

Gartner for HR

Measuring Equity in Candidate Experience

Measuring Equity in Candidate Experience

By Human Resources Research Team

This report summarizes the state of candidate experience segmented by demographics including gender, racial composition (U.S.) and sexual orientation (U.S.). HR leaders can use this report to understand high-level differences between groups of candidates and improve equity in candidate experience.

Overview

Different types of people experience the job application process in fundamentally different ways. We analyzed data on candidate experience and segmented it by demographics including gender, race and sexual orientation. There are significant differences in how different kinds of candidates are treated, how likely they are to discontinue an application process, and what their perceptions are of onboarding program effectiveness. HR leaders should develop candidate experience strategies to compensate for preferences and treatment of all types of candidates to ensure talent processes are equitable.

Key Findings

- Men are more confident in their career opportunities than women, as indicated by differences in how they act on their preferences, what their candidate experience is and what requests they make during the application process.
- Racially diverse candidates in the United States are more likely than white candidates to discontinue an application process due to two critical factors: diversity of the team and management style of potential manager.
- LGBTQ+ candidates are more likely than heterosexual candidates not to apply for a job because they perceive they lack the education and years of work experience required for the role.

Recommendations

To ensure an optimal and equitable candidate experience, HR leaders should:

- Research their candidate experience. Include the perspective of current employees and applicants who did not finish the process or were not offered a position to develop holistic analysis.
- Identify parts of the candidate experience that are marginalizing people or are experienced very differently across the applicant pool by looking beyond overall averages.
- Leverage data to drive the urgency of the issue and need for change. Metrics like candidate satisfaction and rate of candidate withdrawal can illustrate which processes need to change.
- Benchmark the effectiveness of solutions to improve candidate experience against previous performance.

Candidate experience is the first impression of the organization to the job candidate. It is also the first point at which an organization can prove its commitment to equitable principles through treating people in a fair and consistent way. However, many organizations still have room to develop in this area. Recent survey-based research on candidate experience finds significant differences in candidate experience and outcomes between different groups of candidates. As a result, it is essential that HR leaders create processes and evaluate their candidate experience to ensure all candidates feel welcome to their company.

Candidates Discontinue Application Processes for Differing Reasons

There are several critical reasons why candidates may choose not to apply to a role or discontinue an application process. These factors include not meeting the job requirements, the job description not matching their preferences and having a bad experience during the application process. To improve candidate experience, HR leaders should understand how segments of candidates differ in their reasons for discontinuing or not starting an application.

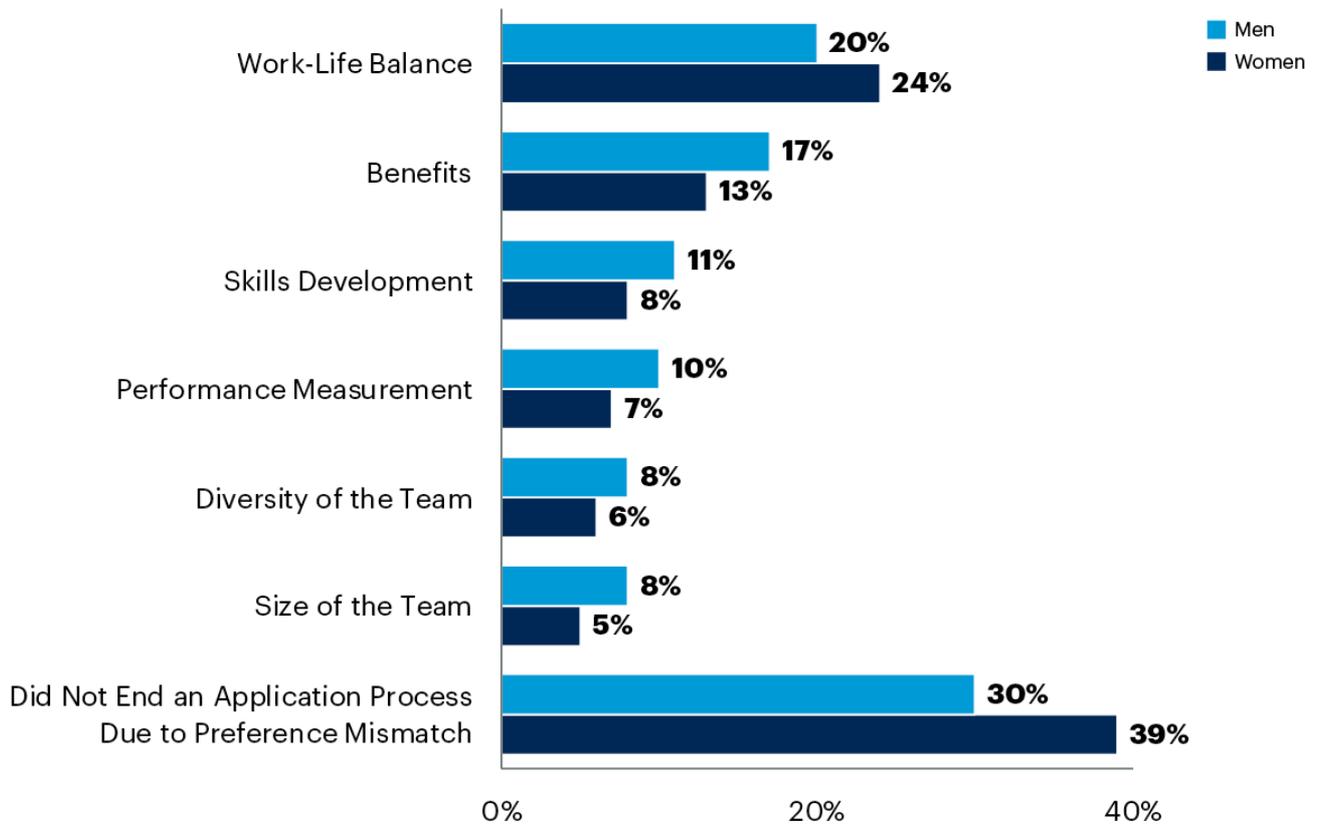
Reasons for Discontinuing Application, by Gender

Men are typically more confident in their career opportunities than women. This is indicated by two major differences: how their preferences align to the role and their candidate experience. Men are more likely to discontinue an application process because part of the job didn't match their preferences (see Figure 1). In the past year, 70% of men discontinued an application process due to a mismatch of their preferences compared to 61% of women. ¹ Women are more likely than men to discontinue an application process for only one reason: work-life balance. Women are consistently more likely than men to prioritize work-life balance in their role. In 2020, women identified work-life balance as a critical part of their role's value proposition at a rate significantly greater than men. ²

Men are also more likely than women to discontinue an application process due to a bad experience (55.4% vs. 50.6%, respectively). Key bad experiences men cited more than women included extended gaps in contact after the initial application and recruiter/interview rudeness.

Figure 1. Reasons for Discontinuing Application, by Gender

Reasons for Discontinuing Application, by Gender



n = 2,776 candidates

Q. In the past 12 months, have you discontinued an application process because your preferences did not match what the role described on any of the following?

Source: 2020 Candidate Survey

Notes: Differences are statistically significant at a .05 significance level.

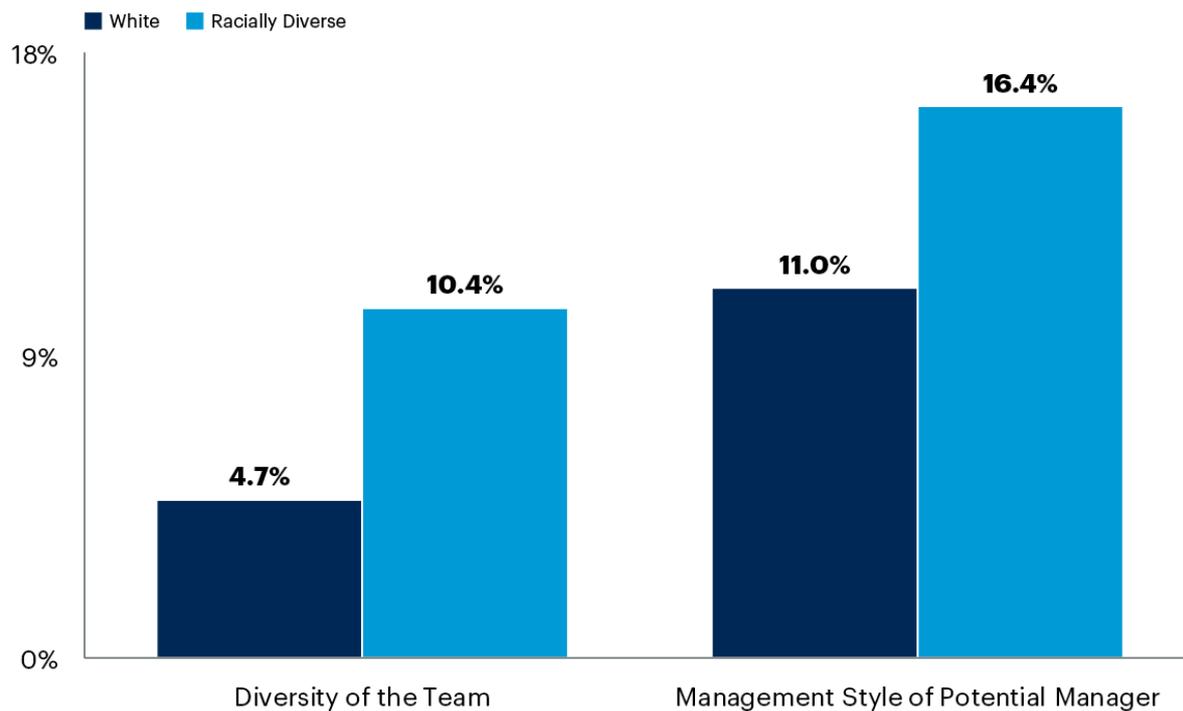
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Reasons for Discontinuing Application, by Race/Ethnicity

In the United States, racially diverse candidates experience candidacy differently than white candidates. Racially diverse Americans are more likely to discontinue an application process due to preference mismatch: 70% of racially diverse Americans stopped an application short in the past year due to their preferences not aligning to the role compared with 60% of white Americans. Out of 13 preferences that would cause a candidate to discontinue an application if not met, racially diverse candidates cited two major driving factors more than white candidates (see Figure 2): the diversity of the team and the management style of the potential manager. Critically, more than 10% of racially diverse Americans have discontinued an application process in the past 12 months due to the diversity of the team not matching their preferences, compared to less than 5% of white Americans.

Figure 2. Reasons for Discontinuing Application, by Race/Ethnicity

Reasons for Discontinuing Application, by Race/Ethnicity



n = 1,128 candidates in the United States

Q. In the past 12 months, have you discontinued an application process because your preferences did not match what the role described on any of the following?

Source: 2020 Candidate Survey

Notes: Sample size varies from total due to segmentation. Due to privacy restrictions, racial composition can only be asked of U.S.-based respondents. Differences between candidates are statistically significant at a .05 significance level.

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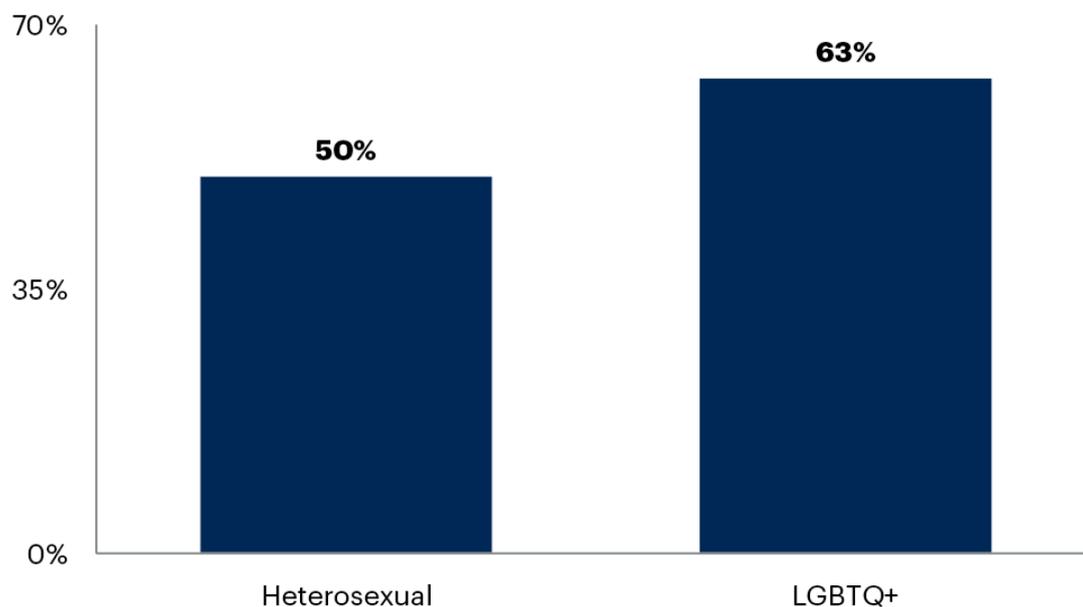
Reasons for Discontinuing Application, by Sexual Orientation

In the United States, there are also critical differences in candidate experiences between LGBTQ+ and heterosexual candidates. Seventy-four percent of LGBTQ+ candidates did not apply for a job because they did not possess the requirements compared with 62% of heterosexual candidates. Although there is no difference in how they perceive their skill or experience, LGBTQ+ candidates are more likely than heterosexual candidates not to apply for a role because they think they lack the education and years of work experience required. It is possible these candidates doubt themselves and their ability, causing them to think that they are reaching too high and causing them to subsequently lower their expectations. This is also supported by the fact that LGBTQ+ candidates are significantly more likely to discontinue an application process because the potential career path described in the role did not match their preferences (18% compared with 11% of heterosexual candidates).

Another reason LGBTQ+ candidates discontinue their application is due to a bad experience. Critically, LGBTQ+ candidates have significantly more bad experiences in their applications: 63% of these candidates discontinued an application in the past 12 months due to a bad experience compared with 50% of heterosexual candidates (see Figure 3). A major factor contributing to this difference is extended gaps in contact after initial application. More than one-third of LGBTQ+ candidates discontinued an application in the past 12 months due to this barrier, compared with 23% of heterosexual candidates.

Figure 3. Share of Candidates Who Discontinued an Application in the Past 12 Months Due to a Bad Experience

Share of Candidates Who Discontinued an Application in the Past 12 Months Due to a Bad Experience



n = 1,128 candidates in the United States

Source: 2020 Candidate Survey

Notes: Sample size varies from total due to segmentation. Due to privacy restrictions, sexual orientation can only be asked of U.S.-based respondents. Differences between candidates are statistically significant at a .05 significance level.

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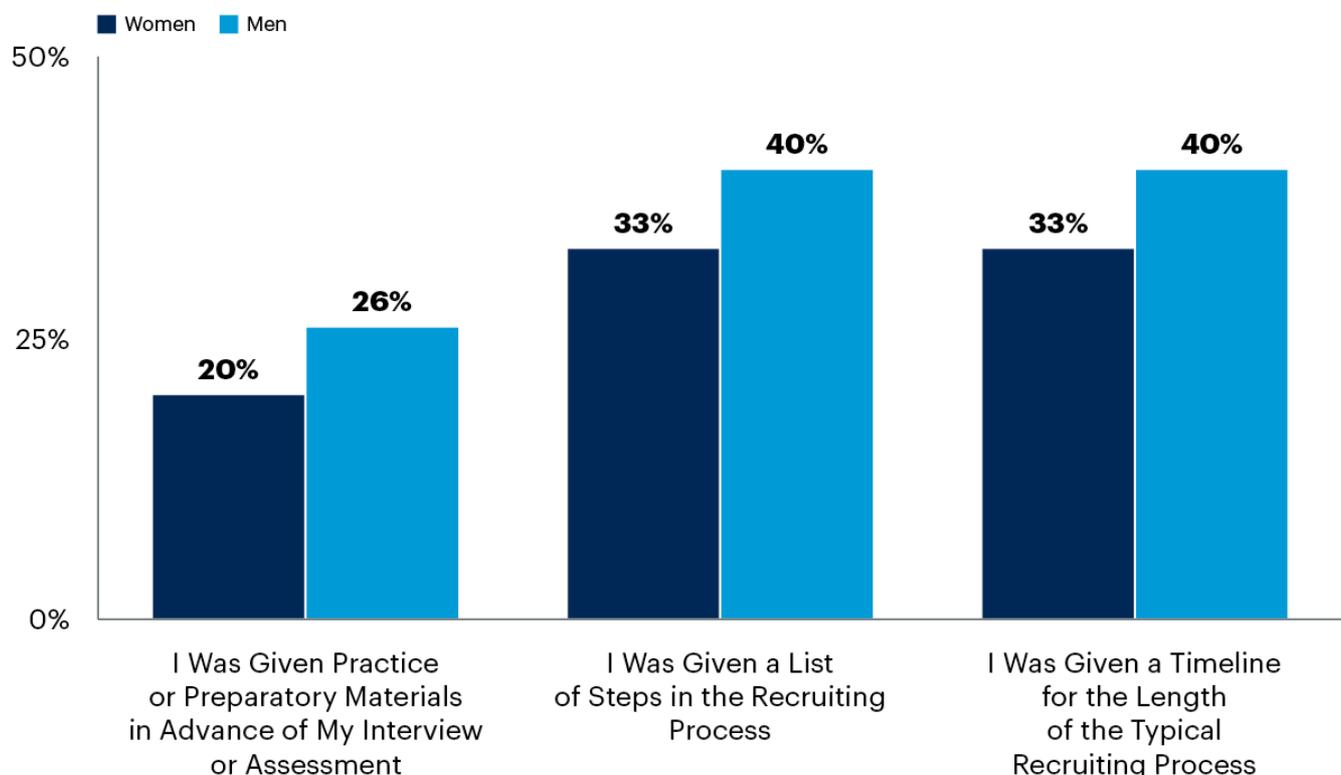
Candidates Differ in Treatment and Behavior

We have already seen how and why some candidates might choose to discontinue an application process and differences in their reasons to do so. But for those who decide to continue through the process, is the experience same for everyone? Are there any differences in the treatment candidates receive or how they perceive the process? Do they make similar requests for changes to their role? These are critical questions that HR leaders should ask about their organization's candidate experiences.

There are significant differences in the experience of men and women as candidates. Men are significantly more likely to receive all types of application preparation, including a timeline for the length of the process, a list of steps in the process, and practice or preparation materials in advance of their interviews (see Figure 4). Seventy-one percent of men received at least one of these types of preparation, while only 59% of women received at least one of these types of preparation. Men requested more changes than women to their job: Sixty-seven percent of men requested at least one change to their job in the application process, but only 51% of women requested at least one change to their job in the application process. This is more evidence that men are more confident than women in their career opportunities.

Figure 4. Types of Preparation Materials Received in Advance of Interviews by Men vs. Women

Types of Preparation Materials Received in Advance of Interviews by Men vs. Women



n = 2,776 candidates

Q. Thinking about your most recent application process, did any of the following occur?

Source: 2020 Candidate Survey

Notes: Differences are statistically significant at a .05 significance level.

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White candidates in the U.S. also typically have different experiences in their treatment during the application process than racially diverse candidates. Racially diverse American candidates are likely to receive more application assistance than white American candidates. However, stakeholder interaction tells a different story. Racially diverse Americans are less likely to interact with their hiring manager (60% compared with 76% of white Americans) and more likely to interact with the recruiter (46% compared with 38% of white Americans). This is concerning because the hiring manager is typically viewed as the most important decision maker in the hiring process. A lack of facetime with a hiring manager could indicate racially diverse candidates in America are not being taken as seriously for a role. Out of all the possible changes to their roles candidates could ask for, racially diverse Americans are only more likely than white Americans to request a location change (15% vs. 9%, respectively).

Onboarding Is Less Effective for Women

After selecting and seating the candidate, there is a final critical component of the candidate experience: onboarding. Getting onboarding right is essential because it is the primary strategy to set up new employees for success. We examined how different types of employees experienced onboarding in their current role. To maximize the success of their organization's onboarding program, HR leaders need to understand how their employees may experience onboarding differently.

Typically, women have worse onboarding experiences than men. The percentage of women who are satisfied with their onboarding program (58%) is lower than the percentage of men (65%). Women also seem to feel their organization is less prepared for them to start their position than men. Fifty-five percent of women said that they feel their organization was well-prepared for their start compared with 61% of men. Fewer than half of women gain access to the equipment they need to do their job during onboarding, compared with more than 60% of men. Racially diverse Americans experienced no significant differences compared with white Americans in the onboarding experiences, which stands in contrast to their experience during the application process.

The onboarding experience provided to LGBTQ+ employees is also comparatively insufficient. LGBTQ+ candidates (7%) are more likely than heterosexual candidates (2%) to not have learned how their jobs relate to their organization's goals and outcomes. A similar trend appears when it comes to learning about promotions. Fifteen percent of LGBTQ+ candidates did not learn what it takes to get promoted in their role compared with 7% of heterosexual candidates. LGBTQ+ candidates are also three times more likely than heterosexual candidates not to have learned about the culture of their team during their onboarding process (10% vs. 3%, respectively). All of these are key pieces of information that a new employee should be made aware of as they start their journey in an organization. HR leaders should ensure the onboarding process imparts sufficient information to employees equitably.

Identifying and Correcting Negative Candidate Experience

To improve candidate experience and provide an equitable application process, HR leaders should collect and analyze data reported by their applicants. Common metrics include likelihood to recommend an organization to a friend after applying, ease of the application and accuracy of information received during the application. It is also critical to ask applicants about barriers or negative interactions they experienced. This data can be collected in a postapplication survey. It is necessary to poll applicants who accepted their offer and became employees, as well as those applicants who dropped out of the process or were not offered a position. This gives a complete spectrum of responses from applicants.

HR leaders can learn even more about the strengths and weaknesses of their candidate experience through segmenting the data they collect. Attracting and retaining diverse groups of talent, including women, LGBTQ+ and a diverse group of races and ethnicities, is a constant challenge for many organizations. Compare the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate experience of these groups to develop the action steps required to improve the process. Using data is an effective way to show senior leaders that urgent steps are necessary to ensure the needs of nonmajority talent are met. Continuing to collect data to measure the effect of strategies to improve candidate experience will show progress toward meeting that goal, or serve as a red flag that you need to rethink which strategies are most effective.

Conclusion

Candidate experience is the first impression applicants have of your organization. However, candidates that are already challenging to hire are slipping through the cracks due to a negative candidate experience. Paying attention to candidate preferences, the barriers they experience and the processes through which they apply can reveal points of friction, some of which may be localized to specific demographic groups. Collecting this information enables HR leaders to make data-based decisions to improve their organizations' candidate experience for all applicants.

About This Research

This research examines the differences in candidate experience for different candidate segments using the key findings of Gartner's 2020 Candidate Survey, which collected information from over 2,700 candidates from across industries and geographies on how they evaluate job opportunities in the digital era. All statistical differences mentioned in this research are significant at a 5% significance level. For privacy reasons, we collected data on racial identity and sexual orientation from the United States only.

Endnotes

¹ Gartner's 2020 Candidate Survey. N = 2,774 candidates.

² Gartner's 3Q20 Global Labor Market Survey. N = 25,004 employees.

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