

# **PREVENTING DISCRIMINATION IN RECRUITING THROUGH UNCONSCIOUS BIASES**

## Abstract

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Title of publication <b>Preventing discrimination in recruiting through unconscious biases</b>		
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Abstract <p>Discrimination in recruiting is a concurring problem within the Finnish work environment, although laws prohibit it. Especially immigrants and people with immigrant background and women suffer from either direct or indirect discrimination. However, in many cases, discrimination is caused by unconscious bias(es), and if those were recognised, discrimination could be prevented.</p> <p>This thesis aims to establish what kind of biases affect recruiters and if they are able to acknowledge them in order to ensure equal hiring process. It also tries to find solutions recruiters could use to tackle their own biases.</p> <p>The theory section examines previous studies covering recruiting, and discrimination related to it, unconscious bias and self-management. The aim is to lay background to recruiting and unconscious bias, so the reader can understand the concept. Self-management was chosen because recruiters often work individually and lead the whole hiring process, and self-management can give them tools to improve the process.</p> <p>The empirical study was conducted with combined research method: It uses both quantitative and qualitative methods. The basis is on a questionnaire which was sent out to recruiters in different fields, and based on the results of that questionnaire, solutions were combined.</p> <p>Results show that recruiters need training regarding unconscious biases, as many of the respondents considered themselves not biased at all, when results show preference especially to similarity. Respondents did have ideas on types of training that could help decreasing the effects of biases, and they were able to identify reasons for biases.</p>		
Keywords Recruiting, Discrimination, Unconscious bias, Self-management		

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the research

The working environment has quite rapidly become diverse. Diversity is seen as an advantage in a workplace, and yet companies have difficulties to match their goals with practices. Companies are eager to design diversity policies but are not able to implement them. (Shemla 2018.)

For example, it is estimated that Finland needs 20 000 occupational immigrants every year. However, at the same time, international professionals, who are already located in Finland, are not able to find employment due to Finnish language skill requirements. Likewise, only 42 percent of international students were able to find employment after graduation, and many have moved to other countries. (Kangas 2019.)

The Finnish language skill requirement is not the only obstacle especially immigrants or first-generation Finns face while looking for employment. A foreign name in itself can be an obstacle to get a position or employment: A person with a Finnish name is more likely to be hired than a person with foreign name (Martti et al. 2019). Some of the troubles of finding a job can be explained with straight-forward (illegal) discrimination or racism but some can be explained by unconscious bias(es).

However, immigrants are not the only people facing discrimination in workplaces. In a study conducted in 2018, 6 percent of respondents felt they had been discriminated in recruiting or appointing situations within the last five years. The discrimination was seen to be based by age (both young age and old age), gender (being a woman), nationality or skin colour, language skills and, most commonly, favouritism. (Sutela et al. 2019, 203 & 206.)

There have been several studies addressing the recruiting process. However, several have focused on how the skills and qualifications of the applicants affect the recruiting process, and what kind of different methods there are, instead of how discrimination affects the process. (Koivunen et al. 2015, 4.) People trust that recruitment is done with a focus on skills and qualifications, and yet there are considerable employment and wage gaps in many Western countries, and several of them can be, at least partly, explained through ethnic discrimination. (Carlsson et al. 2018, 2652.)

Discrimination is not, in most cases, the intent. Stereotypes play a huge role, and stereotypes feed the unconscious biases of recruiters: Recruiters consider themselves non-discriminatory yet unconsciously practice discrimination. (Koivunen et al. 2015, 8.) This is

why it is important for the recruiters to understand and acknowledge their unconscious biases, and thus this thesis will study discrimination, unconscious bias and recruiters in the Finnish work environment. The aim is to find reasons behind recruiting discrimination and means by which it can possibly be prevented through focusing on biases people have.

## 1.2 Research questions, methods and limitations

This thesis tries to find an answer to one main question, and two supporting questions. It uses combined research method approach: Quantitative method is used to collect most of the data, and qualitative method is used to gather solutions. The research is limited to the Finnish work environment.

### **Research questions**

As mentioned earlier, this thesis aims to find an answer to one main question, supported by two supporting questions. The questions are as following:

1. What kind of solutions could decrease unconscious biases?
  - a. If unconscious biases cannot be decreased, what kind of solutions in recruiting could lessen the effect of biases?
2. Do biases explain the types of discrimination?
3. Is it possible for recruiters to acknowledge their unconscious biases?

These questions were chosen to guide the thesis because it is not possible to remove unconscious biases, however, they can be acknowledged, and their effects can be decreased. The important question is, how, in the case of recruiters, the unconscious biases can be decreased, and also determining the tools for minimising effects.

### **Methods**

This thesis uses both quantitative and qualitative method due to its nature. Quantitative method is a good way to collect data from a large group of people, however, it does not offer solutions in itself. Quantitative data is processed as entirety and not as single cases. (Kananen 2015, 95 & 101.) This thesis uses a questionnaire as a method of gathering the necessary data (see appendix 1), which is a traditional approach.

Qualitative method gathers information from different type of sources in order to find a solution. The sources can be divided into secondary and primary sources, secondary sources being existing documents (anything related to the phenomenon) and primary sources are the ones that gathered specifically for the research. (Kananen 2015, 76.) In

this thesis, existing studies, statistics and suggestions from the secondary sources and questionnaire's open questions form the primary source.

The theory, which is presented in chapters 2, 3 and 4, focuses on recruitment and discrimination related to recruitment, unconscious bias and self-management. In chapter 2, recruitment and discrimination are linked together, as this thesis discusses discrimination from the recruiting point of view. This chapter furthermore studies recruitment as a process, its methods, as well as its laws and regulations. Discrimination is first presented in general, and then moved more to the Finnish environment. Chapter 3 presents the theories of unconscious biases, and how they could be managed.

Chapter 4 concentrates self-management. The focus on self-management instead of management as a whole was chosen because recruiters often make the choices considering employment or potential employees. As Koivunen et al. (2015, 4) said: "- - recruiters act as gatekeepers; they have the power to grant or deny people access to a certain job or even to the labor market - -." This is why it is important for recruiters especially understand and acknowledge their biases, and why they need to be able to manage themselves.

### **Limitations**

The thesis targets the Finnish work environment in order to limit the pool, and also to collect more reliable answers. As it has mostly been written during the peak of COVID-19, the study excluded face-to-face testing and/or interviews. Face-to-face try-outs and interviews would have given better results and it would have shown reactions of the recruiters better. Face-to-face meetings would have also offered more qualitative data, and now the research instead leans heavily on the quantitative data.

## 2 RECRUITING AND DISCRIMINATION

### 2.1 The recruiting process

Recruiting should be seen as a process, and compiling it usually falls to human resource department, however, it should be done in co-operation with other departments. As recruiting is usually undertaken in a hurry, a complete and ready procedure eases recruiting. Having a functional process is also cost-effective, as it saves time because the company does not need to start recruiting from scratch. (Valvisto 2005, 36.) The aim of the process is to find the most suitable person for the job, even if the essence of the right person varies depending on the job in question.

The recruiting process varies depending on the method the company chooses to follow. The traditional method is ad-based recruiting, used by companies themselves, private recruitment agency, and even the national employment agency. Outsourced recruitment is a common practice in Finland, whether it is a feasibility assessment, a staffing company or a direct recruitment. Companies have also started to use headhunting as their method of recruiting. This method works well when the company needs to consider their future, strategy or organisational structure, or when they want to do silent recruiting, which means that they do not want to announce the name of the company. (Koivunen et al. 2015, 8; Kaijala 2016, 129, 142-143.)

Figure 1 highlights the ad-based recruiting process, and figure 2 the headhunting process.

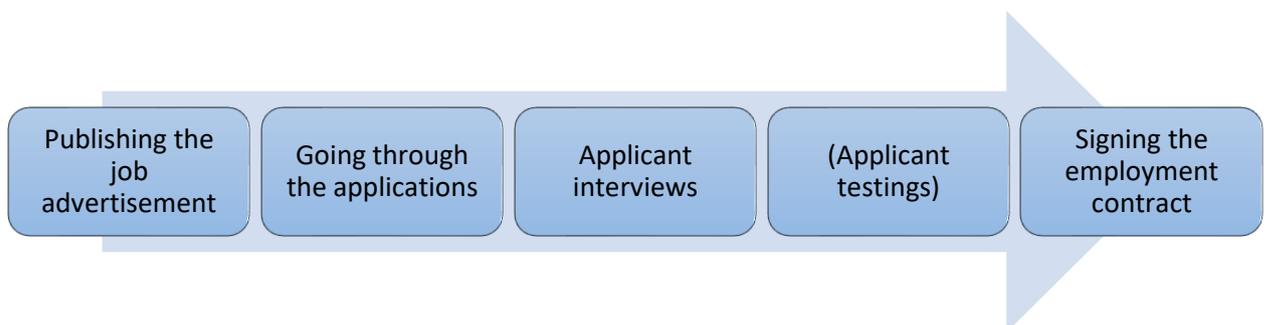


Figure 1. Traditional, ad-based recruiting process (after Kaijala 2016, 142)

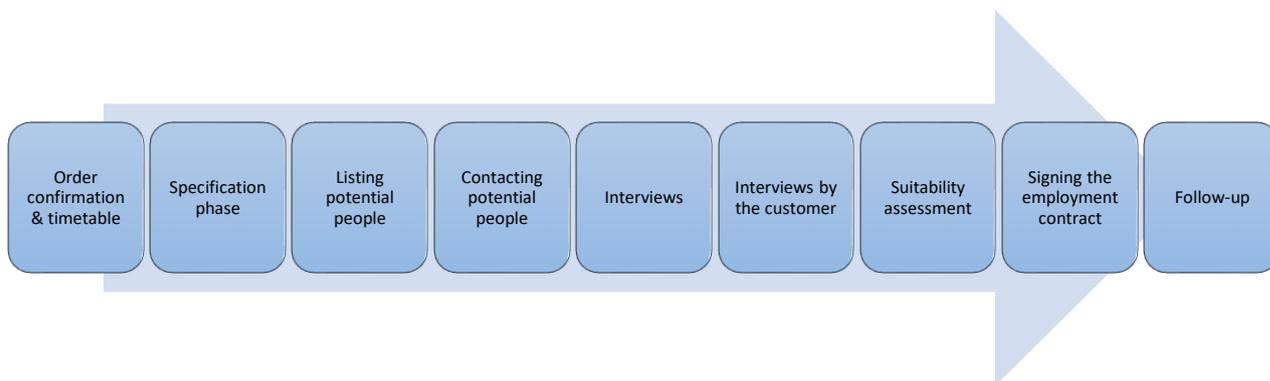


Figure 2. Headhunting process (after Kaijala 2016, 135-138)

As seen in figure 1, ad-based recruiting is very straight-forward: Company posts an advertisement, eliminates applicants and interviews the fitting applicants, and then decides who to hire. Ad-based recruiting has been made even easier with the rise of social media, and it is more cost-effective for that reason as well – company can place an advertisement on their social media page without a cost and reach several potential applicants.

As can be seen from the figure 2, headhunting follows similar path in recruiting, however, it has more steps in its process than the traditional, ad-based recruiting process. The key phase is the specification phase: The key objectives, required know-how, wished work experience and achievements, and the personality of the potential employee are determined between the headhunting company and the customer company. Head-hunters also go through the companies and people who cannot be contacted in the process. (Kaijala 2016, 135.)

## 2.2 Person assessment in recruiting

The use of person assessment has been increasing in work environment. It is not used to assess just young applicants anymore, but everyone in every position level. It is used mostly in entry-recruiting; however, its popularity is rising when assessing in-house personnel. Ever changing markets are changing job descriptions as well, and it is crucial to have the right people in the right job. (Niitamo 2001, 13-14.) Person assessment is meant to find out, who will be successful in a certain position and why and is thus made by different kind of methods. There are correlations between success and different assessment methods: Neither educational background nor years in profession forecast success in work. (Kaijala 2016, 198.)

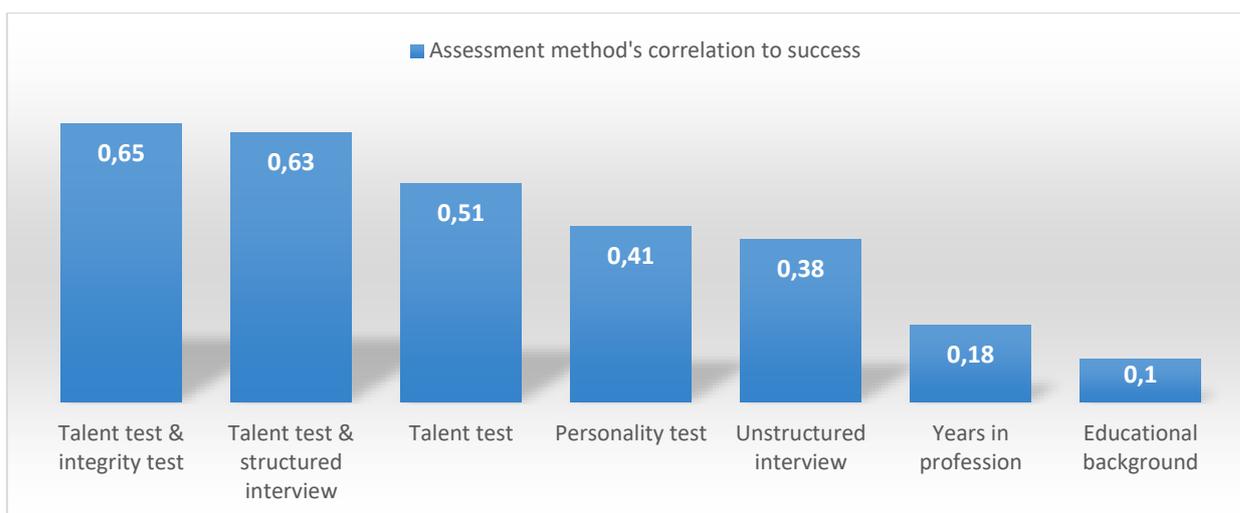


Figure 3. Significance of assessment methods (Kaijala 2016, 198)

The most common assessment methods are questionnaires, talent tests, simulations, projective procedures and interviews. Questionnaires usually handle several different sections, and they help to clarify person's view of themselves. Talent tests measure skills and talents in different fields (e.g. numeral, lingual), when simulations are meant to measure how a person acts in different, job related situations such as presentations. In projective procedures the person is asked to react stimulations – they give information about, for example, how the person would handle the conflict situation. (Suomen psykologiliitto ry. 2001, 84.) Figure 3 highlights the significance of different assessment methods.

The assessment must be, by law, done by a professional, and it must meet quality criteria. It also requires the tested people be treated respectfully and fairly. (Niitamo 2001, 14.) Job applicants can only be assessed through a test in case they agree to it. Applicants also must be given the results of the assessment. (Laki yksityisyyden suojasta työelämässä 13.8.2004/759 section 13.)

### 2.3 Laws and regulations

The Finnish contract of employment law states that an employer must treat all employees equally, unless the difference in treatment is based on a clear difference between position and/or job description (Työsopimuslaki 26.1.2001/55 chapter 2, section 2). This means the employer cannot treat two employees in the same position differently based on, for example, personal preference. In addition to law of contract of employment, employees are protected by the law of equality and the law of equality between men and women.

The law of equality states that no one can be discriminated based on age, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political action, union action, family relations,

health, disability, sexual orientation, or other reason based on the person (Yhdenvertaisuuslaki 30.12.2014/1325 chapter 3, section 8). This does not mean that certain skills cannot be required for a position, and that an unqualified person should be hired. However, different treatment must be based on requirements for the job description and tasks, and it must not be based on the person (Yhdenvertaisuuslaki 30.12.2014/1325 chapter 3, section 12).

Employers have responsibilities based on the law of equality. They are required to assess and implement equal treatment in the workplace, including recruitment situations and when making other decisions about personnel. In case the employer has at least 30 employees, there must be a plan of necessary actions to advance equality. Actions and their effect must be addressed with either the employees or their representative. (Yhdenvertaisuuslaki 30.12.2014/1325 chapter 2, section 7.)

The law of equality between men and women was written to prevent discrimination based on gender, and to advance equality between men and women, and therefore to improve women's position in work life. The law is also meant to prevent discrimination based on gender identity or expression of gender. (Laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta 8.8.1986/609 section 1.)

The law requires employers to advance equality between men and women. It states that employers must act so that both men and women would apply for open positions; they must advance equal setting in different positions and create equal opportunities for men and women to advance in their career. Employers must advance equality in labour agreements, especially in wages, and improve working environment so that it suits men and women. Employers are also required to ease combining work and family life by paying attention to work arrangements. Finally, they must act to prevent gender discrimination. (Laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta 8.8.1986/609 section 6.)

The law also requires employers with at least 30 employees to make a plan for equality, including wages. This plan needs to be made every other year, and it can be included in personnel or training plan, or to work safety operations. It needs to be done in co-operation with personnel representative(s). (Laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta 8.8.1986/609 section 6a.)

## 2.4 Discrimination

Discrimination can be based on one trait (e.g. sexual orientation) or on several traits (e.g. ethnicity, culture, religion). It can be either indirect or direct. *Direct discrimination* happens when a person is treated unfairly compared to another person in the same situation with

the same merits: For example, the male applicant is chosen for the job, although the female applicant is more qualified. *Indirect discrimination* happens usually when a seemingly equal basis for choosing sets applicants in unequal position. Language is a common example of this in Finnish work environment as many employees are expected to speak Finnish, although the job itself does not require Finnish language skills: For example, multinational companies in Finland post their job announcements in English, their inner work language is English, systems can be operated in English yet the applicant is required to speak good Finnish. (Lahti 2014, 113.)

Many employees or applicants are afraid of telling that they have been discriminated, either because of the fear of it affecting future employment. However, it is important to remember, that in Finnish environment, the burden of proof is on the employer: They need to prove that no discrimination has occurred. (Kess & Ahlroth 2012, 148.)

As the legislation shows, Finland has been rather progressive when it comes to preventing discrimination, and the Nordic countries have been titled the leaders of gender equality. (OECD 2018, 1.) This is in most cases true, and according to employees, the discrimination based on gender, having a family or being pregnant has decreased in recent years. However, discrimination is not limited in gender, and discrimination based on ethnicity seems to be more common today. (Koivunen et al. 2015, 6.)

There has been tests that have shown Europe, the United States, and Australia to have high levels of recruitment discrimination, and the discrimination has been based on, for example, ethnicity, nationality or gender. All of these belong to the western societies; thus, it can be expected that discrimination comes from ethnic hierarchies. Ethnic hierarchies differ depending on the country, but western societies seem to carry the same hierarchies, as described in figure 4. (Liebkind et al. 2016, 405-406.)

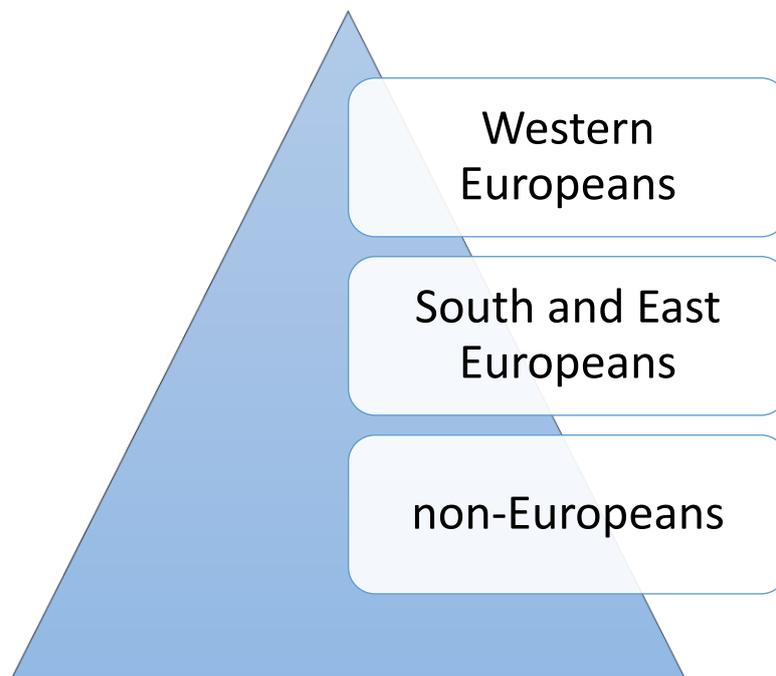


Figure 4. Ethnic hierarchy of western societies (after Liebkind et al. 2016, 406)

Naturally, in every country, an employee with the same background is preferred but the ethnic hierarchy describes the most wanted background if the someone with the same background is not available. For example, Finnish economy needs immigrants in the workforce, yet there has been suggestions that immigrants could be paid less than Finnish employees (Karismo 2018; Hakahuhta & Tolkki 2018). The suggestion was targeted mainly to immigrants from non-European countries: Western European and English-speaking countries have advantage and are desirable in the labour market, while immigrants from Asian, Middle Eastern or African countries have restricted access for jobs the market. (Liebkind et al. 2016, 406.)

### **Racism in Finland**

In 2015, a research was published presenting that approximately one in seven Finnish people is racist. The aim of that research was to find out racist attitudes of Finnish people and their attitude towards immigration. The research showed that immigrants from wealthy, western countries were welcome where immigrants running from war or persecution were not. (Penttilä 2015.) Figure 5 shows the attitude based on nationality.

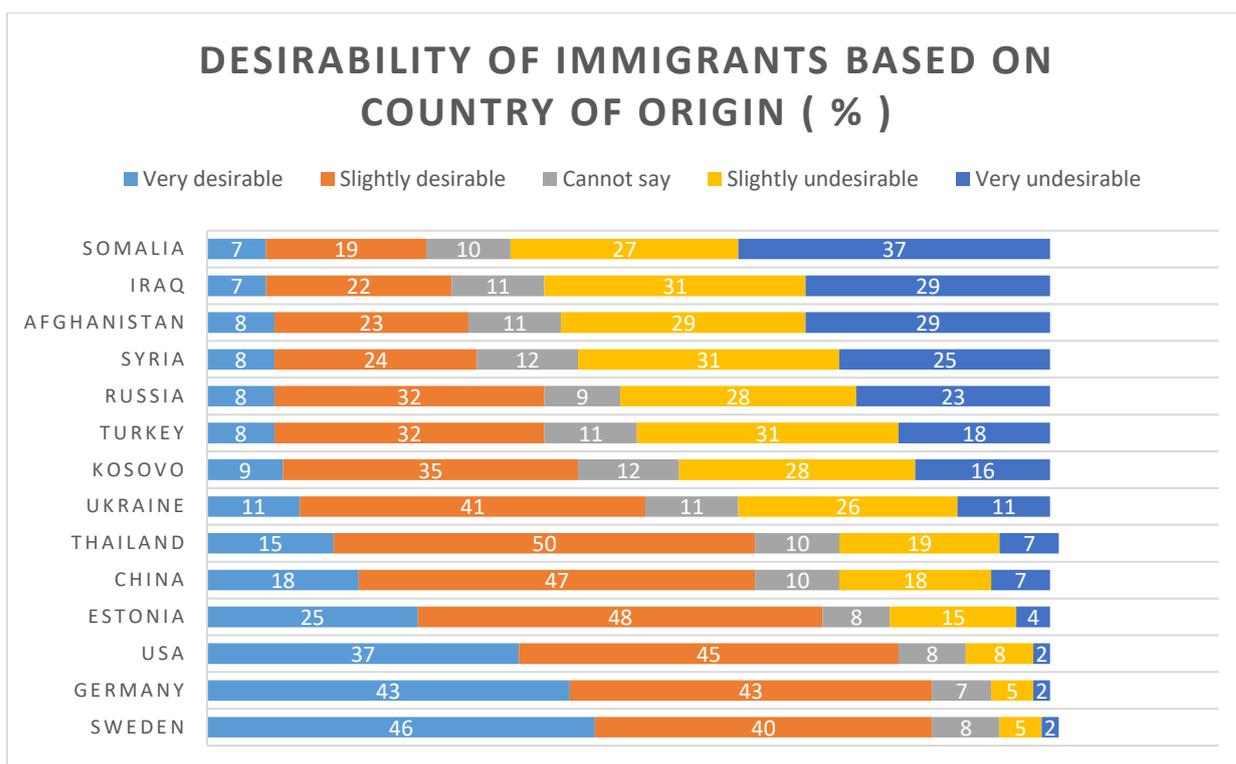


Figure 5. Desirability of immigrants based on country of origin (Penttilä 2015)

In 2018, European Union published a study about minorities and discrimination, and Finland was part of this study. The study showed that in Finland, 63 percent of people of African descent had encountered racial harassment (which could be non-verbal cues, offensive or threatening comments, or threats of violence), and 14 percent had suffered from racial violence. In most cases, threats were made by a person not from another ethnic minority. In Finland, 45 percent of people felt racially discriminated, and the reason for discrimination was most often skin colour. (FRA 2018.)

It is clear that ethnicity matters in the Finnish environment. Finnish people are most willing to welcome immigrants from countries with similar background and ethnicity as Finland, such as Sweden, Germany and Estonia. These countries also have a high Caucasian and Christian population.

### **Ethnic discrimination**

Immigrant men and women seem to be the most discriminated group when it comes to applying a job. Immigrant women seem to suffer from double stigma and are discriminated because of their background and because they are women. Immigrants from low-status countries have lower chances of being selected for a job than an immigrant from high-status country. (Liebkind et al. 2016, 404 & 417.)

Unfortunately, ethnic discrimination is common in Finland, and there has been a recent study regarding it. In that study, a researcher sent out applications posing as Finnish, English, Russian, Iraqi and Somalian applicants who were otherwise exactly the same, only their name was different. Finnish applicants got 390 call-backs from 1000 applications when Iraqi got 134 and Somalian 99. (Martti et al. 2019.) This shows that the ethnic hierarchy (portrayed in figure 4) found in western societies is strong in Finland as well.

### **Gender discrimination**

Gender discrimination puts men and women in unequal positions, and this can be seen very well in management roles. For example, in Europe, only one third of managing positions are held by women, when in the labour force the number is 50 percent (Macarie & Moldovan 2012, 161). This is often described with the term glass-ceiling which means there is an invisible hindrance that stops women from being able to reach higher positions.

The discrimination against women is often related to pregnancies and maternity and parental leaves. This shows as unrenewed fixed-term contracts, difficulties when returning to work and inappropriate interview questions; Men do not face the same difficulties even if they have a family, as taking care of a child is seen as women's responsibility. Women also face the same discrimination in fields where majority of employees are women, it is not exclusive to male dominated fields. (Pääkkönen 2020, 28.)

It is important to acknowledge the discrimination transgender and non-binary people face in employment, although gender discrimination often focuses in the discrimination between men and women. Transgender and non-binary people often face microaggressions and attitudes that can prevent them from stable employment: Unemployment rates for them are twice the number of cisgender people. (Fosbrook 2019; Davidson 2016.)

### **Age discrimination**

Age discrimination is a differential treatment based on age. It is most common in recruiting situations, and it usually affects applicants who are over 55 years old. It least affects people between ages 25 to 44. However, 90 percent of discrimination goes unreported. (EK 2018.) It is a very subjective experience, and that is probably why most of age discrimination goes unreported. People do not want to be seen as difficult, and many fear that reporting discrimination is a hindrance for employment.

Age discrimination has been most studied from the perspective of people over 55 years old (e.g. James et al. 2013), although young people are affected by it as well. In Finland, 13 percent of people under 30 years old have faced discrimination, when the average in Europe is 9 percent (Pääkkönen 2020, 45).

**Other forms of discrimination**

Above mentioned ethnic, gender and age discrimination are often the most common forms of discrimination an applicant faces. However, they can face discrimination based on health (women often face it in the form of pregnancy discrimination), political views or religious beliefs. Also disabled people face discriminatory treatment while applying jobs, even if their disability is not a hindrance for the position.

In the Finnish employment environment, all forms of discrimination are prohibited by law, however, they are difficult to remove from individuals' (e.g. recruiter, manager) behavioural habits. Stereotypes and the image of a "perfect employee" are strong in every field.

### 3 UNCOSCIOUS BIAS

#### 3.1 Unconscious bias

People grow up with biases set by their background and culture, and they form more through positive and negative experiences. However, some of people's biases are unrecognised, unconscious. These biases are coded into their behaviour towards, for example, other people: They define how people act in different situations and with different people. (Cuellar 2017, 333.) Unconscious biases help people to make daily decisions, but it is important to recognise when biases lead to, for example, unequal practices.

Unconscious biases can be classified into several types, depending on how they function. This means that biases do not simply exist, but they activate differently in different kind of situation. Table 1 highlights some of the most common types.

<b><i>Bias type</i></b>	<b><i>Characteristics</i></b>	<b><i>Example</i></b>
<b>Halo effect</b>	Evaluating a person by one positive trait	"They learn new things quickly; they must be an excellent worker."
<b>Affinity bias</b>	The "like me" bias, evaluating a person by their similarities to oneself	"They went to the same school as I did; they must be good for the position."
<b>Conformity bias</b>	Caused by peer pressure	"Others think this candidate is not suitable; I will choose the other one."
<b>Cloven hoof effect</b>	Generalising one negative aspect of a person to all their performance	"That person has no sense in style; they must be unprofessional as well."
<b>Attribution bias</b>	Taking credit on one's own successful work when blaming others for unsuccess, and vice versa when it is about someone else	"Our project would have succeeded if my colleagues had done their part properly."  "That person only succeeded in their work, because they had help from their successful colleagues."

<b>Beauty bias</b>	Beautiful/handsome people are more successful than others	“This candidate looks the part for the position; they would be successful in it too.”
<b>Confirmation bias</b>	Looking for evidence to support one’s opinions when forming an opinion about someone	“I prefer not to hire women; they will cost me too much if they take maternity leave. – This applicant is married, and she seems to have a bump, I cannot hire her.”

Table 1. Types of unconscious bias (after Oberai & Anand 2018, 15)

For example, the halo effect and affinity bias work on association, and these types of biases are very common, as the human brain operates in a highly associative way. This is why it is easier to base decisions on correlation, coherence and connections: It is easier to handle information this way, unlike through inconsistency and variable patterns. Confirmation bias, on the other hand, is based on compatibility. In these types of biases, people generally see what they want to see, or what they are looking for, because decision-making is easier through their competences and prejudices. (Korteling et al. 2018, 5-6.)

Sometimes biases are hard to remove, because once information or experience has entered a person’s mind, it is hard to forget. For example, if a recruiter was told to not to pay attention to an applicant’s clothing, they would definitely be paying attention to the clothing. These types of biases operate on retention (or anchoring). Sometimes, people rely too much on known information and are not able to think outside the box, or they are willing to ignore missing information. These types of biases operate by focusing to the dominant information. (Korteling et al. 2018, 7.)

What is important to notice, is notable information affecting decision-making. Even if information is irrelevant for the decision, if it is notable, it will most likely affect the outcome. This is because notable information is easier to remember, recollect from memory, and observe. This is often why people evaluate others by one positive trait (the halo effect) or why they seek other information to confirm their stereotypes. Media has a huge role when it comes to notable information, and how it affects decision-making. (Pleggenkuhle-Miles et al. 2013, 1908.)

### 3.2 Managing unconscious biases

All types of biases shown in table 1 can be found at workplaces, as the examples show. It is a job for managers and HR professionals to find ways to manage unconscious biases so, that the company can act equally and that the company can be diverse.

There are means to managing biases in work environment. Oberai and Anand (2018, 16) listed awareness training, confrontation, labelling, discussing and reorganising structures and systems as potential means for managing biases. With awareness training, employees are educated, and their self-awareness developed regarding biases. Confrontation means that employees face their biases so that they can identify mistakes that were made because of these biases. Recruiters can be taught about unconscious bias blind spots (Balta 2015, 6).

Labelling categories of biases that cause problems at the workplace and putting them for everyone to see helps employees (and leaders) to understand how these biases affect decision-making, promotions, hiring, and organisational culture in total. Being open about biases and sharing experiences creates an open space for discussion, where employees can learn about biases and their effects. The structure and systems for, for example, recruitments, training, interviews and evaluations can be reorganised so that there is a generalised system everyone can use. This should be done by the senior managers and HR professionals of the company. Finally, managers (or hiring companies) need to ensure that the selecting committee is diverse in itself, and that the criteria for the position can be reflected to large pool of applicants. (Balta 2015, 6; Oberai & Anand 2018, 16.)

Although the whole company needs to actively participate in overcoming biases, in order to have an inclusive and diverse company, the interviewers are the first contact to applicants and also the people who decide whether a person is suitable for the company or not. This is why it is crucial for interviewers acknowledge their biases, and continuously work to overcome them. Interviewers should also be able to identify thoughts and beliefs that are common responses and can create misconceptions: For example, likeability should not be reason to hire someone, because it is often based on bias. They need to explore their own communication, both verbal and non-verbal, and pay attention to how they act in front of the interviewee. It is a good idea for an interviewer to practice before hand, and maybe have a bias checklist so that they can evaluate their own biases. (Chamberlain 2016, 199-202.)

### **Unconscious bias tests**

There are tests that employers can utilise when conducting unconscious bias training. These tests are called Implicit Association Tests (IATs). They are computer/online based tests that in most cases measure the time it takes a person to respond to a particular stimulus. The benefit of an IAT is that participant cannot easily manipulate the results of the test, unlike with self-reports. (Noon 2018, 199-200.)

One of the most well-known IATs is Harvard IAT called Project Implicit. It has been around since 1998 and was founded by three scientists from the field of psychology: Tony Greenwald, Mahzarin Banaji, and Brian Nosek. Harvard IAT has several concepts to choose, including but not limited to skin tone (light skin – dark skin), Asian (Asian – European American), transgender (transgender people – cisgender people), Arab-Muslim (Arab-Muslim – other people), age (young – old), weight (fat – thin) and race (black – white). The IAT measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g. one of the above) and evaluations (e.g. good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g. loud, quiet). (Project Implicit 2011.)

## 4 SELF-MANAGEMENT

As working environment has become ever changing, it requires flexibility, creativity and constant renewal (Sydänmaanlakka 2017, 16). This means employees need to be able to manage themselves and not to trust being managed, and more is expected of them and their work. As Sydänmaanlakka says (2017, 17):

*Managing oneself is tangible action which requires sustainability and assertiveness.*

Self-management helps to prevent exhaustion, boredom and becoming rutted, as one learns to control themselves, identify their boundaries and analyse their leading skills and developing them. This why self-management can be seen as taking care of one's working abilities. (Paasivaara 2010, 33.) However, in the context of this thesis, self-management is seen as a way to self-awareness and being able to resist certain behavioural habits. Self-management (or self-leadership) is about having a sense of oneself: Who they are, what they can do, where they are going and what are their abilities to achieve their goals (Browning 2018, 15). It often comes up when people have to achieve certain career results or when they need to fit in somewhere. It is also more common in people who are naturally more active, motivated and skilled, and less common with people who prefer support from their employer. (Makkonen 2016, 1138.)

### **Self-management as a process**

According to Jennifer Porter (2019, 37), self-management can be seen as a four-step process: Being present, being self-aware, identifying range of behavioural choices, and choosing behaviours believed to be the most productive. Megan Gerhardt (2007, 11) saw self-management as a similar, four-step process that included self-assessment, establishing and setting goals, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation.

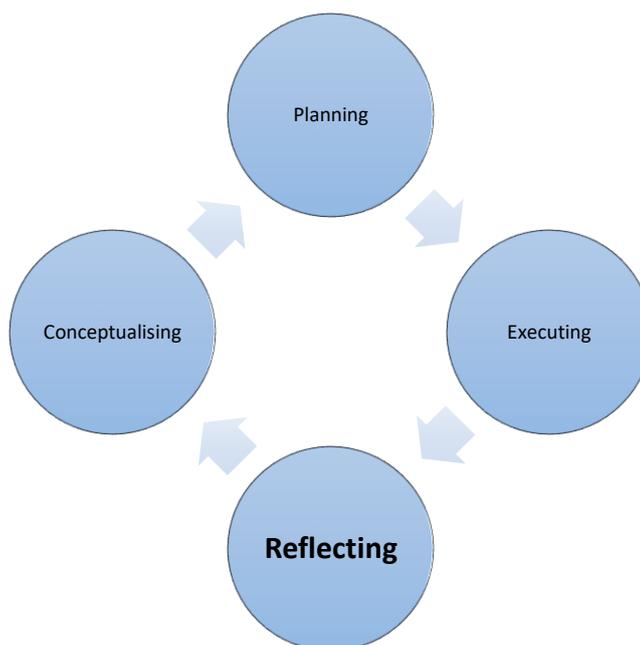


Figure 6. Reflecting as part of self-management process

Because self-management is a process, it can be trained, and especially the self-awareness part of it. Reflecting is a known method for self-awareness practice, and figure 6 shows where in self-management process it occurs. In reflecting, the person analyses their behaviour in a specific, personal experience: What happened, what did they learn and what they could do differently the next time. Reflecting is continuous cycle of learning. (Sydänmaanlakka 2017, 83.)

Although self-management is about oneself, people learn from feedback. Giving and receiving feedback is a fast way to develop management skills: It is also needed to support working. Through feedback, an employee can reflect their actions and behaviour and subsequently evolve. It is important to remember that both positive and constructive feedback help to develop oneself, and that feedback is not always direct: In conflict situations, the feedback can be read between lines. (Paasivaara 2010, 120 & 123-124.)

### Humans as learners

People learn in different ways, and that is why there is not just a one way to self-management. As mentioned earlier, some people require more guidance when others naturally seek to educate themselves. Pentti Sydänmaanlakka (2017, 85) divides people into four categories based on how they learn: practical executors, deliberative observers, logical reasoners, and active participants. *Practical executors* learn best by trying out things: They gather information, plan and try, and they try to have find practical solutions. *Deliberate observers* learn by observing: They like to observe from the side-lines and analyse

what others are doing – they prefer a peaceful approach. *Logical reasoners* learn by deducting: They prefer to ask around, try out and analyse things from all around, and they need to internalise things before they are satisfied. *Active participants* learn by participating and adapting with other people: They want to be included into several things but lack the strength to focus for long – they prefer fast-paced action.

### Levels of learning

Dilts (2003, 267-274) presents a model based on the levels of learning by an anthropologist, Gregory Bateson. They created the model based on that people often describe responding things in different levels: For example, some change is good in one level, and negative on another.

This model has five levels, from Level 0 to Level 4. Level 0 is the base level: Where the person is at, who they are and how they operate. Level 1 is where the individual makes corrections and adaptations within the limits of who they are and where they operate; this is the level which coaching and teaching target. Level 2 is where individuals start to learn from outside their box; a good example of learning ways would be mentoring. In level 3, the individual changes their identity or behaviour drastically, for example when transitioning from one role to another. Level 4 is the state of renewal, where the individual becomes something new and takes on new possibilities. (Dilts 2003, 273)

### 5As

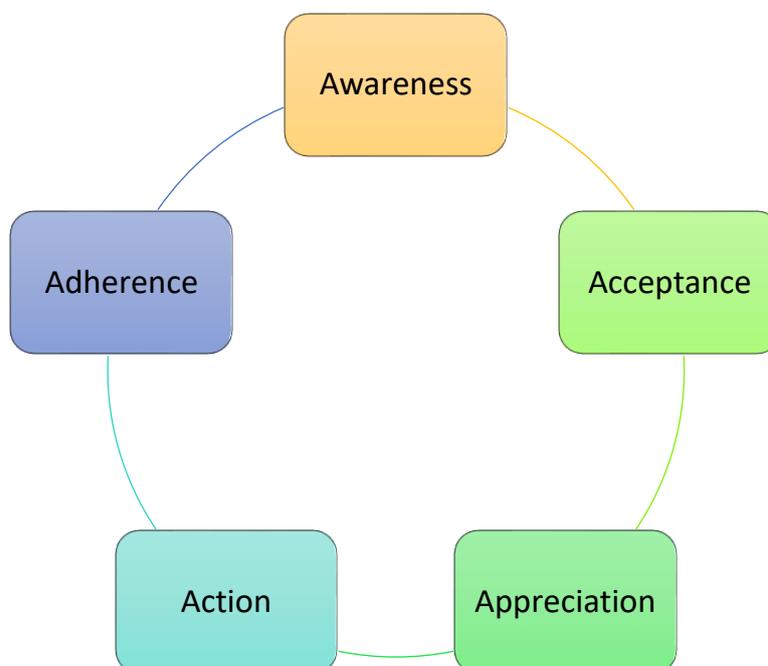


Figure 7. 5As (after Daniels 2020)

Dr. David Daniels (2020) has presented the concept of 5As (as seen in figure 7) regarding Universal Growth Process, and these 5As can be applied in professional self-management as well. They consist of Awareness, Acceptance, Appreciation, Action and Adherence. Ajanko (2016) has altered this concept for self-management in work environment.

*Awareness* is a state of being self-aware and being capable of self-observation. When one accepts the awareness, they reach the stage of *Acceptance*, and will be able to accept their flaws and turn them into strengths. In the stage of *Appreciation*, one learns to respect and appreciate themselves and others. When one has gone through these 3 stages, they can reach *Action*: A stage where they turn their other stages into practice.

*Adherence* is a state which is meant to commit to all the other stages: 5As are continuous cycle. Ajanko (2016, 297-300.)

## 5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

### 5.1 Research execution

Due to limitations created by COVID-19, this research was executed with online questionnaire. The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was sent out to recruiters from different kinds of settings: HR professionals in a company or an organisation, full-time recruiters in a recruiting companies, managers within different kind of companies and organisations etc. The only limitation was that they had to operate in a company or organisation based in Finland (they could be recruiting foreign nationals). The questionnaire was sent as a link through either e-mail or LinkedIn. It was conducted anonymously, so there was no of knowing who answered and what their answers were.

First, the respondents were asked to share some background information about themselves, and then information about their latest recruitment. The questions about the respondents was meant share information that can help to define their decisions and to show if there is any correlation between, for example, age and preferred ethnicity. Then, they were asked to tell about what kind of position they were recruiting for and what kind of person they chose. This is then compared with the ideal applicant.

The ideal applicant gave respondents traits they had to set in order of preference. These traits included everything from gender to work experience and personal traits. This part was meant to see what kind of biases would show up.

Finally, they were asked to answer some questions related to biases. This section asked if they consider them biased, and what kind biases they think they have. Respondents were asked what kind of training they think they should have in order to tackle biases, but also where they think biases are born from.

After a reasonable time, the results of the questionnaire were combined, and based on them, the solutions were gathered. The solutions are based on answers on this questionnaire, supported by the theory of chapters 2 to 4.

### 5.2 Recruiters and unconscious bias

#### 5.2.1 Background information

##### **Respondents**

The questionnaire got 17 respondents. Out of these 17, 10 identified themselves as men and 7 as women, and there was no one that identified themselves as non-binary. Majority

of the respondents were between 26 and 45 years old, and majority were also Caucasian. 71 percent of the respondents had a master's degree (either from a university or a university of applied sciences, this was not specified in the questionnaire), however, there was one with a vocational degree.

15 out of 17 respondents were in a managing position, however, recruiting was not a main job for the same number of respondents. 59 percent had lived abroad at some point in their life. Only three respondents felt they had been discriminated in work life.

### **Latest recruitment**

76 percent of latest recruitment was for an expert level position, 18 percent for a lower level position and 6 percent for a managing position, and in 15 out of 17 cases there were 1 to 5 applicants interviewed. Majority of the recruitments were made by a person in managing position, so this was an expected result.

When asked on what basis the respondents decided to interview an applicant, they were given multiple-choice options. The applicant's skills were the most common reason for an interview, and their previous experience was the second. Educational background was the third most common reason. Referees seemed to be important for the respondents as well, when on the other hand familiarity did not seem to play a great role.

Respondents were asked if they used any person assessment tests during recruiting process, and 15 out 17 had not used any kind of test. In the cases where tests were used, they were conducted by the respondent's own company, not an outside consultant.

Whether the decision to hire was the recruiters or their, for example, manager's or customer's decision, there division was almost 50-50. Some had to get approval from someone else when others were able to decide by themselves.

As for the person hired, 53 percent hired a woman and, most commonly, they were of age between 26 to 35. In majority of the cases, respondents did not think their background was similar to the person hired, and the respondents felt the person was suitable for the position. However, 18 percent thought they were the only fit to the position. Wages asked did not play any role in the decision for hiring.

### **5.2.2 The ideal applicant**

The respondents were asked to choose characteristics to their ideal applicant for their latest recruitment. They had to set characteristics from most preferred to least preferred and were asked not to think about their choice but just answer what would come most natural for them.

### Age, gender and relationship status

Most of the respondents preferred a woman as their first choice for their ideal applicant. As seen in figure 8, relationship status did not seem to play a major role in the ideal applicant, however, being single was chosen as the least preferred trait together with being married with children. Interestingly, being married with no children was not the most preferred option, although other options (single, married with children, in a relationship) were in the same line.

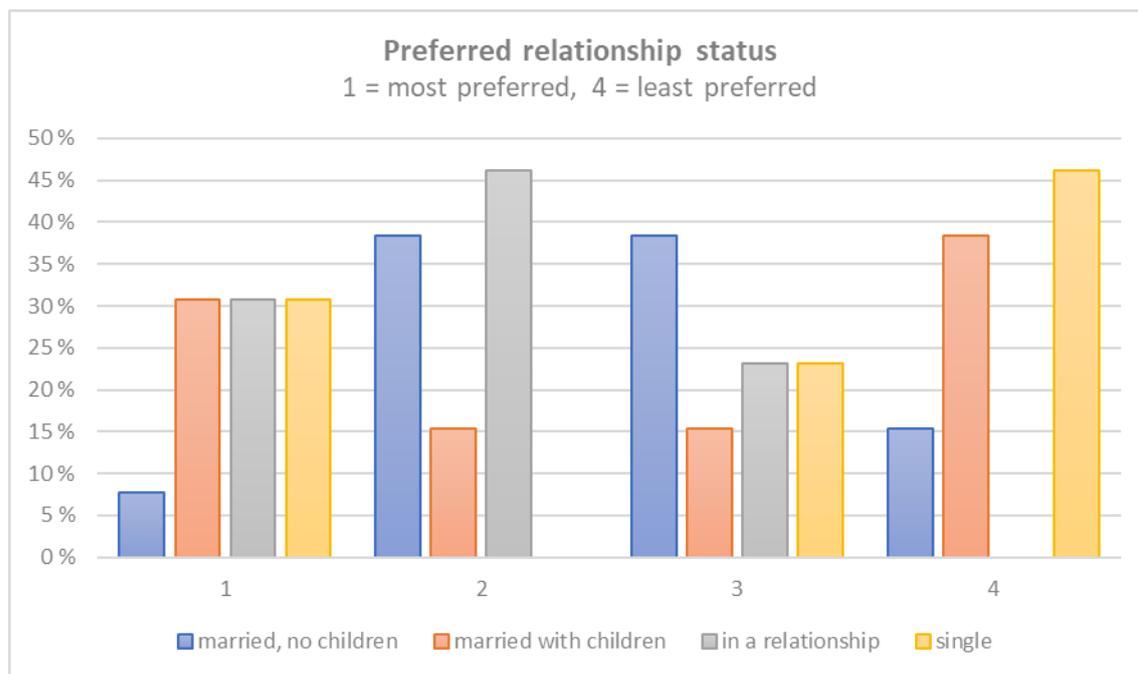


Figure 8. Preferred relationship status of the ideal applicant

Age factor had the most division, as figure 9 shows. This could be because there were more options to choose from, and respondents were able to actually answer the question without over-thinking, as they considered it the least discriminatory trait.

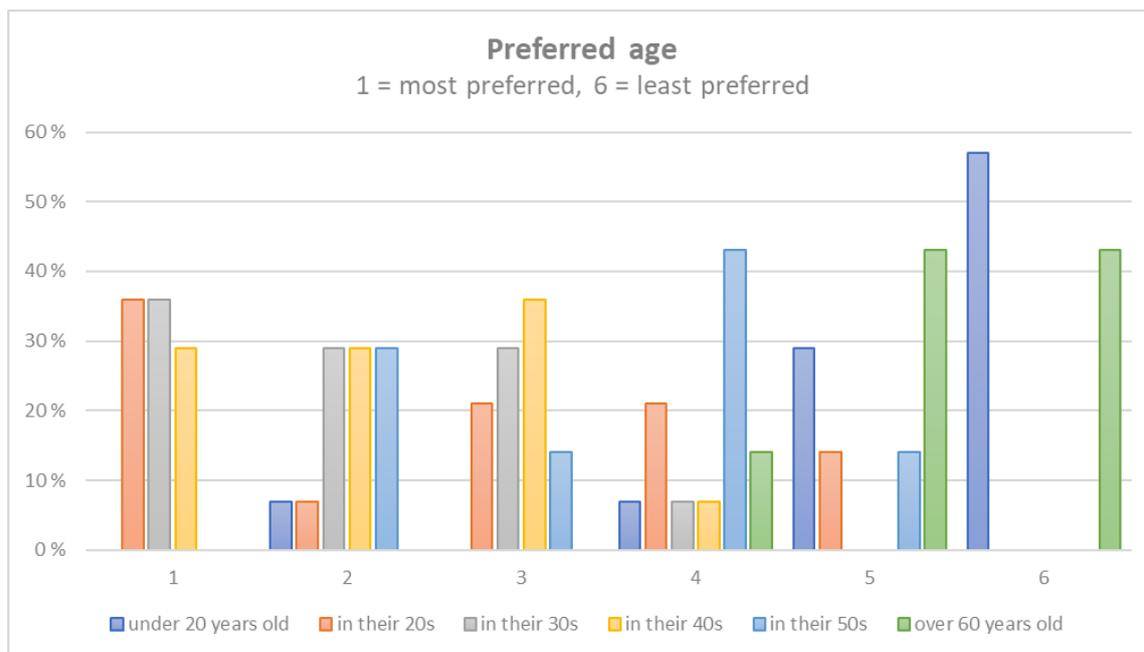


Figure 9. Preferred age of the ideal applicant

It is not surprising that most respondents would not prefer an applicant under the age of 20 or over the age of 60. As most respondents were hiring for an expert-level position, the applicants under the age of 20 usually lack the experience required. When the position is long-term one, people over the age of 60 are seen to have fewer working years left, so recruiters often prefer younger applicants. This is why it is not surprising that the respondents would choose someone between the ages 20 to 50 as their ideal applicant, and especially someone in their 30s.

### **Ethnic background**

When asked about the preferred ethnic background, respondents clearly had trouble figuring out how to answer. This is most likely because as Finnish recruiters, they are required to follow law of equality where discrimination is prohibited, and they felt pressure to answer “correctly”.

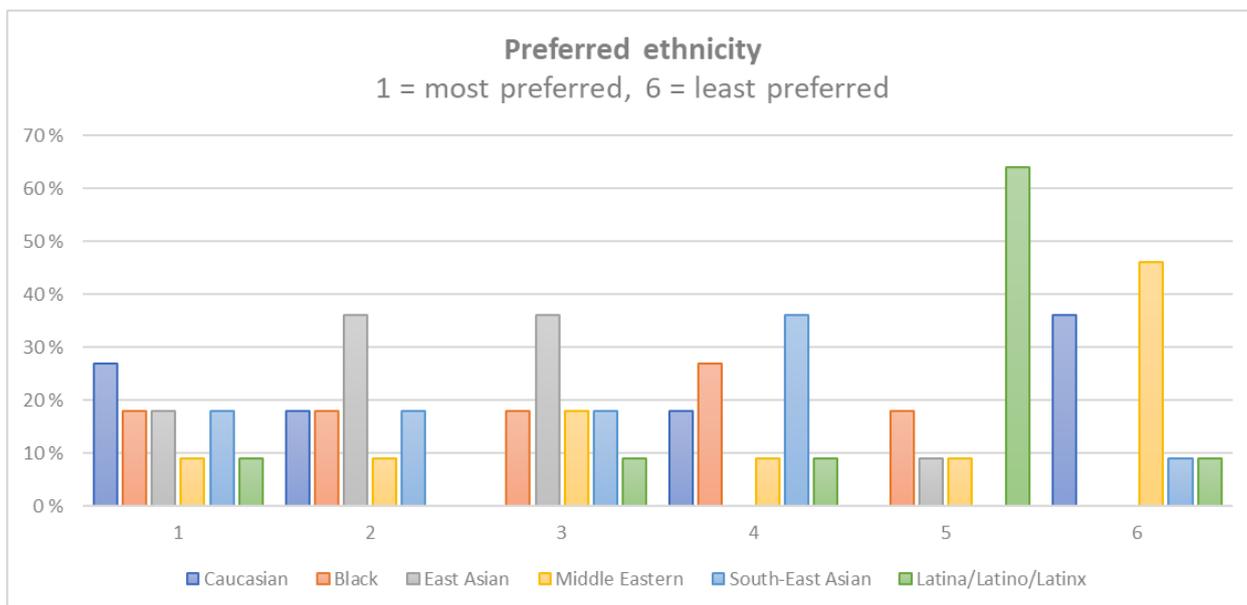


Figure 10. Preferred ethnicity of the ideal applicant

Figure 10 shows that there is not much fluctuation when it comes to the most preferred ethnicity; As majority of the respondents were Caucasian themselves, being Caucasian has a slight upper hand. What is interesting, is that the fluctuation emphasises in the least preferred ethnicities. Considering the current and past refugee status in Finland, it is not entirely surprising that Middle Eastern is the least preferred ethnicity. What is slightly surprising, is that being of Latin descent is seen as non-preferred trait. Also seeing South-East Asians in the least preferred groups is surprising, due to the fact that during the high employability of Nokia, Indians, for example, were a major foreign employee group. Their situation as wanted employees has clearly changed, and East Asians have become more popular.

### Educational background

Finnish people value education, often so that even for lower level positions one needs to have a degree of some sort. As the respondents were mostly hiring for an expert-level position, it is understandable that they preferred higher education in their ideal applicant. Most preferred a master's level degree, but a bachelor's degree was a close second. A vocational degree was not seen as the worst option either. As the fourth option was "other/no degree", it is not surprising that respondents saw it has the least preferred trait. However, some of the respondents clearly had some type of other education in mind, as it was also voted as the second preferred option in some cases (see figure 11).

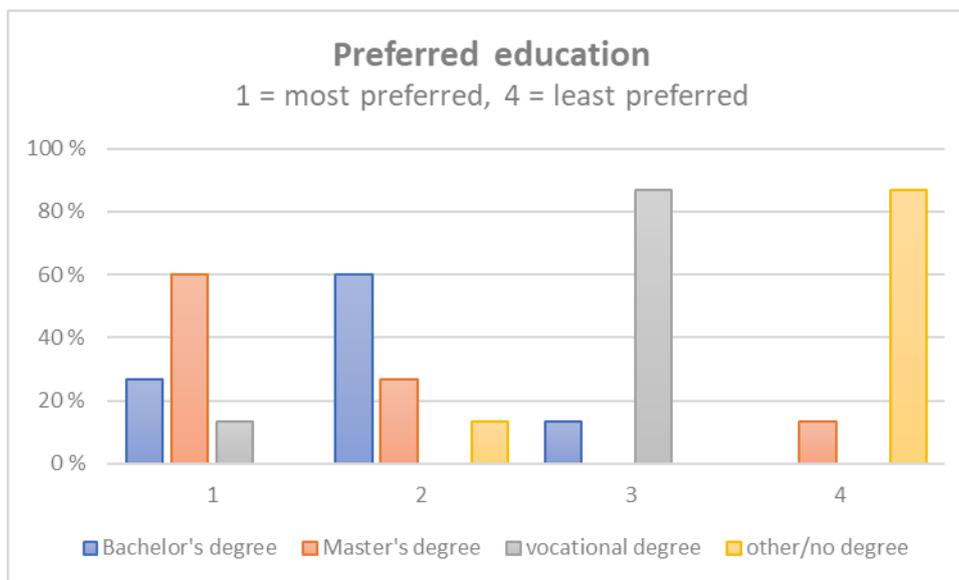


Figure 11. Preferred education in the ideal applicant

Respondents valued well-known schools to others. Naturally, every respondent had their own view of a well-known school (it could be any Finnish University or just, for example, Aalto University) but they would rather know the school. Mediocre schools were also preferred over poor schools.

### Professional background

Most respondents preferred work experience of up to 10 years for their latest recruitment and did not see 10 to 15 years of experience as a bad option either (see figure 12). This seems accurate considering most were recruiting for an expert-level position, where experience usually is needed but a high experience does not necessarily bring anything new to the position.

In most cases, applicants need to present references for themselves. References can be given by former employers, colleagues, project leaders etc, or people outside the applicant's previous workplace. This is why the respondents were asked, which type of recommendation they prefer.

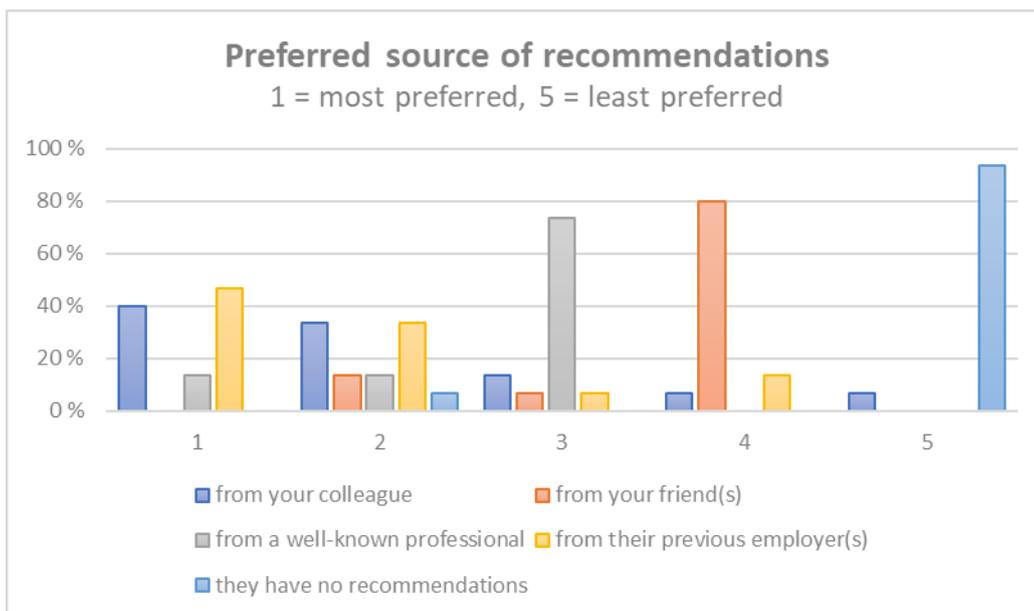


Figure 12. Preferred source of recommendations for the ideal applicant

The preferred source of recommendations had diversity. Recommendations from previous employer were valued as were recommendations from a colleague. It was very clear that no recommendations was the least preferred option, and recommendations from a respondent’s friend would not give much advantage to the applicant.

**Behavioural traits**

Behavioural traits are the most difficult to learn in recruiting as people tend modify their behaviour in, for example, interview situations. However, respondents were asked to set preferred traits in order.

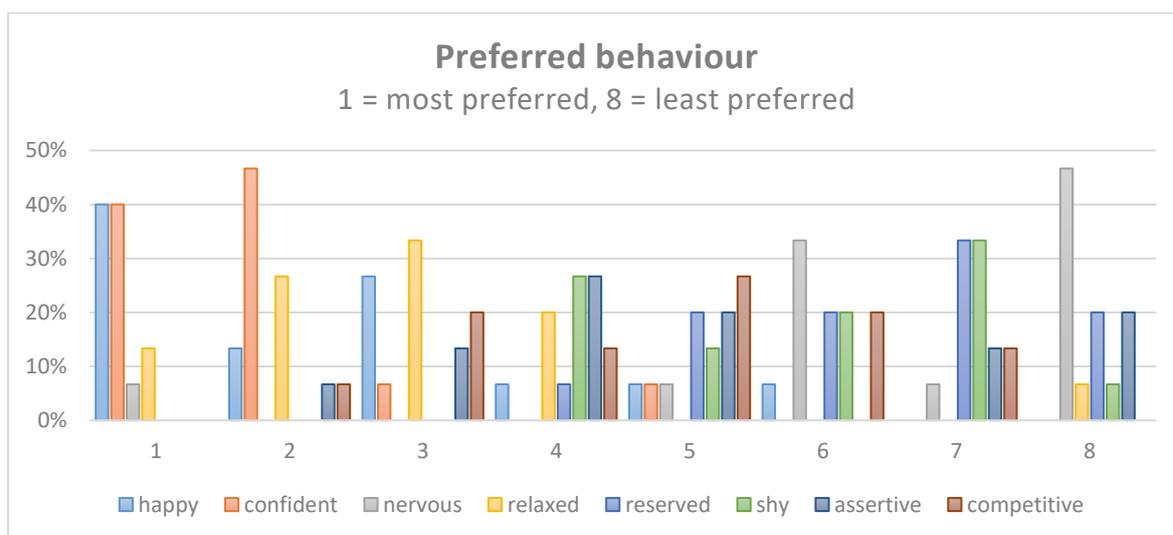


Figure 13. Preferred behaviour in the ideal applicant.

Confident and happy seem to be the most preferred traits in applicant, when nervous, reserved and assertive are the least preferred traits as can be seen in figure 13. This could mean that people who get nervous in recruiting situations are less likely to be hired when their confident counterpart would be more likely to be hired.

When considering biases, the personality traits seem to face the most cloven hoof effect, where one negative trait is generalised to performance in general. This is most likely why shyness, nervousness or being reserved are not preferred traits in an applicant. Likewise, positive traits are more likely affected by the halo effect, where the person is evaluated through a positive trait. This explains why confident, happy people are seen as better employees, while shy and reserved people are seen as either difficult or poor workers.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the ideal applicant of the respondents would be a Caucasian woman in her 20s or 30s, preferably in some sort of relationship. She would have a master's degree from a well-known school, and she would have the work experience equal to up to 10 years. She would have been recommended by her previous employer, respondent's colleague or a well-known professional. She would seem confident, happy and relaxed to the respondent, and would not be nervous, reserved or assertive.

The biases that can be noticed from the questionnaire results are halo effect (evaluating a person by a positive trait), cloven hoof effect (generalising a negative trait to a whole performance), affinity bias (evaluating person by similarities to oneself) and confirmation bias (looking for evidence to support decision). In this setting this was an expected result.

#### **5.2.3 Recognising bias and respondents' solutions**

Respondents were asked if they had ever considered themselves biased, and only four of 17 answered yes. This means 13 respondents thought they were not biased in any way at all. The four admitted that they biases are shown especially with gender and ethnicity, some admitted to preferring university degree over a degree from university of applied sciences. They thought the reason for these biases are from life or work experiences but also from their own socio-economical background.

71 percent of the respondents had not had any kind of bias training; however, 92 percent could imagine taking some sort of training. When asked what sort of training they would prefer, the answers were diverse: Some hoped for training in interview techniques, some wished for basic recruitment training. However, diversity seemed to be a point of interest: They thought training in diversity management could be a good place to start, and one

used multicultural group works and discussion as a good learning experience and easier approach.

It became clear that respondents do know where biases are born: Socio-economic backgrounds, life experiences, stereotypes, fear, lack of knowledge and even the image social media creates. According to them, it is easier to hire a person who is in some ways similar to themselves because familiarity makes the process easier.

In the end, respondents were asked how recruiting could be made more equal and biases could be overcome. Some saw anonymous application as a potential possibility, and in their opinion, the anonymous application should not include age, gender, picture nor years of experience or education as their age could be calculated from those. Some say focusing only on the skills eliminates bias, however, thus far the studies agree with them. Some thought the recruiting should be considered in the company level: Implemented strategy for the organisation and diverse group recruiting and reviewing people. There are suggestions for checklists that could be used with every applicant in the same way or that there should be simple testing and at least two people giving their opinion.

The most interesting outcome was that one of the respondents thought there can be no such thing as equal recruiting. They viewed recruiting as a process of elimination where one person comes out as a winner. According to this respondent,

*“you are always ranked based on who you are and what you can bring to the table.”*

### 5.3 Solutions

Although most of the respondents did not admit to being biased, they suggested valid methods for tackling unconscious and conscious biases. Diversity management (managing style where cultural differences are acknowledged and harnessed for the benefit of the company) was clearly one of the most popular methods, and it could be something many Finnish companies could benefit from. Currently, diversity management is not popular in Finland due to homogenous population, and companies tend to focus more on gender equality. (Ylöstalo 2016, 416-417.) As diversity management is a huge concept and would alter how a whole company/organisation operates, it is not discussed in these solutions. These solutions focus more in the realms of recruiting and what recruiters could do themselves.

#### **Anonymous job application**

In an anonymous job application, the name, age, address, mother tongue, gender and other traits of the applicant, that could affect the recruiters' decision, are removed from the

application. This has been under consideration in Finland for a few years, especially in Helsinki where the city itself employs around 38 000 people. (Siironen 2018.) Internationally, anonymous recruiting is common in private sectors and, for example, France requires anonymous recruiting when the company has over 50 employees (Jännäri 2019).

Anonymous job application has showed heterogenous effects in studies: For example, in some countries, women received more call-backs for interviews, however, immigrants received less. On the other hands, in another countries, women got less call-backs. The negative effects might be due to the lack of possibility to favour minorities. (Krause et al. 2012; 2-3, 14.)

One aspect to notice in anonymous job application is that, in the recruiting process, it usually ends in interviews as interviews are still conducted face-to-face. Even if anonymous job application gives more call-backs to minorities or other discriminated groups, interviews might cut them out as recruiters are still vulnerable to their biases. However, the applicant is protected by law, so in case of discrimination, the employer is at fault. (Nortio 2017.)

Seeking a person with a very specific background, and receiving only a couple applicants, is not a situation best fitted to anonymous application as recruiters can interview all applicants. It best fits situations, where there are a lot of applicants and their backgrounds and skills are very different: One example would be summer job positions, which usually have a lot of students competing for them. However, if excessive work of HR professionals is to be avoided, companies would need a functioning information system that would give the possibility to hide personal information with a few clicks. Trust would be a major aspect; everyone needs to commit to not checking information beforehand. (Nikula 2019.)

### **Recruiting management and interview techniques**

As recruiting is a process, it should be given enough time. Having necessary time prevents hesitated decisions and choosing an applicant who is less likely to succeed in the position. The recruiter should have enough time especially for a wholesome interview and for making proper notes from the interviews. There should also be enough time for objective assessment. It is recommended that the recruiter uses a structured interview which can be used with every applicant: The interview should include the criteria for the position so every applicant can be assessed through those criteria. (Salli & Takatalo 2014, 78.)

#### *Competence-based interviews*

Structured interviews often lean fully to competence-based interviews: The most common techniques for these types of interviews are called STAR and SOARA. STAR comes from

Situation, Task, Action and Result, and SOARA is an acronym from Situation, Objective, Action, Results and Aftermath. (Salli & Takatalo 2014, 60-61.)

The aim of competence-based interviews is to find out how the applicant has handled different kind of situations. For example, if the position where an organisation is recruiting is in customer service, they could ask, what has been the most difficult customer encounter the applicant has had, what did they do to sort it out and what was the outcome. The difference between STAR and SOARA is that in SOARA technique the applicant has to reflect their actions: How did they act, what did they learn and what would they do differently next time. This is why SOARA is often seen as a better technique. (Konu 2017.)

#### *Person assessment tests and other methods for evaluation*

Person assessment tests can increase the reliability of the recruiting decision as they gather information about the applicant from multiple sources and their results are not affected by the recruiter's bias. Usually, a good assessment test is made based on the position in question instead of a general assessment test. Person assessment tests are generally more reliable when conducted by a partner organisation and not the recruiting organisation. The tests also need to meet law requirements. (Salli & Takatalo 2014, 79; 81.)

#### **Unconscious bias training**

Unconscious bias training is seen as a key feature of, especially, gender equity strategies in many companies worldwide (Williamson & Foley 2018, 356). However, the matter how the training is conducted, makes a difference. A fast, inefficient way to train employees is putting them through online testing that shows them their biases and discuss the results afterwards with emphasis on how they can manage them to avoid negative effects (Noon 2018, 198). There are good test to show bias, such as Harvard IAT, but just taking a test will not change people's behaviour or help them tackle their biases.

In order to tackle biases, recruiters need to know the types of biases they might face. Table 1 in chapter 3 presents the most common types, and recruiters could use above mentioned Harvard IAT test to find out more about who they are more likely to be biased towards. This requires recruiters to be honest even if they feel e.g. shamed.

Chamberlain (2016) has presented a five-step model for recognising and tackling biases for recruiters especially. This model is featured in table 2, and it presents examples of target questions for the recruiter in each step.

	<b>Steps</b>	<b>Examples of target questions</b>
1.	Examining and looking into the biases and beliefs blocking the ability to see the full potential in applicants	<p>What kind of stereotypes I follow? What kind of prejudices do I have?</p> <p>Does someone's race/gender/sexual orientation etc make a difference in my mind?</p>
2.	Identifying thoughts, beliefs and interpretations which create misconceptions and are also common responses to e.g. applicant's looks or behaviour	<p>Do my thoughts on the applicant affect their possibility to be successful in the position?</p> <p>Who am I comparing them to? Is my comparison based on equal criteria?</p> <p>Am I giving as much attention to this applicant as I did to previous one, despite them being very different?</p>
3.	Acknowledging the verbal and non-verbal communication that causes attraction or un-attraction	<p>Am I really listening to what they are saying or am I in a hurry to move forward?</p> <p>Am I reading applicant's non-verbal language correctly?</p> <p>Am I being overly sensitive or trying to be "politically correct"?</p>
4.	Being able to see the danger in comparisons over non-biased criteria	<p>Am I setting applicants in order of preference instead of skill set?</p> <p>Am I giving an advantage based on the school they have graduated from?</p>
5.	Setting a checklist for recognised biases, which then helps determining the validity of own thoughts and judgments	<p>Am I basing my assumptions on stereotypes?</p> <p>Do my past experiences affect my judgments?</p> <p>Does acknowledging my bias on one thing change my bias to another thing?</p>

Table 2. Recognising and tackling biases – a five-step model (after Chamberlain 2016, 199-202)

A checklist can be created based on the model above and it is something the recruiter can use as a tool in especially interviews or before or after one. The checklist can be modified to fit specific biases: For example, if the recruiter knows they tend to negatively evaluate people with Somali background, they can create target questions based on specifically that bias.

It is important to consider, that knowing about biases does not automatically lead to changes in behaviour. It is also important to acknowledge, that unconscious bias training with employees can lead to negative results. Training is seen as a quick fix to end discrimination and inequality. Even if it does decrease stereotypes, it does not necessarily lead to gender equality or diversity at workplace. This is often due to blind spots, where people see biases in others but not in themselves. In extreme cases, unconscious bias training has resulted in more prejudice and reinforced stereotypes. (Noon 2018, 198; Williamson & Foley 2018, 356.)

### **Self-management**

Self-management only works when a person is honest and aware of themselves, but also motivation is required. Planning is as important as execution, especially when it comes to changing behaviour, and reflecting one's choices is crucial. (Porter 2019, 38.)

### *Levels of learning*

The levels of learning (see chapter 4) can be used as method for self-learning. This solution is a modification based on Ajanko's (2016, 169-171) model where they used leadership as an example: On level 0, the recruiter considers where they operate and what are their possibilities and limitations in that environment; for example, does the organisation provide fruitful environment for recruiting, such as enough time.

On level 1, the recruiter considers their own actions and behaviour: How they act as a recruiter, what are their daily tasks, what kind of interactions they have. Level 2 is where the recruiter focuses on their skills: How good are their skills regarding recruiting, what are their strategies, and what kind of added value they present to the organisation. Level 3 is where the recruiter considers their work through values, roles and beliefs: What is important, why is important, what is their role. Level 4 is for identity and growth: Who are they as a recruiter, how has being a recruiter changed them, is a recruiter who they are. (Ajanko 2016, 170-171.)

When a recruiter is able to identify themselves in these levels, they are able to change their behaviour. Sometimes change happens on multiple levels, sometimes it requires just one. For example, if a recruiter realises, they are not a recruiter in heart, the change happens in the deepest level and thus usually alters behaviour or goals in all the levels.

### *Reflecting*

Reflecting is one the key tools of self-management and self-learning, as it falls under the step of self-assessment. It is part of a process, where the individual usually will or has planned how, for example, a certain situation will move forward. Figure 14 features the steps of reflecting.

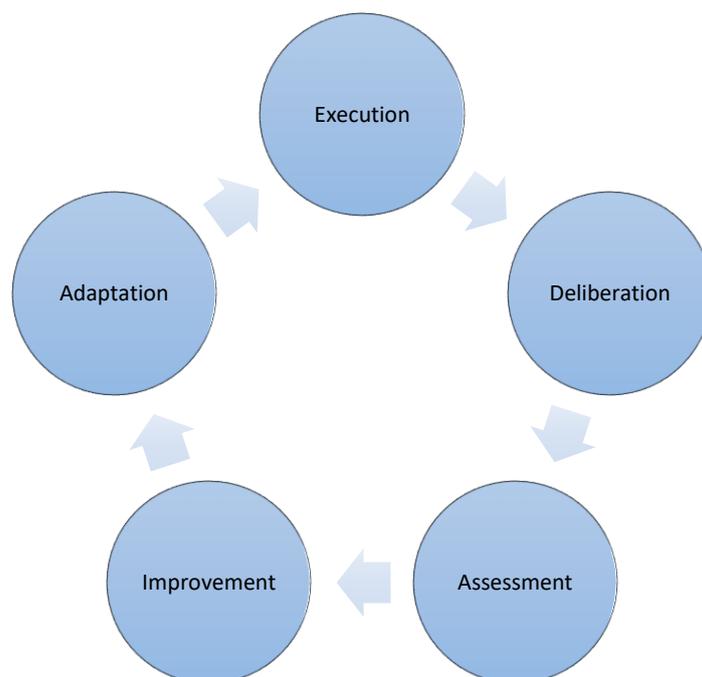


Figure 14. Reflecting as continuous cycle (after Heikkilä 2009, 74)

After the execution of a project or performance (such as recruiting) it is necessary to ponder and assess how it went. Only then can one find improvements to make the next time. Although finding faults and improvements is seen as easy, it is not always easy to adapt them for the next execution. One needs to be committed for change.

Considering interviewing: The recruiter often plans how the interview will go, what kind of questions they will ask and most likely what kind of answers they will receive. Then, they move on to the interview with an applicant. After the interview, they should stop and consider, how did it go: Did they ask the right question or where some of the questions unnecessary regarding the position in question? How could they improve their interview, is a matter of learning new skills or just altering questions? When this part of the process is done, they should conceptualise their thoughts, so they will not, for example, make the same

mistake twice. This way, they are more likely to be more effective in the future interviews or maybe even in the recruiting process. Briefly stated, reflecting is stopping and slowing down for a moment. (Ajanko 2016, 265-267.)

### **Coaching, sparring and mentoring**

Coaching, sparring and mentoring could all be valid solutions for battling (unconscious) biases, especially when done in diverse environment. Especially managers mention that being able to mirror actions to someone else's is very important for them, and that those relationship help them evolve as better managers and leaders (Ajanko 2016, 307-308).

*Coaching* is usually very goal-oriented: There is a problem one wants to resolve, or they want to achieve something specific. The setting is usually trainer-trainee, where one has some sort seniority in the topic, and in the case of recruiters, coaching would mostly target behaviours. Behavioural coaching would emphasise on conscious awareness of resources and abilities and developing conscious competence: This would be done through observation and feedback and would be based on the exchange between reward and effort. (Dilts 2003, 36-37.)

As coaching emphasises feedback as a way for personal growth, *mentoring* helps others to either establish, clarify or strengthen key values and beliefs that reinforce certain actions. The mentored individual needs excessive amount of motivation because otherwise there will be a question of why they should change their behaviour in the first place. (Dilts 2003, 127.) Mentor and mentored can be equals with different mindset or experience, or the mentor can be a teacher or well-known professional in the field (this is the more traditional case). Considering recruiting, recruiters could benefit from a mentor who works in a diverse organisation or in an organisation which has a diversity policy, or maybe they have been hiring diversely for years.

*Sparring* is term adapted from combat sports: It usually refers to a mimic fight or match for training purposes. In work environment, sparring is often used to challenge, swap and create ideas: It is not an actual fight but works on a verbal and/or visualised ground. (Xennek 2019.) Sparring is usually conducted with outside help, often a hired professional from training company, and that would be the best case for recruiters as well: Company environment might support the biases recruiter has and thus sparring would be inefficient. It is important to remember that sparring is most of all solution-centred: It is meant to find a solution to a problem. In this case, the aim is to find a solution to end discrimination, and that means recruiters need sparring to find out their biases and how to tackle them.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 Discussion

Biases, unconscious or not, enable discrimination in recruiting situations. When recruiters are, in the Finnish environment especially, mostly white and middle-aged with higher education, applicants similar to them tend to get chosen. When up to every seventh of Finnish people are racist, the affiliation of discrimination and biases is even clearer. It is extremely necessary for recruiters to acknowledge their biases and companies to have training for their recruiters.

There were three questions this thesis aimed to answer. Two of them were supporting Yes/No -questions, pondering whether biases explain the types of discrimination, and whether recruiters acknowledge their biases. The answer to the first one is yes: Biases explain the types of discrimination. The answer to the second one was not as clear: Some recruiters acknowledge their biases when others do not. However, some might just be reluctant to admit their biases even if they do acknowledge them.

Most of the recruiters wanted to think they are able to recruit based on talent and experience only, and that they would not pay attention to the applicant's race, age, gender or other traits that cannot be altered. This is a common misconception amongst people, and the results show that people suffer especially from affinity bias: They prefer likeness to themselves in applicants.

The main question was about solutions: What kind of solutions could decrease unconscious biases? This question was specified, in case no solutions was found, to solutions to lessen effects of biases. The recruiters themselves had several ideas on how unconscious biases could be decreased, and also how they (or companies) could decrease the effects of biases. This research was thus able to provide solutions for decreasing unconscious bias, or how to lessen the effects of it.

Companies have different kind of options for training, whether it is from actual training to altering company practices. Companies should also encourage self-management and give its employees time to learn about themselves, in addition to learning new techniques. All these options decrease the risk of discrimination based on bias. Some solutions are in use and some are less familiar: Recruiters are familiar with several interview techniques, such as competence-based interviewing, and person assessment tests which are not, however, used in many companies. Private sector companies are less familiar with anonymous job application which could give some benefits.

## 6.2 Reliability and validity

The reliability and validity are assessed by research's steps: Are they executed correctly, is the problem valid, are the methods valid, is the analysis valid etc (Kananen 2015, 111). This way the whole research process is assessed.

The topic of this thesis is valid, and discrimination in Finnish work environment is a real problem based on several studies and statistics. The theory that discrimination is at least partially based on unconscious biases is also reliable.

### **Validity**

In a valid, quantitative research, the indicator measures what it is supposed to measure: This means that, for example, a questionnaire is not understood differently than what the composer meant. (Vilkka 2015, 193.) In this research, there were some parts people were able to read differently, and this most likely due to language and cultural differences. This questionnaire was in English, so it could reach both the Finnish and Swedish (as well as potential English) speaking recruiters, however, the language one uses in English does not automatically translate to Finnish. A good example of this, is the word Caucasian, which was used to describe ethnicity: In English, Caucasian is in official language synonym for a white person, however, in Finnish it means people from Caucasus area.

In general, most of the respondents seemed to understand English well, yet there is always a risk that some parts were not understood correctly. The concept of unconscious bias might be foreign to some, and thus might alter how respondents understood the meaning of the questionnaire. For example, there was a few return comments where people said they did not answer some questions about age or gender because that does not matter to them.

### **Reliability**

Reliability measures the accuracy of results in quantitative research, and if the results are repeatable in another setting. (Vilkka 2015, 194.) This research seems reliable: The results are similar to statistics and other studies and it would most likely give similar results in another setting and with another researcher.

In terms of qualitative research, this study is not as reliable, as it cannot be generalised to a larger population, despite the sample group being rather accurate sample of professional in recruiting position. The pool is also very homogenous and would benefit from diversity in the name of reliability. Currently, it can be stated that white recruiters prefer white applicants yet it cannot be proved whether this is the case only with white recruiters

or are recruiters with other ethnic background preferential to white applicants as well, or do they prefer applicants with the same ethnic background as them.

### 6.3 Future studies

As Finnish studies addressing discrimination tend to focus on gender and age, it would be important to widen research. Especially ethnic and cultural discrimination should be researched more in the Finnish environment, in particular due to constantly changing environment: Finnish workplaces have generally been homogenous (white, Christian, male) and now globalisation brings employees with various different backgrounds, and at the same time Finnish people tend to be biased against people with assumed different ethnic background (see, for example, Akhlaq Ahmad's research "When the Name Matters: An experimental Investigation of Ethnic Discrimination in the Finnish Labor Market").

In the future this research could and should be done in a workplace environment without questionnaires but in more of sparring or brainstorming way. In workplace environment, it would be easier to challenge people for their way of thinking, and maybe get them to better understand and evaluate their way of thinking to induce change.

#### **Example of potential exercise or research setting**

A company or an organisation is chosen, and within that company/organisation recruiters and/or HR professionals are invited to participate. Participants are first given a position they need to find an employee for: The characteristics of the position are common for the company/organisation, or it could be an old position that has been searched a while back. Then, the participants list key features of an applicant for that position: What they need to know, what kind of background they should have, how much experience etc. This part is done together with colleagues.

After the first part, participants work individually. They are each presented with the resumés of potential applicants (three to six should be sufficient), and they need to choose which one(s) they would bring forward to an interview. The resumés are similar in sense that skills and professional background are the same in every single one, however, some of the participants get resumés with names and some get resumés with ages: Some of the names sound traditional Finnish and some sound foreign, and ages differ from a younger professional to an older one. None of the resumés have gender in them, and dates from professional and educational history have been removed. After participants have had time for choosing their preferred resumé(s), they will need to explain briefly, why they chose that/those. In this part, one would be able to see if they focused on the skills or did, for example, the assumed background or age of the applicant affect decision making.

Next, the participants would be shown pictures of people, the same amount as there were resumés chosen for the previous part. The people in the pictures are clearly from different ethnic backgrounds and different genders. The participants are then asked to match pictures with resumés they chose previously. This will show the effects of gender and assumed ethnicity, and whether participants assume that the person, who looks most Finnish, would be the most qualified. The participants can be asked to state their reasoning, why did they combine the picture of person A with the resumé 1 etc.

After the previous part, the executor of the exercise can show all the resumés and match them with a picture (preferably different than what the participants chose), name and age, and ask participants to write their thoughts down. Now with all the information available, participants can describe whether their thoughts on the applicant's suitability has changed: Would they choose the same person as in the initial phase or would they see someone else as more suitable. This part is done in writing because then the opinions of other participants will not affect anyone.

After the exercise, it is important to hold a follow-up a discussion: What thoughts participants have, did they learn something new? It might also be reasonable to have them take at least one section of the Harvard IAT test. This would encourage participants to evaluate their own way of working.

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## APPENDIX 1

### RECRUITERS AND UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

**This questionnaire is done for a Master's degree thesis at LAB University of Applied Sciences. The topic is related to recruiting and discrimination through unconscious biases.**

**The questionnaire is anonymous, and the respondents cannot be identified from their answers. There is no company information needed, as this questionnaire considers recruiters as individuals.**

**Please note all questions are mandatory.**

### BACKGROUND

This section covers questions about your background

#### 1. Gender

- Man
- Woman
- Other

#### 2. Age (in years)

- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- over 55

#### 3. Ethnic background

- Caucasian
- African descent
- Latin descent
- East-Asian descent
- South-East Asian descent
- Other

#### 4. Study background

- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Vocational degree
- Other

#### 5. Are you in a managing position?

- Yes
- No

**6. Is recruiting your main job?**

- Yes
- No

**7. Have you ever felt discriminated in a recruiting situation?**

- Yes
- No

**8. Have you lived abroad?**

- Yes
- No

**LAST RECRUITMENT**

In this section, answer questions based on your last recruitment.

**1. Was your last recruitment for**

- a managing position
- an expert level position
- a lower level position?

**2. How many applicants did you interview?**

- 1 - 5
- 6 - 10
- 11 - 15
- over 15

**3. How did you decide to interview the people you did?**

You may choose multiple answers.

- Based on their skills
- Based on their referee(s)
- Based on their previous experience
- Based on their education
- Based on their background
- Based on familiarity
- Other

**4. Did you use any person assessment methods (personality tests, skill tests etc)?**

- Yes
- No

IF YES:

**4.1. Were the tests done by your company or an outside consultant?**

- My company
- An outside consultant

**5. Was hiring the person just your decision?**

- My decision
- I had to get an approval from a manager/customer/other

**6. Did you hire a**

- man
- woman
- no gender identified

**7. What age were they?**

- Under 18
- 18 - 25
- 26 - 35
- 36 - 45
- 46 - 55
- over 55

**8. Was their background similar to yours?**

- Yes
- No

**9. Why did you choose them?**

- They were the only fit to the position
- They were suitable for the position
- They asked less wages than what you were willing to offer
- They were able to start quickly
- They seemed reliable

**BIASES**

In this section, think about your last recruitment: You will build an ideal applicant for that position.

Now, rank the answers in order of preference for your ideal applicant, 1 being the most preferred trait.

**1. They are**

- ⇓ man
- ⇓ woman
- ⇓ non-binary

**2. They are**

- ⇓ Caucasian
- ⇓ Black
- ⇓ East Asian
- ⇓ Middle-Eastern

- ⇓ South-East Asian
- ⇓ Latina/latino/latinx

### **3. They are**

- ⇓ under 20 years old
- ⇓ in their 20s
- ⇓ in their 30s
- ⇓ in their 40s
- ⇓ in their 50s
- ⇓ over 60 years old

### **4. They are**

- ⇓ married, no children
- ⇓ married with children
- ⇓ in a relationship
- ⇓ single

### **6. They have a**

- ⇓ Bachelor's degree
- ⇓ Master's degree
- ⇓ vocational degree
- ⇓ other/no degree

### **7. They have graduated from**

- ⇓ a well-known school
- ⇓ a mediocre school
- ⇓ a poor school/they have no degree

### **8. They have work experience equivalent of**

- ⇓ 0 - 5 years
- ⇓ 5 - 10 years
- ⇓ 10 - 15 years
- ⇓ over 15 years

### **9. They have recommendations**

- ⇓ from your colleague
- ⇓ from your friend(s)
- ⇓ from a well-known professional
- ⇓ from their previous employer(s)
- ⇓ they have no recommendations

### **10. They are more**

- ⇓ talkative
- ⇓ silent

### **11. They seem**

- ⇓ happy
- ⇓ confident

- ⇓ nervous
- ⇓ relaxed
- ⇓ reserved
- ⇓ shy
- ⇓ assertive
- ⇓ competitive

## FINAL QUESTIONS

### 1. Have thought you might be biased before this questionnaire?

- Yes
- No

IF NO:

1.1. Please, consider testing your biases at

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

IF YES:

1.1. What kind of biases you identify in yourself?

1.2. What do you think are the causes for your biases?

### 2. Have you had training regarding unconscious biases?

- Yes
- No

IF NO:

2.1. Could you imagine taking training or a course on how to avoid unconscious biases?

- Yes
- No

3. What kind of training you think recruiters/recruiting managers should have?

4. What, in your opinion, most affects how biases are born?

5. What, in your opinion, is the key to equal recruiting?