

Fair Hiring as Organizational Legitimacy: Applicant Voice, Inclusive Access, and Accountable Technology

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Abstract

Recruitment and selection communicate what an organization considers worthy, whose participation it facilitates, and whether authority is exercised through explainable rules. This conceptual article develops a legitimacy-centered approach to fair hiring from an instructional manuscript covering recruitment strategy, screening, interviews, selection methods, diversity and inclusion, legal concerns, informal sponsorship, and technology. Rather than treating fairness as an audit performed after a hiring decision, the article organizes it across four moments of the applicant journey: access to opportunity, treatment during assessment, explanation of decisions, and governance of data and technology. A model of procedural legitimacy is proposed in which job relevance, consistency, voice, transparency, respectful treatment, reviewability, and data restraint reinforce both applicant dignity and decision quality. The analysis distinguishes outreach from preferential treatment, candidate experience from entertainment, and algorithmic consistency from demonstrated fairness. It also reframes the padrino or sponsorship problem: referrals may expand information and access, but sponsor influence should never alter criteria, scoring, or review. Two tools are provided: an applicant-journey fairness map and a governance checklist for technology-assisted hiring. The article argues that fair hiring is not secured by identical treatment alone; organizations must provide comparable opportunity to demonstrate job-relevant capability while addressing barriers that make formal equality misleading. No applicant data, organizational sample, or outcome comparison is reported. The contribution is a practical and researchable design for recruitment systems that seek talent without sacrificing inclusion, trust, or accountability.

Keywords: applicant reactions; procedural justice; inclusive recruitment; candidate experience; algorithmic hiring; organizational legitimacy

Introduction

Applicants encounter an organization before they become employees. A job advertisement defines who can imagine belonging; an application form decides what information must be surrendered; an interview reveals whose communication style is treated as competent; a rejection message shows whether the organization considers explanation part of respectful treatment. Recruitment and selection are therefore not only prediction systems. They are public exercises of organizational authority.

The source instructional manuscript covers recruitment and selection from job analysis to onboarding and includes dedicated treatment of diversity and inclusion, legal considerations, informal sponsorship or the padrino system, and technology (Recruitment and Selection, n.d.). These topics are often taught separately: inclusion concerns outreach, fairness concerns compliance, candidate experience concerns employer branding, and technology concerns efficiency. This separation obscures their

common problem. Each concerns whether applicants can understand, access, and trust the rules by which opportunity is allocated.

Organizational justice research provides a foundation for integrating these concerns. Gilliland (1993) proposed that applicant perceptions of selection fairness are shaped by procedural rules including job relatedness, opportunity to perform, consistency, reconsideration, explanation, respectful treatment, and propriety of questions. Hausknecht et al. (2004) found that applicant reactions are associated with consequential attitudes and behaviors, including organizational attractiveness and intentions. Fairness is not simply a courtesy added after psychometric design; it affects participation, motivation, acceptance, and the legitimacy of the process.

The need for integration has intensified with digital recruitment. Automated screening, video interviews, online assessments, and inferred data can make hiring faster and more consistent, but they can also hide criteria, increase applicant burden, and reproduce historical patterns. Raghavan et al. (2020) documented the difficulty of evaluating vendor claims about bias mitigation in algorithmic hiring. Technical sophistication does not remove the need to define fairness, validate scores, examine outcomes, and assign responsibility.

Purpose and Central Argument

This article has three objectives: to conceptualize fair hiring as organizational legitimacy across the applicant journey; to integrate inclusion, applicant reactions, referrals, and technology within one process model; and to provide practical tools for design and review. The central argument is that fairness must be built into access, assessment, explanation, and governance. A process is legitimate when applicants have a comparable opportunity to demonstrate relevant capability, are treated with dignity, can understand the basis of decisions, and are protected by reviewable rules.

Conceptual Method

Artifact Analysis

The source manuscript was analyzed as a sequence of organizational encounters. Content on recruitment strategy, screening, interviewing, selection methods, offers, diversity, sponsorship, and technology was coded according to four applicant-facing moments: access, assessment, decision communication, and data governance. Each moment was examined for possible barriers, fairness rules, organizational evidence, and corrective actions. The analysis is conceptual and design oriented. It does not infer how any actual employer implements the manuscript's practices.

Legitimacy Standards

Seven standards guide the model. Job relevance connects every demand to the work. Consistency applies the same rule where comparability is intended. Voice allows applicants to provide relevant information and clarify material errors. Transparency explains the process and the role of each method without compromising assessment security. Respectful treatment protects dignity and avoids intrusive or stigmatizing conduct. Reviewability preserves a route for correcting administrative and procedural errors. Data restraint limits collection, inference, access, and retention to legitimate purposes. Together, these standards translate fairness from a general value into design questions.

Moment 1: Access to Opportunity

Fairness begins before assessment. Recruitment channels shape who learns about a role and who has reason to apply. Chapman et al. (2005) showed that applicant attraction and job-choice intentions are related to job and organizational characteristics, recruiter behavior, process perceptions, perceived fit, and hiring expectancies. An advertisement that is difficult to find, written around inflated credentials, or distributed only through homogeneous networks can restrict the pool before any formal criterion is applied.

Inclusive recruitment requires more than adding a diversity statement. Organizations should distinguish essential entry requirements from trainable preferences, use accessible formats, identify the actual work and conditions, state the stages and approximate demands, and offer a clear route for accommodation. Outreach can be broadened across schools, communities, professional groups, public channels, and internal mobility routes. The measure of access is not the number of channels but whether qualified people who differ in network position and resources can realistically encounter and enter the process.

Historical patterns make apparent neutrality insufficient. Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) demonstrated discrimination in employer responses to names on otherwise comparable resumes. Kang et al. (2016) found that minority job seekers may whiten resumes and that organizational diversity signals do not necessarily prevent discriminatory screening. These studies illustrate why organizations should examine progression by stage and question whether application cues unrelated to the job influence review.

Moment 2: Treatment During Assessment

Applicants should receive a meaningful opportunity to demonstrate relevant capability. Identical administration may be appropriate for many comparisons, but comparable opportunity can require adjustments that preserve the intended construct. A timed online assessment may disadvantage an applicant because of an inaccessible interface rather than lack of job capability. A video interview may measure bandwidth, camera environment, or comfort with recording more strongly than the intended competence. Fairness therefore requires both standardization and construct-aware accommodation.

Applicant reactions research consistently highlights job relatedness, information, opportunity to perform, and interpersonal treatment. McCarthy et al. (2017) reviewed the applicant perspective and emphasized that fairness perceptions have antecedents and outcomes across the selection experience. Truxillo et al. (2009) found that explanations can improve applicant reactions, although the form and timing of explanations matter. These findings support practical actions: tell applicants why a method is used, provide realistic preparation information, ensure instructions are intelligible, train assessors, and offer a route for reporting technical or administrative problems.

Candidate experience should not be confused with making selection entertaining or effortless. A demanding work sample can be perceived as appropriate when its relevance is evident and the burden is proportionate. A gamified or visually polished

test can remain unfair if it measures irrelevant familiarity, hides scoring, or cannot be accessed. The standard is respectful, job-related opportunity, not applicant amusement.

Table 1

Applicant-journey fairness map

Journey moment	Fairness risk	Evidence of legitimacy	Corrective action
Opportunity awareness	Vacancy circulates only through narrow networks	Channel review shows qualified reach beyond insiders	Add public, community, educational, and internal routes
Application entry	Inflated requirements or inaccessible forms screen out capability	Each required field and qualification has a stated purpose	Remove nonessential demands and test accessibility
Initial screening	Names, addresses, gaps, or proxies influence judgment	Job-related rubric and stage-level progression review	Mask irrelevant cues where feasible and audit exclusions
Assessment	Unequal opportunity, intrusive questions, or irrelevant technology burden	Common instructions, accommodation route, issue log, anchored scoring	Repair administration and recollect comparable evidence
Decision	Informal influence overrides recorded criteria	Declared decision rule and reviewable exception record	Separate referrals from scoring and require justification
Communication	Silence, delay, or vague rejection undermines dignity	Timely status, respectful notice, and appropriate explanation	Set service standards and escalation ownership

Note. The map supports process review; organizations should adapt evidence and corrective actions to the role, scale, and applicable requirements.

Moment 3: Explanation and Decision Communication

A hiring outcome can be unfavorable and still be communicated fairly. Applicants need timely information about whether they remain under consideration, what the next stage requires, and when the organization expects to decide. After a decision, explanation should be truthful and proportionate. Detailed test content or comparative personal data need not be disclosed, but organizations should be able to state the job-related basis and correct administrative error.

Gilliland's (1993) framework treats feedback and explanation as procedural rules, not merely public relations. Hausknecht et al. (2004) likewise connect process perceptions to organizational outcomes. This means rejection communication should not be delegated to an unowned automated mailbox with no route for correction. The organization should define who handles duplicate records, accommodation failures, identity mismatch, corrupted submissions, or evidence that a screening rule was applied incorrectly.

Voice does not require negotiation over every decision. It requires an opportunity to provide relevant evidence and challenge procedural error. A review process can be narrow, time bounded, and independent of the original screener. Its purpose is to correct the process, not promise a preferred result.

Moment 4: Governance of Data and Technology

Technology changes both scale and opacity. Systems may parse resumes, rank applicants, schedule interviews, score responses, analyze video, or combine data from external sources. Bogen and Rieke (2018) warned that hiring algorithms can reproduce discrimination and make accountability difficult. Raghavan et al. (2020) further showed that vendor descriptions of bias mitigation may not correspond to clear definitions, appropriate evaluation, or organizational use.

An accountable organization must remain responsible for the whole system, including vendor components. Before deployment it should define the job-related purpose, data inputs, target outcome, scoring logic at an appropriate level, validation evidence, known failure modes, accommodation process, human review, monitoring plan, security controls, retention, and conditions for stopping use. The question is not whether a tool uses artificial intelligence. The question is whether the resulting inference and action can be justified.

Data restraint is central. Recruitment systems should not collect information simply because it is available. Social-media behavior, inferred emotion, facial movement, location, or device data may be weakly related to work and highly intrusive. Even conventional data can become problematic when retained indefinitely or repurposed. The organization should specify necessity, access, retention, and deletion before collection begins.

Table 2

Governance checklist for technology-assisted hiring

Governance question	Minimum evidence	Stop-use trigger	Responsible role
What job-related inference does the tool support?	Documented link from work requirement to output and intended decision	Purpose cannot be stated without vague proxies	Hiring owner with job-analysis support
What data enter the system?	Field inventory, source, necessity, consent or notice basis, and access map	Unknown, excessive, or repurposed inputs	Data governance or privacy lead
How was performance evaluated?	Reliability, validity, error analysis, relevant comparison, and local-use rationale	Vendor claim cannot be examined or use differs from evidence	Assessment specialist or qualified reviewer
How is unequal impact monitored?	Stage-level progression, missingness, accommodation outcomes, and subgroup review where appropriate	Material disparity without understood job-related basis or remedy	Inclusion and risk review group
Can applicants obtain help and review?	Accessible instructions, human contact, incident log, and correction route	No remedy for technical or administrative failure	Candidate-service owner
When will the tool be changed or retired?	Review interval, decision thresholds, version control, and exit plan	Unannounced model change or inability to reproduce prior scores	System owner and independent approver

Note. The checklist is a governance design, not a substitute for technical, ethical, or jurisdiction-specific review.

Informal Sponsorship, Referrals, and the Padrino Problem

The source manuscript explicitly examines the padrino system, in which an insider recommends or sponsors a candidate. The concept should be analyzed carefully. Employee referral can be a legitimate sourcing channel: it informs a person about a

vacancy or supplies verifiable information. Favoritism begins when a sponsor's status changes eligibility, access to preparation, assessment conditions, scoring, or review. The decisive distinction is whether the connection produces information or authority.

Referrals can narrow opportunity when employees' networks resemble the existing workforce. They can also impose hidden obligations on the referred candidate and the sponsor. Organizations should therefore publish vacancies beyond referral networks, apply the same criteria, disclose relevant conflicts, prevent sponsors from rating candidates they cannot evaluate impartially, and monitor referral outcomes. Referral bonuses should reward successful sourcing under the formal process, not pressure decision makers to validate the referral.

This reframing avoids treating relational cultures as inherently incompatible with merit. Relationships can transmit trust and information. Legitimacy requires that such information be tested through rules available to other applicants and that no relationship creates an unreviewable shortcut.

Inclusion as Climate, Not Only Representation

A diverse applicant pool does not ensure an inclusive hiring process, and a diverse set of hires does not ensure an inclusive workplace. Roberson (2006) distinguishes diversity from inclusion, while Nishii (2013) shows the importance of a climate for inclusion in reducing conflict and supporting benefits from diversity. Recruitment messages that promise belonging should be consistent with onboarding, work design, voice, and advancement. Otherwise, candidate experience becomes branding disconnected from organizational reality.

Fair selection should therefore connect to realistic job information and the conditions into which people are hired. Applicants need enough information to judge the role, not only opportunities to be judged by the employer. Respect for choice is part of legitimacy.

Discussion

Fairness and Prediction Reinforce Each Other

Fairness is sometimes presented as a constraint on selecting the strongest candidate. The journey model shows why that framing is incomplete. Job relevance improves the meaning of scores. Accessible administration reduces construct-irrelevant error. Consistency makes comparison interpretable. Voice can correct material mistakes. Transparency supports motivation and trust. Reviewability exposes broken rules. These practices can improve both dignity and decision quality.

Identical Treatment Is Not Always Comparable Opportunity

A rule applied identically can preserve a barrier unrelated to work. Fairness requires attention to what the method actually demands and whether accommodation changes the intended construct. This does not justify arbitrary exceptions. It requires a documented method for preserving the target capability while removing irrelevant obstacles.

Legitimacy Requires Ownership

Fragmented hiring systems diffuse responsibility. Recruiters own communication, hiring managers own interviews, vendors own scores, and technology teams own

platforms. Applicants experience one organization. A legitimate process needs a named owner for the end-to-end journey and independent review of material changes, incidents, and patterns. Vendor contracts and automation should clarify rather than erase that accountability.

Implications for Teaching and Practice

For teaching, students can map a recruitment case across the four moments and identify where a formally neutral rule creates weak access, irrelevant burden, opaque decisions, or ungoverned data. They can then redesign one stage and specify evidence that the revision improved legitimacy. The exercise connects diversity, ethics, candidate experience, and technology without reducing any of them to slogans.

For organizations, the fairness map and technology checklist support a staged review. A small enterprise can begin with clear advertisements, common screening criteria, structured status communication, conflict disclosure for referrals, and a simple incident route. Larger systems can add progression analysis, accessibility testing, vendor validation review, model versioning, and independent governance. Scale changes the infrastructure, not the underlying standards.

Research Agenda

Future research can test whether applicant-journey mapping changes process design, applicant understanding, withdrawal, trust, and error correction. Studies of referral systems should distinguish sourcing effects from preferential treatment and examine how network structure influences access. Technology research should document actual organizational use rather than evaluate tools in isolation, including accommodations, human overrides, version changes, and applicant review. Such work requires transparent measures, appropriate consent, data protection, and careful interpretation. The present article offers a design for evaluation and makes no claim of tested impact.

Conclusion

Fair hiring is a continuing organizational practice, not a declaration attached to a vacancy. It begins with who can see and enter the opportunity, continues through relevant and accessible assessment, appears in explanations and correction routes, and persists in the governance of data and technology. The same standards should apply when candidates arrive through public advertisements, referrals, or sponsorship.

An organization earns legitimacy when applicants can see that authority is exercised through job-related, consistent, respectful, transparent, reviewable, and restrained procedures. Such a process cannot guarantee a favorable outcome for every applicant. It can guarantee that opportunity is allocated through rules the organization is prepared to explain, examine, and improve.

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