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Exploring Diversity Recruitment in the Netherlands: A Comparative Analysis of Public and Private Sector Practices

Shojaiefard, Anita

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**Exploring Diversity Recruitment in the Netherlands: A Comparative Analysis
of Public and Private Sector Practices**

Anita Shojaiefard

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Abstract

In an increasingly diverse global workforce, understanding how diversity recruitment practices differ between the public and private sectors is essential for shaping inclusive employment strategies. This thesis explores these differences through qualitative research by interviewing recruiters and HR professionals. Findings reveal that while private sector organizations often prioritize filling vacancies with the most qualified candidates, public sector entities actively seek to enhance diversity through targeted recruitment and inclusive practices. By addressing the gaps in empirical research on the specific attributes and practices of diversity recruitment, particularly the differences between public and private sectors, this study offers a clearer picture of how these practices contribute to organizational diversity and inclusion. It also highlights the unique challenges and motivations within each sector, providing a foundation for further research in this critical area.

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Introduction

The Rise of Inclusive Recruitment

Advancements in both economic strategies and technology have led to decreased trade restrictions and a rise in the integration of worldwide markets. Consequently, there is now a widespread exchange of goods, services, information, and even human resources across different regions. This trend shows the necessity, the increasing interest in recruiting underrepresented demographic groups (such as women and minorities), and the corresponding increase in efforts to recruit minority applicants. As a result, the workforce has been and continues to become more heterogeneous (Avery, 2003; McKay & Avery, 2005; Roberson, 2006; Roberson & Hyeon Jeong Park, 2007; Roberson & Stevens, 2006). Moreover, demographic shifts, such as the "baby bust" (a decline in the birth rate following the baby boom) and changes in female labor force participation rates, have significant implications for the labor market. Hence, historical context and demographic trends play a crucial role in shaping organizational strategies for attracting and selecting employees (Rynes & Barber, 1990).

Throughout history, organizations have recognized the critical importance of acquiring the right talent to drive their success. Still, the process of attracting and selecting employees has been a constant concern for them (Downey et al., 2015; Rynes & Barber, 1990). Due to the competition in product and labor markets, firms that discriminate against hiring productive minority workers, such as females, ethnic minorities, the elderly, the handicapped, and homosexuals (Albert et al., 2011), would incur costs and eventually lose out to competitors who capitalize on the opportunity to hire skilled workers. Yet, in situations where employers possess monopsony power, due to high search costs for employees and imperfect information, workers' ability to switch employers is limited, and that leverages employers to discriminate more. Nevertheless, higher search costs for employers cause longer periods of unfilled vacancies if minority candidates are rejected. This could incentivize employers to discriminate less, especially in tight labor markets (Baert et al., 2015). In response to demographic shifts and the prospect of labor shortages, organizations are compelled to place a greater emphasis on attracting labor. They recognize the need to engage with potential candidates proactively, create appealing employment opportunities, and differentiate themselves as employers of choice to secure the talent they require for their operations (Roberson & Hyeon Jeong Park, 2007; Rynes & Barber, 1990).

The predictions of a changing demographic landscape and a rise in the recruitment of female and minority job applicants are now supported by subsequent demographic changes, with significant labor growth among women and an increase in racial minority representation. Concurrently, research has underscored the potential benefits of having a diverse workforce and prompted organizations to invest resources in attracting diverse talent. The evolution of diversity research includes moving from a predominant focus on the problems associated with diversity, such as discrimination and bias, towards emphasizing the potential benefits of diversity in enhancing

work processes and organizational mechanisms. Scholars increasingly explore ways to integrate diverse individuals into organizations and create inclusive work environments where everyone feels valued (Avery & McKay, 2006; Shore et al., 2011; Holmes et al., 2021).

Conceptually, diversity encompasses an infinite number of dimensions. These dimensions can include any category where people share a specific aspect or differ from one another (Köllen, 2021). In general, diversity, characterized by differences in opinions, values, and resources among team members, can have both positive and negative effects on team performance (Kearney & Gebert, 2009), and eventually organizational performance. Therefore, organizations employ different strategies for managing diversity, including targeted recruitment, education, training, career development, mentoring programs, employee participation, communication strategies, and community relations (Roberson, 2006).

However, despite growing interest in diversity and inclusion, there is a lack of empirical research examining the specific attributes and practices associated with these concepts in organizations and how employees perceive or react to workforce diversity in general or these initiatives in particular (Roberson, 2006; Roberson & Stevens, 2006; Scott et al., 2011). Employers have experimented with various approaches, including establishing organizational responsibility for diversity, moderating managerial bias through training and feedback, and reducing social isolation for minority workers (Kalev et al., 2006). However, empirical findings on diversity recruitment are scattered and have made it challenging for practitioners to design effective strategies (Avery & McKay, 2006). Moreover, researchers have shown that fairness in the workplace significantly influences individual employee attitudes and behaviors, such as satisfaction, commitment, absenteeism, and citizenship behavior (Simons & Roberson, 2003), showcasing the importance of fair processes in an organization. Additionally, the rationale for diversity training differs between commercial and public-sector organizations, with the former focusing on short-term profits and the latter emphasizing social justice and learning outcomes (Alhejji et al., 2016). As researchers struggle to conceptualize and study these differences, organizations also face challenges in embracing and managing differences effectively (Harrison & Klein, 2007).

Respectively, as identified by existing research, there is a lack of understanding of diversity practices in organizations. Moreover, despite increasing interest, empirical research on specific attributes and practices associated with diversity and inclusion is lacking, particularly in recruitment. Additionally, there is a lack of clarity on the differences in diversity practices between public and private sector organizations, with little empirical evidence to guide effective strategies. To address these gaps, this study aims to explore the differences in diversity recruitment practices perceived by recruiters in public and private sector organizations, and how these practices contribute to organizational diversity and inclusion. This thesis explores diversity and inclusion recruitment practices through qualitative research and analysis by interviewing recruiters, HR professionals, and other key stakeholders. Through these interviews, the thesis aims to answer the following questions:

1. *What specific practices are currently being implemented by organizations?*
2. *What are the drivers behind diversity recruitment practices?*

3. *How do these practices and motivations differ between the public and private sectors?*
4. *What are the perceived benefits and challenges of having a diverse workforce?*

This approach allows for a deeper understanding of employees' experiences and perceptions, uncovering nuances and patterns that may not be captured through other methods (Roberson & Stevens, 2006).

The analysis of interview data revealed that diversity initiatives in the public and private sectors differ in their motivation, focus, and approach. Private sector organizations prioritize filling vacancies with the most qualified candidates, with diversity often being a byproduct of this process. In contrast, public sector organizations actively pursue diversity through targeted recruitment, inclusive communication, and training to better reflect and serve their communities. This finding strengthens Alhejji et al., (2016)'s argument that the rationale for diversity training is short-term profit for commercial organizations while public organizations seek social justice and learning outcomes through diversity initiatives. Furthermore, while diversity offers numerous benefits such as enhanced creativity, innovation, employee satisfaction, and stronger community relations, both sectors face challenges in achieving true inclusion. These challenges include retaining and integrating diverse employees, overcoming resistance to change, addressing structural barriers, and fostering a culture of inclusivity. The findings of this thesis emphasize the shift from diversity management to inclusion and the ongoing need for inclusive leadership, cultural awareness, and the integration of diverse perspectives into decision-making processes to fully realize the potential of a diverse workforce.

Literature Review

Understanding Diversity: Concepts, Theories, and Implications

The concept of diversity has been through evolution in organizational literature and has moved beyond mere demographic differences to encompass perspectives, behaviors, and identities. Diversity has traditionally been conceptualized as the composition of groups or workforces, often focusing on demographic differences among members. However, its characteristics have expanded beyond observable dimensions such as gender, race, ethnicity, and age (Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2009) to include non-observable characteristics such as education, functional background, and personality (Roberson, 2006). As a result, Roberson (2019) categorized diversity conceptualizations into two approaches: factor or categorical, and proportional approaches. The former views diversity as observable and non-observable individual attributes, while the latter considers diversity as a structural property of groups, examining the distribution of differences within a work unit. However, even this conceptualization faces limitations. Harrison & Klein (2007) also propose a typology of diversity, suggesting that diversity is not one singular concept but rather three distinct aspects: separation, variety, and disparity. Separation refers to differences in position or opinion among unit members and indicates disagreement or opposition. Variety pertains to differences in category, primarily of information, knowledge, or experience among unit members, and disparity involves differences in the concentration of valued social assets or resources, such as pay and status, among unit members.

But how does diversity operate in organizations? There is a complex relationship between workforce diversity and work group effectiveness, focusing on the perspectives and implications of diversity within organizational settings. Researchers have explored various dimensions of diversity, including identity group memberships (such as race and sex), organizational group memberships (like hierarchical position or organizational function), and individual characteristics (such as attitudes and values). Studies suggest that while certain types of diversity may be beneficial, outcomes vary depending on factors like the type of differences and the context in which they operate (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Yang Yang & Konrad, 2011). Relying on various theoretical perspectives rooted in social-psychological theories and concepts, it is considered a cognitive process such as social identity formation and relational demography (Avery, 2003; DiTomaso et al., 2007; Roberson, 2019). Social identity theory suggests that individuals derive their self-concepts from group memberships, and that leads to ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias. According to this theory, people categorize themselves and others into various social groups, such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, profession, etc. These group memberships form a crucial part of individuals' identities and influence how they perceive themselves and others. The issue here is that individuals may also display outgroup bias, meaning they hold negative attitudes or stereotypes towards members of other groups (Roberson, 2019; Sabharwal, 2014). Relational demography suggests that diversity's effects depend on the demographic characteristics of those involved, meaning how the demographics of individuals within a group or organization influence various outcomes and perceptions. It posits that people tend to have more favorable responses when they perceive similarity with others in terms of demographics (Avery, 2003). Moreover, Ely & Thomas (2001) discuss that demographic variables, such as race, ethnicity, sex, social class, religion, nationality, and sexual identity, contribute to cultural identity within groups. Cultural identity encompasses shared worldviews, norms, values, and sociocultural heritage, which can influence communication styles and interactions within groups. Understanding these cognitive processes is crucial for effectively managing diversity in organizations. By acknowledging their role in shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors, organizations can implement strategies to promote inclusivity, minimize biases, and foster positive intergroup relations (Roberson, 2019). However, Roberson et al. (2017) argue for a shift from viewing diversity as a static organizational resource to a dynamic capabilities perspective, where firms can leverage diversity to adapt to changing environments and improve effectiveness.

Diversity Management: From Discrimination to Inclusion

Historically underrepresented groups have spurred greater labor force participation these days, and this has led to the increasing need to manage workforces characterized by a multitude of identities, backgrounds, and experiences. The workforce of the 21st century is becoming increasingly diverse, with more women, minorities, and individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, various age groups, and lifestyles contributing to organizations. As a result, organizations recognize that effectively managing this diverse workforce is crucial for organizational functioning and competitiveness. This recognition is reflected in the high number of companies implementing diversity initiatives (Downey et al., 2015; Roberson, 2006, 2019). Therefore, diversity management, as defined by creating environments that harness differences for organizational benefit and creating environments that leverage differences for innovation and

value, is seen as a crucial aspect of contemporary organizational practice and emerged in response to the predicted increase in diversity within the workforce due to demographic changes (Gröschl & Doherty, 1999; Morrison et al., 2006).

Diversity management typically centers on initiatives related to recruiting individuals from various backgrounds and presumes their integration into organizational procedures (Roberson, 2006). The approach toward diversity management may vary slightly depending on the legal framework, sociopolitical factors, and cultural context of each country but generally shares similar practices and rationales. Over the past decades, diversity management gained prominence and focused more on the economic benefits of diversity rather than solely on combating discrimination (Köllen, 2021). Pitts et al. (2010) define diversity management with three interrelated components: recruitment and outreach, valuing differences, and pragmatic policies and programs. Recruitment and outreach involve actively seeking employees from underrepresented groups, which can lead to greater innovation and performance. Valuing differences focuses on fostering multicultural understanding among employees and managers, often through diversity training and cultural awareness programs. Pragmatic policies and programs aim to support the needs of diverse employees through measures such as mentoring, family-friendly policies, flexible working hours, and collaborative assignments.

But why does studying diversity (management) matter? Decades of immigration have made diversity more noticeable in European countries. Therefore, there is a growing recognition among organizations about the need to adapt to diverse environments (Van Ewijk, 2011). Moreover, Baert et al. (2015) revealed that studies in Europe found pervasive ethnic discrimination based on applicants' names and also identified discrimination based on gender, beauty, and sexual orientation. The findings reveal that discrimination is predominantly present in occupations without identified recruitment difficulties. The study, however, acknowledges that the absence of discrimination in difficult-to-fill occupations could be influenced by other factors such as low wages and poor working conditions, which deter both minority and majority workers. Therefore, there is still a robust negative relationship between discrimination and occupational tightness. Moreover, Pitts et al. (2010) express the increasing importance of diversity management in public organizations in response to the changing demographics of the workforce. They argue that as more women and people of color enter the workforce, the traditional management approaches are no longer effective in promoting employee performance in a diverse environment, and managers face new challenges related to work-life balance, cultural differences, collective values, and communication styles. As a result, diversity management programs have become a common response to these challenges. However, the implementation of these programs varies widely across organizations.

Roberson (2019) and Köllen (2021) discuss various organizational practices aimed at managing diversity in the workplace. These practices encompass diversity staffing, diversity training, mentoring programs, work-life flexibility policies, and inclusion practices. Diversity staffing involves attracting and selecting applicants from underrepresented groups, but its effectiveness varies across social categories and requires further research. Diversity training aims to address bias and promote positive intergroup relations, yet implementation often lacks comprehensive evaluations and behavioral learning methods. Formal mentoring programs support career

development for women and minorities, but challenges such as mentor bias hinder their effectiveness. Work-life flexibility practices help employees balance their professional and personal lives, but a systemic approach is needed to develop supportive organizational cultures. Lastly, inclusion practices aim to create environments where individuals feel valued and welcomed, yet more research is needed to identify effective practices and understand their impact on individuals and groups.

A Look at Diversity Management Initiatives

Diversity policies emerged to combat discrimination by improving minority representation in employment. These strategies have evolved with societal changes and legislation. The evolution of diversity policies in public organizations includes shifting from traditional affirmative action/equal employment opportunity (AA/EEO) programs toward diversity management initiatives. However, the effectiveness of these policies, particularly concerning ethnic minority representation, is under scrutiny. Therefore, contemporary diversity management focuses on leveraging diversity as a strategic asset to enhance organizational performance (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015; Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012). Similarly, McKay & Avery (2005) suggest that nowadays mandates such as Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and financial justifications have led to superficial recruitment efforts and numerical targets without addressing underlying racial conditions within firms. It is challenging when minority recruits develop overly positive views of firms' diversity climates that may not be met which leads to high turnover rates. Moreover, legislative initiatives, such as the Act Stimulation Labor Participation Minorities, mandate organizations to strive for proportional representation of ethnic minorities (Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012), but the legitimacy of diversity management practices is subject to debate. Legal frameworks provide a baseline, but organizations have leeway in setting priorities within these frameworks (Köllen, 2021). Moreover, Gröschl & Doherty (1999) suggest that unlike earlier concepts like equal opportunity (EO) and affirmative action (AA), diversity management is driven by the business case rather than legal requirements.

Diversity policies are multifaceted and can encompass a wide range of initiatives, including recruitment practices, training programs, mentorship opportunities, and organizational culture initiatives. The effectiveness of these policies may depend on how well they are implemented, integrated into organizational practices, and supported by leadership (Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012). McKay & Avery, (2005) suggest that there are various tactics used in diversity recruitment such as showcasing a diverse workforce in advertisements, employing minority recruiters, and promoting identity-conscious staffing policies. However, recruitment efforts may create positive perceptions of a diverse climate among minority job seekers, but their actual workplace experiences may not match these expectations and that leads to potential high turnover. To solve this issue, they stress the importance of organizations avoiding misrepresentation and ensuring that aspects of the job other than diversity are genuinely attractive to minority job seekers. It is worth mentioning that similar to diversity conceptualization and diversity policies, recruitment strategies have also evolved. The evolution mostly involves advancements in technology, partnerships with third-party agencies, and

research to understand market dynamics and measure return on investment (James-MacEachern, 2018).

While many authors view diversity management enthusiastically, there is no common agreement on its objectives and characteristics. Some advocate for affirmative action plans to create diversity at every level, while others criticize such plans for potentially contradicting the merit-based recruitment principle (Gröschl & Doherty, 1999). For example, Kalev et al. (2006) suggest that programs aimed at establishing responsibility for diversity within organizations yield the most significant increases in managerial diversity. This suggests that structural changes within organizations, such as affirmative action plans and diversity committees, play a crucial role in driving diversity initiatives. On the other hand, efforts to moderate managerial bias through diversity training and evaluations are found to be less effective in increasing diversity representation. Furthermore, there is a growing recognition of the need for understanding diversity across countries and within global organizations. As a result, there is also a need to understand how diversity is defined and perceived across different national contexts, and also the proper way of managing multicultural teams and fostering effective interactions among employees from diverse backgrounds (Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007). Understanding these differences is also crucial when examining how diversity policies and recruitment practices are implemented in the public and private sectors.

Boyne et al. (1999) study revealed significant differences in human resource management (HRM) between the public and private sectors. The findings suggest public sector organizations surpassed private ones in staff training, employee participation, equal opportunity promotion, and welfare support. These findings emphasize distinct HRM approaches and suggest implications for organizational management and policy-making. Diversity management, as a part of HRM, has shaped the implementation and effectiveness of such initiatives in public and private sector organizations. Public sector organizations often prioritize diversity for symbolic and legitimate reasons, leading to more visible policies but potentially less substantive implementation. In contrast, private sector organizations are driven by economic incentives, which may result in more effective implementation of diversity policies to meet business goals. Additionally, the importance of top management support and policy implementation determines their effectiveness (Ashikali et al., 2021; Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012). Overall, diversity management aims to attract, retain, and effectively manage a diverse workforce to contribute to organizational success and views diversity as an aspect of strategic human resource management. Moreover, in commercial organizations, diversity training is often justified using the business case, which emphasizes its potential to improve organizational performance and financial outcomes. However, in public-sector and non-profit organizations, the rationale for diversity training may differ (Alhejji et al., 2016). Furthermore, public organizations in Western societies have increasingly adopted HRM practices from the private sector, including both "soft" practices emphasizing development and well-being, and "hard" practices like performance metrics and temporary employment (Wiersma et al., 2024).

The growing recognition of the importance of diversity in organizations is evident through increased attention in books, meta-analyses, and organizational initiatives. While the business

case for diversity and its positive impact on organizational outcomes has been widely accepted, empirical support for this case is limited, and its relevance may differ in public-sector and non-profit organizations. (Alhejji et al., 2016; Boyne et al., 1999; Roberson, 2006; Scott et al., 2011). Moreover, researchers have stressed the need for more empirical research on the early phase of recruitment and some evidence suggests that recruitment practices influence applicants' perceptions of the organization (Roberson et al., 2005). To address these, this study aims to delve deeper into specific (diversity) recruitment practices conducted by organizations, in both the public and private sectors by interviewing practitioners in the field.

Methodology

Tailoring diversity strategies to specific national contexts

Existing research highlights the importance of considering national contexts when implementing diversity management strategies (Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007). Therefore, understanding the role of context as situational opportunities and constraints affecting organizational behavior is crucial here (O'Toole & Meier, 2015). Article 1 of the Dutch Constitution emphasizes equal treatment for all individuals regardless of religion, belief, political opinion, race, or sex, symbolizing the country's dedication to combating discrimination (Guiraudon et al., 2005). Since the 1980s, Dutch integration policies aimed to ensure the proportional participation of ethnic minorities in the labor market. Diversity policies in organizations, including public and private sectors, became significant in the 1990s as part of employment equity legislation (Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012). Additionally, the 1994 Equal Treatment Act prohibited discrimination based on various factors including ethnic and racial origin, nationality, religion, belief, political affiliation, gender, sexual orientation, and marital status (Guiraudon et al., 2005). The legislative initiative known as the Act Stimulation Labor Participation Minorities (Wet SAMEN 1998-2003) was introduced in the Netherlands to address the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the workforce. Ethnic minorities in the Netherlands are defined based on social position rather than nationality, race, or color. This definition includes both first-generation migrants and individuals born in the Netherlands with at least one parent from a "nonwestern" country. It aimed to promote diversity and inclusion by requiring organizations with 35 or more employees to strive for proportional representation of minorities and submit annual reports detailing their efforts. The Act encouraged proactive measures in recruitment, hiring, and promotion, monitored by government agencies. While it raised awareness and prompted diversity initiatives, its effectiveness varied among organizations, highlighting both progress and challenges in minority participation. Overall, the Act represented a significant step towards fostering diversity and inclusion in the Dutch labor market (Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012). Furthermore, understanding the perspectives of HR professionals on the ground is critical to assessing the real-world impact and challenges of implementing such policies.

Research Approach

This thesis relies on qualitative analysis of narratives obtained from HR professionals working within the Dutch policy context via semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow focused yet flexible exploration of ideas pertinent to the research topic. The thesis concentrates on semi-structured interviews due to their capacity to capture participants' unique perspectives (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

The first step was assessing the suitability of semi-structured interviews and determining if this approach is appropriate (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Given the complexity of social and organizational dynamics inherent in diversity recruitment, semi-structured interviews offer a valuable method for capturing nuanced insights. By interviewing recruiters from each sector, we gain an understanding of how organizations implement their diversity recruitment practices. Through comparative analysis, we can discern differences between public and private sector practices, and explore their rationales, motives, and approaches. Semi-structured interviews provide a flexible framework for navigating this complex and sensitive topic, allowing us to gather rich data on recruitment initiatives and strategies.

Sampling and Participants Profile

The second step involves identifying HR professionals with diverse experiences across both public and private organizations. This involved reaching out to potential interviewees through LinkedIn and personal networks. Specifically, the interview was conducted with a total of eight recruiters, HR professionals, and advisors, with four individuals from each sector. The participants were carefully selected to encompass a range of organizational contexts. This balanced approach aims to capture a range of perspectives on diversity recruitment practices. The composition of interviewees is as follows:

Interview Number	Sector	Type of organization	Gender	Organization Size	Interviewee Role
1	Private	Manufacturing Company	Male	>20,000	HR Manager
2	NGO	Association	Female	<200	HR Manager
3	Public	Higher Education	Female	< 10,000	HR Advisor
4	Private	D&I Recruitment Agency	Female	<10	Recruiter & HR Consultant
5	Private	Recruitment Agency	Male	>10	Recruiter (Backend engineers recruiter)

6	Public	Ministry	Female	>1000	Manager of Diversity Office
7	Public	Water Company	Female	>1000	Technical Recruiter
8	Public	Police	Female	> 64,000	Diversity Recruiter & Advisor

Table 1 Composition of interviewees

It is worth noting that interviewing about such a sensitive topic requires gaining trust, understanding the interviewee's perspective, and navigating power dynamics. Therefore, building rapport, crafting questions, and interpreting responses were highly important (Harvey, 2011). As Harvey (2011) suggests, the interview was conducted to first, build rapport from initial contact by beginning with transparent communication about the interviewer's identity, affiliations, research goals, and the intended use of the data to establish trust. Moreover, as he states, an effective interview involves questions tailored to suit the context and preferences of the interviewees. Hence, the interview questions were modified to suit the mode of the interviewees and the context of the organizations in which they work. This means that the general questions are contingent through all interviews but follow-up questions have been customized to the overall atmosphere of the interview.

Data Collection: Interview Process and Data Management

The third step was the data collection design. The interview guide employs a strategic approach to building rapport and establishing context before diving into the substantive topics (Appendix 1). Following the introductory phase, the guide systematically explores various aspects of the organization's recruitment practices and diversity initiatives. By focusing on recruitment practices, the interview gains insights into how candidates are sourced, screened, and hired, and provides a foundation for understanding the organization's approach to talent acquisition. Subsequently, attention shifts to the organization's underlying principles that guide its diversity and inclusion efforts. The exploration of diversity recruitment initiatives delves into specific programs and strategies aimed at attracting talent from diverse backgrounds, ensuring fairness and equal opportunities throughout the hiring process. The section on measuring effectiveness probes how the organization evaluates the impact of its diversity recruitment efforts. Additionally, the guide examines best practices and strategies implemented to address challenges in attracting a diverse workforce and fosters an understanding of how the organization navigates obstacles and drives progress. This approach explores recruitment practices and diversity initiatives and offers a holistic view of the organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion. Ethical considerations, particularly regarding confidentiality and informed consent, are integral components of the interview design and ensure the integrity of the research process.

The fourth step was conducting the interviews and data management. The interviews, conducted in April 2024, involved targeted recruiters from both public and private sectors, all taking place

online and via phone to accommodate logistical constraints. After establishing rapport with the interviewees, the interview transitioned smoothly into questions focused on diversity recruitment practices. It is worth noting that some HR directors may prioritize profit and production over diversity management, potentially leading to reactive diversification strategies (Gröschl & Doherty, 1999). Therefore, I was mindful of this dynamic and adapted my questioning to elicit nuanced insights into organizational approaches to diversity recruitment. Additionally, secure methods were established for recording, transcribing, and storing interview data to uphold confidentiality and data integrity throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

Following the interviews, the transcripts were coded using data analysis software (Atlas. ti) to facilitate in-depth analysis and organization of the data. For the data analysis phase, thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview transcripts and identify themes and patterns of diversity recruitment practices in the public and private sectors. Thematic analysis is an analytical method commonly used to help identify patterns across language-based data (Lester et al., 2020). Through thematic analysis, differences and similarities in recruitment approaches between the two sectors were examined, and provided valuable insights into the strategies and challenges organizations face in fostering diversity and inclusion in their recruitment processes.

In the first attempt, six code groups were created:

Code Groups
Diversity Practices
Private Sector Practices
Public Sector Practices
Recruitment Practices
Strategic Consideration
Sector Differences

Table 2 Code Group Overview

Each Group contains several subgroups, Sample codes are as follows:

Recruitment Practices
Recruitment Practices: Advertisements
Recruitment Practices: Comparing Diversity Initiatives
Recruitment Practices: Direct calls
Recruitment Practices: Job Qualification
Recruitment Practices: Recruitment Practices

Recruitment Practices: Diversity Initiatives
Recruitment Practices: Framework
Recruitment Practices: Leveraging Networks
Recruitment Practices: Private Sector
Recruitment Practices: Public Sector
Recruitment Practices: Recruiting on LinkedIn
Recruitment Practices: Understanding
Recruitment Practices: Comparison Framework
Recruitment Practices: Interviews
Recruitment Practices: EU Regulations
Recruitment Practices: Hiring Restrictions
Recruitment Practices: Gender Disparities
Recruitment Practices: Responsibility

Table 3 Subgroup Code Sample 1

Diversity Practices

Diversity Practices: Comparative Analysis
Diversity Practices: Comparing Practices
Diversity Practices: Comparing Diversity Initiatives
Diversity Practices: Engaging
Diversity Practices: Diversity Initiatives
Diversity Practices: Understanding
Diversity Practices: Framework
Diversity Practices: Public Sector
Diversity Practices: Private Sector
Diversity Practices: Recruitment Practices
Diversity Practices: Challenges

Table 4 Subgroup Code Sample 2

Public Sector Practices

Public Sector Practices: Targeted Recruitment
Public Sector Practices: Diversity Training
Public Sector Practices: Public Sector Diversity Practices
Public Sector Practices: Dutch speaking
Public Sector Practices: Inconsistency within the government
Public Sector Practices: Gender Neutral
Public Sector Practices: Communications
Public Sector Practices: Cultural Diversity
Public Sector Practices: Changes within the Organization
Public Sector Practices: Competency-based

Public Sector Practices: Best Practices
Public Sector Practices: Bias Mitigation

Table 5 Subgroup Code Sample 3

Private Sector Practices

Private Sector Practices: Employee Referrals
Private Sector Practices: Unconscious Bias
Training
Private Sector Practices: Mentorship
Programs
Private Sector Practices: Recruitment
Agencies
Private Sector Practices: Business
Relationship

Table 6 Subgroup Code Sample 4

After coding all transcripts via the mentioned codes, a review of codes such as recruitment practices, diversity initiatives, comparing diversity initiatives, diversity practices: public sector, recruitment practices: private sector, etc. gave an insight into each organization's recruitment practices and applied diversity initiatives. The result was 8 frameworks containing sections such as Focus Areas, Recruitment Practices, Diversity Initiatives, Defining Diversity, Measuring Diversity Success, Benefits of Diversity, Challenges, Best Practices, and Additional Insights.

The following section presents the detailed findings derived from these frameworks, offering a comprehensive analysis of the recruitment practices and diversity initiatives across the different organizations.

Findings

General recruitment processes

Across these eight frameworks, we see a variety of general recruitment processes. Most organizations follow a multi-stage approach involving screening, multiple rounds of interviews, and final selections (Frameworks 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8). The number of stages often depends on the role's complexity and the company's size, and also some prioritize filling vacancies with existing internal candidates (Frameworks 6 and 3). Organizations demonstrate vastly different approaches to diversity. Some put significant effort into actively building a diverse workforce (Frameworks 2, 4, 6, 8), while others maintain a primary focus on skills and motivation (Frameworks 1, 3, 5). To achieve their diversity goals, they employ tactics like targeted recruitment efforts, inclusive job advertisement, and unconscious bias training (Frameworks 3, 4, 6, 8). Several key takeaways emerge from these frameworks. Firstly, recruitment is not a one-size-fits-all process and needs tailoring to the organization's specific needs. Secondly, interviewees expressed that building a

diverse workforce carries substantial benefits, including fresh perspectives, enhanced problem-solving, and better societal representation, however, it is a long-term process (Frameworks 2, 4, 6,7, 8).

Interview/Framework Number	Sample Quotation
5 (private)	<i>“We don't really care about who they are or where they come from as long as they have some sort of criteria for their work” (Speaker 1, p2)</i>
1 (private)	<i>“I think it's an organic process with us. ... we hire people who are most enthusiastic ...” (Speaker 1, p2)</i>
8 (public)	<i>“The main goal is to reach more ethnically diverse people working for police... and the reason we chose to do so is that we want to represent all kinds of people working in the police” (Speaker 1, p3)</i>
4 (private)	<i>“It [diversity] is about a long-term change of the culture within the organization.” (Speaker 2, p5)</i>

Table 7 Sample Quotes for General Recruitment Process

The general recruitment process across the frameworks begins with identifying a hiring need. This need might stem from company growth, employees leaving, internal restructuring, or simply because the organization needs more diverse talent. Once the need is established, a thorough job analysis is conducted, resulting in a detailed job description outlining the essential skills, responsibilities, and experience required for the role. Some organizations start by prioritizing internal promotions, giving existing employees the chance to advance (Frameworks 3 and 6). Job postings are then advertised across various platforms, including the company's website, job boards, and social media (Frameworks 1, 2, 3, 5, 6). To reach specific talent pools, organizations might partner with recruitment agencies (Frameworks 1, 5). Additionally, leveraging the organization's professional network for referrals and recommendations plays a role in broadening the candidate pool (Framework 2, 5). Furthermore, some companies utilize Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to manage and streamline their recruitment efforts (Framework 5).

The next stage is screening applicants. Resumes are carefully reviewed to assess if candidates meet the basic job requirements. To minimize bias, some companies opt for anonymized resume reviews during this initial stage (Framework 4). Often, a phone/online screen serves as the first point of contact, allowing recruiters to gauge the candidate's interest and general suitability for the role. Interviews are usually a multi-stage process, typically involving two or more rounds (Frameworks 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8). Depending on the role, recruiters may incorporate technical assessments (Framework 7). To ensure objectivity and minimize bias, they may also utilize competency-based questions across interviews (Framework 4, 6). Many companies emphasize cultural fit, seeking candidates who align with their organizational values (Framework 1, 2, 7, 8). Then, interviewers collaborate to discuss candidates and determine the best fit. Ultimately, the selected candidate enters into negotiations concerning salary, benefits, and start date.

Not all organizations go through all stages. This is a general framework of an organization's recruitment process.

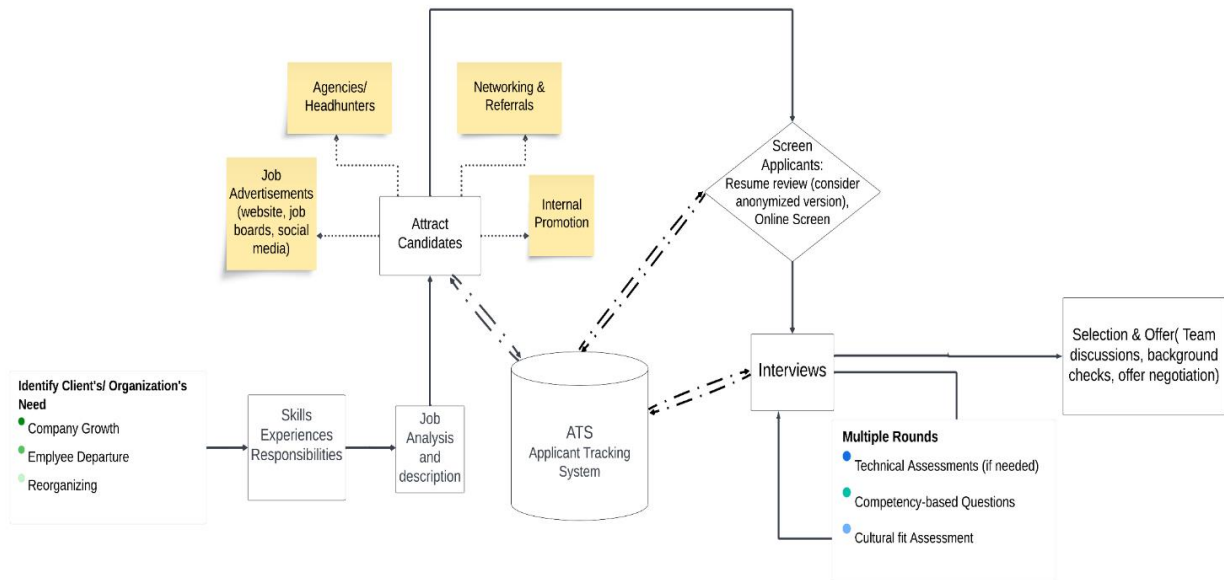


Figure 1 General Recruitment Process.

Public Sector Practices

In some public sector organizations, diversity recruitment is essential for creating representative workforces that reflect the communities they serve (Framework 8). Moreover, in organizations such as the Dutch police, negative media portrayal and the lack of highly competitive salaries have intensified the need for proactive recruitment measures. Others state that employee shortage is the main motive for recruiting a diverse workforce (Framework 1, 6). As a result, waiting for applications has shifted to a proactive approach such as actively seeking candidates at schools, community events, and through targeted outreach efforts (Framework 8). This approach has allowed organizations to engage with a wider range of potential candidates, particularly those from underrepresented groups.

“...nowadays, the work field is completely different. So, we have to look for them and we have to arrange meetings where they can get their information. We really have to be present at schools and events”(Interview 8, Speaker1, p1)

The police (framework 8) have the most thorough selection process, spanning approximately 8 months and involving assessments to evaluate fitness, psychological suitability, and background checks. Initial interviews are mainly about motivation and information exchange rather than traditional job interviews. For other public sector organizations, it is like the conventional recruitment process: analyzing resumes and applicants' capabilities, multiple rounds of interviews, and negotiating salary. For technical positions, at least one round of interviews is dedicated to assessing candidates' technical skills and suitability for the organization's specific

needs. For such positions, a technical specialist collaborates alongside the manager and HR. One interviewee noted that sometimes HR departments filter based on rigid criteria instead of recognizing valuable experience, which can block qualified candidates early in the process (Framework 7).

“... an HR person is not the suitable person to do the selection... because the professional one can say if it's suitable or not....”(Interview 8, Speaker1, p1)

A considerable note in some public organizations is that vacancies are prioritized for internal candidates (Framework 3 and 6), especially those affected by reorganizations. Depending on the organization, they first share open positions internally. They give priority to employees whose jobs were eliminated due to reorganization. If they do not fill the position internally, they then post it externally.

“... if your job ceases to exist, then I'm talking about reorganization practices. So if because of that, you will lose your job, then you are put into that pool...”(Interview 7, Speaker 1, p1)

Each public organization presents various motives for attracting diverse applicants. A diverse police force builds stronger community relationships, making people feel safer to approach them and giving them a better understanding of the communities served (Framework 8). An organization specializing in infrastructure development (Framework 7) may have the motive to increase a positive public image and recruit highly skilled workers while being vastly diverse and inclusive. A higher education institute (Framework 3) leverages new ideas for innovation and learning, and a ministry (Framework 6) is driven by diversity initiatives due to anticipated employee shortages and aims to build a healthier and more equitable work environment. Therefore, different motives have resulted in a variety of diversity recruitment strategies and other diversity initiatives. Additionally, more conditions exist for applicants' recruitment in the public sector. Dutch language proficiency is a requirement for most public organizations (Framework 6,7, 8), with some also having Dutch nationality as an additional prerequisite (Framework 8). Moreover, public organizations focus on certain groups to increase their diverse workforce. One emphasizes recruiting individuals with a distance from the labor market (Framework 6), and the other one focuses on reaching more ethnically diverse people to better represent the communities they serve (Framework 8) and even has a target of 35% of the ethnical diverse workforce in its employee composition. As a result, motives and specific requirements direct organizations' diversity practices.

Interview Number	Sample Quotations
6	<i>“Dutch is our primary language...and it's mandatory to fulfill the role.”(Speaker 1, p5)</i>
6	<i>“...there's going to be in the next coming years a shortage of employees.”(Speaker 1, p4)</i>

8	<i>“... the main goal, within diversity and inclusion is to reach more ethnically diverse people. And there's even a goal of 35% mentioned, that's quite a lot.”(Speaker 1, p3)</i>
8	<i>“... we understand what's happening inside the role better if we represent every single culture living in the city.” (Speaker 1, p3)</i>

Table 8 Sample Quotes for Public Organization

Public Sector Diversity Initiatives

Organizations that need a more diverse workforce, implement targeted recruitment (Framework 8). For example, to reach the 35% target, the Dutch police attend community events like a Turkish festival to connect with potential candidates. Moreover, initiatives like having a referral bonus for people advocating for the police to attract diverse talents and engaging with schools and events to ensure visibility and awareness of career opportunities within the police force to broaden the pool of applicants, are also in place. Meanwhile, another interviewee feels their organization attracts a diverse pool of applicants, but during the selection process, people from underrepresented groups are favored (Framework 7).

“I think what they do is not attracting them [diverse applicants] but selecting them... and because they need more women to have more balance or to get a certificate and be proud, and more companies do that...” (Interview 7, Speaker 1, p4)

However, the most practiced initiatives are inclusive job advertisements and diversity training (Framework 3, 6, 8). Public organizations have realized that people from different backgrounds react positively to inclusive job advertisements. This means using gender-neutral language, inclusive imagery, and design elements. Moreover, they communicate the importance of this practice to people in the HR sector and those responsible for hiring procedures. Furthermore, they provide training and workshops regarding diversity recruitment practices and unconscious bias to most levels of organizations ranging from HR professionals to senior leadership. However, organizations with thorough diversity and inclusion guidelines may still lack in effectively implementing them (Framework 3). Additionally, all workshops in all organizations are optional, which may cause challenges in communicating the message. Professionals believe diversity initiatives are disadvantageous without interactive presentations on diversity recruitment practices and consistent policies across the organization (Framework 3). Moreover, they believe that hiring for the sake of representation without true diversity of thought can be counterproductive. Despite this, organizations with more spotlight on diversity initiatives (such as the police) have special programs to train cops about ethnic profiling. However, all interviewees mentioned they struggle with positive discrimination. This means they encounter resistance from those who do not understand the benefits of D&I initiatives and realize constant communication on the “why” of such practices is crucial (Framework 8). Furthermore, organizations have also prepared an environment such as gender-neutral restrooms, participation in Gay Pride, and social events with a platform for employees with different backgrounds to share their experiences (Framework 3, 6, 7), to show their dedication to diversity and inclusion.

Interview Number	Sample Quotations
6	<i>“...from the vacancy to everything that we promote, has had like a filter of how to write inclusive, which photos to use to which colors ...” (Speaker 1, P4)</i>
6	<i>“We provide training workshops throughout the organization. So, from the higher level, to like, throughout all levels. within the organization everybody that has to deal with recruitment, so HR professionals to Director General, staff and everything in between.” (Speaker 1, P2)</i>
3	<i>“I think what you see is you have a D&I officer from the central team... and then they discuss the ideas that take place in their own faculty because from what I've seen up until now, it's fairly shattered...” (Speaker 1, P2)</i>
3	<i>“...you could send somebody a PDF with information [D&I guideline]...and probably nothing will happen. So now, we are also asking the central recruitment team like ... can you maybe give a presentation about it so that it becomes more vivid for supervisors...” (Speaker 2, P3)</i>
8	<i>“... with ethnic profiling, they are having training to really do it the right way... we are working hard to change the people who are working at the police now to become more inclusive ...” (Speaker 1, P7)</i>
8	<i>“We're saying that every single person needs to understand why we are making an effort and how this works...” (Speaker 1, P8)</i>

Table 9 Sample Quotes for Public Organization

Fairness throughout the recruitment process is essential to diversity practices. Initiatives differ depending on the nature of the organization and the position. For extensive assessments such as those required by the Dutch police, pre-employment support helps maximize candidates' chances of success. A focus on equity ensures that all applicants receive equal treatment once they start working, with supervisors trained to respect cultural differences (Framework 8).

“... during the assessment, we have psychologists who are doing the assessment and they are trained to see cultural differences.” (Interview 8, Speaker 1, P4)

Moreover, objective assessments, such as structured interviews with trained assessors, help mitigate bias and ensure fairness in candidate selection (Framework 7).

“... that's why I said three [three technical recruiters]. So, we have three technical recruiters who get the feeling about that. And then you can be sure about your decision...”. (Interview 7, Speaker 1, P4)

Notably, as mentioned by the interviewee from the ministry (Framework 6), diversity mandates and policies can catalyze change, even if they do not fully address the underlying issues. While ideally, diversity initiatives should stem from within an organization, mandates can act as a trigger, particularly for older leaders who may be less naturally inclined toward diversity. Although these mandates may sometimes seem like a negative incentive, they can spark a shift in leadership's perspective and ultimately contribute to a more inclusive organizational culture (Framework 6).

Finally, an interviewee mentioned that the best hiring practice is primarily based on assessed skills and competencies. Competency-based assessment involves questions focusing on a maximum of five (ideally three) core competencies with predefined scoring throughout the assessments to intentionally downsize applicants' backgrounds (Framework 6).

“...we use this inclusive way of selection and we downsize [questions] to a maximum of five competencies, and we're trying to minimize it to three... we just ask the same questions, and we score throughout the conversation on the competencies.” (Interview 6, Speaker 1, P9)

Challenges and Barriers in Public Organizations

Measuring the success of diversity recruitment efforts has been challenging for organizations. Organizations focus on the combined impact of various initiatives, believing that the collective efforts will shift organizational image and attract more diverse candidates. Tracking and analyzing results from recruitment events help identify which outreach activities are most effective in attracting diverse talent (Framework 8). Some do not measure the effectiveness and express that the higher managers believe it might create a bias (Framework 3). Some interviewees were not aware of any measurement in this regard. Furthermore, they all believe gathering information about individuals' backgrounds is difficult due to privacy and disclaimer requirements. However, they all believe it is necessary to establish baselines to track the effectiveness of initiatives.

Challenges in diversity recruitment however hinder the progress of diversity initiatives. For police forces, nationality requirements and regulations like the headscarf ban, which can intensify the negative image, can severely limit the diversity of the applicant pool. Additionally, such organizations require a strong internal sense of public service motivation, potentially narrowing the applicant pool (Framework 8). In technical hiring, HR departments sometimes act as a roadblock by filtering candidates too rigidly and it can lead to overlooking valuable experience. There is also the risk that companies prioritize diversity image over the true creation of an inclusive culture. Moreover, societal biases, such as invasive questions towards women (i.e. maternity leave, etc.) or discrimination against those wearing religious attire remain

problematic (Framework 8). Professionals also have mentioned a fragmented approach to diversity and inclusion, with inconsistent efforts across faculties and a lack of centralized, diversity-specific recruitment programs. For example, in higher education institutes, many supervisors come from academic backgrounds with limited HR experience, including best practices for inclusive hiring. Interviewees also mentioned cultural resistance to mandatory training, even for beneficial programs like unconscious bias awareness, exists within Dutch organizations (Framework 3). Finally, in organizations with a broader recruitment focus, staff turnover disrupts the continuity of diversity efforts (Framework 6). The interviewee noted that changes in teams or managers can disrupt ongoing diversity efforts, and leave individuals to manage their work independently. This sudden absence of support can cause employees to feel excluded.

Interview Number	Sample Quotations
6	<i>“I think the biggest challenge is to keep them ...” (Speaker 2, P5)</i>
8	<i>“The government also decided that especially women can't wear hijab or something when working in the uniform, so that's also something that we already know is making it harder to attract diverse people” (Speaker 1, P 6)</i>
7	<i>“...nobody asks a man how are you gonna manage a full-time job and three kids. But it's a standard question, no matter where you come from, they ask the woman that even in the Netherlands.” (Speaker 1, P2)</i>
6	<i>“...the biggest issues arise when people with a distance to the labor market are employed. And after one year there's no job coach anymore.” (Speaker 1, P7)</i>

Table 10 Sample Quotes for Public Organization

Private Sector Practices

In the private sector, organizations' missions, goals, vacancies specific qualifications, and their diversity motives drive diversity recruitment practices. Several companies mentioned finding the most enthusiastic and motivated candidates, prioritizes their selection. They center the interview process on connecting with the applicants' personality and drive (Framework 1 and 2). However, it is worth mentioning that this approach is mostly for jobs that do not require technical and organizational skills. For example, for warehouse jobs, the interviewee mentioned that enthusiasm is the main determinant of candidate selection, and this has resulted in positive experiences with refugees, who often displayed higher enthusiasm (Framework 1). Moreover, the interviewee from an NGO mentioned their main goal for selection is to create a sense of belonging within a community of like-minded individuals who may feel isolated in 'individualistic' Western cultures (Framework 2). The interviews revealed a spectrum of approaches to workplace diversity. The interviewees emphasized finding the best overall candidates and valuing passion and potential. This focus naturally has led to increased diversity,

particularly in warehouse environments as enthusiasm seemed more prevalent in underrepresented groups.

Interview Number	Sample Quotation
1	<i>"...we hire people who are most enthusiastic.."</i> (Speaker 1, p2)
2	<i>"... especially in the West, people sometimes get too detached from each other because of the individualistic cultures."</i> (Speaker 2, P2)

Table 11 Sample Quotes for Private Organization

Conversely, the interviewee from a D&I recruitment agency (Framework 4) demonstrates a targeted approach to diversity recruitment. They specialize in designing inclusive hiring processes, including competency-based scoring, anonymized screening, and structured interviews. The foundation of this agency is designing hiring processes that minimize bias while emphasizing core competencies. They specialize in transforming the recruitment process to be more objective and inclusive at every stage. They primarily work as consultants, advising external organizations- mostly public organizations- in implementing inclusive hiring practices. Their internal recruitment process mirrors the services they offer to their clients. This organization helps clients address two specific hiring challenges. Firstly, they assist clients who struggle to attract diverse talent. These clients often have homogenous teams (primarily white males) and want to expand their reach to include people of color, those with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community. Secondly, they help fill difficult-to-source roles, and step in when clients have been unsuccessful with traditional recruitment methods. They advise clients to design job descriptions that avoid biased language, and instead focus on 5 essential competencies needed for the position. The interviewee mentioned that the ideal process would replace traditional CVs and cover letters with short competency-based questionnaires. Moreover, initial candidate evaluation is based solely on the answers to those competency-based questions. Names and demographic information are withheld to minimize the influence of unconscious bias. Then, clients are encouraged to use standardized interviews where every candidate faces the same set of pre-determined questions. These questions provide a deeper exploration of the competencies outlined initially. Meanwhile, a scoring template is created before interviews begin, outlining criteria for different competency levels (e.g., scoring 1, 2, or 3). This template provides a consistent evaluation framework for all hiring team members. Notably, the organization stresses the importance of including diverse viewpoints within the hiring team itself to combat unconscious biases. Remarkably, the organization understands that some clients may not be ready for a complete overhaul of their processes. Therefore, they offer flexibility, allowing clients to adopt elements gradually. This could include using competency questions alongside classic resumes, or maintaining a slightly less strict interview structure while still striving for consistency and some degree of standardized scoring.

Interview Number	Sample Quotation
4	<i>"...we help them to write the vacancy text more inclusive by only asking five key competencies and to ask questions around</i>

that, to tell us if candidates have these competencies.” (Speaker 2, P2)
“Before the talk, you set the questions that you want to ask which are usually two to three questions that you have already asked but then you zoom in more in-depth during the talk.” (Speaker 2, P2)

Table 12 Sample Quotes for Private Organization

On the contrary, another recruiter from a recruitment agency does not focus on diversity while screening applicants. This recruitment agency primarily focuses on fulfilling specific client needs, with an emphasis on specialized technical skills.

“It’s specific to what we need not really about ethnicity or stuff like that.” (Interview 5, Speaker 1, P2)

While they acknowledge gender disparities in engineering positions and try to address them where possible, diversity largely depends on whether the client prioritizes it. This recruiter’s main objective is to establish partnerships with companies to understand their specific hiring needs and find and place suitable candidates for those client-defined roles. The recruiter mentioned that the client’s job qualifications likely include a mix of “must-have” and “nice-to-have” skills. Those with additional “nice-to-have” qualifications might receive higher consideration. This agency prioritizes matching a candidate’s skills and experience to the client’s outlined criteria, and background and ethnicity play a less significant role in selecting and screening candidates. Furthermore, the interviewee focuses on placing backend engineers, revealing a niche technical specialization, meaning, client-defined needs ultimately determine the characteristics the agency will target in their search. As a result, diversity does not appear to be a formalized goal within the agency, and managers do not seem to emphasize diversity-focused targets when discussing hiring strategies. Notably, it was also mentioned that their clients have restricted themselves to Dutch law restrictions of hiring those possessing Dutch passports or those from within the EU. This regulation presents a potential barrier that impacts the ability to achieve a more diverse candidate pool.

Interview Number	Sample Quotation
5	<i>“In our field, there aren’t many females... they are scarce but they’re also really wanted... they usually are invited more than men with the same experience.” (Speaker 2, P4)</i>
5	<i>“I always have to think in terms of what the client wants...” (Speaker 1, P5)</i>

Table 13 Sample Quotes for Private Organization

Conversely to public sector organizations, while asking about the organizations’ definition of diversity, they mentioned they do not care about candidates’ backgrounds as long as they possess the necessary qualifications. If diversity is currently the case in the organization, it is a natural incident (Framework 1,2,4,5). For example, the interviewee from the D&I recruitment agency

(Framework 5) mentioned that good inclusive hiring practices organically attract more diverse talent, and the goal is to identify the best fit based on skills, not on demographic factors. Therefore, it is also a way to tackle positive discrimination because

“... you attract automatically more candidates than you do usually with the traditional way of hiring and selection ...” (Interview 4, Speaker 2, P8)

The most notable thing this interviewee mentioned is that diversity initiatives are beyond just recruitment and a holistic organizational effort is required to build an inclusive environment. Therefore, they encourage companies to treat D&I efforts as an ongoing project, not a one-time fix. As a result, they believe that, in addition to this long-term mindset, inclusive leadership is vital to talent retention.

“...the most important thing is that you need inclusive leadership. Because once you have attracted a diverse talent ... the next question is how you keep them.” (Interview 4, Speaker 2, P8)

Moreover, it is crucial to take guidance from those the initiatives aim to help and remain open to feedback and critique. The organization's commitment is also reflected in how they communicate internally and externally.

Benefits and Challenges

Interviewees mentioned employee satisfaction, better financial performance, increased innovation, and a better reflection of the target market as benefits of having a diverse workforce (Framework 2, 4). Furthermore, the interviewee from the NGO mentioned that having diverse participants in the NGO creates a mutual learning situation where everyone learns and expands their viewpoints, and these diverse passions and perspectives lead to a wider range of unique ideas (Framework 2). The most interesting takeaway is when asked about diversity benefits, the interviewee from the manufacturing company mentioned that being open to diverse talents has helped them with labor shortages other companies face:

“... we don't have any problems filling our positions.” (Speaker 1, p5)

However, it is worth mentioning, that due to European guidelines, some organizations have mandates to increase the representation of specific groups. For example, the mentioned company (Framework 1) has a target of 25% women in leadership roles, but due to the nature of work, it is a hard duty to fill. In addition, it is important to note that they recruit for different departments, such as the office and warehouse where recruitment practices differ for each. For office recruitment, it is a normal recruitment process, but for the warehouse, the company develops partnerships with logistics schools and government agencies that assist former refugees in broadening their candidate pool.

These variations in recruitment practices underscore the broader differences between public and private sector approaches, particularly in how they implement diversity recruitment practices and tailor their strategies to departmental needs.

Discussion

Public vs. Private

Public and private sector organizations both recognize the value of a diverse workforce, yet the stage in which they apply diversity initiatives in recruitment and their motivations often differ. The public sector is driven by a mission to represent the communities they serve and tends to have a more formalized and structured approach. This includes proactive outreach to underrepresented groups, extensive assessments, and a focus on specific skills and competencies. However, they may face challenges like strict regulations, negative public image, and internal resistance to change. While both sectors seek skilled candidates, the private sector primarily focuses on talent acquisition to fulfill specific organizations' and clients' needs. They prioritize skills and experience over demographic factors, and diversity is not always a formalized goal. Some organizations acknowledge the benefits of diversity for innovation and problem-solving, but it is not always the driving force behind their recruitment strategies.

Despite these differences, both sectors utilize inclusive job advertisements and diversity training to foster welcoming workplaces. Both also grapple with measuring the success of diversity initiatives and overcoming unconscious bias in the hiring process. A key distinction is that the public sector often prioritizes internal candidates and may have strict language and nationality requirements, while the private sector's diversity efforts vary greatly depending on company size, industry, and the need for skilled workers. Some private companies may even specialize in diversity recruitment, and offer consulting services to other organizations seeking to improve their diversity practices.

Feature	Public Sector	Private Sector
Primary Motivation	Primarily driven by a desire to represent the communities they serve, anticipated employee shortages in the future, and comply with legal mandates. Often focused on specific underrepresented groups.	Driven by a mix of factors, including talent acquisition, innovation, and social responsibility. The focus is often on finding the best overall candidates, with diversity as a secondary consideration.
Approach	Often more formal and structured, with a focus on standardized processes and compliance. May involve targeted outreach to specific underrepresented groups.	More flexible and adaptable, with a focus on finding the best fit for the role. Diversity recruitment may be more opportunistic and less structured.

Recruitment Practices	Emphasizes proactive recruitment through community events, schools, and targeted outreach. The selection process may involve extensive assessments and focus on specific skills and competencies.	Relies more on traditional recruitment methods like job postings and LinkedIn. The selection process may be more focused on enthusiasm, cultural fit, and potential.
Challenges	Faces challenges like strict regulations, negative public image, and resistance to change. May struggle with positive discrimination and unconscious bias.	May lack formal diversity targets and struggle with measuring the impact of initiatives. May be influenced by client demands and industry-specific biases.
Additional Consideration	Often prioritizes internal candidates and may have strict language and nationality requirements.	Diversity efforts may vary greatly depending on company size, industry, and the need for skilled workers. Some companies may specialize in diversity recruitment and offer consulting services to other organizations.

Table 14 The difference in diversity recruitment practices in the public and private sectors

However, the main difference lies in the primary motivation behind diversity recruitment. The public sector is primarily driven by a desire to better represent society, often with specific mandates to increase the representation of underrepresented groups, and also anticipated employee shortages in the future. The private sector, on the other hand, prioritizes finding candidates with the right skills and experience to meet specific business needs, with diversity being a secondary consideration.

Drivers of Differences

Private Sector

In the private sector, the organization's needs drive recruitment practices and therefore, diversity initiatives. Based on the professionals' experiences and perspectives, their recruitment practices and therefore, diversity initiatives, are driven by what the organization or their company client requires. They state that generally, the client/organization's main driver is to fill their vacancy and find the best fit for the organization. Their recruitment process is the general process of crafting the vacancy text, analyzing resumes, screening applicants, a couple of rounds of interviews, and making a contract. If an organization is diverse, it is the byproduct of its organizational motive for recruitment: finding the most qualified person to fill the vacancy.

However, even organizations in the private sector sometimes only hire people with Dutch/EU passports, which can reduce diversity and inclusion within the organization. Nevertheless, due to fewer restrictions, such as proficiency in the Dutch language and having Dutch nationality, they attract more diverse talents (Figure 2).

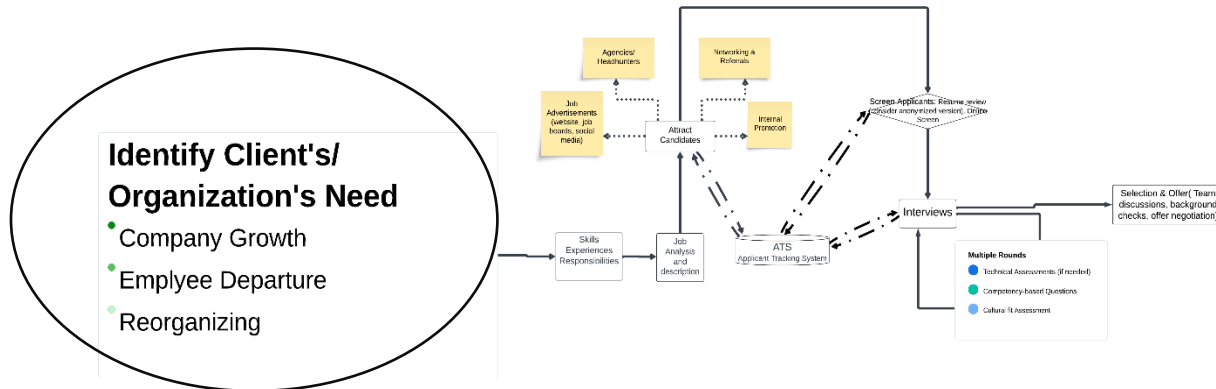


Figure 2 The main driver of diversity initiatives in the private sector

Public Sector

In the public sector, on the other hand, diversity initiatives mainly happen in the attracting applicant stage. Organization’s needs indeed determine how and why public organizations target applicants, but the main diversity initiatives occur in the attraction step. At this stage, they set campaigns to be more visible to applicants, attend festivals, and are mindful of how they present themselves to the external world. They engage with the community and promote representation by hosting events to engage with diverse communities and build trust. By ensuring that the workforce reflects the diversity of the community it serves, organizations strengthen their connections and understanding of community needs. Moreover, one of their major focuses is on inclusive recruitment and training workshops. Public organizations aim to conduct training sessions for employees at all levels, ensuring they understand and implement diversity and inclusion principles in recruitment processes. They also focus on inclusive communication and practices. This includes using specialists to ensure that job vacancy descriptions, promotional materials, and all communication within the organization are inclusive in language, images, and colors. This approach aims to attract a diverse pool of candidates and foster a sense of belonging among existing employees. However, decentralized programs and optional workshops may reduce the effectiveness of diversity initiatives.

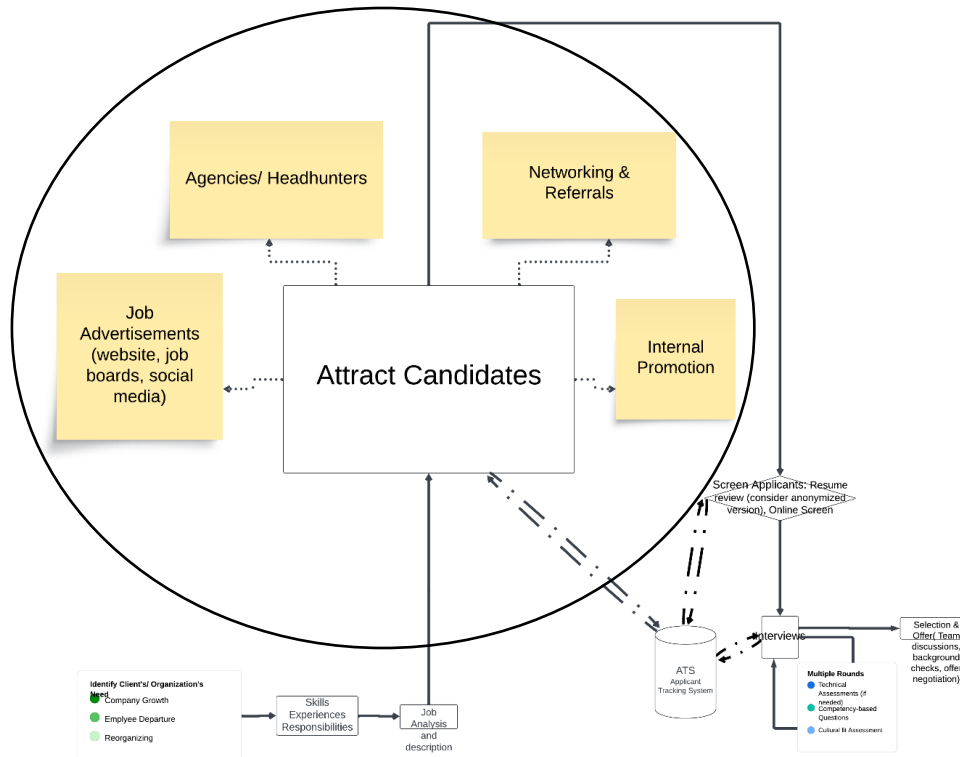


Figure 3 The main driver of diversity initiatives in the public sector

Benefits and Challenges

Diversity in the public sector brings a multitude of benefits. Diverse teams foster creativity and innovation by bringing together individuals with varying perspectives, experiences, and problem-solving approaches. This leads to enhanced productivity and more effective solutions. Furthermore, employees who feel seen, heard, and included in a diverse workplace report higher job satisfaction, which translates to improved performance and a more positive workplace culture. This is particularly important in the public sector, where employee engagement and commitment are crucial for delivering quality services. Diversity also strengthens the connection between public sector organizations and the communities they serve. A workforce that reflects the diversity of the population can better understand and address the needs of different groups, leading to increased trust and improved relationships. Moreover, the presence of diverse perspectives challenges assumptions and biases, and that leads to more robust and well-rounded solutions. This is particularly valuable in the public sector, where decisions often have far-reaching consequences. Finally, diversity enriches the workplace by fostering cultural understanding and awareness. Interactions with colleagues from different backgrounds provide opportunities for learning and growth which creates a more inclusive and accepting environment. This contributes to a more positive workplace culture and can lead to greater organizational success.

With consideration of all the benefits of having a diverse workforce, there are still challenges that hinder the progress of diversity initiatives. Retaining and integrating employees from diverse backgrounds poses a significant challenge for public sector organizations. This is particularly true for individuals with a distance from the labor market, who may require ongoing support and understanding to thrive in the workplace. Integrating these individuals into existing teams can also be difficult, as differences in communication styles and cultural backgrounds can lead to misunderstandings. Moreover, changes in team members or management can further disrupt established support systems, making integration even more challenging. This can be one of the main reasons that scholars increasingly explore ways to integrate diverse individuals into organizations.

Notably, external factors like negative public image and economic conditions can also hinder diversity efforts. Negative media portrayals can deter potential candidates from diverse backgrounds, while discrimination within organizations can undermine trust. Economic factors, such as low salaries in the public sector, can make it more challenging to attract and retain top talent from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, organizations such as the police need to work on improving the image they project to the public. While targeted outreach and extensive diversity initiatives may increase applicant attraction, these efforts will not be successful without addressing the underlying reasons for repulsion. Effective DEI initiatives must go beyond superficial measures to be truly impactful.

Furthermore, effective communication and raising awareness are also crucial. It can be difficult to communicate the importance of diversity and inclusion to those who do not see the need for it, or understand its benefits. Discussing sensitive topics like unconscious bias can be met with defensiveness or denial, necessitating a thoughtful approach. There is a clear need for increased awareness of the challenges faced by diverse employees and training on fostering inclusivity.

Therefore, to fully leverage the benefits of diversity, organizations must foster inclusion, ensuring that diverse perspectives are valued and integrated into decision-making processes (Ashikali et al., 2021). The shift from diversity management to inclusion reflects the understanding that organizations need to create inclusive environments to leverage diversity's benefits. In inclusive environments, individuals of all backgrounds are treated fairly, valued for their unique identities, and included in decision-making processes (Nishii, 2013). Shore & Chung (2022) emphasize the importance of understanding the leader's influence on individual experiences of inclusion. While diversity initiatives aim to create a workforce that mirrors society's demographics, the focus now shifts toward integrating and utilizing this diverse workforce effectively. However, despite efforts like diversity training and structural changes, true inclusion where the full potential of diverse employees is realized, remains a challenge (Sabharwal, 2014). Downey et al. (2015) suggest that individuals perceiving themselves as having insider access to decision-making processes will be more receptive to the positive effects of diversity practices. Therefore, as mentioned by professionals, diversity and inclusion is an ongoing, long-term process, and cannot be achieved by just one time or even multiple efforts within organizations. It requires inclusive leadership, consistently increasing cultural awareness,

and including diverse employees' opinions in decision-making and problem-solving dynamics of diversity and inclusion efforts.

Conclusion

This study makes several contributions to diversity management literature, addressing gaps in empirical evidence and providing nuanced insights into sector-specific practices. Firstly, it offers crucial empirical support for diversity practices in both public and private sectors. Scholars such as Alhejji et al. (2016), Boyne et al. (1999), Roberson (2006), and Scott et al. (2011) have noted that while the business case for diversity is widely accepted, there is a need for more empirical evidence, particularly in the public sector. This study responds to this call by documenting specific practices through interviews with field professionals. For instance, in the public sector, the research reveals that organizations like the Dutch police engage in targeted community outreach, such as attending Turkish festivals, to attract diverse candidates. In contrast, private sector firms focus more on skill-based recruitment, prioritizing candidates' abilities over demographic factors.

The study challenges prevailing notions about motivations for diversity in the public sector. While existing literature often emphasizes social justice as the primary driver, this research reveals more complex motivations. Public organizations view diversity not just as a matter of social justice, but as a means to enhance organizational efficiency and address anticipated workforce shortages. As one interviewee from a ministry stated, "*There's going to be in the next coming years a shortage of employees.*" This finding adds depth to the understanding of public sector motivations. Moreover, Roberson (2019) and Köllen (2021) noted that the effectiveness of diversity staffing varies across social categories, warranting further research. This study confirms their assertion, adding that public sector organizations focus more on ethnic and gender representation to meet community needs.

Furthermore, the research provides insights into how labor market dynamics influence diversity practices, expanding on Baert et al.'s (2015) work on discrimination in occupations without recruitment difficulties. The study reveals that private sector organizations facing recruitment challenges, particularly for lower-skilled positions, are more likely to embrace diversity. For example, one interviewee noted that their company has no problems filling warehouse positions due to their openness to hiring diverse candidates, including former refugees. It is undeniable that a highly-skilled worker, regardless of their background, is chosen for a position due to their competency. However, this also suggests that if a position is not difficult to fill, discrimination could prevail. This raises important questions about the relationship between job skill levels and diversity initiatives, potentially extending current theoretical understanding.

The study also identifies specific implementation challenges, particularly in the public sector. Despite successful diverse recruitment, many public organizations face high turnover rates. As one interviewee from the police force stated, "*The main goal is to reach more ethnically diverse people... but we are working hard to change the people who are working at the police now to*

become more inclusive." This finding underscores the limitations of numerical targets, as suggested by McKay and Avery (2005), and emphasizes the need for comprehensive inclusion strategies beyond mere recruitment. As McKay and Avery (2005) mention, mandates (such as requiring 35% of the police workforce to have an ethnic background) often lead to superficial numerical targets without addressing underlying racial conditions within organizations, resulting in high turnover rates. This assertion is supported by interviewees who identified high turnover as a primary challenge in public sector organizations. Many noted that while attracting candidates is not an issue, retaining them is. This suggests that, in addition to setting numerical targets, organizations must investigate the root causes of high turnover and develop comprehensive plans for employee inclusion. Additionally, Pitts et al. (2010) argue that changing workforce demographics drive public sector organizations to focus more on diversity initiatives. Interviewees agreed, noting that demographic shifts in communities and the workforce make diversity crucial for fostering an inclusive and equitable working environment. To provide the best services to a diverse community, service providers must reflect the community they serve. Therefore, organizations should implement effective diversity initiatives to ensure their workforce can meet these needs. This issue also supports scholars' beliefs that public sector organizations often prioritize diversity for symbolic and legitimate reasons. Weak initiatives for including employees lead to low job satisfaction and high turnover, making their motives appear symbolic. However, many professionals believe that diversity and inclusion are crucial in public organizations because effectively managing them directly impacts organizational success.

Additionally, the research highlights how organizational structure impacts diversity efforts. It reveals that decentralized approaches in public institutions can lead to inconsistencies in diversity initiatives. An interviewee from a higher education institution noted, "*What you see is you have a D&I officer from the central team... and then they discuss the ideas that take place in their own faculty... it's fairly shattered.*" This contribution adds a crucial structural dimension to diversity management literature, emphasizing the need for coordinated efforts across large public organizations. In contrast, the study showcases how private sector organizations' adaptability can lead to innovative diversity practices. For instance, an organization specializing in DEI initiatives developed a novel approach to diversity recruitment based on competency-based assessments and interviews. This finding enhances our understanding of sector-specific approaches to diversity management and highlights the potential for innovation in the private sector. However, while flexibility generally benefits inclusion by allowing for rapid and innovative practices, it requires careful management to ensure consistent and equitable application across the organization. This nuanced understanding highlights the need for a strategic approach to flexibility in diversity initiatives.

The research also provides empirical support for recent literature emphasizing the shift from diversity management to fostering inclusion (Ashikali et al., 2021; Nishii, 2013; Shore & Chung, 2022). Public sector professionals consistently emphasized that diversity and inclusion is an ongoing, long-term process requiring consistent effort and inclusive leadership. As one interviewee stated, "*It [diversity] is about a long-term change of the culture within the organization.*" Interestingly, while Kalev et al. (2006) found diversity training less effective for increasing representation, this study suggests such initiatives may be more beneficial for

fostering inclusivity within organizations. Public sector organizations reported positive impacts of diversity training on workplace inclusivity, even if not directly increase diverse representation. This finding challenges previous assumptions about the effectiveness of diversity training and suggests a need for reassessment of its role in organizational diversity efforts.

Collectively, these contributions advance the field of diversity management research by providing empirical evidence of sector-specific practices, challenging assumptions about motivations for diversity initiatives, and highlighting the complex interplay between organizational structures, labor market dynamics, and diversity outcomes. The findings underscore the need for a more nuanced, context-specific approach to diversity management that goes beyond recruitment to focus on long-term inclusion and retention strategies.

Limitations and Future Research

This study provides valuable insights into diversity recruitment practices in the public and private sectors in the Netherlands. However, several limitations should be acknowledged, which also point to directions for future research.

Firstly, the study's sample size of eight recruiters and HR professionals, while providing rich qualitative data, limits the generalizability of findings. The diversity in organizational types and sizes represented by these professionals, while offering a broad perspective, also introduces variability that complicates direct comparisons. Future research could benefit from a more focused approach, examining organizations within a specific industry or of similar size. This would allow for more precise comparisons and potentially reveal industry-specific patterns in diversity initiatives.

Secondly, the interview guide, while flexible and tailored to each interview, did not adequately account for organizations with limited or no diversity initiatives. This became apparent in Framework 5, where the interviewee's responses were constrained by their organization's lack of formal diversity practices. Future studies should develop more adaptive interview protocols that can effectively probe the reasons behind the absence of diversity initiatives, potentially uncovering barriers or alternative perspectives on workforce diversity.

Thirdly, the varying roles and responsibilities of the interviewees within their respective HR departments introduced inconsistencies in the depth and specificity of the information provided. For instance, professionals specializing in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offered more comprehensive insights compared to technical recruiters. This disparity in expertise and focus areas may have skewed the overall picture of diversity practices. Future research should aim for a more homogeneous sample in terms of job roles and levels of responsibility, which would facilitate more direct comparisons and potentially yield more consistent findings.

Lastly, despite efforts to probe the effectiveness of diversity initiatives, the study's ability to gather comprehensive information about specific measurement tools was limited. This limitation was primarily due to the heterogeneity of interviewees' job roles and levels of responsibility.

Future research should address this issue by ensuring a more homogeneous sample of participants and delving deeper into methodologies for measuring the effectiveness of diversity initiatives. Such an approach could yield valuable frameworks of best practices and provide practitioners with a more nuanced understanding of which strategies are most effective in various organizational contexts.

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Appendix 1

Interview Guide:

After a short introduction about myself, the purpose of the interview, ensuring confidentiality, and gathering basic demographic information about the interviewee, such as their job title, department, organization, and years of experience in recruitment or HR, I move on to these questions:

General and introductory questions:

1. Would you please tell me about your role and responsibilities?

Recruitment practices

2. Would you please describe the general recruitment processes of your organization?

Organization's values and culture:

1. Would you please elaborate on how your organization defines diversity and inclusion in the workplace?

Diversity recruitment practices:

2. What specific initiatives or programs does your organization have in place to promote diversity in recruitment?
3. How does your organization ensure fairness and equal opportunities for all applicants throughout the hiring process? (e.g., blind resume reviews, diverse interview panels)
4. Would you please share some examples of how your organization reaches out to and attracts talent from diverse backgrounds? (if required)
 - **If it was not mentioned till this point:
What channels or methods does your organization primarily use to source candidates?
(Job boards, social media, employee referrals, etc.)**

Some backup questions if the interviewee did not mention them:

- a. How do you garner the attention of female and minority job seekers?
- b. What is your motive for recruiting a diverse workforce?
- c. What diversity practices were successful and what practices do you consider unsuccessful? And why do you think they are considered unsuccessful?

Effectiveness of practices:

5. How does your organization measure the effectiveness of its diversity recruitment efforts? (e.g., diversity metrics, applicant demographics)

- a. Are there specific metrics or key performance indicators (KPIs) used to track diversity outcomes in recruitment?

Best practice and navigating challenges

6. What strategies or best practices have you implemented to help you in addressing the challenges you face in attracting a diverse workforce?

Closing questions

7. What are the benefits you've seen from fostering a diverse and inclusive work environment?
8. What factors make you particularly interested in pursuing a candidate?

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your organization's recruitment practices or diversity initiatives?

Thank them for their time and their valuable insights.