Minimising cross-cultural issues during the interview

Newcomers are a very heterogeneous group and companies need to take into account issues, such as their administrative situation (migrants, asylum seekers, refugees), skills, residence in the host country, etc.

On the other hand, some of the most significant barriers newcomers have to face in the workplace are: stereotypes and prejudices, individual or systemic discrimination, limited access to networks and relations that may support their access to a job, social exclusion, etc. Understanding their background will contribute to minimise or remove those barriers and favour the process of integration into the company and thus result in a positive impact on both the company and the newcomer.

Below there are described measures that may help companies to understand the newcomer's background:

Action steps to minimise cross-cultural issues during the recruitment process

The first barrier that companies and professionals generally meet when hiring and working with newcomers is cultural differences. There are some action steps that organizations can take to minimize them during the recruitment process and that also will help to understand the newcomer's background:

- Be prepared for surprises when interacting with culturally different people. Avoid negative judgement until collecting more information.

- During telephone interviews, give the benefit of the doubt since these interviews may not provide an accurate representation of these candidates' ability to communicate face-to-face (if communicating by telephone is not a criterion in the selection process).

- Include Human Resources professionals and/or diverse people in recruiting teams. A culturally different employee will help to identifying cultural differences that may put off other recruiters.

- Provide training on intercultural competences, communication styles, etc. to people involved in the selection process on a regular basis so that they know how to identify and overlook culturally determined behaviours likely to lead to the rejection of candidates for cultural reasons.

- Focus on transferable skills. Some culturally different candidates may have worked in industries that require the same technical skills even though they appear to be quite different.

- Consider hiring culturally different candidates with strong potential but who need to learn more about the hosting country system. Someone/a mentor can guide the new employee through the differences that he or she has to overcome.

- Create tests to evaluate candidates in real-life situations.

- Describe on the company's website the recruiting process used, including sample interview questions and answers. This kind of detail can help every candidate show their true abilities, especially culturally different candidates.

- E-mail questions to candidates in advance, for example 48 hours before the interview, and ask them to respond in writing by e-mail. This gives the candidates a chance to look up words and to figure out how they are going to present more complex concepts.

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