



SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Early Careers Virtual Roundtable Social Mobility

No. 7

Wednesday 7th
October 2020
10am - 11:30am

Overview

Social mobility and inclusion is a key focus for any organisation looking to make positive change in their diversity and inclusion. Placing candidates in the best-fit careers also affects their futures and can improve social mobility as a result.

For most, however, candidate attraction and engagement for the benefit of social mobility starts with defining the problem, and a step above that, defining the candidate.

This roundtable looked to open up the definition of social mobility, identifying the candidates and some of the barriers preventing them from becoming socially mobile in the process.

SOCIAL MOBILITY

Defining the problem – Identifying the solutions – (with help from MAJIC)

Attendees of the seventh roundtable included:



With many more attending...
Government Security Profession
The Science & Technology
Facilities Council
Nesta Impact Investments

Housing 21
IGD
Civil Service
CMS
JLP

PwC
BEIS
NCFE
Direct Line Group
Acrisis LLC

Defining and measuring Social Mobility



Any organisation consciously looking to improve their diversity and inclusion will likely be making a positive change to social mobility as a result, consciously or unconsciously. Social Mobility, defined as the movement of individuals, families, or groups through a system of social hierarchy or stratification (Britannica, 2020), is a key focus on modern hiring. In the case of recruitment, examples of these social hierarchies and stratifications would include income, occupation type, education or health.

Breaking down social barriers and supporting candidates to access careers previously considered out of reach will almost certainly have profound positive impacts to their lives and to their future opportunities. In addition, organisations benefit accessing untapped talent as well as ensuring they are representative of the communities in which they exist. The topic therefore, is of key importance.

But taking into consideration the 'Measure' element of the MAJIC model, how do organisations identify and monitor the progress being made?

The conversation



One attendee had struggled with the approach to measuring social mobility for some time. They described it as a vicious circle in which by leaning on one set of data to assess the status of a candidate, other barriers and biases are created. Over-reliance on one dataset erodes its values and can ultimately make it counter-productive. In addition, some data points have traditionally been used because they have a common value which is well understood; looking at grades as the major indicator of candidates' capabilities does not give the organisation a rounded view of the candidate as the opportunities. Not only to the majority of grades represent the knowledge and skills associated with exams, but the variable quality of education across different regions and communities do not make them an absolute indicator of even this performance.

Other datasets exist that can help generate an overall picture of groups of candidates. Datasets such as:

- Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), the measurement of relative deprivation in small neighbourhoods/areas based on seven key domains (income, employment, education, health, crime, barriers to housing and living environment)
- Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) a measurement of classification based on a proportion of grouped UK areas that attend higher education
- Classification of candidates on Free School Meals (FSM)

Taken in isolation, each data set has both strengths and weaknesses, and the general consensus of participants was that to achieve the most impact, they must be used in a considered way as part of an overall programme design.

The group also agreed that the method in which data was collected to inform social mobility raised questions. Anecdotal evidence suggested that self reported (SR) status of free school meals was subject to both under and over reporting. Whilst this data can be beneficial at a programme evaluation level, the use of SR data for positive action within the recruitment process itself could be problematic.

One attendee said the issue starts a step before measurement of background and capability, with the need to understand what makes a good candidate first. They said that understanding the limitations of the data presents a need to consider multiple insights in order to build up a candidate's background and as a result, an approach to unlocking that individuals' potential.

Once the applicants have been engaged, providing them with the opportunity to apply for is next. This process itself is a challenge in it's own right. Dealing with social and group stereotyping can be a major issue; "Candidates can't be what they can't see" as it was put during the discussion. There are additional challenges around the timing and use of different different media, recognising that different candidates, and groups of candidates, will respond differently.

One attendee highlighted the need for additional support as part of the planning for engaging with underrepresented candidate groups; whether that is extended conversations via the phone, workshops and tasters, exam preparations, peer communication and review or interview practice. Any dataset, insight or experience that can help identify these groups of individuals can be used as part of an effective campaign.

Targeted attraction



Measuring previous candidate interactions to plan how to progress social mobility is the first key step, but the benefits that an 'always on' approach can bring are unanimously positive. Giving fair and equal opportunity is the agreed starting point, but how can organisations grow their candidate attraction capabilities to match every candidate to their best-fit future?

The conversation



The roundtable agreed that starting relationships with candidates at an early stage and engaging with them throughout the entire process is very important for the success of that candidate as questions and queries can be tended to as they arise, and insecurities put to rest.

One attendee agreed saying that by sharing opportunities to engage with a brand and company from an early age works. From school, all the way through to job search, allowing young people to ask questions, attend events and generally familiarise themselves with the working world has huge positive advantages to attraction and hiring at a later stage.

For one attendee, using individuals, who have been in a similar position to the candidate before, as an influencer is the most important step to successful social inclusion and effective candidate attraction. Candidates become more receptive to advice and information when it comes from an individual they can assimilate with. This method has created much needed confidence in under-represented groups.

One attendee had taken this a step further by using the same key point of contact from candidate outreach (via school workshops) to take the interviews for available vacancies. This created a consistent point of contact and ensured the comforts associated with a familiar face and voice throughout the process, improving candidate confidence and performance.

Another attendee had mentioned that since starting candidate attraction campaigns, a realisation had been that reducing intrusive questions to measure social mobility had seen positive affects to attracting under-represented groups. Questions around parents' careers during the candidates' younger years are not that effective at generating a picture of social mobility and acted against the inclusion of these candidate groups.

The need to identify and measure candidate background, however, was acknowledged to be part of the picture in providing a tailored candidate experience and therefore a successful engagement, hiring and onboarding process. Being able to measure against objectives in social mobility and inclusion was guaranteed to help 'level up' efforts in these areas.

For one attendee, the requirement to measure candidates in the attraction stage created distance from the reality of these individuals being real people and had the ability to withdraw the candidate from a personal attraction experience. This has negative impacts on attraction, hiring and therefore social mobility as a result.

Assessment and selection



For candidates less aware of a recruitment assessment and selection process, large gaps in confidence and participation has been known to occur. This is particularly the case for under-represented groups and therefore a direct barrier to social inclusion and mobility, where candidates are new to subject matter, career and industry ideas in addition to the process of finding and applying for opportunities. As such this subject was an important part of the conversation.

The conversation



Online assessments and the process of a traditional post and apply recruitment procedure has been known to reduce success in the attainment of social inclusion due to a lack of target candidate confidence, said one attendee. Uptake in virtual interview methods had created technological discrimination in a process that already had big barriers to candidates of more deprived socio-economic levels. Another attendee shared that where a strong WiFi signal was needed, some candidates had resorted to calling in from public restaurants in order to take part in interviews, impacting their confidence and the quality of the interview as a result.

The roundtable agreed that resources must be assigned to identify the blockers to certain candidate groups and if possible, on an individual level too. Identifying the blockers equips companies with the knowledge of what needs to be changed to create level playing fields for all applying candidates and thus creates the possibilities for social mobility where candidates can begin to explore and be accepted to careers they previously might not have thought possible.

One attendee identified that many candidates, especially in the generation 'Z' bracket are desperate to make a positive impact on the world, a personality trait that holding open evenings with these individuals on career and industry topics were able to draw out. A candidate was even known to say "I can be myself here" when given the opportunity to take part in the event. Knowing about these qualities and interests gave the interviews a greater focus on discussing what the candidate could and would do, as opposed to what they couldn't do. This is particularly important for candidates of a more deprived socio-economic background who typically do not have the confidence or the knowledge of how to sell themselves, therefore creating interview inequalities that act as a blocker to hiring for social inclusion.

Technology testing environments and preparation calls ahead of assessment were championed for social inclusion by another attendee. Where candidates are worried and show reluctance, these are areas that they simply fear for never having tried them before. The obvious choice for this company was to call them, coach them and give them opportunities to experience what they fear ahead of time. This had direct and positive affects on the candidate during the eventual official procedure and improved uptake of underrepresented candidates.

Another attendee agreed, saying that some are uncomfortable with certain test scenarios, so where alternatives can be found, or a pre-recorded testing session could be utilised, the organisation was able to gain a sense of the individual in their natural emotional environment. Interviews are still important to the candidate selection process but these steps to create level playing fields are a key step in improving social inclusion through the hiring of underrepresented socio-economic and ethnic groups.

Using a combination of assessment methods, both formal and informal, as diagnostics to aid a decision makes it much easier to make an effective hiring decision as opposed to using these same methods as screening tools. The best-fit candidate isn't always obvious on paper, and where candidates want to share value with a career and an employer, multiple diagnostics can identify them and act on them.

In conclusion

Social mobility and inclusion are high up the priorities lists for hiring organisations but there are still queries as to how this can best be done. Just how there is no one-size-fits-all approach to attracting, engaging and hiring candidates, there is also no single way to assess and select candidates either. A personal and early approach seems to be championed by attendees, where tending to the fears and inexperience of candidates had seen progress, but more needs to be done.

Placing emphasis on the role Training Providers' play in improving social inclusion is of key importance now and improving schools' ability to support candidates into careers is also an imperative, where teaching time and interpersonal assistance from teachers has been lost as a result of COVID-19.