



DIVERSITY-FOCUSED RECRUITMENT IN U.S. WORKPLACES: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

Workforce diversity is becoming a primary strategic, ethical and legal concern for U.S. organizations, although there is still a long way to go before formal diversity commitments translate into everyday recruitment outcomes. This study explores the experiences and practices of HR recruiters in diversity-focused recruiting, and how they reconcile merit, fairness, organisational requirements and applicant quality. Its purpose was to identify the primary hurdles to inclusive hiring and to explore the tactics and organizational practices employed to improve representation. The study was conducted using a qualitative phenomenological design and was framed by the theories of inclusive organizational culture and sensemaking. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 experienced recruiters from technology, finance, healthcare and manufacturing firms across the United States, to obtain primary data. Participants were selected purposively and the interview transcripts were examined thematically using NVivo, independent coding and consensus-based topic creation. Four themes were identified: organizational commitment and resource constraints; issues around prejudice and justice; inclusive recruitment tactics; and recruiter identity and agency. The results indicate that leadership commitment, clear policies, targeted outreach, inclusive job advertising, organized interviews, blind screening and standardised evaluation promote diversity-focused recruitment. But inadequate resources, competing performance goals, unconscious bias, and ambiguity about how to balance diversity with quality continue to hamper inclusive hiring. This study advances knowledge on the relationship between human judgement and organizational policies in shaping recruiting outcomes and provides practical implications for HR management and policymakers. Its qualitative, cross-sectional, U.S.-focused perspective limits generalizability. Future study should evaluate these practices across sectors and nations, and examine their long-term implications on worker representation and organisational effectiveness.

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1 Introduction

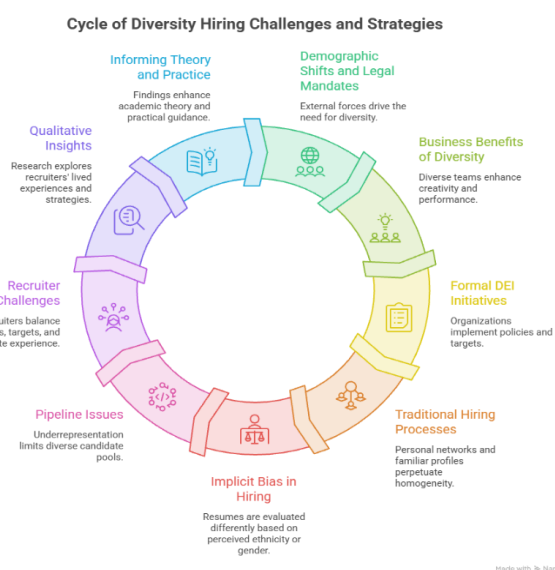
Workforce diversity and inclusive hiring have emerged as critical priorities for U.S. organizations.

Demographic shifts and legal mandates such as the Civil Rights Act and affirmative action have pressured companies to recruit a more representative talent pool (Shore et al., 2022; Dobbin & Kalev, 2018). Advocates

contend that diverse teams enhance creativity and decision-making, yielding a competitive advantage (Cox & Blake, 1991; Page, 2007). Empirical studies in the U.S. context link demographic diversity to innovation and financial performance (Nishii, 2013; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998), suggesting significant business benefits. At the same time, the moral and legal imperatives—federal non-discrimination laws and Affirmative Action policies—mandate equitable recruitment (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018). Many firms have therefore adopted formal DEI initiatives and hiring targets. Nevertheless, actual workforce composition often lags intentions, indicating a gap between rhetoric and reality (Dover et al., 2020; Kalev et al., 2006).

One core challenge is that traditional hiring processes may perpetuate homogeneity. Recruiters and managers often rely on personal networks and familiar candidate profiles, which tend to exclude those who are different (Rivera & Tilcsik, 2021). Research on implicit bias shows that identical resumes receive different evaluations depending on the applicant's perceived ethnicity or gender (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Moss-Racusin et al., 2012; Noon, 2021). Moreover, pipeline issues—such as underrepresentation of certain groups in STEM or management positions—limit the pool of available diverse candidates (Kalev et al., 2006; McKay et al., 2007). Together, these factors complicate recruiters' efforts to produce representative shortlists and hires.

Figure 1: Cycle of Diversity Hiring Challenges and Strategies



Recruiters and HR professionals are at the nexus of these forces. They evaluate organisational diversity policy and make front-line choices about sourcing, screening, and interviewing applicants. Their own training, attitudes and limits can thus influence whether diversity programs succeed (Shen et al., 2009; Kulik, 2014). The challenges regarding recruiters are also practical, with tight employment objectives, limited budgets and demands for great candidate experience. In practice they have to reconcile human judgement, legal conformity and aims of organisational diversity. We don't know much about how recruiters manage these opposing expectations in their everyday hiring practices, especially in the U.S. (Rivera, 2015; Arnold & Randall, 2010).

Much of the existing work on diversity hiring has focused on policy outcomes or experimental investigations on bias (Dover et al., 2020; Avery & McKay, 2006). However, qualitative information on the experiences of recruiters lived is limited. Such inquiry might shed light on how culture, leadership support and individual views influence recruitment practice (Shen et al., 2009; Bendick et al., 2010). This study thus presents an interpretive qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of recruiters in U.S. organisations seeking to bring to light the issues they experience and the techniques they utilise in diversity-focused hiring.

In sum, we examine the balance of human judgement and diversity mandates in recruitment. The primary objective is to understand the ways in which U.S. HR recruiters face the challenges of balancing fairness, bias, and organisational diversity goals. We focus on the particular issues faced and the strategies employed to create inclusiveness. Through qualitative examination of these questions, we want to provide insights that inform both academic theory and practical help in inclusive talent management. Our findings may inform recruitment models by explicitly incorporating inclusive considerations and emphasising recruiter viewpoints.

1.1 The Role of Human Judgement in Diversity Recruitment

The increased awareness of inequity in the workforce, regulatory obligations, and the organizational benefits of diverse teams have made diversity-focused

recruitment a prominent issue in U.S. organizations. While numerous businesses have adopted Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs, the real-world practice of inclusive recruitment is far from simple. The report emphasizes that diversity in recruiting is not merely about setting corporate targets but demands thorough consideration of recruitment processes, human judgement, technical support and organizational culture.

A major issue of debate is the link between merit-based selection and diversity aspirations. Traditional recruiting techniques frequently focus on qualifications, experience, and job-related abilities, but human decision-making can unintentionally add prejudice through factors such as a candidate's name, gender, race, educational background, or personal likeness to the recruiter. Therefore, using human judgement alone may restrict equitable chances for underrepresented groups. At the same time, diversity programs should not sacrifice professional competency or job fitness. The challenge for organizations is to build a recruitment system where diversity and merit are regarded as complimentary, not opposing goals.

Regarding U.S. recruitment, employee selection often includes many steps, such as workforce planning, candidate sourcing, resume screening, interviews, assessments, and final hiring decisions. Human judgement is still vital as recruiters may assess attributes that are hard to measure, such as motivation, communication ability, adaptability, and interpersonal skills. However, systematic interviews, established evaluation criteria, and diverse hiring panels are needed to decrease subjective bias and increase fairness in decision-making.

AI has opened new ways for firms to improve diversity recruitment by assisting them to assess applicants based on job-related qualifications, anonymize resumes and discover broader talent pools. However, AI should not be seen as a total replacement for human interaction. Because artificial intelligence systems learn from prior recruitment data, they may perpetuate existing inequities if the training data incorporates previous

biases. Therefore, AI should serve as a supportive tool, but human recruiters have the responsibility of analyzing recommendations, guaranteeing fairness, and making ethical decisions.

Organizational culture and leadership commitment are other important variables in successful diversity recruitment. The study shows that diversity programs work when senior executives give clear policies, resources, training, and accountability systems. Organizational support is key to ensuring that diversity goals translate into genuine transformation rather than just symbolic assertions. Recruiters require enough time, technology, and support from the institution to cast a wider net for candidates and to put inclusive recruiting processes in place.

It is also vital to note that diversity recruitment isn't only about equal-opportunity statements, but proactive strategies. To enhance representation, organizations should broaden their recruitment channels, engage with diverse talent networks, revise job descriptions to use inclusive language, and use structured assessment methodologies. These methods enable firms to tap qualified individuals from wider backgrounds while ensuring fairness and uniformity across the hiring process.

To summarize, diversity-focused recruitment should be viewed as a balanced approach that integrates human expertise, AI support and solid organizational principles. Artificial intelligence can enhance efficiency and minimize certain forms of bias, but human judgment remains important for ethical appraisal and contextual comprehension. Thus, the most effective recruitment systems are those that combine technology with trained HR experts, transparent policies, and ongoing corporate commitment to inclusiveness.

2 Literature Review

A diverse workforce is widely linked to positive organizational outcomes. Early theory and evidence (Cox & Blake, 1991; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998) argue that heterogeneous teams outperform homogeneous ones on complex tasks due to varied perspectives and

skills. Recent studies in U.S. organizations confirm that employee diversity is associated with increased innovation, creativity, and problem-solving (Shore et al., 2022; Nishii, 2013; Page, 2007). These benefits arise as individuals from different backgrounds bring novel ideas and avoid group thinking.

In parallel, the U.S. legal and social context creates strong incentives for diversity recruitment. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) prohibits employment discrimination, and affirmative action regulations require proactive measures to improve representation in affected firms (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018). Federal contractors, for example, must prepare Affirmative Action Plans targeting underrepresented groups. Social movements and stakeholder expectations have further intensified pressure; many companies now publicly commit to DEI goals (Ones & Johnson, 2020). However, research indicates that formal policies or statements alone do not ensure equitable outcomes (Dover et al., 2020; Kalev et al., 2006). In practice, there are often “gaps” between organizational intentions and actual hiring diversity.

Numerous studies document barriers that hinder inclusive recruitment. Standard hiring practices—such as unstructured interviews and referral-based sourcing—tend to favor candidates like incumbents (Rivera & Tilcsik, 2021; Avery & McKay, 2006). Research in social psychology (Byrne, 1971) shows that people are inclined to select those like themselves (homophily), which reinforces existing homogeneity. Empirical field experiments provide concrete evidence of bias resumes identical except for applicant name or demographic markers (e.g. ethnic-sounding names) generate significantly lower callback rates for minority candidates (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Moss-Racusin et al., 2012). Similarly, job advertisements containing masculine-coded language or not signaling inclusion can discourage women or minority applicants (Thaler & Hartman, 2018). These findings illustrate how seemingly neutral recruitment cues can reduce applicant diversity before any human contact.

In response, scholars and practitioners have proposed various inclusive recruitment strategies. “Blind” review processes remove names or personal details from resumes so that hiring focuses on skills (Shen et al.,

2009; Coffman et al., 2025). Targeted outreach efforts are another approach: organizations may partner with minority-serving institutions (MSIs), advertise on forums for underrepresented groups, or participate in diversity-focused career fairs (Bendick et al., 2010; Davidson, 2011). Such activities expand the candidate pool beyond traditional pipelines. During selection, structured interviews and standardized scoring rubrics have been recommended to reduce subjectivity and bias (McCarthy et al., 2014). Diverse interview panels (including women and minority interviewers) can also mitigate individual bias by bringing multiple perspectives to hiring decisions (Kalev et al., 2006).

Effective implementation of these strategies depends on organizational context. Research consistently highlights that leadership commitment, and an inclusive culture are critical (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2022). When senior managers visibly prioritize diversity, they typically allocate resources (e.g. dedicated recruiter roles, training budgets) that enable inclusive hiring practices (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018; Nishii & Leroy, 2022). Conversely, if diversity is framed as optional or symbolic, recruiters may feel little pressure or support to change standard routines (Noon, 2021). Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and mentorship programs can reinforce recruitment efforts by creating internal networks and role models (Kulik, 2014). However, scholars caution that without sustained commitment, isolated measures can be superficial (Benard & Correll, 2010).

Despite this literature, gaps remain regarding the recruitment process itself. Most existing work examines aggregate outcomes (e.g. diversity statistics) or use laboratory studies of bias (Ones & Johnson, 2020; Dover et al., 2020). Few studies use qualitative methods to capture how diversity initiatives are enacted by recruiters in U.S. organizations. Qualitative inquiry is valuable here because it can surface subtle dynamics and contextual constraints that quantitative methods may miss (Lindsay et al., 2022). For example, interviews could reveal how recruiters understand corporate diversity rhetoric and how they choose to apply (or override) formal policies in practice. This perspective aligns with calls to center practitioner experiences and sensemaking in diversity research (Onyeador et al., 2021; Swidler, 1986).

In sum, the literature indicates that inclusive recruitment is recognized as important but is difficult to achieve. A variety of “best practice” interventions have been proposed, yet evidence on their day-to-day effectiveness is mixed. Theoretical recruitment models (such as Schneider’s Attraction–Selection–Attrition model) suggest organizations tend to self-perpetuate homogeneity unless external interventions occur (Schneider, 1987). Psychological theories (Social Identity Theory, Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explain bias at the individual level, but do not fully account for organizational forces. Taken together, research suggests the need to understand how human judgment and organizational context jointly shape recruiting outcomes. The current study addresses this gap by investigating HR recruiters lived experiences with diversity-focused hiring.

3 Challenges, Strategies, and Organizational Practices

3.1 Challenges in Diversity-Focused Recruitment

There are a number of issues associated with diversity-focused recruitment in U.S. workplaces that affect organizations’ capacity to achieve inclusive hiring outcomes. One of the big issues is to reconcile traditional merit-based selection with diversity aspirations. Recruiters often find it challenging to ensure recruiting selections are based on skills and qualifications while also addressing past underrepresentation of specific communities. Diversity efforts strive to provide equitable opportunity, but some recruiters worry about fairness and how diversity objectives could interfere with competency-based selection.

Another major problem is unconscious bias in recruitment processes. Human judgement is a vital part of evaluating candidates, however personal preferences, prejudices, and similarity bias can impact decisions during resume screening, interviews, and final selection. Research and recruiting experiences show that even equal qualifications may be rated differently based on demographic indications like names, gender or socioeconomic background. Such biases can limit

possibilities for qualified applicants from underrepresented groups.

Resource restrictions also provide hurdles to effective diversity recruitment. Many recruiters have rigorous hiring timeframes, financial demands and performance benchmarks such as time-to-fill positions. Such demands can prohibit casting a wide net to attract various candidates. This can be difficult for many organizations that lack specialized teams, training programs, or even the funds to support diversity initiatives.

The rising adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in recruitment also introduces new obstacles. AI tools can help to enhance consistency and decrease some types of human bias, but they can also replicate existing inequities if they are trained on previous recruiting data. AI-based systems may accidentally disfavor specific groups of candidates without sufficient monitoring and oversight by humans. Hence, companies need to assess critically the fairness and transparency of AI-supported recruitment technology.

3.2 Strategies for Improving Diversity Recruitment

Organizations have used a range of techniques to tackle these issues and establish more inclusive recruitment procedures. One effective way is to increase applicant sourcing beyond typical recruitment networks. Many organizations work with minority-serving universities, professional associations, diversity-focused employment platforms, and community organizations to reach candidates from underrepresented backgrounds. Targeted outreach tactics assist enhance access to a larger and more varied talent pool.

Another key tactic is the implementation of structured and consistent selection procedures. To reduce subjective decision-making, organizations are increasingly employing blind resume screening, competency-based evaluation techniques, structured interviews, and standardized scoring systems. These methods enable candidates to be evaluated on the basis of job-related qualifications rather than on personal traits irrelevant to performance.

Inclusive communication methods are also crucial in attracting different applications. Updating job ads to exclude exclusionary language and highlighting the organization's commitment to inclusiveness will help attract more applicants with varied backgrounds. A straightforward and inviting recruitment message helps firms demonstrate that diversity is appreciated in the workplace.

Another emerging technique is the mix of artificial intelligence technology and human judgement. Artificial intelligence can help recruiters in analysing large quantities of applications, identifying promising applicants and aiding unbiased first screening. But ultimate judgments should be made by human professionals who can take into account individual situations, ethical issues and organizational principles. This balanced approach helps to blend technology efficiency with human responsibility.

3.3 Organizational Practices Supporting Inclusive Recruitment

Successful diversity recruitment requires strong corporate mechanisms beyond individual hiring initiatives. Leadership commitment is one of the most critical criteria affecting the effectiveness of diversity programs. When senior leaders commit to inclusion goals, organizations are more likely to provide resources, training, accountability systems and clear recruitment procedures.

Organizations also need to put in place accountability measures to ensure diversity goals are integrated into the day-to-day recruitment activities. Recruitment outcomes, representation levels, and hiring processes can be measured to identify gaps and improve decision-making. Diversity initiatives should be related to firm performance goals, not seen as separate endeavors.

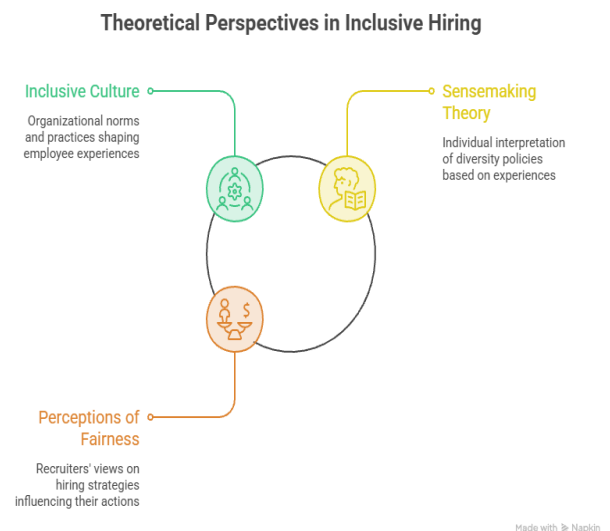
Recruiters and hiring managers also need to be continuously trained and made aware. Training may assist people understand the concepts of inclusive hiring, as well as help them become aware of unconscious prejudice and put fair evaluation procedures into practice. However, training alone will not be enough until organizational policies, leadership participation and systematic improvements in recruitment methods are put in place.

Effective diversity recruitment requires a comprehensive plan that includes inclusive policies, structured hiring processes, technological support and human judgement. Organizations that accomplish this well are better positioned to create egalitarian workplaces and to sustain high levels of employee quality and performance.

4 Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two complementary theoretical perspectives. First, we adopt an inclusive organizational culture lens (Nishii & Leroy, 2022; Shore et al., 2022), which posits that organizational norms, leadership, and practices jointly determine how employees experience inclusion. Under this view, recruiters operate within cultural and policy contexts that shape what is “taken for granted” about fair hiring. For example, in a culture with a strong diversity climate, recruiters are more likely to perceive inclusive hiring as a priority and to have clear guidelines (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018). Conversely, if the prevailing culture downplays diversity, recruiters may feel justified in defaulting to

Figure 2 : Theoretical Perspectives in Inclusive Hiring



traditional criteria. This framework helps us examine how organizational signals (e.g. DEI training, leadership rhetoric, accountability systems) influence recruiters' decisions.

Second, we draw on sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) to show how recruiters make

sense of and apply diversity initiatives. Sensemaking argues that people build their interpretation of events from their prior experience and the cues in the environment. In this environment, the personal history of inclusion of a recruiter, as well as their professional norms and cues from supervisors and peers will impact how they make sense of diversity programs. One recruiter might perceive a formal mandate as a true commitment, while another might consider it as mere window decoration, and so act accordingly. Sensemaking also suggests retrospective rationalisation. Recruiters may rationalise their methods through narratives (e.g. “we’re just being fair to all applicants”) which correspond with either efficiency or inclusiveness aims.

Combining these viewpoints, our paradigm shows that the behaviour of recruiters is a function of the relationship between organisational context and individual interpretation. Organisational variables (policy, leadership, resources) provide the structural framework. Sensemaking processes determine the ways in which recruiters apply or alter formal regulations. We also consider perceptions of fairness (Greenberg, 1987) as a mediator: a recruiter who views a hiring technique as fair is more likely to adopt it, whereas a tactic perceived as violating merit may be opposed. Combined, these theoretical lenses inform our examination of how recruiters navigate human judgement and AI/automated tools vis-à-vis diversity objectives in the hiring process.

5 Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to explore how HR recruiters in U.S. organizations balance human judgment and diversity goals during employee selection. Specifically, we address two research objectives:

- i. Identify the primary challenges and barriers recruiters encounter when implementing diversity-focused recruitment (e.g. bias concerns, resource constraints, candidate experience).

- ii. Examine the strategies and organizational practices recruiters employ to foster inclusive hiring (e.g. targeted outreach, structured processes, leadership support).

These objectives informed the study’s design and analysis, allowing us to connect empirical findings to theory on inclusive recruitment (Nishii & Leroy, 2022; Shen et al., 2009).

6 Methodology

6.1 Research Design

This was a qualitative, phenomenological exploratory study to record the experiences of recruiters. We conducted semi-structured interviews with HR recruitment professionals across a diverse range of organisations in the U.S. (varying by size and industry). A phenomenological design is ideal to investigate the meaning that participants give to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

6.2 Participants and Sampling

We recruited 18 HR recruiters through professional networks and industry associations. Participants had at least five years of recruitment experience in sectors including technology, finance, healthcare, and manufacturing. Sampling was purposive: we sought those who had been involved in diversity initiatives. Recruitment continued until thematic saturation (no new themes emerged). All participants were informed of the study purpose and provided with consent. Demographically, recruiters were a mix of genders and came from different U.S. regions, but all were employed by organizations with active diversity hiring programs.

6.3 Data Collection

Data were collected via individual, in-depth interviews conducted between January and March 2025. Each interview lasted about 60–90 minutes and used an interview guide. Questions covered topics such as the recruiter’s role in diversity hiring, perceptions of AI or automated tools in selection, validation or override of AI recommendations, fairness concerns, candidate reactions, and organizational support for diversity. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed

verbatim. Field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues.

6.4 Data Analysis

We used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify key patterns. Analysis followed six steps: data familiarization (reading transcripts repeatedly), initial coding (generating codes for meaningful segments), theme development (collating codes into candidate themes), theme review (ensuring themes fit the data), theme definition, and write-up. Two researchers coded independently to enhance reliability, then met to reconcile differences and agree on final themes. We used NVivo software for data management. Throughout analysis, we applied the theoretical framework to interpret themes in terms of inclusive culture and sensemaking.

6.5 Trustworthiness

We conducted a theme analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify key patterns. Analysis involved six steps: familiarising with the data (reading transcripts repeatedly), producing initial codes (codes for meaningful segments), developing themes (collating codes into candidate themes), reviewing themes (ensuring themes fit the data), defining themes, and write-up. To increase dependability, two researchers coded independently and met to discuss differences and agree on final themes. Data handling was done with NVivo software. During the study, we used the theoretical framework to analyse the themes in terms of inclusive culture and sensemaking.

7 Contextual Analysis

7.1 The strategic case for diversity in recruitment

We used a theme analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to uncover key patterns. The analysis followed six steps: becoming familiar with the data (reading transcripts multiple times), generating initial codes (codes for meaningful segments), building themes (grouping codes into candidate themes), reviewing themes (ensuring themes work in relation to the data), identifying themes, and writing-up. Two researchers coded independently and met to discuss differences and agree on final themes to boost reliability. Data handling was performed utilising NVivo software. During the study, we employed the theoretical framework to

investigate the themes concerning inclusive culture and sensemaking.

7.2 Structural and procedural barriers to inclusive hiring

We employed a theme analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify key patterns. The analysis involved six steps: familiarising oneself with the data (reading the transcripts multiple times), generating initial codes (codes for meaningful segments), constructing themes (grouping codes into candidate themes), reviewing themes (checking that the themes work in relation to the data), defining and naming themes, and writing-up. Two researchers coded independently and then met to discuss differences and agree on final themes to improve reliability. NVivo software was used for data handling. The theoretical framework guided the study in exploring the themes of inclusive culture and sensemaking.

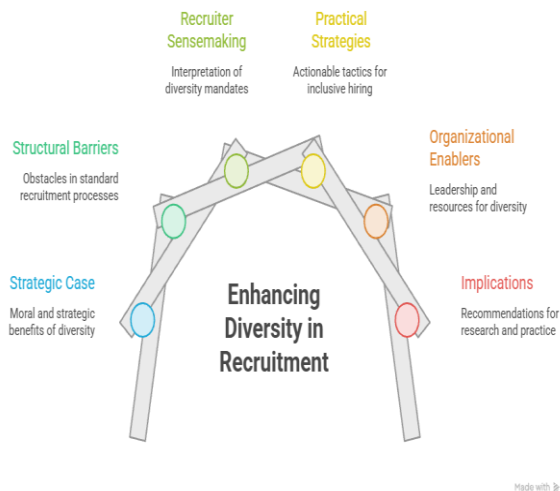
7.3 Recruiter sensemaking and the tension between merit and inclusion

We identified essential patterns through a theme analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis comprised six steps: getting to know the data (reading the transcripts several times), generating initial codes (codes for meaningful segments), developing themes (grouping codes into candidate themes), reviewing themes (checking that the themes work in relation to the data), defining and naming themes and writing-up. Two researchers coded independently and then met to discuss differences and agree on final themes to increase reliability. Data handling was performed by NVivo software. Theoretical framework guided the study in investigating topics of inclusive culture and sensemaking.

7.4 Practical strategies to expand and diversify candidate pools

The empirical and practitioner literatures agree on a set of actionable tactics: blind review, focused outreach, organised interviews, and diverse panels (Avery et al., 2004; Shen et al., 2009). The article's participants indicated establishing collaborations with minority-serving institutions, rewriting job descriptions for inclusive language, and applying score cards to reduce subjectivity, practices that parallel evidence-based suggestions (Shen et al., 2009; Page, 2007). Interventions act at multiple phases of the funnel

Figure 3 : Enhancing Diversity in Recruitment



(sourcing, screening, selection) and are more effective when used in combination than in isolation (Nishii & Leroy, 2022).

7.5 *Organizational enablers: leadership, resources, and accountability*

One common finding is that the explicit commitment of senior leaders and the deployment of resources are important preconditions for sustainable success (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018; Nishii & Leroy, 2022). The essay captures recruiters' experiences that executives' commitments to diversity, along with specific roles or tools, empower recruiters to seek inclusive sourcing; nevertheless, symbolic commitments without follow-through yield modest change. These results lend support to the notion that structural support measures, budgets, and governance are needed to translate DEI talk into consistent recruiting practice (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018).

7.6 *Implications for research and practice*

The report has numerous ramifications. First, research should continue to link qualitative insights with metrics of outcomes to determine whether combinations of approaches consistently promote representation (Shen et al., 2009). Second, practitioners need to implement accountability systems (e.g., dashboards, audit trails)

and engage in recruiter training so that sensemaking corresponds with company inclusion goals (Nishii & Leroy, 2022). Finally, organisations must realign performance measures to reward inclusion outcomes rather than penalise the extra effort to widen candidate pools because normal hiring demands (time-to-fill, cost measurements) might be at odds with diversity work (Page, 2007; Dobbin & Kalev, 2018).

7.7 *Current AI-Assisted Inclusive Recruitment*

A lot of companies use artificial intelligence (AI) techniques and human expertise to improve their recruitment results. Companies such as IBM, Unilever, and LinkedIn have embraced AI-powered recruiting technology to improve their applicant discovery, screening, and assessment processes. The firms employ AI to sift through the vast quantity of information on applicants, but human recruiters still decide on the suitability of prospects and make the final judgments.

This integrated strategy helps companies to find a balance between efficiency and fairness in diversity hiring. Artificial intelligence can help with the objective screening and selection of qualified candidates, but human judgment ensures that situations, ethical concerns, and company values are considered.

AI-assisted recruitment helps workplace diversity by increasing fairness, opening opportunities, and cutting down on some types of human prejudice in hiring. Traditional recruitment strategies may inadvertently favor candidates who have comparable backgrounds, experience or networks to recruiters and hiring managers. AI systems can assist mitigate these constraints by assessing candidates on job-related credentials, skills, and experience rather than irrelevant personal qualities.

One keyway AI improves diversity is by reducing bias in first screening. AI-based systems can anonymize resumes by deleting information like names, gender indications, or other demographic factors that may impact unconscious human judgement. AI's focus on competencies and qualifications means candidates from diverse social, cultural, and demographic backgrounds are considered more fairly.

AI also increases diversity by broadening the pool of candidates. Rather than depending on traditional recruitment channels alone, AI-powered systems may evaluate enormous volumes of applicant data and uncover qualified candidates from wider talent pools. This allows firms to find qualified applicants who may have been missed through traditional networking-based recruitment strategies.

Artificial intelligence may also help to make the evaluation of candidates more consistent, by applying uniform criteria to applicants. Structured AI-supported assessments can minimize discrepancies in applicant evaluation between recruiters and departments, assisting organizations in developing a more transparent selection process.

But artificial intelligence is unable to guarantee diversity on its own. If artificial intelligence systems are educated on past recruiting data containing prior disparities, they could replicate those biases. Hence, supervision by humans is still necessary. AI recommendations must be reviewed by human recruiters, who must consider contextual variables and guarantee that judgments are made within the bounds of ethics and equal employment practices.

Hence, the fusion of artificial intelligence with human judgement leads to a well-rounded recruitment method. AI promotes efficiency, uniformity, and access to a broad range of talent pools, whereas human decision-making offers justice, ethical considerations and alignment with company values. Together they help organizations create more inclusive and representative workforces.

8 Findings and Discussion

The analysis showed four important themes: (1) Organisational Commitment and Constraints, (2) Navigating Bias and Fairness, (3) Inclusive Recruitment Strategies, and (4) Recruiter Identity and Agency. These topics show how recruiters construct and respond to diversity hiring imperatives. Below, citations from the literature are provided to contextualise each theme.

8.1 Organizational Commitment and Constraints:

All panellists mentioned leadership support and resources as significant facilitators. Recruiters felt

emboldened when leaders expressly prioritised diversity and funded recruitment tools or training. “Our VP of HR made it clear diversity is non-negotiable, so I have vendor support and regular training” (P7). This is consistent with research indicating that strong leadership advocacy is associated with increased D&I success (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018; Nishii & Leroy, 2022). Conversely, if management commitment was weak or irregular, recruiters indicated frustration. Several gave examples of proclaimed diversity targets without follow up assistance. This disconnect between “talk and walk” sometimes meant that recruiters deprioritized diversity in favour of pressing hiring quotas. This echoes the result of Dover et al. (2020) that diversity initiatives might be neglected in the absence of credible enforcement.

Resource limits also proved to be a challenge. Many recruiters were under tight timelines, and high volume demands which hindered their capacity to do broad outreach. For example, one recruiter (P12) stated, “We’re measured on time-to-fill and cost-per-hire. “More week’s sourcing diversity damages my metrics. This is consistent with Shapiro’s (2015) argument that recruiters are balancing different organisational KPIs, which may be at odds with DEI goals. Recruiters observed that organisations with fewer resources often did not have dedicated diversity recruiters or budgets for specialised ads, indicating how the possibility is shaped by organisational size and structure. When diversity was baked into HR processes (e.g. inclusive hiring committees, tracking dashboards), recruiters reported being more successful; otherwise, it felt like “random acts of diversity.” Such data underscore the significance of structural support as proposed in models of inclusive culture (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2022).

8.2 Navigating Bias and Fairness:

Recruiters knew that bias was a problem. Many said they relied on subjective human judgement and hence had a hard time trying to be fair. Several interviewees recalled “calibration” sessions with hiring managers about latent preferences. One recruiter stated, “We found ourselves constantly debating if we were being ‘fair’ or if our own biases were creeping in. “It’s a heavy responsibility” (P3). This tension of excellence versus equity is well-documented in the literature (Page, 2007; Nishii & Leroy, 2022). Recruiters said they understood that a focus on diversity can feel like reverse

discrimination, and for some there was concern about reaction. Yet almost all agreed that it was not acceptable to disregard diversity ideals for convenience.

Many of the panellists highlighted candidate experience as a facet of fairness. They tracked whether candidates were rated on irrelevant characteristics (e.g. dialect, dress). This was also a concern for AI and automated technologies, with some recruiters mentioning pilot usage of screening software, while no recruiters in this sample revealed extensive reliance on third-party algorithms. They asked how such tools are trained, and whether biases could be ingrained in them (Raghavan et al., 2020). One recruiter (P15) explained that her employer was wary of adopting an AI resume screener since it had consistently screened out qualified women prospects. This scepticism aligns with research demonstrating that without adequate control, technology might perpetuate bias (Coffman et al., 2025).

A related subject was the dilemma of fairness/feasibility. Recruiters talked about how they tried to make sure the process was consistent for all candidates but also collected demographic indicators. For example, anonymising applications were mentioned in the first screening by numerous. However, in subsequent phases (phone screens, interviews), they regularly brought back demographic information — for example, volunteering that a candidate attended a minority-serving university to promote diversity. This patchwork is reflective of the complexity identified by Shen et al. (2009), in which recruiters utilise a combination of blind and targeted approaches. Thus, in practice, recruiters engage in constant sensemaking to determine when diversity factors should inform selections, balancing principles of justice with company drive for inclusiveness.

8.3 *Inclusive Recruitment Strategies:*

Recruiters said in interviews they used different tactics to reach different candidates. Many have success with targeted outreach efforts. For example, several respondents highlighted collaboration with historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), women's professional associations, and disability advocacy groups. One participant (P9) shared how working with

a veterans' network led to qualified applications that they might not have otherwise found. These strategies are consistent with previous recommendations (Shen et al., 2009; Avery et al., 2004) that active sourcing beyond typical sources can enhance variety.

Recruiters also changed job advertisements and screening criteria. Several updated job descriptions focus on inclusive language and vital criteria only to attract a broader readership. This is in line with Lambert et al. (2019) who found that inclusive language boosts the diversity of the applicant pool. The usual way to assess recruitment was formal, with recruiters saying they used scorecards or blind rubrics to compare candidates on pre-defined competencies, limiting subjective bias. Structured approaches such as these have been demonstrated to promote fairness (McCarthy et al., 2014).

Interestingly, some recruiters went beyond the policy, using their own networks to fill the positions. For instance, internal referrals were commonly promoted, but recruiters observed that reliance on reference networks alone can lead to homogeneity (Dobbin et al., 2015). To address this, some participants only provided referral bonuses for referrals of diverse candidates, a practice noted by others in study (Kalev et al., 2006). These examples demonstrate recruiters employing agency and inventiveness in keeping with best-practice advice.

8.4 *Recruiter Identity and Agency:*

A cross-cutting topic was how the recruiters' own identities and beliefs influenced their approach. Several recruiters indicated a personal commitment to diversity (often owing to their own heritage) that prompted them to "go the extra mile." One stated, "I've been discriminated against, so I understand that we must fight for fairness. By contrast, a few indicated that they did not feel competent to evaluate diversity goals and preferred to submit to managers' judgements. This difference supports the theory of sensemaking, suggesting that individual experiences shape the importance that recruiters place on inclusiveness.

Furthermore, recruiters generally thought of themselves as intermediaries between the candidates and business

policy. For example, they mentioned building narratives for recruiting managers, such as portraying diversity personnel as value-add rather than “special concessions.” This narrative work reflects how they make meaning of tensions (Weick, 1995). It also echoes Lindsay et al. (2022), who showed that HR professionals develop meaning around diversity initiatives in context-dependent manners. In practice, some recruiters became “diversity champions,” internally campaigning for under-represented candidates, which occasionally put them at odds with peers. These perspectives emphasise the complicated

Figure 4 : Understanding Diversity Hiring Challenges



social role played by recruiters and imply that any theory of selection must take account of recruiter action (Schneider, 1987).

8.5 Integration with Theory:

Our themes are also consistent with and enrich established theories. For example, the relevance of leadership support and inclusive culture is consistent with Nishii's (2013) results on climate for inclusion. The bias-fairness tensions we identify are consistent with social identification perspectives (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) of in-group favouritism. Our findings, however, suggest that recruiters do not automatically apply such tendencies but negotiate them as sensemaking theory predicts (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Our findings provide a basis for reconsidering Person–Organization Fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) in terms of recruiting models by including inclusion criteria as part of fit.

Overall, the recruiters we studied implemented a mixture of evidence-based and improvised methods, adapted to the organisational situation. This underscores the significance of a comprehensive strategy in theory and practice that integrates formal tools and policies with human judgement and cultural awareness (Shore et al., 2022; Shu et al., 2019). In the next section, we will go over the consequences of these findings and provide recommendations for study and practice.

Employee referral systems should be carefully monitored because excessive dependence on existing social networks may unintentionally reproduce organisational homogeneity. Organisations should therefore analyse the demographic patterns associated with referral recruitment and compare referral outcomes with other recruitment channels.

Where appropriate, organisations may encourage employees to expand their professional networks and refer qualified candidates from a broader range of backgrounds. However, diversity-related incentives should be designed carefully and in accordance with relevant legal and ethical requirements. The overall objective should be to widen access to opportunities rather than create perceptions of unfair preferential treatment.

8.6 Establish Responsible Governance of AI and Recruitment Technology

Although AI was not extensively used by all participants, concerns regarding algorithmic bias were evident. Organisations considering AI-based recruitment systems should not assume that technological tools are automatically objective or unbiased.

Before adopting automated screening or assessment technologies, organisations should evaluate how the systems are trained, what data are used and whether particular demographic groups may experience adverse outcomes. Regular audits should be conducted to identify potential discriminatory patterns.

Human oversight should remain an essential component of AI-supported recruitment. Recruiters and hiring managers should understand how technological recommendations are generated and should be able to question or override automated decisions where

appropriate. Organisations should therefore adopt AI as a decision-support mechanism rather than allowing technology to become an unaccountable substitute for human judgement.

8.7 Invest in Recruiter Training and Professional Development

Recruiters require continuous training not only on diversity principles but also on practical decision-making. Training programmes should address unconscious bias, inclusive communication, structured interviewing, legal responsibilities, candidate experience and the responsible use of recruitment technologies.

However, training should not be treated as a one-time solution. The findings suggest that recruiters constantly interpret complex situations and negotiate competing organisational expectations. Therefore, organisations should create opportunities for recruiters to discuss difficult cases, share experiences and learn collectively.

Professional development should also strengthen recruiters' confidence in challenging potentially biased hiring decisions. Recruiters who possess greater knowledge and organisational support may be more willing to exercise agency when diversity objectives conflict with traditional preferences or practices.

8.8 Empower Recruiters as Strategic Partners and Diversity Advocates

The findings show that recruiters are not simply administrative actors who implement organisational policies. They often act as intermediaries, interpreters and advocates between candidates, hiring managers and organisational leadership.

Organisations should therefore provide recruiters with an appropriate level of professional autonomy and strategic influence. Recruiters should be involved in discussions about workforce planning, recruitment strategy and diversity objectives rather than being consulted only after hiring decisions have already been shaped.

At the same time, organisations should avoid placing the entire responsibility for diversity on individual recruiters. Recruiters can act as diversity champions,

but sustainable inclusion requires shared responsibility among senior leaders, HR professionals and hiring managers.

8.9 Develop an Inclusive Organisational Culture Beyond Recruitment

Improving diversity at the point of entry alone is insufficient. Candidates may be successfully recruited but subsequently leave if the organisational culture is not inclusive. Therefore, diversity recruitment strategies should be integrated with broader organisational initiatives concerning employee inclusion, career development, promotion, leadership representation and workplace culture.

Organisations should ensure that new employees from diverse backgrounds experience meaningful inclusion after recruitment. Otherwise, recruitment initiatives may become symbolic rather than sustainable. A comprehensive approach linking recruitment with retention and career advancement would therefore be more effective in improving long-term workforce diversity.

9 Conclusion

This study explores how HR recruiters in U.S. businesses negotiate the problems, techniques, and organizational contexts of diversity-focused recruitment. The findings suggest that inclusive recruiting is not simply about diversity policies or numerical targets, but about how recruiters balance merit, fairness, applicant quality, legal responsibilities and organisational diversity objectives throughout the selection process. Leadership commitment, proper resources, clear inclusion policies, accountability mechanisms and continual recruiter training were important to translating organisational aspirations into consistent recruitment practices. Successful approaches to widen the pool of applicants and minimize subjective bias involved targeted outreach, inclusive job postings, blind résumé screening, organized interviews, standardized evaluation standards, and diverse selection panels. But implementation is still hampered by unconscious bias, narrow recruitment networks, tight budgets, time-to-fill demands, contradicting

performance indicators, and uncertainty about the link between diversity and merit. Theoretically, the findings contribute to understanding, adapting and enacting diversity policies in practice, which are co-shaped by inclusive organisational culture and recruiter sensemaking. The findings also highlight the agency of recruiters as intermediaries between organisational expectations and candidate interests. In practice, organisations should integrate diversity outcomes into their recruitment performance indicators, provide recruiters with adequate time and technology support, regularly assess selection processes, and maintain human review of AI-assisted decisions to prevent replicating existing inequalities. Limitations: The study's qualitative cross-sectional approach, purposive sample of 18 recruiters, reliance on self-reported experiences and exclusive emphasis on U.S. companies limit the broader generalizability of the findings. Future research should use longitudinal quantitative, mixed-method, cross-sectoral and cross-national designs to assess the long-term impact of inclusive recruitment methods on workforce representation, applicant experience, employee performance, and organizational effectiveness. What is needed is continuous institutional commitment to genuine diversity recruitment that makes inclusion a measurable, responsible and sustainable organisational practice rather than a symbolic ambition.

10 Recommendations

Based on the essay, we recommend several organizational actions:

a. Future research should examine diversity-focused recruitment across different organisational sectors, geographical regions and organisational sizes to determine whether the findings of this study are broadly applicable or shaped primarily by the specific context of American workplaces. Comparative research could further investigate how differences in legal frameworks, organisational cultures and broader social contexts influence recruiters' understanding of fairness and diversity. Future studies should also incorporate the perspectives of hiring managers and job candidates, in addition to those of recruiters, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how diversity recruitment is interpreted and experienced at different stages of the selection process. Longitudinal research

would be particularly valuable for monitoring and evaluating diversity-focused recruitment outcomes over time and for examining whether such initiatives produce sustainable improvements in workforce representation. In addition, future research should investigate the increasing role of artificial intelligence and algorithmic decision-making in recruitment, particularly in relation to fairness, bias and inclusive hiring outcomes. Alongside these research priorities, organisations should provide continuous training in diversity, bias awareness and inclusive decision-making for recruiters, hiring managers and senior leaders to strengthen their capacity to implement diversity-focused recruitment practices effectively.

e. Organisations should demonstrate sustained and visible leadership commitment to diversity and inclusion, as leadership support provides an essential foundation for effective diversity-focused recruitment. Such commitment should be translated into practice through clear, consistent and transparent recruitment frameworks, guidelines and procedures that promote fair and inclusive decision-making. Establishing these structures can help reduce the influence of both conscious and unconscious bias and ensure greater consistency throughout the selection process. However, formal policies and procedures alone may not be sufficient. Their effectiveness also depends on the knowledge, awareness and capability of those responsible for recruitment decisions. Organisations should therefore provide ongoing training in diversity, bias awareness and inclusive decision-making for recruiters, hiring managers and senior leaders. By combining committed leadership, structured recruitment practices and continuous professional development, organisations can create stronger conditions for promoting fairness, consistency and inclusion throughout the recruitment and selection process.

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