



Role of Company's Own Career Portals in Recruitment: A Suggestion for IT Companies Operating in Pakistan

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Abstract

Attracting and hiring a talented workforce is the primary role HR professionals have to play. For recruitment in IT industry, companies usually prefer different online job portals for advertising the open vacancies. The selections of these popular channels mainly depends upon the size of that particular company, average number of vacancies they have to fill and budget allocation for R&S activities. In small and medium sized organizations, budgetary constraints and limited staff strength in HR departments make it even harder to shortlist only the talented candidates. On the other hand, professionals tend to apply on every vacancy they see in order to grab a better opportunity or just grab an opportunity in heavy unemployment shadows and tight job markets. Company's own career portal can be a comprehensive solution to all the challenges being faced by the recruiters in software houses.

Introduction

Recruitment is a well-recognized area in Human Resource research and a lot of research has already been done on various channels, campaigns, techniques and processes of Recruitment, and their impact on employee's performance, satisfaction, bonding, commitment and professional success. The topic of Recruitment was covered in couple of paragraphs only in 1st edition of "Handbook of Industrial & Organizational Psychology" (Guion, 1976) and it took almost 45 pages in the 2nd edition (Rynes, 1991). HR practices are getting modified with the advancement in technology and corresponding changes in the business practices. From Personnel Management to Human Resource Management to Human Capital Management to Strategic HR Business Partnership; the focus of HR is constantly moving from internal issues to strategic decision making for attaining competitive advantages in to-

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day's fast paced complex markets (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 1988). Same is the case with Recruitment & Selection function of Human Resource domain. Bulk hiring of unskilled workers to semi/skilled manpower to hard workers to smart workers; focus and techniques of Recruitment are also varying with the changing business environment.

From local mass hiring to print media job advertisements and then to online specialized job portals, the recruitment process further needs special considerations to help organizations in finding the right resources for the right job at the right time (Ruta, 2005). This highly challenging task of HR professionals demands some innovative alternates to offer them some systematic help in meeting the targets (Pearson & Daff, 2011). Where increasing intervention of Information Technology in our professional lives has made work routines easier for us, it has also generated some challenges as well. Most of the job portals are free for applicants and job seekers can apply for multiple jobs advertised on these portals at zero cost (excluding the cost of internet services) and within fraction of time. This aspect of recruitment has overburdened the HR professionals to shortlist the closest matches for vacant seats. This costless and instantaneous application submission protocol generates a huge pile of irrelevant applications which cost nothing but waste of time and energies of recruitment executives (Galanaki, 2002, Piotrowski & Armstrong 2006). The situation is worst for the HR departments of companies working in the field of Information Technology as all the relevant jobseekers are assumingly computer literate, have access to computer and internet, information of vacant positions in different companies can be spread like wildfire, and they can apply online or via emails for numerous jobs in shortest time.

Statement of the Problem

Relatively smaller HR teams of software houses are facing a big challenge of handling irrelevant applicants in Recruitment & Selection process. This burden of reviewing irrelevant candidatures is one of the biggest hurdles for these teams in arranging the right person for a vacancy in their organization at the right time.

Several root causes have been identified and appropriate solutions have



been suggested for contending this situation. Perhaps the most appropriate solution is to confine the candidates from hassle-free application submission and make them bound to review the job details first. Time and energies of HR teams saved in Recruitment & Selection process can be consumed in other productive activities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research article is to examine how job portals of a company, especially less famous and from SME segment, can strengthen their recruitment process.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative study will explore the factors affecting recruitment process the most in software houses so that appropriate corrective and preventive measures can be taken to relax these HR professionals and offer them some room for focusing on other more critical roles so that they can play their part in organizational success.

Theory or Theoretical Perspective

As the HR practitioners from IT industry have been interviewed to explore the most effective remedies of recruitment challenges, this research is mainly guided by the interpretive perspective. The research focus remains on interpreting the meanings and perceptions of representatives of the population in interpretivist paradigm (Trujillo, 1992). This approach is best suited for constructing a meaningful reality based upon the research's quest and questioning the audience directly engaged with the topic under consideration.

Research Method

The HR managers of software houses has been interviewed for inquiring the common barriers they have experienced in their professional tenures and what are the most appropriate steps to mitigate the impact of these obstacles in recruitment process. After codifying the interviews, analysis has been done with the help of QSR NVivo 10.

Definition of Key Terms

Recruitment: The process of attracting and hiring the best suitable candidate for an open vacancy in a timely fashion.

Jobsite: A dedicated website, acting as a platform where different organizations use to publish their vacant positions and jobseekers use to apply for jobs in much convenient way.

Career Portal: The section of any organization's official website where that organization publish it's open vacancies and interested candidates apply for those vacancies as per the procedure adopted by that particular organization.

Delimitations

Considering the depth of the topic, there can be so many other factors influencing the recruitment process of any organization including but not limited to organizational reputation as an employer, assumed growth opportunities, compensation structure, skillfulness of recruiters, quality of professionals available in market, economic conditions of the society, etc. To keep focused on the role of jobsites and career portals, all these factors have been excluded intentionally. To serve this purpose, both structured and unstructured interview styles were not adopted to avoid the influence of researcher's own believes as well as detraction of discussion towards aspects not being observed in this research activity.

Limitations of the Study

Having different working domains and business models, recruiters in software houses have to face different sort of hurdles in their professional life, which are somehow unique to each software house or niche segment of population under consideration. The researcher was also unable to conduct face-to-face interviews of sufficient number of participants due to scarce willingness and limited availability of HR practitioners in the process of data collection.

Summary

This research activity is an attempt to explore the most critical hurdles recruiters are facing in the software houses and how these can be resolved to improve the efficiency of HR departments. The results of this study can help organiza-



tions working in this sector in streamline their processes for best utilization of their resources. Although multiple factors are effecting recruitment process directly or indirectly but the focus of this study is on jobsites and career portals only, so that a best suited alternative can be proposed.

Literature Review

Review of Related Research

Recruitment is a comprehensive process of fascinating, selecting and hiring appropriate candidates for open vacancies, either paid or voluntary, on regular or short term basis (Carroll et al, 1999). To have a right candidate for a job, it is the first and foremost step HR professionals have to take within their professional jurisdiction. For recruitment purposes, companies usually prefer different online job portals, third party recruitment agencies, referral bonuses, collaborations with academia, etc. (Tardos & Pedersen, 2011). The selections of these popular channels mainly depends upon the size of that particular company, average number of vacancies they have to fill and budget allocation for R&S activities. In small and medium sized organizations, budgetary constraints and limited staff strength in HR departments make it even harder to shortlist only the talented candidates (Melo & Machado, 2013). On the other hand, professionals tend to apply on every vacancy they see in order to grab a better opportunity or just grab an opportunity in heavy unemployment shadows and tight job markets.

Leading job sites are providing excellent platform for effective Recruitment & Selection functions of HR and especially their CV Searching tools are helping employers in finding closest matches (Kuhn & Mansour, 2014). But the room for improvement is still there, most of these job portals don't provide any information on the age of any profile created. If a candidate had started his professional career in say 2008 and created/updated his profile on these portals in 2010, the filters available in searching tools will pick that candidate in the category of 3 years' experience if the filters will be applied even in 2013.

Secondly, if shortlisting team of any company from SME sector tries to contact a potential candidate after searching his/her CV as per their requirements, they have to provide comprehensive details of the company and the

job to that candidate. The level of confidence remains at lower side in such scenarios as they don't have any (or very less) information about that organization before hands (Celani & Singh, 2011). Mostly candidates turn down their interview invitations and they have to re-run the cycle multiple times. Every jobseeker, no matter fresh or experienced, has his own style of CV building which increases the shortlisting team's task of initial shortlisting by considering bulk of CVs with different formatting styles and compositions. Even a potentially sharp resource with ordinary CV might be skipped if he got reviewed after some average candidate with appropriate layout (Samad, 2012).

On the other hand, these portals also provide the keywords searching facility to jobseekers as well which in turn, also creates hurdle for employers. A common trend has been observed that job hunters, after creating their profiles, practice to search some relevant keywords on the job sites and start pressing "Apply" buttons of all the filtered jobs without even opening the JDs and minimum requirements of each job posted (Berg, 2012). This phenomenon becomes more aggressive if the applicant is unemployed or is desperate to switch his/her job. In this scenario, such candidates can apply for 10 jobs in hardly 15-20 seconds but they never bothered how much workload they have increased for the recruitment teams.

Theoretical Construct

Based upon the literature available and feedback received from the experts, the extracted constructs for this research activity are Recruitment Efficiency, Recruitment Effectiveness, Applicants Screening Distraction, Jobsite Usefulness and Applicant's Attitude.

Summary

Recruitment is a well-established topic in the field of research but most of the work has been done in context of its relationship with performance and retention areas. Not much domain specific work has been done in IT industry on the operational issues recruiters have to face. The topic has been discussed from both parties', i.e. jobseekers and employers, point of view. Detailed contextual information has been presented in this section along with the impact of proposed alternatives.



Research Methodology

Research Questions

This research activity has questioned:

1. What are the key issues recruiters are facing in IT industry?
2. How these issues can be resolved in order to increase the efficiency of recruitment process?

Research Settings

The settings in qualitative research play a significant role on behaviors, responses and reactions of the participants in interviews and panel discussions. In order to get the closest real feedback from the participants, they were contacted first with the invitation to participate in this study along with the details of research topic, their role in the research process, confidentiality and integrity of the data collected. On receiving their consent on participation, they were requested to share the venue and time slot as per their ease, availability and convenience for recording the interview. All the interviews are conducted as per participant's convenience so that they should share their purest thoughts on the subject.

Population

Government of Pakistan is investing heavily to develop the IT industry on priority basis because this is the segment which has the ability to strengthen nation's economy like a backbone. ICT industry of Pakistan is growing rapidly and its estimated annual revenue collection is well above 2 billion dollars. Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA) and Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB) are the two prominent national-level bodies helping software houses in achieving their individual as well as collective target.

As per the records available on the website of Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA), there are 218 members of this association nationwide and out of these, 101 member IT companies are situated in Lahore. On the other hand, official website of Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB) claims that 631 software houses and IT companies are registered with them from all over Pakistan at the moment, 145 companies (22.6%) are from La-

hore. The complete breakup of both resources is presented below:

Table 1: Geographical Distribution of IT Companies

Organization	Members Geographical Locations				
	Lahore	Karachi	Islamabad	Other	Total
P@SHA	101	125	78		304
PSEB	145	215	164	107	631

Data Source

The HR Managers of 20 Lahore based software houses were approached randomly for the sake of participation in this research study. Membership Directory on the website of P@SHA contains the email address of Head of the HR department of every member IT organization. This information was the key source to approach the targeted participants. Out of these 20 HR Managers, seven showed their willingness to participate in this study. Codified in person interviews of these seven HR representatives are the data source of this qualitative study.

Ethical Considerations

Respondents were informed explicitly about the purpose and scope of this study and were given the freedom to participate in the research entirely at their own will, even the option of withdrawal at any stage of the study without mentioning any reason. The anonymity of the participants was guaranteed in this research and fictitious names were allotted to them in discussions.

Interview Instrument and Protocol

Interviewing technique was selected to explore the main hurdles recruiters are facing in inducting new resources in IT industry and how to minimize these obstacles in order to improve the overall efficiency of resources engaged in this process. This data collection technique was considered appropriate for the objectives of this research and to allow the respondents to share their real life experiences.

A panel discussion was arranged in order to finalize the questions to be asked during these interviews. This panel was comprised of five fellow postgraduate students having decent professional experience and similar research interests



as this study. Four questions were eliminated to make this instrument significant and best suited for this study. Content and context validations have also been assured by this panel.

Starting from appreciating the voluntarily participating in this research study, a brief introduction of research problem and objects are presented to align the focus of interviewees with the research team. Data confidentiality and ethical considerations are also presented before actually starting the interview questions.

Data Analysis Strategy

No analysis software exists which can directly analyze data of business research in audio format, so it was mandatory to codify/transcribe the data into written form. Participants usually share few key factors through their facial expressions, mode swings and in body language so these elements should also have to be codified with the stated responses. So, it was strategized that notes (apart from direct responses/statements) have to be taken during interviews and the data will be codified in the same day to avoid any sort of data loss.

The objective of this study was to identify the key issues of recruiters in IT industry, so “Thematic Analysis” technique was adopted to generate the patterns for emerging themes based upon the interviews conducted of experience recruiters of different software houses. QSR NVivo 10 software was selected for this research activity.

Summary

The way this research will be conducted is discussed in detail in this section. The main objective of this research is to explore the barriers of recruitment in IT sector and propose alternatives accordingly. Depending upon the nature of research design and objectives, it was decided to adopt a qualitative approach and use interviewing method to collect the data. P@SHA and PSEB are two of the most prominent source of IT Industry in Pakistan, hence both were consulted to access the population and sampling for the research activity. Standard ethical considerations and panel discussion for instrument development were followed to finalize the interview protocols. Mock exercise, content and context validation were performed before actu-

ally collecting the data as per the data analysis strategy devised earlier.

Findings

Multiple realities observed during the interview phase have been interlinked to reach some conclusion. An overview of the findings is presented in the following table:

Table 2: Overview of Research Findings

Research Question	Themes	Categories	Sub-Categories
What are the key issues recruiters are facing in IT industry?	Shortlisting	Bulk of CV	Quantity of Applicants
			Irrelevant Applicants
		Resume Structure	Poor Resume Writing
			Varying Resume Formats
	Response Time for Hiring the Candidate	Staff Strength in HR Dept.	
		Shortlisting Time	
		Candidates' Skills of Marketing Themselves	
	Organization's Fame and Reputation	Employment Desires of "Right Candidates"	
	Features of Jobsites	Applicant's Perspective	Effortless Application Submissions
			Costless Solution
		Employer's Perspective	Aging of Candidate Profiles
			Limited Filtration Options
			CV Searching Tools
How these issues can be resolved in order to increase the efficiency of recruitment process?	Quality Applicants	Genuine Applicants	
		Applicant's Engagement	
		Uniform Resume Structure	
	Ease for HR	Limited Number of Applications	
		Reduced HR Workload	
		Better Applicants Handling	
	Improved Functionality of Jobsites	In-depth Filtering Option	
		Customized Reports	
		Auto-Aging of Candidate Profiles	
		Tight Application Controls	
	Company's Image	Organization's Branding	



Participants

HR heads of 20 Lahore based software houses were approached for this research study and 7 out of them agreed to participate. On request of the majority of participants and in light of ethical considerations, it was decided not to disclose the names of participants and the organizations they are serving.

Female participation dominated in this study with 57.14% and remaining three participants were male. The experience of respondents varies from 3 years to 14.5 years, with an overall average of 8.5 years. Two HR Managers didn't participate in this research but referred their team members to share their experiences for this study.

Data Analysis Strategy

Data analysis strategy is discussed in detail in Section 3.7 above. No major changes have to be made in execution of that strategy.

Data Analysis and Coding

The transcription of interviews is a very critical step in qualitative research analysis as codification of data can diverge the meanings and conceptualization of the research topic altogether. Keeping in view the objectives of this research and profiles of the participants, denaturalism style was adopted to codify the interviews so that contextual information should also be captured in analysis of data.

Summary

HR heads of 20 software houses were contacted for this study and 7 out of them have shown their interest in participation. The details of these representatives were collected from the membership directory of P@SHA's official website. Keeping in view the nature of this study, contextual information was considered equally important as compared to the verbal contents of the participants, so it was decided to adopt Denaturalism Style for transcription of interviews recorded. After performing the thematic analysis with the help of QSR NVivo 10, a detailed overview of the themes identified and patterns observed were presented in the form of a table.

Discussion

Research Questions

There are two main questions asked in this research activity; what the major issues of recruitment in IT industry are and how to cater them. These questions were further drilled down to explore the insights of these phenomena. The themes around which these questions evolved were significance of shortlisting, factors distracting the shortlisting process, famous jobsites working in Pakistan, major improvements desired in these job portals and remedy to applicants' habit of clicking "Apply" button against every job advertisement on these portals.

Effective shortlisting is described as the most critical function of recruitment process. Participant_D stated "Actually hiring the right person for the right job is eventually the perfect thing for the organization, which is not possible without perfect shortlisting". Participant_B also seconds this fact as "Short listing plays important role as if you properly short list only then you can get the right person for the right job".

Starting from the open-ended question of what makes recruitment tough for them; majority of the participants said that overwhelming response to job vacancies with majority from irrelevant disciplines and/or not even getting closer to minimum requirements of the job put a lot of workload on them. Participant_A described this situation as "whenever we go for hiring by means of job Portals, it happens every time. We advertise a job; we get a lot of irrelevant CVs (bulk of them). It's a hazard to filter." The same situation has also been narrated by Participant_B as "If we talk about electronic media we get a quick response as within an hour or two we get a lot of Applicants but sometimes let's say we are looking for an HR or Admin person and we get the people from finance and marketing too. Or for some junior level posts we get the CVs with high profiles too. Irrelevant junk of applications screening is main distracting factor for HR Department."

ROZEE.PK and BeRozgaar.com were described the most popular job portals available in Pakistan by Participant_B and Participant_C. Both of these job portals offer free services to jobseekers and provide a limited control to employers on their advertised jobs. On asking the role these job portals are playing in recruitment, the common issue highlighted was the trend of applicants



in applying multiple jobs within seconds without even checking whether these jobs are suitable to their candidatures and professional goals, and whether they even meet the basic requirements or not. After creating the basic profile and adding a CV, it was described that a huge majority of jobseekers use to search a keyword suitable to their professional profile and start pressing “Apply” button to all the jobs popped up in return of that search query. Participant_E referred it to the poor economic conditions of the country and quest of the applicants to keep exploring ‘Better Opportunity’ on the go.

Uploading resume once and forwarding it unlimited times, and at almost zero cost, are declared as the prime reasons of creating tremendous junk pool of irrelevant CVs against an advertised job by the participants. Participant_G narrated the situation as “At job portals, everyone applies, regardless of job is relevant or not. As far as Pakistani candidates are concerned, they apply irrelevantly and then job portals are not smart enough to provide efficient screening tools that should be present at job portals if they apply for irrelevant job then there is some restriction from job portals.” Participant_A claimed that her organization once received 1180 applications for Jr. HR Officer and 1360 for Administration Officer within 24 hours of publishing the jobs through a leading domestic jobsite. These jobsites offer some basic searching tools to employers so that they can drill down candidates having best match to their needs but effectiveness of these tools is also doubtful. If a candidate is not updating his/her profile regularly, search queries will extract the same record set for same query even if the query been run after ten years (excluding the profiles updated and created in these ten years).

Sometimes, employer succeed in finding an ideal candidate but that candidate turns down the offer straightaway just because he has no prior idea about the company and he don’t want to take a risk to join any unreliable, non-famous organization. This factor highlighted by Participant_F has pointed the importance of organization’s branding in terms of employability.

In the quest of what can turn things right; some great ideas were shared by the participant. The most common reason identified why applicants make a mess with applying to every single vacancy was the careless attitude of applicants and costless, quick and easier method of submitting candidacy through the jobsites. The common solution proposed was to engage the applicants in filling the job application and forcing them to go through the job details so that they

can only apply for a job if found themselves suitable enough. Participant_D described this situation as “Instead of just emailing or pressing a button, making the application submission process a bit tricky, length and time consuming can work in filtering such non-serious applicants automatically. Only serious jobseeker will afford to spend his time, say 15 minutes, on one vacancy where he could even apply at least 50 jobs in the same time.”

Conclusions

The qualitative approach of this research activity helped in exploring valuable insights into the hardships recruiters of IT industry are facing. This exercise also offered them an opportunity to share their thoughts how these hurdles can be overruled in a bigger spectrum. To make the things right, organizations have to take some initiatives to avoid these barriers.

Development in the field of Information Technology where facilitating the business community at large, it is also creating problems as well for the recruiters as well. Irrelevant job application in a huge quantity is the biggest challenge for recruitment teams in comparatively smaller HR departments of software houses. The burden created by these piles of applications consumes most of the time and energies of the recruiters which went vain in return. If avoided, not only the recruitment process's efficiency will increase but these resources (time and efforts) can also be utilized in some other productive activities by the HR department. Based upon the overall analysis of the responses, it can be concluded that these emerging software houses should create their own career portals on their official websites and apply all those checks and filters which are not being offered to them by the ordinary jobsites of the market.

Recommendations and Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice

Based upon this whole exercise, some recommendations are presented below for all the stakeholders of this industry.

The practice of individually acknowledging the receipt of CVs by addressing the candidates with their first/last name at some random time slot of a working day can make an SME organization prominent in the market and candidates will have confidence in that organization that they do review the CVs received



and do not trash them unattended. This can easily be done with the help of standard Mail Merge feature of any emailing software (Outlook, Thunderbird, etc.). Instantaneous auto-responders can't win the confidence as everyone knows such replies are being generated automatically without the involvement of recruitment team. If the acknowledgement email will be sent after some time of application submission, it will give an impression of manual activity regardless it might be sent automatically. Similarly, online test invitation and test result intimation can multiply this confidence.

To move a step further, it is suggested to smaller/relatively un-famous organizations to develop their own job portal on their websites where interested candidates must create their profiles (multiple tabs for different sections e.g. personal, academic, professional, achievements, etc.) and then apply for the jobs they feel comfortable with (Lyons & Marler, 2011). This profile creation process should have to take at least 10 minutes so that only serious job seekers should apply and save both party's time and resources. These organizations should keep on advertising their jobs on popular jobsites to catch the maximum audience but applicants should be redirected to organization's own career portal and instructed to create their complete profile first on company's portal and then apply for the vacancy. This portal can also serve as a branding and awareness tool, companies can send notifications to all the registered candidates on new openings, special religious and cultural events like Eids, Christmas, New Year, etc. and can also share the success stories and achievements. The aging issue of profiles, candidates having interest in the company, CVs on same pattern and flexibility of implementing customized controls would be the benefits of this portal.

In the second phase, companies can go for shortlisting, interview scheduling, status updates of each interview and even job offers through this portal which will help them in company's branding as well as implementation of latest recruitment practices.

These suggested pages should be simple in design, not graphically too much enriched and should have some simple administrative controls/interfaces coupled with a database. This could be done with the help of current resources if available, through some third party vendor or even by hiring an intern for this task for specific period of time. This one-time investment has a tremendous potential of great returns if executed in a systematic way.

Summary

The crux of this research activity is to propose all the organizations working in IT sector to have developed their own career portal on their respective official website. This will not only help them in branding and recognition activities, but also help them in fixing the issues being faced in recruitment process. The existing job portals can be utilized as usual, but only for the sake of advertising their vacancies. Having the full control of the portal, they can not only generate reports and apply filters as per their own requirements and business practices but can also control the biggest challenge of this sector, i.e. junk pools of irrelevant CVs. Being a software house itself, it will be a quick, cost effective solution for all the member organizations of the industry.

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