of structured and inclusive interview questions,
3. Implementing independent evaluations before group debriefings,
4. Monitoring, and evaluating processes, tools, and hiring outcomes,
5. Establishing candidate-employer feedback mechanism.

At the **individual level**, four key interventions are recommended:

1. Mandating training for all decision makers (interviewer training),
2. Providing DEI training,
3. Developing mentorship programs, and
4. Ensuring diverse representation in the hiring panel table.

It is important to note that while DEI training and interviewer training are categorized as organizational interventions in Table 6 within Chapter 4, which outlines the study's finding, they are reframed as individual level interventions in this chapter to align with the Bias Cycle Theory

(BCT). Though, these efforts are driven at the organizational level, their primary impact is at the individual level, targeting attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors that perpetuate unintended biases.

These nine implementable recommendations establish hiring as a foundational pillar for fostering an inclusive organizational culture, one that extends beyond recruitment to shape long-term workplace practices. While bias continues to persist even in organizations with strong DEI awareness and DEI policies in place, those that demonstrate meaningful progress are the ones that move from awareness to sustained action. These organizations place culture at the core of their strategy and implement multi-level, reinforcing interventions by operationalizing inclusion through concrete, day-to-day actions. Despite only 10% of participating organizations identifying culture as a key strength in their DEI strategies, integrating these tangible, bias-mitigating interventions can drive meaningful transformation. By embedding inclusion into hiring and beyond, organizations can ensure that a truly inclusive culture is not just an aspiration but a sustained reality.

Organizational Interventions

Organizational interventions target the structural biases that are embedded in recruitment processes and organizational culture. These interventions focus on creating a framework that enables equitable hiring practices.

1- Adopting Blind Résumé Screening or Collaborative Voting Systems

Organizations seeking to mitigate biases such as name, ethnicity, and similarity biases are encouraged to adopt blind résumé screening or collaborative voting systems as part of their recruitment processes. Blind résumé screening, recommended by the CP (Adamovic, 2022), removes identifying information from résumés, allowing evaluations to focus exclusively on

candidates' skills and experiences. Despite its effectiveness and the interest expressed by 31% of practitioners in anonymizing early stages of the recruitment process, blind résumé screening was not implemented by any of the participants interviewed in Ontario.

Understanding that adoption of blind resumes could be challenging in terms of implementation, an alternative intervention is the collaborative voting system, used by one participating organization. This system involved evaluators, who were themselves from diverse backgrounds, independently selecting their top résumés. The résumés receiving the most votes were shortlisted for further review. This process reduces individual biases, incorporates multiple perspectives, and provides a transparent method for résumé evaluation.

Organizations are encouraged to implement one or both methods, ensuring evaluators are trained in equity-focused criteria and consistent application. These approaches foster fairness, transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in résumé screening, improving the overall equity of the recruitment process.

2- Strengthening the use of Structured and Inclusive Approach to Interview Questions

While job seekers participating in this study exhibit a preference for semi-structured interviews due to their conversational dynamics, evidence-based research highlights the advantages of structured interviews. Specifically, 45% of employers already employ structured interviews to standardize the process, ensuring all candidates respond to the same set of questions and are evaluated based on uniform criteria. Structured interviews, as recommended by this study, and moderately used by practitioners, offer a systematic approach to recruitment. However, relying solely on structured interviews does not guarantee equitable candidate assessment.

A critical component often overlooked is the language used in formulating interview questions. Questions must be accessible and directly aligned with the job posting to mitigate potential biases. Feedback from job seekers reveals significant challenges arising from culturally specific language, idiomatic expressions, and overly generalized questions. Such practices frequently disadvantage candidates, particularly newcomers and individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds, by diverting attention from their actual competencies.

This recommendation is underpinned by BCT, which advocates for structural reforms in evaluation processes to debiasing tools and processes bias. Moreover, it aligns with SDT) by addressing the cultural barriers that impede inclusivity in recruitment practices. By crafting interview questions that are clear, competency-focused, and free of local idiomatic expressions, organizations can enhance their ability to assess candidates equitably while promoting a hiring process that actively values diversity.

To operationalize this recommendation, organizations should develop inclusive language in their interview questions that are explicitly linked to the role's requirements. Addressing systemic evaluation practices and cultural barriers concurrently ensures a more equitable and effective recruitment process, fostering inclusivity and fairness across diverse candidate pools.

3- Implementing Independent Evaluations Before Group Debriefings

Malhotra (2019) recommends evaluators form their own decision about a candidate before discussing it with peers. Independent evaluations are a critical practice for mitigating groupthink and conformity bias, both of which are common in panel discussions and collective decision-making. This study reveals that only 2.4% of organizations in Ontario utilize independent evaluations, while 74% rely on conversational debriefings. Such as unstructured

discussions often amplify subjective judgments, hinder diverse perspectives, and perpetuate bias, emphasizing the need for more impartial evaluation methods in recruitment processes.

Aligned with BCT (Stephens et al., 2020), independent evaluation is an intervention that interrupts biases at both individual and systemic levels. By requiring evaluators to form initial assessments independently before engaging in group deliberations, this approach ensures that each panelist's perspective is captured without undue influence from group dynamics or dominant opinions. This process fosters a more equitable and transparent decision-making framework.

To implement independent evaluations effectively, organizations should introduce structured assessment tools such as guidelines and scoring rubrics that standardize individual evaluations before group discussions; such tools will also enhance accountability. Additionally, the recommendation for training panelists on biases and cultural awareness including the risks of groupthink and the benefits of independent assessments can further reinforce these practices.

4- Monitoring and Evaluating Processes, Tools, and Hiring Outcomes

To foster a culture that genuinely promotes equitable practices, organizations must implement robust systems that create accountability in the entire process, monitoring and evaluating recruitment processes, tools, and outcomes would offer objective information that will serve to assess practices. These efforts ensure continuous improvement and enable the effective adjustment of strategies to mitigate biases while attracting, training, and retaining diverse talent.

However, findings reveal that only 14% of organizations actively monitor the inclusivity of their recruitment. This limited adoption underscores a significant gap in practice.

Organizations that do prioritize monitoring or auditing gain a clearer understanding of their

strengths and weaknesses in achieving inclusive recruitment as part of their DEI goals. This awareness makes them more mindful of potential strategies to attract and engage underrepresented talent, creating a pipeline of opportunities that reflect their commitment to equity. For instance, regular audits on their process, tools, and hiring data can ensure the organization identifies interventions that need refinement. Also, candidate surveys can highlight areas where inclusivity efforts need reinforcement.

5- Establishing Candidate-Employer Feedback Mechanism

The recommendation for feedback mechanisms emerges from insights into candidate experiences. Constructive candidate feedback was mentioned by job seekers as a driver of inclusive recruitment practices. Only 1 organization in this study noted feedback mechanisms as an intentional practice.

A mutual feedback mechanism is recommended to bridge this gap, emphasizing both employer-to-candidate and candidate-to-employer exchanges. Employers should provide constructive, actionable feedback to candidates who are not selected, offering insights and reasons for non-selection as noted by Carperter (2013) when referring to key factors for a positive candidate experience. This practice not only demonstrates respect for the candidate's time but also strengthens the organization's reputation for transparency.

Equally, organizations should solicit feedback from candidates regarding their experience during the recruitment process to measure their satisfaction. Surveys or post-process feedback tools can uncover strengths, inefficiencies, and highlight areas for improvement. For example, candidates can share observations about the inclusivity of interview questions, the clarity of job postings, or overall perceptions of the hiring process.

The goal of this intervention is to improve candidate experiences, foster equity, and contribute to building an inclusive organizational culture. This practice ensures that organizations remain mindful of their DEI objectives, leveraging candidate insights to inform and adjust strategies while demonstrating accountability and transparency throughout the hiring process.

Individual Interventions

Individual interventions are strategies designed to disrupt biases at the personal level, focusing on the cognitive and behavioral patterns of individuals involved in decision-making processes.

1- Education: Mandating Training for All Decision Makers (Interviewer Training)

This study reveals a significant gap in interviewers' preparedness, as only 12% of organizations currently provide for those responsible for hiring decisions. Eberhardt (2016) highlights that implicit bias training can play a critical role in raising awareness of unconscious stereotypes, enabling employees to make more equitable and thoughtful decisions. When implemented effectively, such training contributes to a workplace that is not only fairer but also more inclusive.

An HR Talent Acquisition Director, Participant P36, stressed the value of practical bias training to interviewers, suggesting incorporating discussions on biases in the real world (i.e., résumé gaps, perceptions of online degrees) while providing action tools (i.e., interview guides, criteria for rating assessments, sample questions, and feedback submission processes). The perspective of job seekers further underscores the necessity of such intervention, with 20% of participants recommending that decision-makers undergo training to address the biases Devine

et al (2012) demonstrate that reducing implicit racial bias requires a combination of bias awareness, concern about bias effects, and the application of targeted strategies; which this training aims to achieve.

Chan et al. (2006) and Dalton and Villagran (2018) advocate for cultural training. For example, Chan et al. (2006) propose mandatory training supported by leadership, as it would enhance interviewers' awareness and cross-cultural communication skills. This recommendation aligns with the findings, as practitioners have not articulated cultural training as an intervention. Yet, job seekers frequently bear the responsibility of navigating cultural differences during interviews. For instance, Participant JS31 experienced a cultural clash, noting that her expressive demeanor contrasted with the interviewers' reserved nature. This disparity compelled her to self-monitor and adjust her behavior, ultimately hindering her ability to be authentic.

Immigration Refugee Citizenship Canada, IRCC (2024) National Feedback Forum reported the struggle faced by employers and newcomers including cultural barriers and a lack of understanding of international qualifications and skills, making a recommendation for building employer capacity. Congruent IRRC report, this study's findings reveal Immigrant & Newcomers Biases to be the most common among job seekers, with accentism and lack of Canadian experience as the most present. Therefore, the recommended interviewer training should include:

- Training interviewers to recognize the existence of implicit biases and to apply mitigation strategies through practical discussion and real-world examples.
- Self-reflection on their own implicit bias. The Implicit Association Test, IAT can be a good tool to help with this self-reflection (Project Implicit, 2011).

- Incorporating cultural training to equip interviewers with awareness of cultural similarities and diversities, rethinking soft-skills evaluation (Chan et al, 2006, IRCC, 2024).
- Accent Bias Training to view accent as normal and part of cultural heritage (O'Brien et al., 2024).
- Raising an understanding of international skills and credentials (IRCC, 2024).
- Providing interview guides that include processes and tools including but not limited to the purpose of the guide, what not to ask, and how to utilize structured interviews, structured, relevant questions, rating criteria, and feedback submission processes.
- Developing certification programs to validate interviewers' readiness to conduct unbiased evaluations.

Providing interviewer training to decision-makers, including hiring managers, panel members, and recruiters, helps organizations adopt an equity-based approach that fosters bias awareness and encourages critical reflection. This training enables participants to recognize and address biases effectively. By incorporating bias-specific modules, practical tools, and cultural training, organizations can promote fairness, enhance equity in hiring, and build the capacity for inclusive recruitment practices. According to BCT (Stephens et al., 2020), disrupting biases at both individual and systemic levels is essential, positioning interviewer training as a critical element of equitable recruitment strategies. While interviewer training can be considered organizational level intervention due to the significant amount of training in a structured process, it has been allocated under individual intervention as it does embed training that encourages awareness and reflection at the individual level.

2- *Education: Providing DEI Training*

An intentional approach to developing and regularly updating content is crucial to maximizing the positive impact of training and education. DEI training is an intervention for fostering inclusivity within the workplace. Findings from this study indicate that while 57% of organizations have formal diversity policies, only 33% implement DEI training programs. This inconsistency underscores the need to bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring diversity initiatives translate into meaningful, actionable outcomes. Cultural awareness, and bias reduction, which are part of the interviewer training, should be reinforced by including them in the DEI training content.

Literature and research on DEI training reveal mixed results regarding its effectiveness. Some critiques highlight challenges in sustaining long-term behavioral change or ensuring training translates into equitable practices. Despite these concerns, BCT supports DEI training as part of multilevel interventions.

Pairing individual interventions such as DEI training with other interventions such as interviewer training or organizational training interventions such as blind resumes or collaborative voting to understand the applicability of the training, can support organizations in achieving the effectiveness of their bias mitigation practices.

3- *Establishing Mentorship Programs*

Mentorship programs are widely recognized as highly effective in supporting newcomers, women, and underrepresented groups. According to Dalton and Villagran (2018), organizations with formal mentorship experience a 9% to 24% increase in minority representation. Moreover, grounded in BCT (Stephens et al., 2020), mentorship disrupts biases by fostering intergroup contact and countering stereotypes, making it a key component of

workplace bias mitigation strategies, including recruitment. Through structured relationships, mentorship equips mentees to navigate workplace norms and cultural expectations, addressing biases related to cultural fit and professional capabilities. Mentorship programs also align with SDT (Wilson, 2018), by addressing cultural barriers and promoting inclusivity within institutions. By creating structured pathways for underrepresented groups to integrate successfully into workplaces, mentoring programs challenges hierarchical structures and fosters equity.

This study reveals that 97.5% of job seekers value and would like mentorship, recognizing its role to empower individuals, providing guidance, and offering access to the unspoken workplace norms through supportive relationships. However, only 19% of organizations currently offer formal mentorship programs, leaving significant gaps in addressing systemic barriers. Establishing mentorship initiatives allows organizations to enhance inclusivity, counteract biases, and demonstrate a strong commitment to diversity and equity.

4- Ensuring Diverse Representation in the Hiring Panel Table

Diverse hiring panels play a crucial role in mitigating biases such as affinity bias and in-group bias, promoting equity in recruitment decisions. Despite their importance, findings reveal that only 14% of organizations are intentional about ensuring diverse panel representation, highlighting a significant gap in practice. By including panelists from varied genders, ethnicities, and/or abilities organizations can foster richer discussions, challenge groupthink, and ensure more comprehensive and equitable evaluations.

The presence of diverse hiring panels also positively influences candidates' experiences. One job seeker shared that seeing someone diverse on the panel gave her the confidence to bring

her authentic self to the interview, which ultimately led to her hiring. This underscores the broader impact of representation in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for candidates.

The integration of diverse panels aligns seamlessly with SDT and BCT. SDT emphasizes the importance of addressing cultural barriers and fostering inclusivity within institutions, positioning diverse panels as a tangible step toward dismantling structural inequities. Similarly, BCT highlights the value of intergroup contact in reducing stereotypes to mitigating biases, a dynamic that diverse panels naturally facilitate. Adopting diverse hiring panels not only reduces systemic and interpersonal biases but also enhances fairness in recruitment. This practice fosters a workplace that reflects broader societal diversity and creates an environment where candidates and employees alike feel valued and represented.

Finally, **the continued utilization of ATS** as a tool to support recruitment should be noted. The majority of participating organizations (70.7%) reported employing ATS for uploading job postings, gathering and scoring resumes, and storing candidate information. While this practice is not explicitly aimed at mitigating bias, its efficient use can significantly enhance the candidate experience. Specifically, ATS can streamline the application process and automate communication, creating a more seamless and engaging recruitment journey. Fanning (2023) highlights the importance of intuitive and efficient application processes, emphasizing the critical role ATS plays in facilitating these seamless interactions. 42.5% of job seekers expressed a preference for timely and proactive communication, a need that can be more effectively addressed through the strategic utilization of technology.

These recommendations provide a balanced and actionable framework for organizations to address hiring biases while fostering an inclusive, equitable, and culturally aligned workplace.

By implementing these strategies, organizations can achieve not only immediate improvements in recruitment practices but also long-term cultural transformation.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study identifies four critical areas for future exploration that could advance equitable hiring practices: (1) the concept of "noise" in human judgment, (2) the application of nudges as a bias mitigation strategy, (3) talent scouting practices in industries such as advertising, and (4) the potential of co-designing solutions through participatory design labs, and (5) strategies to reduce barrier to employment for newcomers. The first two areas, noise and nudges were absent from participant discussions but are supported by existing literature while talent scouting emerged as a significant yet under-researched issue during discussions. Co-designing solutions reflects a promising mixed approach where both employers and job seekers support the recommendations and engage collaboratively. Each area is elaborated upon below.

The concept of "noise," introduced by Kahneman et al. (2021), refers to variability in human judgment caused by factors such as mood, energy levels, workload, and time pressure, leading to inconsistent evaluations and unequal treatment of candidates. While this study did not uncover participant insights related to noise, existing literature underscores its critical role. Future research could investigate how hiring practices can address the interplay of noise and biases interventions to foster greater consistency and equity in decision-making.

Similarly, "nudges" (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008), involve subtle modifications in choice architecture that influence behavior without limiting options. Although participants did not explicitly discuss the use of nudges, the literature suggests their potential to change behavior that

mitigates biases by framing choices in ways that promote desired outcomes. Future research could explore how nudges can be integrated into recruitment practices to enhance fairness.

In contrast, talent scouting practices in industries like advertising were highlighted by participants as an area of concern but lacked sufficient academic research to inform robust recommendations. Participants noted that reliance on awards and portfolios perpetuates representation gaps rooted in historical inequities. Future research should critically evaluate how these practices reinforce disparities and propose strategies for creating more inclusive and equitable talent-scouting mechanisms.

The fourth area, participatory design labs, emerged from participants interest in supporting this research to find suitable solutions that open the potential for further engagement and collaboration between employers and job seekers in co-designing solutions through participatory design labs. Future research could evaluate the effectiveness of this approach by supporting its implementation, monitoring its impact, and enabling iterative refinement of interventions to ensure relevance and efficacy. Engaging all stakeholders in this collaborative process holds the potential for long-term improvements in hiring practices.

Fifth, and significantly, finding from this study highlight the prevalence of perceived bias experienced by immigrants and newcomers. While this study did not explore structural barriers, the frequency in which participants raised these forms of bias suggest a more targeted interventions and research in this area.

Finally, beyond the thematic areas outlined above, future research would benefit from more intentional sampling strategies to ensure a balance gender representation. This study unintentionally resulted in a predominantly female participant group, which may have shaped the nature of the insights collected. Future studies could incorporate targeted outreach efforts to

ensure broader gender balance among job seekers and employers. Doing so would support a more comprehensive understanding of how different genders perceive bias in hiring, potentially revealing underexplored patterns and dynamics.

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Appendix

Appendix A: List of Participants, Job Seekers' Composition (JS)

ID	Age Group	Highest Level of Education	Location	Gender	Ethnic background	Country of Origin	Immigration Status	Employment Status
JS1	46-55	graduate studies-masters	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Venezuela	Canadian Citizen	unemployed
JS2	36-45	graduate studies-masters	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	Black	France	Canadian Citizen	full-time
JS3	46-55	bachelor (university)	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Peru	Canadian Citizen	unemployed
JS4	26-35	bachelor (university)	Lima, Peru	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Peru	Peruvian Citizen	unemployed
JS5	36-45	college diploma	Madrid, Spain	woman	European (French origins, Eastern European, Southeast European, British)	Spain	Canadian Citizen	part-time
JS6	26-35	graduate studies-masters	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	South Asian Origins (Bengali, Indian, Nepal, Bhutanese, Pakistan, Sr.Lankan, etc)	India	Work Permit Visa (Temporary resident, international student, post grad)	unemployed
JS7	46-55	bachelor (university)	Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Venezuela	Canadian Citizen	full-time
JS8	26-35	bachelor (university)	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	European (French origins, Eastern European, Southeast European, British)	Ukraine	Work Permit Visa (Temporary resident, international student, post grad)	unemployed
JS9	26-35	bachelor (university)	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Mexico	Refugee	part-time
JS10	46-55	bachelor (university)	Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Peru	Canadian Citizen	full-time
JS11	26-35	bachelor (university)	GTA, Ontario, Canada	man	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Ecuador	Canadian Citizen	full-time

JS12	36-45	bachelor (university)	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Mexico	Canadian Citizen	full-time
JS13	26-35	bachelor (university)	GTA, Ontario, Canada	man	West Asian origins (Afghan, Iranian,)	Iran	Work Permit Visa (Temporary resident, international student, post grad)	part-time
JS14	26-35	graduate studies- masters	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	West Asian origins (Afghan, Iranian,)	Iran	Work Permit Visa (Temporary resident, international student, post grad)	part-time
JS15	46-55	graduate studies- masters	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Mexico	Canadian Citizen	full-time
JS16	36-45	graduate studies- masters	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	West Asian origins (Afghan, Iranian,)	Iran	Permanent Resident	unemployed
JS17	36-45	college diploma	Ontario, Canada	prefer not to say	Prefer not to say	Palestine	Permanent Resident	full-time
JS18	56-64	secondary	GTA, Ontario, Canada	man	Caribbean (African Caribbean, Cuban, Dominican, Jamaican, Martinique)	Canada	Canadian Citizen	unemployed
JS19	36-45	graduate studies- masters	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Peru	Permanent Resident	full-time
JS20	26-35	graduate studies- masters	Ontario, Canada	woman	South Asian Origins (Bengali, Indian, Nepal, Bhutanese, Pakistan, Sri Lankan, etc)	India	Canadian Citizen	full-time
JS21	56-64	graduate studies- masters	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Mexico	Canadian Citizen	part-time
JS22	26-35	bachelor (university)	GTA, Ontario, Canada	man	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Brazil	Permanent Resident	part-time
JS23	36-45	bachelor (university)	Lima, Peru	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Peru	Peruvian Citizen	unemployed

JS24	26-35	other	Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Argentina	Canadian Citizen	unemployed
JS25	18-25	other	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	Mixed (Chinese/Italian)	Canada	Canadian Citizen	unemployed
JS26	36-45	bachelor (university)	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	South Asian Origins (Bengali, Indian, Nepal, Bhutanese, Pakistan, Sr.Lankan, etc)	Sri Lanka	Canadian Citizen	full-time
JS27	36-45	bachelor (university)	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	North America (Canadian, American)	Canada	Canadian Citizen	full-time
JS28	26-35	bachelor (university)	Lima, Peru	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Peru	Peruvian Citizen	full-time
JS29	36-45	graduate studies-masters	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Colombia	Canadian Citizen	casual
JS30	36-45	graduate studies-masters	Ontario, Canada	woman	African Origins	Zimbabwe	Canadian Citizen	full-time
JS31	36-45	bachelor (university)	GTA, Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Colombia	Work Permit Visa (Temporary resident, international student, post grad)	unemployed
JS32	56-64	bachelor (university)	GTA, Ontario, Canada	man	European (French origins, Eastern European, Southeast European, British)	Netherlands	Canadian Citizen	unemployed
JS33	26-35	bachelor (university)	Lima, Peru	man	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Peru	Peruvian Citizen	unemployed
JS34	36-45	graduate studies-masters	Ontario, Canada	woman	African Origins	France	Canadian Citizen	full-time
JS35	46-55	bachelor (university)	Ontario, Canada	woman	South Asian Origins (Bengali, Indian, Nepal, Bhutanese, Pakistan, Sri Lankan, etc)	India	Permanent Resident	full-time
JS36	46-55	graduate studies-masters	Ontario, Canada	man	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Peru	Canadian Citizen	full-time

JS37	56-64	secondary	GTA, Ontario, Canada	man	Caribbean (African Caribbean, Cuban, Dominican, Jamaican, Martinique)	Dominican Republic	Permanent Resident	casual
JS38	46-55	bachelor (university)	Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Mexico	Canadian Citizen	full-time
JS39	26-35	bachelor (university)	Quebec, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Colombia	Canadian Citizen	unemployed
JS40	36-45	bachelor (university)	Ontario, Canada	woman	Latin American (North, Central, and South America)	Colombia	Permanent Resident	full-time

Appendix B: List of Participants, Employer's Composition (P)

ID	Age Group	Gender	Ethnic Background	Role Title	Type of Organization	Company Size	Company Location
P1	56-64	Male	South Asian	Hiring Managers: Executive Director/CEO	International Corporation	1-50	Ontario, Canada
P2	36-45	Female	Latin/Hispanic	Hiring Manager: Other Roles	Government	1001-5000	Ontario, Canada
P3	56-64	Female	Chinese Descent	HR/TA Manager/Lead/Coordinator	Local Corporation	1-50	Ontario, Canada
P4	46-55	Male	Latin/Hispanic	HR/TA Manager/Lead/Coordinator	Other	201-500	Lima, Peru
P5	46-55	Male	Italian	HR/TA Director	Local Corporation	1001-5000	Ontario, Canada
P6	36-45	Male	Black African	HR/TA Generalist/Adm/Officer	Government	5000+	Ontario, Canada
P7	26-35	Male	Caucasian	HR/TA Manager/Lead/Coordinator	International Corporation	51-200	Ontario, Canada
P8	46-55	Male	Black	HR/TA Director	Local Non-profit	51-200	Ontario, Canada
P9	36-45	Female	South Asian	HR/TA Generalist/Adm/Officer	Local Non-profit	51-200	Ontario, Canada
P10	46-55	Female	Latin/Hispanic	Hiring Manager: Other Roles	Local Non-profit	51-200	Ontario, Canada
P11	36-45	Male	Latin/Hispanic	Hiring Manager: Other Roles	International Corporation	51-200	Ontario, Canada
P12	56-64	Female	Asian	HR/TA Director	Other	5000+	Ontario, Canada

P13	36-45	Female	Latin/Hispanic	Hiring Manager: Owner/Founder	Local Corporation	1-50	Ontario, Canada
P14	36-45	Female	Latin/Hispanic	HR/TA Generalist/Adm/Of ficer	International Corporation	51-200	Ontario, Canada
P15	26-35	Male	Latin/Hispanic	HR/TA Generalist/Adm/Of ficer	International Corporation	1001-5000	Ontario, Canada
P16	18-25	Female	Latin/Hispanic	HR/TA Generalist/Adm/Of ficer	Local Corporation	1-50	Lima, Peru
P17	46-55	Female	Latin/Hispanic	Hiring Manager: Other Roles	International Corporation	5000+	Ontario, Canada
P18	46-55	Female	Latin/Hispanic	HR/TA Generalist/Adm/Of ficer	Local Corporation	51-200	Ontario, Canada
P19	36-45	Female	Caribbean	Hiring Manager: Owner/Founder	Local Corporation	1-50	Remote
P20	36-45	Female	Canadian	HR/TA Manager/Lead/Coo rdinator	Local Corporation	51-200	Ontario, Canada
P21	36-45	Female	Middle Eastern	HR/TA Manager/Lead/Coo rdinator	Local Non- profit	201-500	Ontario, Canada
P22	36-45	Female	Caucasian	HR/TA Director	International Non-Profit	51-200	Ontario, Canada
P23	18-25	Female	South Asian	HR/TA Generalist/Adm/Of ficer	Local Non- Profit	201-500	Ontario, Canada
P24	36-45	Female	Black African	Hiring Manager: Other Roles	Government	1001-5000	Ontario, Canada
P25	26-35	Female	Canadian	HR/TA Generalist/Adm/Of ficer	Other	501-1000	Ontario, Canada

P26	26-35	Female	Latin/Hispanic	HR/TA Generalist/Adm/Officer	Local Corporation	5000+	British Columbia, Canada
P27	26-35	Female	Black	Hiring Manager: Owner/Founder	Local Corporation	1-50	Ontario, Canada
P28	26-35	Female	Black African Canadian	HR/TA Manager/Lead/Coordinator	International Corporation	501-1000	Ontario, Canada
P29	46-55	Female	Latin/Hispanic	HR/TA Director	International Corporation	1001-5000	Philadelphia, USA
P30	26-35	Female	Asian	Hiring Manager: Owner/Founder	Local Corporation	1-50	Ontario, Canada
P31	46-55	Male	Afro Canadian/Caucasian and Indigenous	Hiring Managers: Executive Director/CEO	Local Non-Profit	51-200	Ontario, Canada
P32	36-45	Female	South Asian	HR/TA Generalist/Adm/Officer	Government	51-200	Ontario, Canada
P33	36-45	Female	South Asian	Hiring Managers: Executive Director/CEO	Local Non-Profit	1-50	Ontario, Canada
P34	36-45	Male	French Canadian	Hiring Manager: Managers, Senior Managers	International Corporation	5000+	Ontario, Canada
P35	26-35	Female	Latin/Hispanic	HR/TA Director	International Corporation	1001-5000	California, USA
P36	36-45	Female	American (US)	HR/TA Director	Local Corporation	501-1000	California, USA
P37	36-45	Female	Armenian	Hiring Manager: Owner/Founder	Local Corporation	1-50	Quebec, Canada
P38	46-55	Female	Latin/Hispanic	Hiring Manager: Managers, Senior Managers	International Corporation	5000+	Ontario, Canada

P39	46-55	Female	Caucasian/European	Hiring Manager: Managers, Senior Managers	Local Non- Profit	501-1000	Ontario, Canada
P40	46-55	Male	Middle Eastern	Hiring Manager: Managers, Senior Managers	International Corporation	5000+	Ontario, Canada
P41	46-55	Male	Latin/Hispanic	Hiring Manager: Managers, Senior Managers	International Corporation	5000+	California, USA
P42	26-35	Female	Latin/Hispanic	HR/TA Generalist/Adm/Of ficer	Local Corporation	1-50	Ontario, Canada

Appendix C: Flyer to Attract Job Seekers

Calling all Job seekers!

Help shape the future of hiring by volunteering an hour in a research interview.

Share your job-hunting insights and be part of the solution to reduce bias in the hiring process. Your voice matters!



ddlacruz@yorku.ca



(647) 518-8376



#VolunteerForChange

#BiasInHiring

#DiversityandInclusion

Appendix D: Flyer to Attract Employers



Calling all HR Pros & Recruiters!

HELP REDUCE BIAS IN HIRING

Volunteer one-hour in a research interview.
Share insights & help uncover strategies for
mitigating bias in recruitment.

#VolunteerForChange
#BiasInHiring
#DiversityandInclusion

**Let's help to
create a fairer
hiring**

 ddlacruz@yorku.ca

 (647) 518-8376

The flyer features a large black silhouette of an elephant on the left side. In the bottom right corner, there is a small illustration of two people sitting at a table, one with their back to the viewer and the other facing them, possibly representing an interview. The background is a solid teal color.

Appendix E: Interview Questions Employers

Research: Good Employers Look for Diversity. Great Employers Fight Bias: **Fighting Bias in Hiring**

Fighting Bias in Hiring, a two-year master's research project, seeks to identify optimal strategies for reducing bias in the hiring process with the potential to uncover new interventions. Your identity and company affiliation will not be asked or disclosed. Please note that some questions might not be applicable to your company. Thanks immensely for your participation and insights!

DEMOGRAPHIC

- What is your age group? 18-25 / 26-35/ 36-45/46-55/56-64/65+
- What is your gender?
- What is your ethnic background?
- What is your country of origin?
- What is your mother tongue?
- What is your highest level of education?
- What is your role title?
- What type of organization are you working for?
- What is your industry?
- What is your company size? (1-50/51-200/201-500/501-1000/1000-4999/5000+)
- Where is your company located?

TALENT PROCESS - DEI GOALS

- How does your company evaluate potential candidates in the talent acquisition process?
- How do you ensure all candidates are evaluated fairly and objectively (free of bias)? What interventions are in place? (e.g., at the systems and individual level)
- Does the organization you work for have a diversity policy? If not, what guides your hiring?
- Do you use any diversity matrix? If yes, how long ago was it implemented?
- What would you say is the current employee racial composition?
- Has the employees' racial demographic changed post-COVID? If so, how? What do you think has contributed to this change?
- Has your company established specific goals or targets to promote diversity hiring? If (YES),
 - Are you given specific numbers or rough guidance?
 - What was the rationale?
 - Are these goals enforced or monitored?
 - What are the consequences if the goal is not met?
 - Which department or team is responsible or accountable for monitoring or meeting those goals?

RECRUITMENT

- How does your organization position its employer brand to attract candidates?
- What recruitment strategies does your company use?
- Where does your company advertise jobs?
 - What considerations are taken into account when selecting those channels?
 - Do you advertise in the same channels for all the roles?
- Has COVID-19 impacted talent attraction/recruitment? If so in what ways?
 - Did your recruitment strategies change?
- How does your company attract racially diverse talent to meet diversity targets in recruitment?
- What would you say are the most effective methods or strategies to attract racially diverse talent?

RESUMES & JD

- What steps are taken to reduce bias from the process of filtering candidates to setting up interviews?
- How do you evaluate resumes? What are the key things you look for when reviewing a resume?
 - Do you use any intervention when shortlisting resumes to avoid unintended bias?
 - If (managers or delegates) shortlist resumes, are they provided with training on mitigating bias?
 - Do HR / recruiters receive training on mitigating bias in resume screening or the hiring process?
- What pre-interview screening methods do you use to select the most suitable candidates?
- How do you ensure the job description is inclusive?

DECISION MAKING & CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

- How is the final hiring decision typically made in your organization? who decides?
- What considerations are taken into account to ensure fairness in the hiring process?
- How does your organization ensure it delivers a pleasant and inclusive candidate experience?

SELF-REFLECTION

- Do you think the interventions mentioned are effective at mitigating biases? Please elaborate. What would you change.
- If you could design a fair recruitment model free of bias, what would be your ideal model?

Appendix F: Interview Questions Job Seekers

DEMOGRAPHIC

- What is your age group (18-25 / 26-35/ 35-45/46-55/56-65/65+)
- What is your highest level of education? (e.g. elementary, secondary, college diploma, bachelor (university), graduate studies (masters, PHD))
- Where are you located? (e.g. Toronto ON, Miami, FL, Montreal, QC)
- What is your gender? Women. Man. Non-binary. Prefer not to say. Other.
- What is your ethnic background?
- What is your country of origin?
- What is your mother tongue?
- Immigration status?
- What is your employment status? (casual, part-time, full time, or unemployed)

THE JOB SEARCH

- How long have you been actively looking for a job?
- What type of role are you looking for? If currently working,
 - What is your current role?
 - Why do you want to leave your current role?
- What type of companies are you interested in to applying? Why?
- What type of companies are you hesitant to apply to? Why?
- What is your job search strategy? Do you work with an action plan (with goals or is it more flexible)?
 - Are you doing anything different when applying for jobs now than before COVID?
- Do you have any type of support mechanisms to achieve your goal? If yes, what are those?
- When it comes to your resume,
 - Do you craft your resume for the role you are applying to? Do you use any tools to craft it? How much do you craft your resume? Why?
 - How many types of resumes do you have?
 - What do you include? What do you remove? What are those and why?
- How do you look for job opportunities?
- What board sites do you prefer and why?
- How proactively are you job searching?
- Have you ever felt any type of bias in favour or against you when competing for a job? Elaborate.
- Have you been recently interviewed? How was your experience?
- Any negative experience during your job-hunting you can share. Why it was negative?
 - If yes, how did that experience impact your job search?
- Any observation on a good recruitment practice you can share? What makes it a good recruitment practice? If, yes how did that experience impact your job search?
- Have you had any mentors or role models? In an organization or outside? Would you benefit from one? What is the impact of having one?

OWN ANALYSIS

- What would be your ideal job-hunting experience? In other words:
- If you could design a fair recruitment model (free of bias), what would be create

Appendix G: Informed Consent Letter

Informed Consent Form

Date:

Study Name: Good Employers Look for Diversity. Great Employers Fight Bias: Fighting Bias in Recruitment

Researchers:

Diana De la Cruz

Principal Investigator/ Master's Student – Graduate Programme Interdisciplinary Studies

ddlacruz@yorku.ca

Graduate Supervisor: Christopher Chan

Purpose of the Research:

The research aims to investigate the utilization, or lack thereof, interventions addressing biases in recruitment while identifying and assessing the most and least used interventions to address biases in recruitment in the post-pandemic era, where diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have gained more attention. The goal is to offer insight into recruiting biases to provide practical recommendations on best practices among employers, and advice on how employers, recruiters, and job seekers can prevent, fight, or interrupt them to ensure fairness and equity at the initial phase of the potential employment relationship.

The anticipated forms of output resulting from this research may include presentations and written papers. Ethical guidelines and participant confidentiality will be handled with the utmost care. For instance, in presentations and written papers, all potentially identifying information will be thoroughly anonymized, de-identified, coded or pseudonymized. Any potentially identifying data of participants will be pseudonymized, de-identified/ anonymized or coded.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:

I will ask participants, Human Resources practitioners, Recruiters, and Job Seekers to voluntarily participate in a one-time interview session lasting between 45-60 minutes.

During the interview, I will request relevant demographic information from the participants such as age group, gender, education level, ethnicity, country of origin, employment status, role title, and mother tongue. Furthermore, I will ask targeted questions that are also relevant to my research. For instance, Human Resources practitioners and Recruiters will be asked about their recruitment practices while job seekers will be inquired about their job-hunting experience.

Participants will not receive compensation. Instead, as a token of appreciation, I will conduct a draw and I will ask each participant for their permission to participate. Each participant will be assigned a unique code or pseudonym, ensuring confidentiality. I will request participants to provide their email address, which will be kept confidential. Email addresses will be used for individual communication such as to coordinate the interview, to send e-calendar invite for remote interviews (e.g., internet or telephone). Emails will also be used to announce details of the draw such as date/time it took place, the prize, and to let participants know that the winner will be contacted directly. Importantly, the notification of the draw will be sent to all participants via Blind Carbon Copy (Bcc) to maintain anonymity as this option hides the identity of all the recipients. The identity of the winner will be kept strictly confidential ensuring the utmost privacy and confidentiality throughout the entire research, including the draw process.

Risks and Discomforts: *“We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.”*

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: Through this study, we can gain valuable insights into whether companies are effectively implementing recommendations from academic research to promote fair recruitment practices. This study will enhance our understanding of the best strategies used to mitigate bias in recruitment, which can contribute to reducing social inequalities in employment. By shedding light on these crucial aspects, this research can have a meaningful impact on advancing knowledge and fostering positive change in recruitment practices, leading towards more equitable employment opportunities.

For participants, participation in this research presents a unique chance for participants to actively contribute towards the realization of equitable recruitment practices, with far-reaching societal implications. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for self-reflection, encouraging critical examination of one's own practices as either recruiters or job seekers, and fostering a culture of learning and improvement in this domain.

For me as a researcher, my engagement in this research offers me the opportunity to contribute to the important topic of achieving fairness and equality at the initial point of the employment potential relation. As a human resources and employment consultant professional, by learning how to effectively mitigate biases in recruitment, I can better serve and empower applicants and participants within a framework that promotes fairness and inclusion.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researcher or nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

If you stop participating, you will still be eligible to take part in the draw for agreeing to be in the project, even if you withdraw without completion of the research. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete.

Confidentiality: Unless you choose, otherwise your identity will not be identifiable. All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research.

The principal investigator will keep a link that identifies you to your coded information, but this link will be kept secure and available only to the principal investigator. Any information that can identify you will remain confidential.

Your data will be collected by electronically notetaking or handwritten notes. Your data will be safely stored in a locked cabinet or in a password-protected file on the investigator personal computer. The data will be stored for ten years, and it will be destroyed by September 2034. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

This study will use Zoom, Ms Teams or GoogleMeet to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet, privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate, perhaps via telephone. Please contact me via email at ddlacruz@yorku.ca for further information.

Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a meeting / data collection session

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Diana De la Cruz by e-mail ddlacruz@yorku.ca Graduate Programme in Interdisciplinary Studies, 4700 Keele St, 227 Vanier College, York University (telephone 416-736-5126) This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Director, Research Ethics in the Office of Research Ethics, Kaneff Tower, York University (e-mail ore@yorku.ca)

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____ consent to participate in Fighting Bias in Recruitment conducted by Diana De la Cruz. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Additional consent (where applicable)

1. Consent to use of quotes

I consent to the use of quotations in any final reports/ publications of the research? Y N

Appendix H: York University Application Approval (including Amendment Approval)



OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS (ORE)

4700 Keele St.
Toronto ON
Canada M3J 1P3
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Certificate #:	STU 2023-153
Initial Approval:	11/23/23-11/23/24
Amendments:	Amendment approved: 02/07/24
Renewals:	
Current Approval Period:	11/23/23-11/23/24

ETHICS AMENDMENT APPROVAL

To: Diana De La Cruz Alfaro - Graduate Student
Interdisciplinary Studies
Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies
ddlacruz@yorku.ca

From: Alison M. Collins-Mrakas, Director, Research Ethics
(on behalf of You-ta Chuang, Chair, Human Participants Review Committee)

Date: Wednesday, February 7, 2024

Title: Good Employers Look for Diversity. Great Employers Fight Bias: Fighting Bias in Recruitment

Risk Level: ☒ Minimal Risk ☐ More than Minimal Risk

Level of Review: ☒ Delegated Review ☐ Full Committee Review

With respect to your research project entitled, "Good Employers Look for Diversity. Great Employers Fight Bias: Fighting Bias in Recruitment", the committee notes that, as there are no substantive changes to either the methodology employed or the risks to participants in and/or any other aspect of the research project, a renewal of approval re the proposed amendment(s) to the above project is granted.

Any further changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process by submission of an amendment application to the HPRC prior to its implementation.

Ongoing research – research that extends beyond one year – must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research ethics (ore@yorku.ca) as soon as possible.

For further information on researcher responsibilities as it pertains to this approved research ethics protocol, please refer to the attached document, "RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE".

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: acollins@yorku.ca.

Yours sincerely,

Alison M. Collins-Mrakas M.Sc., LL.M.
Director,
Office of Research Ethics



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Certificate #: STU 2023-153
Approval Period: 11/23/23-11/23/24

ETHICS APPROVAL

To: Diana De La Cruz Alfaro
Graduate Student of Interdisciplinary Studies
ddlacruz@yorku.ca

From: Alison M. Collins-Mrakas, Director, Research Ethics
(on behalf of You-ta Chuang, Chair, Human Participants Review Committee)

Date: Thursday, November 23, 2023

Title: **Good Employers Look for Diversity. Great Employers Fight Bias: Fighting Bias in Recruitment**

Risk Level: ☒ Minimal Risk ☐ More than Minimal Risk

Level of Review: ☒ Delegated Review ☐ Full Committee Review

I am writing to inform you that this research project, "Good Employers Look for Diversity. Great Employers Fight Bias: Fighting Bias in Recruitment" has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

Note that approval is granted for one year. Ongoing research – research that extends beyond one year – must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process by submission of an amendment application to the HPRC prior to its implementation.

Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research ethics (ore@yorku.ca) as soon as possible.

For further information on researcher responsibilities as it pertains to this approved research ethics protocol, please refer to the attached document, "RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE".

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at acollins@yorku.ca.

Yours sincerely,

Alison M. Collins-Mrakas M.Sc., LLM
Director, Office of Research Ethics