

WITHOUT PREJUDICES

How the selection of new employees can be truly fair

ESG-compliant recruiting brings companies closer to their sustainability goals. With a few tricks, you can fill positions without discrimination

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Guest article by Charlotte Eblinger-Mitterlechner

The first year of mandatory sustainability reporting is coming to an end. Companies with more than 500 employees and more than 100 million euros in total assets will submit their first report in accordance with the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) with the 2024 balance sheet. This report covers the company's contributions in the dimensions of environment (E), social (S), and governance (G) - ESG for short.

The aim of the new European directive is for every company to contribute to shared social and environmental values and human rights. From 2026, the suppliers of these companies will have to contribute data to their clients' reports. In short, this means that ESG-compliant suppliers will have a positive impact on their clients' sustainability reports.

In the medium term, many companies in Austria that are unable to change their processes quickly enough will have to rely on suppliers with a clean ESG balance sheet to be able to submit an acceptable report. Eblinger & Partner began converting internal processes in the search and selection process to be ESG-compliant a year ago. Both our consultants and our clients receive training and advice on how to avoid unconscious bias when recruiting.

First and foremost, it is about diversity and inclusion. It starts with the commitment of everyone involved to carry out a diverse recruitment process. Because if you don't address this from the outset, you are unlikely to recruit diversely. What is diverse staffing? Care is taken to bring people from groups that are usually underrepresented into the company.

Wide range of possibilities

This could be a woman in a male-dominated company, it could be an older employee surrounded by young female colleagues, but it could also be people with disabilities or a migrant background. The opportunities for more diversity in the workforce are manifold. Commitment is followed by the

creation of a requirements profile that addresses this underrepresented group.

Based on the job profile, the advertisement is written in a way that not only genders the language, but also deliberately avoids words that are unconsciously attributed to only one gender, for example. Studies show that the vast majority of characteristic words such as dynamic and determined are attributed to men and words such as team player and reliable are attributed to women.

This is followed by the choice of job portal and the selection of the method for directly approaching candidates with whom we expect the best access to the defined underrepresented group. During the application interview, prepared competency-based questions ensure that the interviews are comparable at the end and that discriminatory questions are avoided.

Structural barriers

These include, for example, questions about origin, solving private problems such as ensuring childcare or hobbies, none of which have any significance with regard to the candidates' professional qualifications. The final step is to ensure that the selection process is also fair. Structural barriers refer to the fact that applicants who are ranked last have fewer chances than those who are ranked first. One-on-one interviews reduce discriminatory decisions based on the prejudices of just one person.

“Above all, those who criticize the fact that the best candidate is ultimately not selected in the ESG-compliant process should deal with misperceptions.” - Charlotte Eblinger-Mitterlechner

The desired skills that an employer has already defined can be assessed using the school grading system during the selection process. A well-prepared ESG-compliant recruiting process beats the so-called gut feeling, which is often just an expression of prejudice or “unconscious bias”. At the same time, there are statistically verifiable differences in the self-presentation of social groups.

Fair selection

We need to take these differences into account in order to give underrepresented groups a fair chance in the selection process. In particular, those who have not yet considered the benefits of a diverse workforce, but criticize that the ESG-compliant process does not ultimately select the best candidate, should address misperceptions in recruiting.

Because it is precisely when you try to remedy this that the best person really comes out on top. Nobody wants the dazzlers, the cut-ups who manage to serve our prejudices about what is best. Adhering to ESG-compliant process steps ensures a search and selection process that does not discriminate and leads to more diverse appointments. And ultimately also the future of the company. (Charlotte Eblinger-Mitterlechner, 3.12.2024)