

EMPLOYER'S HANDBOOK

Creating an inclusive and affirming hiring process for LGBTQI+ individuals is essential for fostering a diverse and equitable workplace. This toolkit provides employers with practical steps, legal considerations, and best practices to ensure an unbiased and welcoming interview process.



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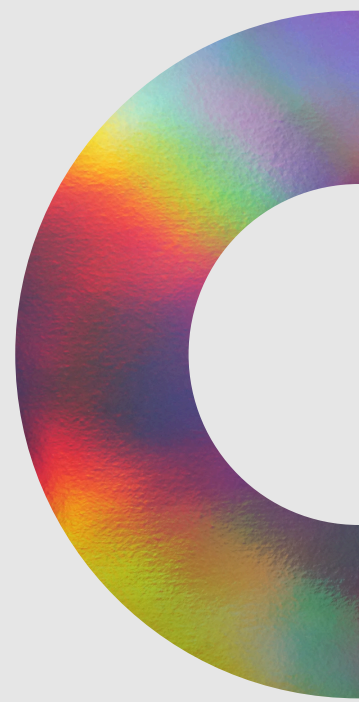


By using this toolkit, employers will:

- Gain a clear understanding of key LGBTQI+ terminology
- Learn how to create an inclusive interview process
- Understand legal considerations and best practices
- Receive guidance on becoming more unbiased their decisions

This toolkit is designed for:

- Employers, HR professionals, and recruiters committed to diversity and inclusion
- Organizations seeking to improve hiring policies to support LGBTQI+ candidates
- Business leaders aiming to foster an inclusive and welcoming workplace



Glossary of Key Terms

To create a respectful and informed hiring process, it is essential to understand key LGBTQI+ terminology:

- **LGBTQI+** - Stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and other diverse identities
- **Sexual Orientation** - A person's emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to others (e.g., heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual)
- **Gender Identity** - A person's internal understanding of their gender, which may or may not align with their sex assigned at birth
- **Transgender (Trans)** - A person whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth
- **Non-Binary** - A gender identity outside the male/female binary
- **Intersex** - A person born with sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of male or female
- **Cisgender** - A person whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.
- **Deadname** - A previous name used before a trans person changed it; should not be used without consent
- **Coming Out** - The process of revealing one's sexual orientation or gender identity
- **Misgendering** - Using incorrect pronouns or gendered language for someone
- **Ally** - A non-LGBTQI+ person who supports and advocates for LGBTQI+ rights

Challenges Faced by LGBTQI+ Candidates

- Fear of discrimination or bias during interviews
- Lack of inclusive policies or understanding from employers
- Difficulty in sharing previous experiences due to potential stigma
- Unclear guidelines for name and gender marker changes in official documentation

Why Inclusive Hiring Matters

Many LGBTQI+ individuals face discrimination in the hiring process due to bias, lack of awareness or systemic barriers. A fair and inclusive recruitment process ensures:

- Equal opportunities for all candidates
- Compliance with anti-discrimination laws

Creating an inclusive hiring process is not just about compliance—it is about building a work environment where everyone can thrive. A diverse and inclusive workforce contributes to:

- **Higher employee satisfaction and retention rates** – employees who feel valued and respected are more engaged and productive
- **Stronger workplace culture** - employees who feel safe and accepted have higher sense of belonging and togetherness
- **Innovation and creativity** – diverse teams bring different perspectives, leading to better problem-solving and creativity
- **Stronger company reputation** – companies known for inclusive hiring attract top talent and build trust with customers and stakeholders
- **Better financial performance** – research shows that inclusive organizations perform better financially and have lower turnover rates

By prioritizing LGBTQI+ inclusion in hiring, businesses not only strengthen their internal culture but also set an example for broader societal change.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

What do we mean by Diversity, Equity and Inclusion?

DIVERSITY

Diversity is all the ways we differ as individuals

Inherent diversity - the traits you were born with and have been conditioned by, such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation

Acquired diversity - the traits and experiences you have gained over time that influence how you think, solve problems, and interact with others
Diversity is anything that makes us unique. Diversity is difference...

EQUITY

Equity refers to the principle of ensuring fair and just treatment, opportunities, access and advancement for all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds or identities. It recognizes that different people may require different resources, support and accommodations in order to achieve equality.

Equity is different from equality.

► Equality =

everyone gets the same.

► Equity = everyone gets what they need to succeed.

INCLUSION

Inclusion is about creating an environment where all individuals feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued and where the richness of ideas, backgrounds and perspectives are harnessed to create business value. It's not just about having diverse people present—it's about making sure they're heard, involved, and empowered. Inclusion is about belonging, psychological safety, connection and participation. Inclusion is welcoming difference and making fair decisions (free from bias)

The business benefits of creating Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Wherever your stakeholders are on their journey, wherever you are on your own journey, you need to be able to articulate the reasons for being inclusive with your hiring managers. They may well be on the same page but it is not unheard of in any business for a hiring manager to have a 'preference' – whether that be a positive preference for someone of a certain age or sex, or a rejection of a certain difference.

Here are some arguments to support your conversations:

Innovation – there is a link between greater diversity and increased innovation

Customers – diversity can improve an organization's customer orientation and is also linked to increased customer satisfaction

Reputation & Brand – supporting diversity, equity and inclusion can have a positive impact on the company brand

Productivity & Growth – A study from McKinsey found that companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity were 30% more likely to have financial returns above the national industry median

Employees - an inclusive culture has a very strong and positive impact on employees in a number of different ways. One study showed that when leaders are perceived by their teams as being inclusive, 84% of employees reported feeling more motivated and 81% indicated it had a positive impact on their productivity.

Talent - this is essentially about recruiting the best available talent from the widest possible talent pool

New Markets - There is evidence that greater diversity in organisations means that they are more likely to break into new markets

Mitigating Bias

What is bias?

Bias is a natural human phenomenon. Everyone has biases. They are a natural part of human cognition. Biases are the brain's shortcut to attribute meaning or value to the environment and what is happening around us.

Due to their nature, for the most part they are unconscious and hidden from ourselves. People are often unaware of their biases.

Biases trigger automatic responses - quick judgments and assessments. In this way, they predict and shape behavior.

When do biases most often arise?

1. Cognitive Overload

When people are juggling multiple tasks, handling large amounts of information, or dealing with mental fatigue, their ability to process situations fairly and objectively is diminished.

✦ Example: A manager reviewing resumes at the end of a long day may rely more on names, education, or photos to make decisions.

2. Time Pressure and Urgency

The need to make fast decisions often overrides deliberate reasoning, leading to instinctive or habitual responses.

✦ Example: Making snap decisions about who should attend a leadership program may favor "known" high performers, excluding newer or quieter team members.

3. Emotional Stress or Personal Threat

When emotions are heightened — such as during conflict, disagreement, or personal discomfort — we're more likely to fall back on stereotypes or defensiveness.

✦ Example: In a tense meeting, someone may interpret disagreement from a colleague as hostility rather than a difference in communication style.

4. Ambiguity or Lack of Structure

Situations that lack clear rules, expectations, or data allow personal biases to fill in the gaps. In the absence of facts, we often rely on assumptions, past experiences, or stereotypes.

✦ Example: In unstructured interviews, interviewers may unconsciously rate candidates based on perceived “cultural fit” rather than skills or qualifications.

5. Similarity and Comfort

We naturally gravitate toward people who reflect our own background, values, or behavior — reinforcing affinity bias.

✦ Example: Choosing someone for a team because they “remind you of yourself at that age.”

6. Group Influence and Social Norms

When a team or workplace culture leans toward conformity or shared views, dissenting perspectives can be undervalued or suppressed. In homogeneous or highly conformist environments, groupthink and in-group favoritism can skew perspectives.

✦ Example: Team members remain silent about a biased decision because the group consensus is strong and questioning it feels risky.

7. Desire for Simplicity or Closure

Humans tend to avoid uncertainty. When under pressure to “wrap things up,” we may ignore complexity or nuance, leading to premature judgments.

✦ Example: Deciding who is “not a team player” based on one isolated disagreement rather than a full performance review.

8. Hierarchical Power Dynamics

When power is unevenly distributed, individuals in authority may rely more on personal perceptions than feedback from others — especially if those others are in more marginalized positions.

✦ Example: A leader assuming a junior employee lacks ambition because they’re quiet in meetings, without considering cultural or psychological factors.

9. Reinforcement of Past Experiences

We tend to seek and interpret information in ways that confirm what we already believe (confirmation bias)

✦ Example: If you think older employees struggle with technology, you may overnotice their mistakes and ignore their successes in that area.

10. Impression Management & Reputation Concerns

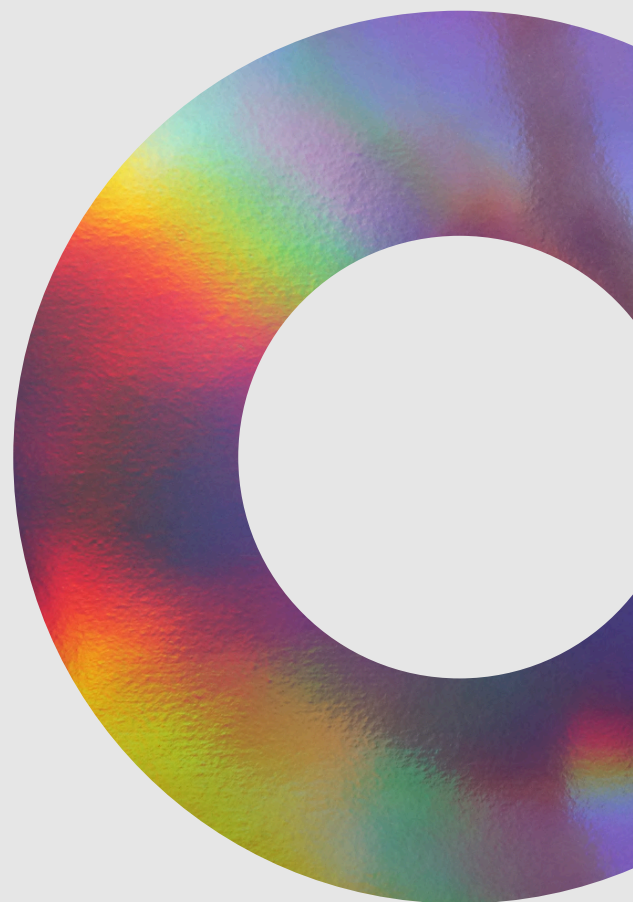
People may shape their views to align with what they believe is socially or politically acceptable, instead of voicing or exploring more diverse perspectives.

✦ Example: Avoiding feedback about bias in the workplace because it may upset the status quo or a powerful individual.

11. Lack of Exposure or Contact

Limited interaction with diverse individuals increases reliance on stereotypes or incomplete information.

✦ Example: Making assumptions about a colleague's values based on their religion, nationality, or gender identity without direct conversation.



What shapes our biases?

1. Personal Experiences

- **Upbringing & family environment:** The values, attitudes, and beliefs we absorb early in life from parents or caregivers.
- **Education:** How subjects are taught and framed—what is emphasized or omitted—can reinforce particular views.
- **Life experiences:** Interactions with people, trauma, success, or failure in different settings can form mental shortcuts.

2. Cultural & Societal Influences

- **Media exposure:** TV, films, advertisements, and online platforms often portray groups in stereotypical ways, reinforcing bias.
 - **Cultural norms and traditions:** What's considered "normal" or "acceptable" varies across cultures and influences our assumptions.
- Language and metaphors: Phrases used daily can carry bias ("manpower," "black sheep," "crazy idea," etc.).

3. Group Dynamics & Social Identity

- **In-group favoritism:** We tend to trust and favor those who share our background or identity, leading to implicit exclusion of others.
- **Conformity pressure:** The need to belong can cause people to adopt group biases even when they conflict with personal values.
- **Stereotype reinforcement:** Being in homogeneous environments can reinforce generalizations about those not represented.

4. Cognitive & Biological Tendencies

- **Heuristics** (mental shortcuts): The brain prefers speed over accuracy, leading to assumptions based on incomplete data.
- **Pattern recognition:** We try to make sense of the world through categorization, which can cause overgeneralizations.
- **Emotional reactions:** Stress, fear, or perceived threat can trigger biased judgments.

5. Institutional and Structural Systems

- **Workplace and societal systems:** Biased policies and practices (e.g. recruitment, evaluations, promotions) can normalize exclusion.
- **Lack of diversity in leadership:** Can perpetuate blind spots and reinforce dominant group perspectives.
- **Reinforcement loops:** When biased decisions go unchallenged, they get repeated and validated over time.

6. Influential Figures & Social Influencers

- **Mentors & managers:** In professional settings, their perspectives can influence our perceptions of leadership, success, and value.
- **Peers and friends:** Especially during formative years or in high-trust environments, peer opinions reinforce shared assumptions or stereotypes.
- **Religious or community leaders:** Often shape moral views and beliefs about social roles or hierarchies.
- **Public figures and influencers:** Celebrities, politicians, and online personalities shape societal narratives—often spreading stereotypes (intentionally or not).

What are the most common biases in our everyday life?

Affinity bias

Affinity bias is the tendency to favor people who are similar to ourselves in terms of gender, age, background, interests, experiences, interpersonal and work style or appearance. This unconscious bias often shows up in hiring, promotions, or team dynamics, where individuals may prefer colleagues who share their alma mater, ethnicity, hobbies, or communication style—sometimes at the expense of objectivity or fairness. This might create an 'insider vs. outsider' dynamic.

Example Scenario: a manager might unknowingly mentor someone who reminds them of their younger self, while overlooking equally or more qualified colleagues with different perspectives.

Horn effect

The Horn Effect is a type of cognitive bias in which a single negative trait or behavior of a person leads to an overall unfavorable impression of them, overshadowing their positive qualities. It causes people to assume that if someone demonstrates one undesirable attribute, they are likely to have others—even without evidence.

This bias can distort judgment in areas like hiring, performance reviews, or teamwork, leading to unfair treatment or missed potential. For example, one's discomfort with presentations might lead to the request of their overall stepping off a work project.

Example Scenario: A candidate arrives late for a job interview. Because of that one negative behavior (tardiness), the interviewer assumes they are unreliable and unprofessional — even though the candidate has excellent qualifications and gives strong answers during the interview.

Recency effect

The Recency Effect is a cognitive bias where people tend to remember and give more weight to the most recent information they've received, rather than considering earlier data equally. The impact can be positive or negative.

Example Scenario: During performance reviews, a manager might overemphasize an employee's most recent mistake or success, while overlooking consistent performance throughout the year.

Confirmation bias

Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, and recall information in a way that confirms one's existing beliefs or assumptions, while ignoring or undervaluing evidence that contradicts them. This might affect the decision making process by dismissing valid opinions and reinforcing preexisting perceptions, thus hinder innovation and perpetuate unfair treatment

Example Scenario: A manager who believes a team member is unreliable might focus on that person's occasional mistakes and overlook their consistent successes, reinforcing their original belief—even if it's not accurate.

Spillover effect

The Spillover Effect refers to how emotions, behaviors, or experiences in one context or interaction can carry over and influence attitudes and judgements in another unrelated context. It can work in a negative or positive way.

Example Scenario: If an employee performs exceptionally well on one high-profile project, a manager might assume they are highly competent in all areas (even unrelated ones), and overlook areas where the employee may actually need development. This is a positive spillover. Alternatively, a single conflict or mistake might unfairly color all future perceptions of the employee's work — a negative spillover.

Anchoring bias

Anchoring bias is a cognitive bias where people rely too heavily on the first piece of information (the "anchor") they receive when making decisions, even if it's irrelevant or arbitrary. It has a negative impact on choices and judgements leading to biased decisions.

Example Scenario: A female employee's difficult pregnancy can lead to lack of work progression by avoiding cross-border team assignment due to monthly travel considerations.

Halo effect

The Halo Effect is a cognitive bias where one positive trait or impression of a person leads to an overall favorable evaluation of them, often without objective evidence to support it. The Halo Effect can unintentionally lead to favoritism and overlook real performance data.

Example Scenario: If an employee is charismatic or well-spoken in meetings, a manager might assume they're also highly competent, organized, or a strong leader — even if those traits haven't been directly observed. As a result, they may receive better evaluations or opportunities than others with equal or greater qualifications.

Projection

Projection is a psychological defense mechanism or bias where a person unconsciously attributes their own thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs or behaviors to someone else — often as a way to avoid acknowledging them in themselves. Projection can distort interpersonal dynamics and create misunderstandings or conflict, especially in team settings.

Example Scenario: A manager who is feeling insecure about their leadership might accuse a team member of lacking confidence or commitment, even if that team member is performing well. Or, someone who is resistant to change might label others as inflexible or close-minded.

Frame of Reference

Frame of Reference refers to the set of personal experiences, values, beliefs, culture, and assumptions through which a person perceives and interprets the world around them.

Example Scenario: A manager raised in a highly structured environment might expect punctuality and rigid adherence to rules. When evaluating a creative, flexible employee who delivers excellent results but works irregular hours, the manager might rate them poorly — not based on performance, but because they don't match the manager's frame of reference for what “professionalism” looks like.

Addressing Bias Impact

1. Pause & Reflect

Reflect on automatic responses and acknowledge personal preferences that influence behavior. Before reacting or making a judgment, ask yourself:

- What assumptions am I making about this person or situation?
- Am I reacting based on past experiences or stereotypes?
- Would I respond the same way if it were someone else?
- “Who might be disadvantaged by this decision?”
- “Is this based on data or instinct?”

Even a 10-second pause can help interrupt bias.

2. Seek Contrasting Perspectives

- Invite input from people with different styles, roles, or backgrounds for decision-making.
- Challenge the idea of cultural fit and consider how diverse backgrounds can add to the culture
- Reflect on your preferred communication style and avoid favoring those with similar styles
- Get comfortable being challenged — bias thrives in echo chambers.

3. Track Your Patterns

Try to keep track of your past decisions and behavior. It would be very useful to keep a short, private journal or note where to reflect on:

- Who you naturally trust, promote, or listen to more.
- Who you might overlook, interrupt, or assume less of.
- What stories you tell yourself about people.

Seeing these patterns over time helps you disrupt them.

4. Make Correction Part of Growth

- Upskill Yourself. Recognize and understand personal biases. Develop skills like emotional intelligence and agility
- Share your learning openly. Discuss biases with others and adopt different behaviors — modeling bias accountability helps normalize it for others.
- Stay vigilant and call out bias and inequities when observed. Identify actions to implement.

5. Establish clear rules and criteria

- Focus on role requirements and use consistent criteria when evaluating others and taking decisions

Guidelines for an inclusive interview

Objectives of the guidelines

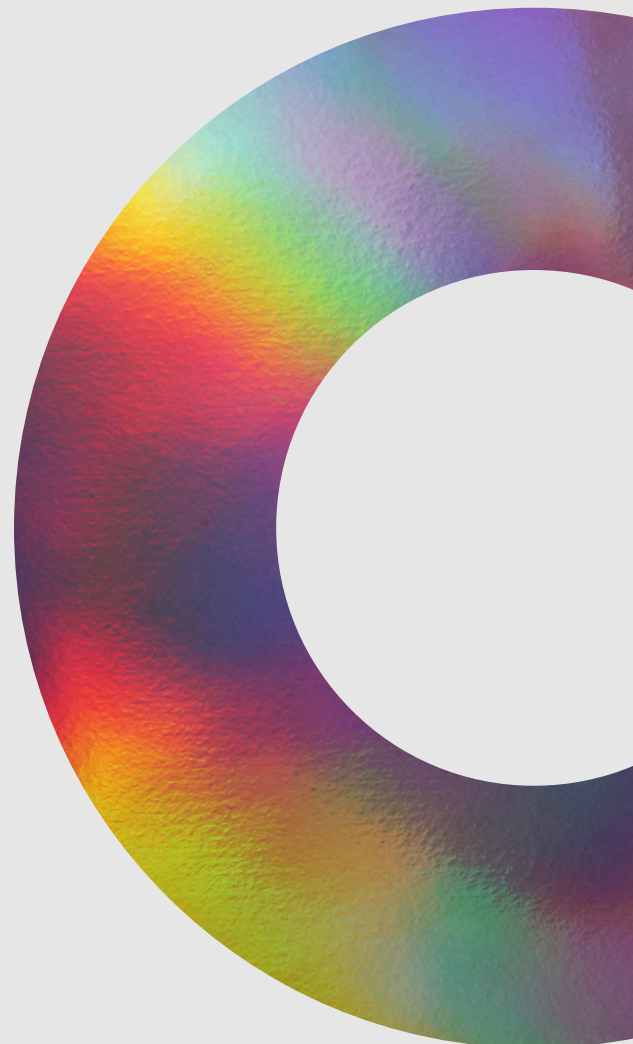
Empowers interview teams to carry out impactful and effective interviews
Seeks to draw in top-notch candidates with a variety of skills and experiences.

Ensures the employer's brand is showcased properly, providing an outstanding candidate experience

Confirms that the interview procedure is equitable and unbiased

Promotes a uniform interviewing method

For an exceptional candidate experience, the aim of the interview is to be challenging, equitable, interesting, and relevant and provide the candidate with an opportunity to ask questions and perform to the best of their ability.



Conducting an interview

Preparation

It is the responsibility of the interviewer to thoroughly prepare for each interview.

Before each interview, the interviewer must review the credentials of the candidate, including CV/résumé, and any other materials submitted. It is recommended to review notes and feedback from previous interviews to find out if any areas need further probing and to avoid duplication.

Advance preparation enables the interviewer to spend time during the interview getting to know more about the candidate — beyond who the candidate is on paper — and providing the candidate with an exceptional interview experience.

When interviewing candidates, interviewers are asked to assess relevant skills and competencies which needs to be agreed in advance

Behavioural questions:

Prepare one to two questions aligned with the agreed skill that are most appropriate based on the candidate's credentials and experiences.

Technical questions:

Prepare example technical excellence competency questions specific to the industry sector and role being recruited for. Ask the same set of questions to all candidates in the recruitment process to ensure an equitable process.

Interview up to 60 minutes

Interviews should be a combination of the interviewer assessing candidate skills, engaging in an interactive discussion and selling the opportunity. For an exceptional candidate experience it is important we communicate the reasons and benefits to joining the company clearly and well. Conduct a thorough, fact-based, and experience-based discussion with the candidate.

Follow a recommended four-step format:

Step 1: Set the structure of the interview and facilitate introductions

Step 2: Establish rapport:

- Interviewer's goal is to provide the candidate with an opportunity to perform to the best of their ability.
- Questions should be focused on the candidate's credentials, experiences, or opinions.

Step 3: Ask insightful questions related to the competencies and the technical category, and understand the candidate's past behavior and experiences, as those are the best indicators of future performance

Step 4: Conclude the interview by answering the candidate's questions. This is an opportunity to engage in an interactive discussion, explain to the candidate next steps of the interview and selection process and sell the opportunity.

Evaluate up to 30 minutes

Spend appropriate time evaluating and rating the candidate using the evaluation form.

When completing a candidate evaluation after the interview, the interviewer must document the candidate's capabilities against the agreed competencies

A 1-5 rating scale can be used as per below

1- Emerging level: Demonstrated very few of the relevant skills and competencies required for the position and/or significant weaknesses were evident

2- Basic level: Demonstrated some of the relevant skills and competencies required for the position; weaknesses were evident

3- Competent level: Demonstrated a high level of most of the relevant skills and competencies required for the position

4- Differentiated level: Demonstrated a high level of nearly all the relevant skills and competencies required for the position

5- Exemplary level: Among top 10% of candidates interviewed; demonstrated an unusually high level of all the relevant skills and competencies required for the position

Interview Approach Recommendations

One-on-one:

One interviewer conducts an interview with one candidate.

- Interviews should be a combination of the interviewer assessing candidate skills, engaging in an interactive discussion and selling the work opportunity
- All interviewers are expected to assess at least one assigned competency category

Multiple candidate interviews:

A number of interviewers and assessors conducting a range of interviews and assessments with multiple candidates in one location on one day. Provides an opportunity to assess a number of different skills through different types of assessment methods on the same day.

This approach is useful when

Hiring demands are accelerated and multiple open positions with similar profiles need to be filled and/or multiple candidates were progressed simultaneously in the candidate pipeline.

Interviewer and/or candidate availability makes it extremely difficult to schedule the interviews on multiple days.

Hiring manager(s) and interviewer(s) typically need to be able to dedicate up to a half or full day for the interview activity.

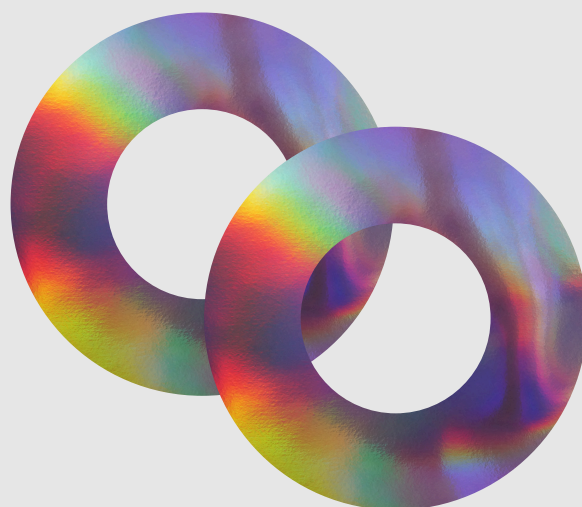
The interviewers and assessors should have diverse representation.

Microsoft Teams or video:

One or more interviewers conduct an interview with a candidate via video or or virtually, leveraging available technology.

This approach is best when candidates are in a different location from the interviewer(s) or when there are travelling constraints.

When choosing a location to conduct the interview, consider candidate confidentiality and audio quality.



Tips for being inclusive

1. Prepare an inclusive interview panel

- Include diverse interviewers in terms of gender, age, background, and roles.
- Ensure everyone is trained on unconscious bias, inclusive communication, and evaluation consistency.

2. Use structured and standardized questions

- Prepare the same core questions for every candidate to ensure fairness.
- Align questions with job-related competencies, not personality or culture “fit.”
- Avoid assumptions based on a candidate’s background or appearance.

3. Be clear, transparent and proactive

- Clearly outline:

The role and responsibilities

The interview format and expectations

The timeline and next steps

- Offer accessibility info (e.g., virtual platform details, breaks, accommodations available)
- Offer accommodations proactively - ask early if the candidate needs reasonable accommodations (e.g., extra time, sign language interpretation, ergonomic setup)

4. Avoid biased language and behaviors

- Don’t comment on appearance, accent, family status, or age.
- Refrain from “culture fit” language—focus on “value add” or alignment with company mission.
- Be mindful of interruptions or tone—especially with women, introverts, or non-native speakers.

5. Allow for different communication styles

- Don't penalize for nervousness, pauses, or indirect communication.
- Encourage storytelling and examples but avoid rushing or pressuring for immediate answers.

6. Use a Rubric or Scoring Matrix

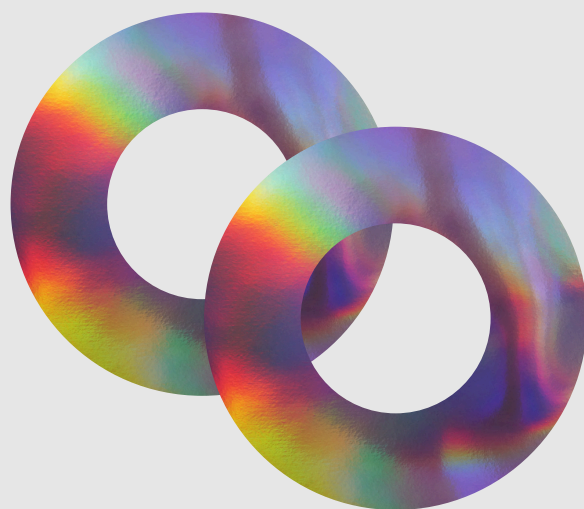
- Evaluate candidates against pre-defined, objective criteria.
- Take notes and rate independently before group discussions to reduce groupthink or halo/horn effect.

7. Debrief and reflect together in a structured way to:

- Compare impressions against the rubric
- Reflect on potential biases
- Look for overlooked strengths due to stereotyping

8. Collect feedback from candidates

- Ask about their experience to identify any exclusionary practices and continuously improve.

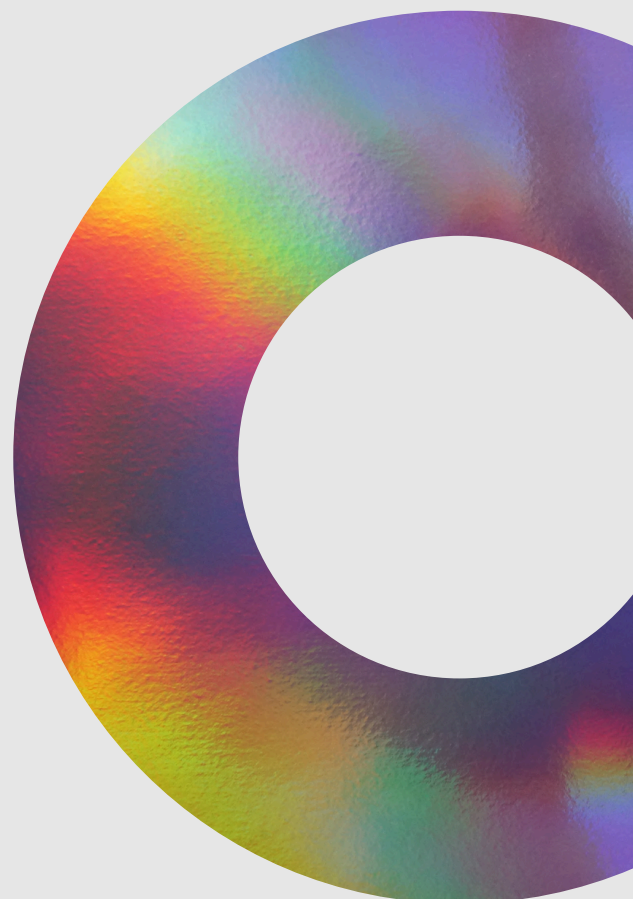


The STARL Model

The STARL Model is an inclusive interview technique adapted from the traditional STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result), with an added "L" for Learning. It's used to guide behavioral interviews in a structured, bias-reducing way and helps interviewers evaluate candidates based on competencies, not subjective impressions.

The STARL Model provides a structured approach for candidates to showcase their experiences effectively and to emphasize their problem-solving abilities and adaptability in challenging situations.

By utilizing the STARL Model, candidates can effectively demonstrate their competencies and increase their chances of success in an interview while at the same time employers can evaluate properly and choose the best fit for the job.



Component	Description	Purpose in Inclusive Interviews
S - Situation	Ask the candidate to describe a specific situation they faced.	Grounds the response in a real scenario (not hypotheticals or assumptions).
T - Task	What were they tasked to do in that situation?	Focuses on the role and responsibility, not just outcomes.
A - Action	What specific actions did they take?	Helps assess individual contribution while minimizing bias about team dynamics.
R - Result	What was the outcome of their actions?	Measures impact and effectiveness of the approach
L - Learning	What did they learn, and how did they apply it later?	Adds depth by highlighting growth, adaptability, and reflection. Encourages valuing nonlinear career paths or lived experience

How STARL Promotes Inclusion:

- Levels the playing field: Helps candidates from non-traditional or underrepresented backgrounds articulate their strengths through lived experiences and transferable skills.
- Minimizes bias: Shifts focus from subjective impressions (e.g., “gut feeling”) to concrete evidence.
- Encourages diversity of experience: Learning from failure, adversity, or unconventional paths becomes a strength, not a weakness.
- Enables consistent evaluation: Interviewers can compare responses fairly using structured criteria aligned with STARL.

Example STARL-Based Question:

“Tell me about a time when you had to adapt to a new team dynamic. What was the situation? What was your task? What actions did you take? What was the result? And what did you learn from the experience?”

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Vagueness in Responses

Having vague responses from the candidate will obscure their message. It's essential to elicit specific and clear information.

Staying Focused

Staying focused on the question helps in eliciting relevant information. Avoid going off-topic to ensure effectiveness.

Practice Makes Perfect

Practicing ensures you analyse candidate's experiences effectively, highlighting key accomplishments and skills.