

## **Transition to an Automated Online Talent Acquisition System in an IT Project-Based Organization: A Case Study**

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### **Evolution of Talent Acquisition**

The evolution of recruitment as a function has been fascinating. The traditional recruitment involved recruiting over long timelines and use of print advertising (post, spray and pray). Process superseded end-result and the idea was to ensure right headcount. Later recruitment saw the shift to online and e-recruitment. The offline post-spray-pray of recruitment advertisements was complimented with online post-spray-pray of attracting candidates. The traditional recruitment and online recruitment existed side-by-side. The next version of recruitment was a considerable advancement over the previous versions. While the older forms of recruitment focused on the active job seekers and aimed at attracting them, the newer version of recruitment focused also on the passive job seekers. The passive job seekers are those who are not actively looking for a change of job but are precious talent who can be converted. The newer version of recruitment also saw the recruitment going social or in other words, social media recruitment. The use of social networking platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter saw recruiters connecting to professionals over social networks and attracting talent. The focus shifted from process to end-result. No more headcount is enough. Talent acquisition was the need of the hour.

Today all these versions interestingly co-exist, although there is increasing shift towards talent hiring. Employer branding has become all the more important. The next shift of recruitment is even more transformational and aims for the very first time to convert recruitment from a cost centre into a profit centre. What many times is dubbed as the fourth version of recruitment or recruitment 4.0 believes in the power of the network. It involves crowdsourcing and Gamification. The traditional job boards and job agencies lose significance. The recruitment also looks beyond recruiting traditional employees to recruiting talent over the network who connect, do the job and disconnect. The process follows an open call format i.e. being open to virtually anyone in the world. The volunteering workers join, connect over the network and do the job. This is known as crowdsourcing. 'This depends on building and nurturing a

“qualitative” community, a strong employment brand, vibrant social networks, mapped competitors, and putting in place a predictable talent pipeline for key hiring channels’ (Jeffery, 2011) (Foxall, 2013) (McClure, 2011) (Haterd, 2011). ‘Simply defined, crowdsourcing represents the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call. This can take the form of peer-production (when the job is performed collaboratively), but is also often undertaken by sole individuals. The crucial prerequisite is the use of the open call format and the large network of potential laborers’ (Howe, 2006).

Technology continues to impact hiring in a big way. The war for talent on one hand makes it imminent for companies to find newer and better ways of acquiring talent. On the other hand there is a continuous pressure to reduce cost and improve the ROI on recruitment. In short, can technology help to improve the rigour and effectiveness of hiring and help in acquiring better talent at a lower cost? The more a company can do that, the greater advantage it has over its competitors. Better talent at a lower cost means even more in knowledge intensive and tech-skills intensive industry like Information Technology. IT Project-based organizations are increasingly transitioning to fully automate hiring using automation and artificial intelligence. The possibility of reducing human involvement and let machines take over the hiring initially in screening resumes and then in conducting selection tests and then even in scheduling interviews and finally conducting interviews and making offers (Nagy, 2013) (Paesani, 2013) (Jibe, 2015) (Rosenblum, 2015) (Faliagka, et al., 2012).

### **Research Objective**

The research paper is a result of a research project undertaken in a premier IT Project based MNC – Inimcap. Inimcap is determined to adapt a new system to acquire talent. Currently the talent acquisition process is more traditional and involves face-to-face approach. The talent acquisition process is on the verge of a major transformation using automation and artificial intelligence technologies.

While technological development and implementation is definitely futuristic but the greater challenge comes from acceptance from the recruiters and even more from the business managers for them to believe that the next resource who will be hired in their team is going to be hired by a machine.

The objective of this research was to understand the various issues in implementing the new talent acquisition system and plan and map the entire change strategy for the company. The paper hence attempts to explore aspects for successful execution of the new talent acquisition process:

- Adequately appreciating change and planning for execution of new talent acquisition process using automation and artificial intelligence.
- Sufficient support for employees.
- Competent execution by managers.
- Developing Change managers with appropriate skills sets and capabilities

## **Case Study**

In choosing Inimcap<sup>1</sup> as the focus of the research, an attempt was made to study a project-based organisation facing challenges in the way it changed from a traditional talent recruitment system to a modern technology enabled fully automated online recruitment system for acquiring talent. The complexities of managing this change at Inimcap provided for a comprehensive study of change management issues at a project-based organisation.

## **Rationale behind the choice of the case method**

Case studies contribute to the building of a professional repertoire (Schön 1991). A case study and, normally, history focus on one case, but simultaneously take account of the context, and so encompass many variables and qualities, either following an “explicative” strategy as opposed to “experimental” (one unit of analysis and a few isolated variables) and “reductive” (many units of analysis and a few variables) (Johansson 2002). Our objective to understand the various aspects of managing change from a traditional talent recruitment system to an automated online talent recruitment system led us to choose case research method. The case presented in the study conforms to Yin’s definition. The case investigates a present-day phenomenon in a real-life setting, and the focus is on organizational and managerial (rather than technical) issues (Myers, 2003).

## **About Inimcap**

Inimcap is a multinational corporation and an IT Project-based company. Inimcap is one of the world’s foremost providers of consulting, technology, outsourcing services and other professional services. The company is present in over 50 countries with almost 165,000 people. Inimcap Group offers an array of integrated services that combine top - of - the - range technology with deep sector expertise.

Inimcap in India has over 65,000 people across 8 cities. A pioneer in the IT industry, Inimcap has nearly 50 years of global expertise collaborating with leading corporations and brings the Consulting, Technology and Outsourcing experience to India. With dedicated teams to service the local markets, Inimcap has strong domain experience to service clients across the Government and Public Sector, Energy and Utilities, Manufacturing, Telecom and Financial Services sectors.

## **Benchmarking Competition**

### **Competitor 1 - WIPRO**

Wipro, one of the biggest Indian IT Company, use an online recruitment system - ‘Synergy’, which has the database of all resumes received through

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<sup>1</sup> Inimcap is an alias for the actual IT project-based company that was the focus of the case study.

various sources. The system provides complete control and view of the candidatures. The recruitment team can access to all sources database.

The system does a duplication check at the time of resume entry and at the time of processing. Wipro processes the first accurate resume received regardless of the source or channel it is received from.

Wipro has been trying different methods to hire the right students and reduce the turnover. For this reason they created WASE programme, which provides students the opportunity to work for the company for 4 years. By doing so, the company gives young and motivated students exposure to a multinational company work environment. The students have an the opportunity to work on live client projects along with full time employees of Wipro. This enables them to get invaluable industry experience and technical knowledge.

#### Competitor 2 – IBM

IBM has designed ‘Watson’, a home grown artificial intelligence based recruitment system. ‘Watson’ is an artificially intelligent computer system capable of answering questions posed in natural language developed in IBM deep QA project by a research team led by investigator David. The system was named after IBM’s first CEO Thomas J. Watson.

#### How IBM’s ‘Watson’ works –

The first step consists on exploring IBM job openings and submit resume online

- If the company thinks there is a potential match, the candidate will be asked to complete a brief video or written introduction. For IBM ’s technical roles, candidate may be asked to complete a coding challenge as well .
- Interviews are conducted virtually or in-person.
- If there is a match, candidate receives an offer.

#### Recruitment technology

“ The company provides also services to automate the full cycle of talent acquisition from sourcing to hire, so company solution is designed to standardize the recruitment process to make it more efficient.” (IBM website, 2015)

The idea is offer a service in real time that help adhere to government regulations and hiring practices, centralize talent data and leverage it across the talent management life cycle, and respond to business growth objectives – helping company move beyond achieving hiring process efficiencies.

#### Case for Change at Inimcap

## **Appreciating Change**

In order to appreciate change it is required to understand the existence of two forces: the stability (e.g. HR team) and the force of change (e.g. the CEO support). The second one is important because sometimes an organization requires a change so it is helpful to understand the reasons of this need, the future benefits in order to appreciate all change process.

All organisations are goal directed and fix specific performance targets that want to reach: if this does not happen, than a change is needed. This is the case of Inimcap with its recruitment process. The present recruitment process has neither been efficient nor been effective in identifying and acquiring talent.

The present e - recruitment process at Inimcap is as follows:

- Resume phase
- Obtained resume from a particular database
- Find the Right profile
- Multiple databases
- Collect all resumes from different sources (i.e. Monster, LinkedIn, etc.)
- Online test.

## **Reasons for Change**

The company assessment process does not reach the target in the recruitment process standard quality, there is a disconfirmation that the company wants to fix with the new system. The company is engaged in an incremental change (Managerial Approach) and Anticipatory too, in other terms the company want strengthening existing competitive position, that means realising opportunities within existing organisation and business model.

People in charge of doing the interview are not competent enough. Most of them do not have a psychology background, and are only involved in this activity on part time basis.

## **Old Problem – What needs to be changed?**

The current issue is the inefficient recruitment process: with too many candidates for the traditional one. The candidates experience is really bad, because they need to wait for a lot of time and in this way HR department cannot give them the right attention . Travelling to reach the recruitment place seems to be uncomfortable and expensive for the candidates, and it can affect their performance too.

## **Benefits of Change**

Time saving will be a major benefit of the new fully automated online recruitment system. The time savings will be both from the candidate perspective (who will no longer have to travel

long distances or wait in long queues for their interview) and also from the company's perspective. Inimcap is working for the future when all candidates could appear for the selection test from wherever (location) they prefer.

#### >Cost effectiveness

The difference between putting a job vacancy on company website and putting one on a newspaper is huge in terms of cost. A recruitment consultant fee for a candidate could be anything up to 20% of the first year's salary, with online recruitment you can choose between a huge number of candidate reducing the cost of the previously less efficient system.

The online assessment will reduce the cost too, for example with the new system an online assessment will be cost only about 5 dollars per candidate.

#### >Time Savings

With the new fully automated online recruitment system in place the entire recruitment process could be done in a day: a job vacancy can be put on a job site in the morning, the first applications arrive by lunchtime, and a candidate interviewed by the end of the day. Of course, it isn't always like this; senior position need more time, because there are more details to fix. But it would still be far quicker than the present system.

#### >Better chances of success

Automated online recruitment doesn't face time, localization, availability problems, whereas the traditional one could be national, local or trade press – faces these kinds of limitations. The success of the process is hugely people dependent. Automated Online recruitment is different. A job vacancy advertisement on a job board or website is there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for as long as the company desires. Candidates can come back to it again and again. Everybody in the company can access to it: from office administrator to the Financial Director: they are all online and so there is an increase in transparency.

#### >Bigger audience

More people every year could access to Internet all around the world. So company audience increases every time. It is many times believed that online recruitment is only effective for young net - savvy Facebook generation. This simply is not the case. Research consistently shows that the average age of candidates using online recruitment channels is around 35 years old. And the trend is up. Online recruitment is now a standard part of most people's job - hunting no matter what level or age.

>Easy

Posting a job on company own site is straight forward enough. Most job sites and CV databases are very user - friendly and an in - depth knowledge of information technology is needed to post a vacancy advertisement. Usually, all it is needed is the job description, a bit of time and an electronic payment system. Furthermore there is the possibility to post a job vacancy on Twitter, LinkedIn or Facebook too for free.

### **Defining the Change**

The change consists on shifting from a traditional inefficient recruitment process to an entirely automated online recruitment system.

#### Phases of proposed Automated Online Talent Acquisition System

- Resume Parsing
  - o Obtained resume from a particular database
  - o “Intelligent Searching”. CV filtration.
  - o Find the right profile
- Collect all resumes from different sources (i.e. monster, LinkedIn etc. . . .)
- Automated online test.

All stages are planned to conclude after 6 months. Nevertheless each stage is independent, so it is possible to stop each one at any time if it is required. Training sessions are schedule only for the second and the third phases.

### **Consequences of Changing**

Change will be reducing costs, it will be a better assessment process experience, and it will be avoid human error and subjectivity during the process. The company will save a lot of time too and can use the energy saved in other processes; and finally the employees can reduce the effort for routine activities and focus on building greater levels of engagement. The contents of change involved are technology, quality and cost (i.e. building efficiency reduces cost).

### **Key issues in Change**

This change impacts the entire organization. This change doesn't affect only the HR department. For instance a department, which asks for extra employees, should accept the output of the new system.

A change agenda should answer many questions like –

- What is the company's assessment of the external environment?

- What capabilities are the company missing and which one the company needs to develop?
- What are the critical issues facing the company and how the company plans to address these issues?
- In order to answer to these questions the company agenda should:
- Explain well to all 'actors' involved the problem faced and also the benefits of change.
- It is preferable speak in small groups with employees who have similar responsibilities.
- During the process the leader should be open to capture all feedbacks that arrive from the environment.

### **Mobilizing Support**

In order to change, people in an organization have to be assembled and rallied together to bring about meaningful results (Nilakat, Ramnarayan, 2006).

There are three main ideas in this phase:

- People have to take charge of the change. Participation, involvement and ownership are crucial for effective change.
- Change is both cultural and political: it involves influencing, inducing, negotiating, persuading.
- Persuading mainly involves communication. Effective communication strategies are crucial to change.

Inimcap must mobilize support for this change. In fact, not all the stakeholders may agree with the new procedures and they can put up a resistance to it. Many change management efforts in organizations fail because they do not sufficiently mobilize the support of people. Many times, managers jump from appreciation to execution, skipping this crucial step. Hence it will be important for Inimcap to mobilize support of recruiters, business managers and other stakeholders to ensure that the execution is smooth and acceptance of the new system is high.

### **Approach to Change**

According to Axelrod (2009), there are four historical approaches to change:

- Leader - driven approach
- Process - driven approach
- Team - driven approach
- Change - management approach

Each of them has different characteristics and suits different contexts. In case of Inimcap, it is suggested to use the Change Management approach, which is a combination of expert - driven and team - driven approaches. While the former provides a business and technical focus to change, the latter generates ownership, involvement and commitment.

In order to gain commitment the parallel organization<sup>2</sup> concept can be adopted. A suggestion for Inimcap would be to create parallel organizations across the functions and the levels of workers. A 'sponsor team' can be created comprised of managers of the different functions, so that they can initiate and promote change. The main supporters of the change in recruitment will have to be the top level managers. For this reason, a sponsor team could be a good option along with a parallel organization.

### **Ownership and Involvement in the change process**

Employees' ownership, involvement and commitment to change are crucial to the success of organizational change. In the Bangalore division of Inimcap almost 200 people are working in the recruitment function. Knowing the point of view of the employees and involve them in the change process is a crucial aspect for the HR managers. In fact, the main opposition to the change can come from them, who can see the e - recruitment as a threat. They must be told the benefits of the change and that one of such benefit will be that they will be able to devote more time and attention towards more strategic functions of HR like engaging employees.

Also the employees of the line functions need to be involved in the process. They are going to work with people recruited through the automated online system, so it is important to know their point of view and commit them to the change. Once involved, they would feel strongly part of the change and of the entire organization.

There is a need to build support of a number of employees that is referred to as the "critical mass", the minimum number of people in an organization whose support is required to launch change.

### **Difficulties in Mobilizing Support**

Some difficulties can come out during the process of mobilizing support; in fact, most individuals are oriented to stability rather than change. Therefore, people need to be persuaded to give up the status quo. They need to be sufficiently enthusiastic to alter their mindset and mental models. What it should be done in this case, is to make all the employees understand the benefits that fully automated e - recruiting can bring to the company, in order to make them feel enthusiastic and to involve them in the change process.

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<sup>2</sup> A parallel organization improves problem solving and decision making by liberating creative, rigorous inquiry blocked or unavailable in the formal organization (Hawk & Zand, 2014).

In order to create a critical mass, manager needs to convert at least 20 per cent of the fence-sitters into active supporters of change.

### **How to motivate to change?**

People are largely motivated by self-interest; they want to know what is in for them. The change agenda should consider the stakeholders' interests. At Inimcap, there are three main groups who can oppose some resistances to the change:

1. Recruiters: they could be scared by the possibility of a replacement of their job and/or they can find it unusual to work with an automatic process instead of the traditional one.
2. Technical team: they could find it strange to work with people hired by a machine or a completely automated process. This can lead to problems of trust and team work.
3. Project managers: like technical team members, the project managers can also put up some resistance to having in their teams people hired through an automatic process instead of the traditional one.

On the other side, the supporters of the change who can help in mobilizing support through the company are:

- The CEO.
- Senior managers.
- Recruitment head.

Mobilizing support is largely about influencing people to change despite or because of their self-interests. It's important to use and understand the art of persuasion. It's important to select people who are undecided about the change agenda, in order to convince them, while supporters and opponents can be ignored.

Then, it may be identified the interests of people whose support is needed. The concerns usually are about:

- Loss of status quo.
- Loss of sense of competence.
- Threat to identity.
- Uncertainty about the future.
- Negative consequences for others.

In order to persuade the target groups, it should be created a communication and persuasion strategy<sup>3</sup> for each of them. An effective communication strategy should take into account

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<sup>3</sup> According to Cialdini (1993), there are six principles of persuasion:

1. Liking: we tend to like people that are more similar to us and that like us.

four critical elements: the audience, the purpose of communication, credibility of the communicator, context of communication.

### **Persuading the Recruiters**

Persuasion strategies of reciprocity, authority and scarcity can be used to persuade the recruiters. Senior researchers and academic experts can be invited to explain the benefits of the automated online recruitment and to assure that there will be no negative consequences.

### **Persuading the Technical team**

The technical team can also be persuaded using reciprocity, authority and scarcity strategies. It's useful to share strategic information with employees, identify the opportunities they are likely to miss if the organization doesn't undergo the change, make them like the opportunity to facilitate the recruitment job and to assure better co-workers who can enhance competitiveness of Inimcap.

### **Persuading the Project managers**

It is important to persuade project managers explaining them the benefits of the new talent acquisition system and to tell them that they can get skilled people in a quick time. The automated talent acquisition system will make it possible to:

- Reduce time of recruitment.
- Reduce the costs, and this will benefit the entire company.
- Access to an unlimited number of profile, increasing the scalability.

It may be useful to present to the target audience of employees bench-marking to the organizations against the best practices of the other organizations, like IBM and Wipro, so that employees are exposed to new approaches other than their familiar. If influence and persuasion fail, a manager may need to mobilize support through negotiation. To negotiate, it's important to show to the target audience what they can earn in

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2. Reciprocity: it leads people to repay in kind what they receive (Employees are more willing to trust managers who are perceived to be benevolent.)
  3. Social proof: people rely on who is close and around them. (It's useful to communicate to people that "everyone is doing it": teams can be used, because people rely most on what the other team members do.)
  4. Consistency: when people take a position publicly, they tend to stick to it. (Getting public commitment from the employees will help them to support change when executed.)
  5. Authority: people are more influenced by individuals perceived as experts.
  6. Scarcity: when things are available less readily, they become more valuable.

return of their commitment to change: better workers for the company, selected by a scientific and reliable method, who will help the company to grow.

### **Executing Change**

Inimcap faced several challenges during the execution phase.

#### Challenges during Execution

1. Implementation took more time than originally assigned. Each phase of the online recruitment took variable time for implementation.
2. Major problems surfaced during implementation –
  - a. Dysfunctional software - certain snags in software emerged. They had to be fixed.
  - b. Major discontent of the hiring managers – The hiring managers were not at all happy with the change, primarily because they felt threatened.
  - c. Fears of security transgressions: e.g. Deletion or exporting data.
3. Coordination of implementation activities was not effective enough. Despite efforts there was not enough communication between departments regarding the new recruitment process implementation. Some people felt left out and were resistant to cooperate.
4. Capabilities and skills of employees involved were not enough for implementation. Training and instruction given to lower level employees were not adequate. The training carried out on stage 2 and 3 of the change management process, were not very well designed.
5. Certain uncontrollable factors in the environment delayed the implementation.

Inimcap will have to further elaborate the main aspects of change has to consider in order to accomplish a successful execution of change.

#### **Lessons learnt while executing the change -**

- The employees of Inimcap need to be empowered to act on the vision established by the planned change. The fear of losing job has to allay with not only words but with intent and action. New responsibilities can be added to the existing role of the recruiters. This will assure them that they will not be laid-off as a result of an automated talent acquisition system.
- There is a further need to define and share what is behind changing the actual recruitment process for a comprehensive automated online recruitment to establish a sense of urgency among employees.
- Communicate continuously and repeatedly emphasise the positive aspects online recruitment gives to the organisation.

- It is important to consider the feedbacks of the people involved, while pursuing the improvements.
- There is a need to acknowledge the support of its employees who support the change and motivate them to share their experiences and views with other employees.
- Recognize the effective new approaches within the online recruitment system by institutionalise them.
- Plan for and create short-term wins. It is important to determine short - term goals within each stage of the new recruitment system implementation.
- Keep reinforcing the advantages of automated talent acquisition system and sharing the comparative results of the new and the old system with all the 'actors' from time to time. This is important to maintain the momentum of change.

### **Future Steps being planned to execute the change better**

- To create cross-functional linkages in the organization. The purpose of creating cross – cross-functional linkages in the organisation is to improve the communication among the 'actors' involved (viz. lower level technical team with HR department) on implementing and promote the new recruitment process and platform.
- To further build change capabilities of employees through proper planned training intervention. This will help Inimcap to accomplish an efficient growth and transformation.
- To boost the collaboration among the agents involved (HR, hiring managers, recruitment team). This can be accomplished by:
  - Creating a reward system – recognition of actions in the direction of executing change needs to be recognized more often.
  - There is also a need to recognize the importance of sharing information between different departments, in this case especially between HR and hiring managers.
  - Encourage the designers of the software to implement new things by interacting with HR and technical team/project managers.
- It is important to share the goal and importance of the new recruitment system interdepartmentally.
- It is important to share the positive results of online recruitment interdepartmentally, more frequently.
- To retain flexibility for incorporating opinions and suggestions of 'actors'.
- It is also important to align policies, procedures and remove structural impediments to performance and change.
- New routines for continuous improvements and innovations must be created.
- It is also important to benchmarking, i.e. seeing what others have done and adapt.

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

Implementing a change initiative is never easy and in case of Inimcap the lessons learnt were both before, during and after implementing the change (automated talent recruitment system). The lessons learnt before helped caret a change management plan for transitioning

from a traditional recruitment system to an automated online talent recruitment system. During execution however, more lessons were learnt from the challenges that the company faced in implementing the new system. The lessons drafted for future execution aim to gradually change to the new talent acquisition system. The lessons learnt in this case can be significant for other project-based organizations when they transition to a more advanced talent acquisition system.

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**Ray Titus** is the Professor and Marketing & Strategy at the Alliance School of Business, Alliance University, located at Bangalore, India. Ray’s entry into academia followed a decade long stint in the Industry where he served in Operations, Marketing, and Project roles. As an Industry Professional he’s overseen strategic growth initiatives that included product and category expansions and the launch of an independent strategic business unit.

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**Subhashish Sengupta** is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP®). He has over 15 years of work experience in the IT industry and his key strengths are in Project Development & Management, Delivery management, Project Analysis & Design. He currently works as Project Manager. He has played a leading role in coming-up with recommendations on implementing Agile in the Indian IT scenario. He has received several awards in his career and was awarded the 'Star performer of the Year' award for his professional contributions. Besides his present role, Subhashish also has interests in practice-oriented research, especially in the area of Project Management. Email: [subhashishsen@gmail.com](mailto:subhashishsen@gmail.com)