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Thought Leadership Insights

Diverse Talent Pools

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There are many, often intertwined, reasons for the ongoing talent gap we’re seeing in our markets in North America, Australia and the UK. And while the answer isn’t as easy as ABC, it can be found in ED&I.

For all the talk of skills shortages, there are still groups of people who are under-represented in the workforce and/or overlooked by employers, from women in tech to the over-50s. Dig deeper and you’ll find barriers to employment that range from living with a disability to having a criminal conviction. Lack of confidence and connections on the part of candidates, and lack of flexibility on the part of employers, can restrict access and even exclude diverse communities from an organisation — and when competition for talent is fierce, it can make finding and keeping great people harder than it needs to be.

A diverse and inclusive workplace has been shown to be good for business and having robust ED&I policies and practices in place is good for recruitment and retention too. In 2022, more than 50 million US workers quit their jobs. While some were in search of a bigger pay cheque, others were reassessing what was important and looking for company values that aligned with their own.

With 24.7% of businesses in Australia reporting at least one vacancy, and 13.3% of UK businesses experiencing a shortage of workers, company culture is becoming increasingly important to fill those vacancies. LinkedIn research found that 87% of workers in the US, and 68% of workers in the UK, France, Germany and Ireland, prioritise organisations that share their values. Job adverts referencing workplace culture, flexibility and wellbeing receive nearly twice as many applications today than two years ago. It’s a trend that’s being driven by younger generations of workers: 9 out of 10 Gen-Z and Millennial respondents to the LinkedIn study said they would leave a job to work somewhere that better matches their values, and 57% said misaligned values were a dealbreaker.

Organisations have to be clear on their priorities and their values — and there must be internal practices to back them up. Then companies have to be vocal about their values in a way that’s going to be authentic and resonate with their stakeholders.”

— Ann Bookout, Global Head of Culture and Fulfilment

1 BBC News - Over-50s at work: ‘You feel your usefulness has passed’
2 World Economic Forum - The business case for diversity in the workplace is now overwhelming
3 U.S. Chamber of Commerce - Understanding America’s Labor Shortage
4 Australian Bureau of Statistics - Job Vacancies, Australia
5 House of Commons Library - Skills and labour shortages
6 Forbes - Company Values Essential For Attracting And Retaining Talent Says LinkedIn
7 Personnel Today - Three in five would not work for company that doesn’t share values
8 Personnel Today - Three in five would not work for company that doesn’t share values
Storytelling will help to attract talent that shares an organisation’s values, but beware: organisations that don’t live up to their messaging are being called out in increasingly impactful ways, as the Gender Pay Gap Bot demonstrated during International Women’s Day. In a turbulent political, economic and social climate, so-called purpose washing is being exposed and it’s not just bad PR: it’s bad for recruitment and retention too.

In a talent competitive market, an employer that walks the walk is more attractive to under-represented communities. For example, a flexible working policy can open doors to more parents and carers; remote working practices might encourage applications from more people of colour if your geographical location is predominantly white; and an emphasis on learning & development might appeal to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

If you’re at the beginning of your ED&I journey, it can be difficult to know where to start. At Impellam, we work with our customers to develop strategies to attract and engage under-represented groups, from designing inclusive marketing campaigns, to using technology to remove bias from the screening process and delivering unconscious bias training for hiring managers.

For example, in North America, we’ve been holding customer workshops to identify the ED&I areas they want to focus on — and where there might be gaps.

Consistency is key. Your website might talk the talk but are your values reflected in the employee experience? Do your job descriptions use gender-neutral language? Do they encourage applications from candidates who might not tick all the boxes? Are your hiring managers trained in unconscious bias?

We have the tough conversations with them about what they need to be doing differently to be more successful. Our customers are realising that they need to start talking about who they are as a company, especially within the contingent space. That influences everything that happens downstream because temporary can be a pipeline to permanent employment.”

— Marie France, Senior VP of Global Managed Services, North America

If you’re not clear as an organisation what you stand for, you’re going to continue to find difficulties, and so being prepared for the unexpected, and knowing that you’ve got the right people in the right roles who can articulate the values that you stand for amidst uncertainty is critically important.”

— Ann Bookout, Global Head of Culture and Fulfilment

9 BBC News - Gender pay gap bot ‘keeps pressure on companies’, co-founder says
We’re also supporting Diverse-Certified and Minority Business Enterprises, as well as suppliers with a focus on diversity, through our INfluence Supplier Diversity Programme. The programme gives diverse suppliers access to our customer base – and our customers access to diverse talent pools. We’re helping those customers to increase their diverse spend, but that’s just the beginning, says Marie. The next frontier in the contingent space is candidate tracking – and customers will be looking to their managed service providers to supply the data. In fact, it’s already a requirement in the state of California, where we’re helping our customers to file Employer Information Reports detailing pay and hours data, including the number of permanent and temporary employees by race, ethnicity and gender.  

“Once we understand how much of that population is diverse, then we can address pay inequality. And as the space matures, we’re going to be able to offer greater insights to help organisations solve these problems.”

— Marie France,  
Senior VP of Global Managed Services,  
North America

As well as helping customers to increase the diversity of their workforce, we’re removing barriers to employment for diverse candidates. For example, in the UK, we’re helping prisoners due for release to find meaningful work through HM Prison and Probation Service’s employment advisory board (EAB) scheme.

Comensura’s UK Managing Director, Hoa Ngo, is chair of HMP Drake Hall’s EAB (Employment Advisory Board) – one of 91 EABs in resettlement prisons in England and Wales. Hoa works with board members at the Stafford women’s prison to advise and support the prison on their training and employment support to prisoners and prison leavers. Through our extensive network of customers and suppliers Comensura encourages employers to get involved and helping prisoners to get job ready. Our goal is to see more people leave prisons and enter sustainable employment. This includes running two pilots to help build prisoners’ confidence. The first is a workshop based on Google’s #IAmRemarkable initiative, adapted for prisons and supported by the onsite psychologist, and the second is a mentoring scheme. Prison Employment Leads (PELS) are also being invited to our offices spend time with Impellam’s marketing, recruitment and compliance teams so they can benefit from our commercial expertise and in turn educate our own people in this complex area.

“The women I’ve met have a fantastic work ethic. They’re so apologetic for what they’ve done – many of them will want to work even harder to demonstrate their worth. People who have gone through adversity, have that resilience in them, and that’s a real benefit for employers.”

— Hoa Ngo,  
Managing Director,  
Comensura, UK

10 JD Supra - California Continues Effort to Hold Employers Accountable for Diversity In the Workplace through AB 979 and SB 973
Lianne Watkinson, Head of Service at Comensura, sits on the EAB at HMP Featherstone. She’s working with our customer, Veolia, to promote opportunities for prisoners at the waste, water and energy management services company.

Lianne has also been helping to place Ukrainian refugees with Veolia through our Jobs for Ukraine scheme. She worked with Jobs for Ukraine lead Galina Hewins to identify candidates and obstacles to employment such as English language skills. She then sat down with the customer to discuss how we could make reasonable adjustments to accommodate them.

Having a voice on those boards is vital to be able to champion Veolia, its vision and its nurturing of candidates and workers, so we can get that message out into the prison community. When prisoners are due for release, we hold work events and give talks about the benefits of working for Veolia. We’re not just looking for temporary agency workers: we want that long-term commitment.”

— Lianne Watkinson, Head of Service, Comensura

“These candidates are desperate to settle; they want to work, they want to support themselves. The commitment from them is there straight away, and that’s what we struggle with in some of the roles. They’re desperate to get in there and make a difference.

We’re in a talent shortage situation – we have more roles than we have candidates. These under-represented groups have got the skills we need; it’s short-sighted not to look at the pockets of talent available.”

— Lianne Watkinson, Head of Service, Comensura
It’s a really exciting time to be in our business, we are right at the forefront of environmental change and innovation. We have more than 20,000 people working across the Northern Europe Zone who are making extraordinary efforts to deliver solutions which help tackle climate change.

We need a diverse range of people from all parts of society to support the work we do and deliver our purpose of Ecological Transformation. Working with Comensura to support ex-offenders in finding meaningful job opportunities to lower reoffending rates has been very important.

We have also been able to address the challenge of language barriers and design appropriate employment routes for Ukrainian refugees.”

— Beth Whittaker, North Europe Chief HR Officer, Veolia

For Danny Cohen, Head of STEM, Impellam NA, and founder of our STEM Council for Good, working with community programmes is key to hiring diverse talent because those communities may not be aware of the opportunities available. For example, veterans are another overlooked group – yet they’re ideal candidates for hard-to-fill cyber security roles because they already have security clearance.

We launched the STEM Council for Good to create pathways for diverse talent into STEM and the council acts as a community for companies, not-for-profit organisations and individuals to connect through virtual and in-person events. It also offers job seekers no-cost training, mentoring and coaching through its Higher Me programme.

There’s so much opportunity in the market today, but a lot of people don’t know what they don’t know. It’s our job to share the opportunities available: we need to be the conduit, the partner to help bring them in. There has to be effort and intention to find diverse talent.”

— Danny Cohen, Managing Director, STEM North America

In September 2023, Comensura, in partnership with Veolia UK, won the DE&I Award at the 2023 TIARA Talent Solutions Awards Europe.
Take Aways

As Ann said, if you want to attract more diverse talent to your organisation, begin with who you are and what you stand for. What is your purpose and what are your values? Are these reflected in your policies and practices? Do you work with and/or support organisations that align with your mission and vision? How are you embedding equity, diversity and inclusion in your organisation, at all stages of the employee lifecycle and into your behaviours?

Numbers are important too: where are you starting from, what are your goals and how are you measuring your progress? How are you promoting your organisation and what you offer to diverse communities? Which communities do you want to focus on? Who can you partner with to increase access to those communities and remove barriers to employment?

What is the employee experience for diverse communities? Are they represented at all levels of the organisation? Do they have a voice? How are you creating an employee experience that makes people feel welcome, accepted and included?

At Impellam, we work with ED&I partners to help diverse talent pools overcome barriers to recruitment and create more welcoming and inclusive workplaces for our customers.
Further Information

To find out how we can support you on your ED&I journey, please email us at askimpellam@impellam.com