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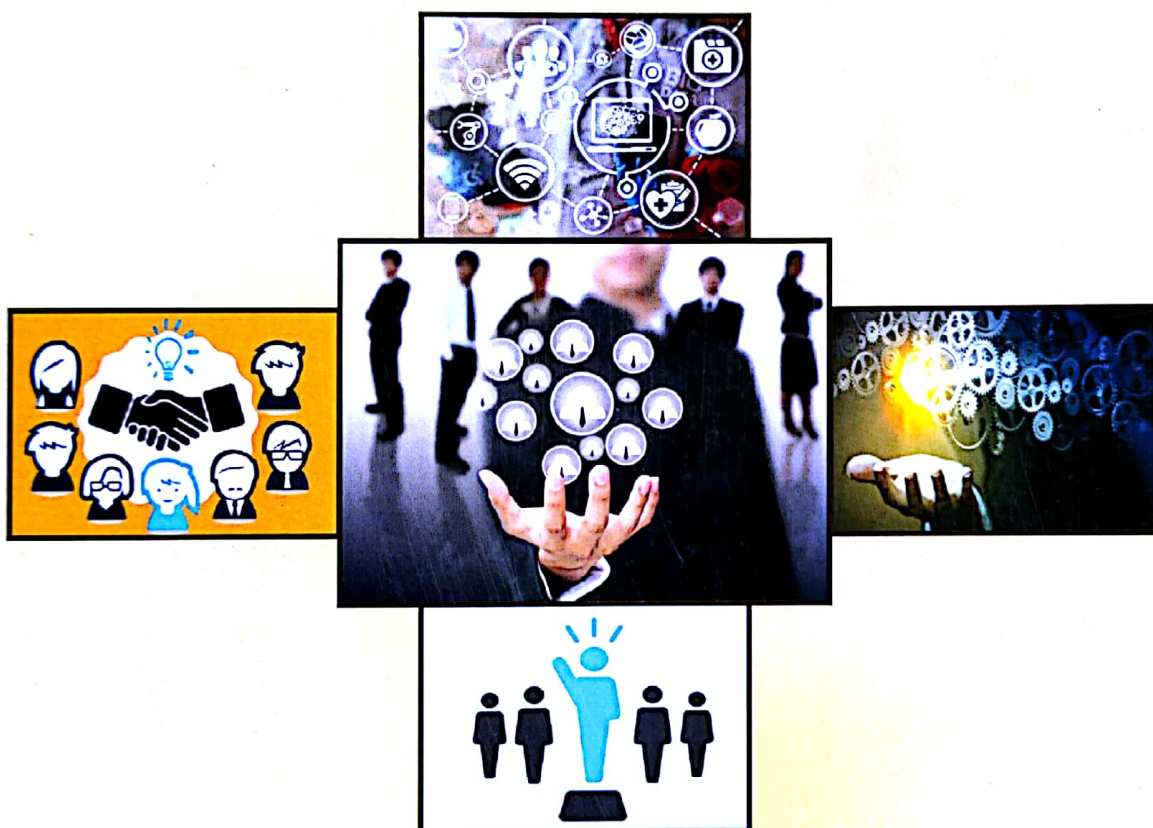
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# 24. Pre-Onboarding Engagement of Lateral Hires - A Study among Recruiters in the it Industry

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## Abstract

This paper is an outcome of a quantitative study on lateral hire engagement prior to onboarding carried out in the IT sector. The major focus is on various methods adopted by the human resource recruiters of the IT industry to keep the new hires engaged and to understand the benefits and challenges of new hire engagement prior to onboarding. The respondents were Human Resource recruiters (n=60) in different IT companies. The respondents were identified by convenience sampling method and the data were collected using a customised questionnaire during January 2017. Major results indicate that the top three new hire engagement methods adopted by the recruiters in the IT industry are (i) interaction about the organisation, (ii) welcome notes / mail and (iii) interaction about prospective roles and responsibilities. These predominant methods are low-cost, low-risk initiatives.

**Keywords:** IT industry, Lateral hires, New hire engagement, Onboarding, Pre-onboarding engagement, Recruitment, Innovative HR practice.

## Introduction & Statement of the Problem

Organisations cannot afford to have surplus talent or be victims of talent shortfalls owing to cost and other business implications. This applies to any organisation, and more so IT organisations that operate at a global level, in a highly competitive business environment and with niche skill sets. Given the war for talent and the cost implications of surplus workforce, employee selections are made in a pre-determined and phased manner in line with projected business needs. However, despite rolling out offer letters, changes in the business needs / environment may prompt an employer to delay the scheduled date of joining of prospective employees. Meanwhile, the prospective employee may settle for a confirmed placement compared to a desirable placement. Also, candidates with niche skill sets or employable talent have an upper hand whereby they obtain a few offers letters, negotiate a good deal and subsequently join an organisation of choice. Thus it is but true that due to various factors not all job offers will be closed and that 'no shows' (i.e., phenomenon where candidates who have

accepted the letter of offer do not join the organisation as expected) are inevitable. The issue of 'no-show' is further complicated and has far-reaching impact when the position is for tenured talent.

## Research Objectives

To know the methods adopted by the IT recruiters with respect to pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires.

To trace the benefits of pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires.

To highlight the challenges in pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires.

## Review of Literature

Organizations need talent as they have the capability to change the current and future performance (Julia, 2008). Boxall (1999) affirms that organisations need to attract and nurture people who have the competencies and ability that will contribute to enhance organization performance. Organizations take initiatives to attract talent as talent in the labour market is limited (Athey, 2008). One of the most important ways for an organization to improve effectiveness and profitability is by investing in the most important resource of today, people, through strategic use of an onboarding program. Onboarding is defined as "a way to help new hires adjust to social and performance aspects of their new jobs quickly and smoothly" (Bauer, 2010). Though the structure of the onboarding process differs from company to company, its linkages to better employee and consequent organisational performance are evident (Hillman, 2009).

Pre-onboarding engagement of new hires is the process that happens prior to onboarding where the HR recruiter organises engagement activities for the new hires who have been selected and who have accepted offer for a job role in the organization. Pre-onboarding engagement of new hires is an extension of the employee engagement principle and includes building relationships with prospective employees or new hires who are about to join the organization. These engagement activities are to excite them about the job transition, bring commitment towards the organization and make them onboard on the date specified. Pre-onboarding engagement of new hires is said to create an opinion about the company brand and make the job transition smoother thereby making new joinees feel comfortable in the new organization (Malhotra, 2016). This process usually happens when the candidate accepts the offer and while waiting for the start date.

Some of the industry practices on pre-onboarding of new hires are invitation to team-building events like team lunch, meetings, after hours get-togethers, e-learning engagements,

establishing and pursuing a professional relationship/connection with the prospective employee at the earliest and so on (Vandersande, 2012). Other typical pre-onboarding engagement activities include providing information (welcome notes / mail, outlines regarding the department, outlines regarding the new role, newsletters and so on), frequent contacts (Coffee meets, team lunch, meeting with department head, interaction with seniors, simple phone calls from HR departments and so on), providing training, benefits sign-ups, and taking actions to increase their commitment to the firm before they actually start (office tour, business cards, portal of tasks to be completed before joining and so on).

## Research Methodology

The present studyadopts the Descriptive design. The field of study is the IT Sector in Chennai city. The data were drawn from primary sources. The unit of analysis is the IT recruiter of any IT company in Chennai city that does pre-onboarding engagement. The universe of the study is comprised of all recruiters employed in IT companies in Chennai city that does pre-onboarding engagement. The sample size is 60 and was identified by convenience sampling technique. A customized questionnaire served as the tool of data collection. The tool elicited information pertaining to Profile of the Respondents, Organisational Practices regarding Onboarding, Respondents' Views on Pre-onboarding Engagement of Lateral Hires, Methods of Pre-onboarding Engagement of Lateral Hires, Benefits of Pre-onboarding Engagement of Lateral Hires and Challenges faced in Pre-onboarding Engagement of Lateral Hires. The tool was subject to expert validation and pre-testing before actual collection of data. Data collection was done during the month of January 2017. Data analysis was done using MS-Excel. Major limitations of the study are owing to the limited sample size and the self-report bias.

## Study Results

## Profile of the respondents

A little more than one-fourth of the respondents (26.67%) are women. As a HR recruiter, majority of the respondents (75%) had up to 5 years of experience. The mean years of experience was 3.95 years.

## Organisational Practices regarding Onboarding

Great Majority of the respondents (80%) mentioned that the time duration given to new hires to join the organisation ranged from 30 days to 60 days. While less than one-fifth of the respondents (16.67%) have indicated that new joinees in their organisation were not asked for any formal feedback regarding the onboarding process, a little more than one-third of the respondents (38.33%) have mentioned that such feedback is sought every time while hiring.

More than three-fifth of the respondents (61.67%) have stated that induction to new hires is given while onboarding and a little more than one-third of the respondents (35%) have mentioned that induction to new hires is given after onboarding. As part of organisational policy, new hires were extended a basket of benefits at the time of joining. Based on the multiple responses it was found that the predominant benefits included employee relocation assistance (35.41%), joining bonus (34.38%) and notice period reimbursement (26.04%) (Refer Table 1).

**Table 1: Benefits Given to New Hire while Onboarding**

| Sl no | Benefits | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-------|----------|---------------|----------------|
| 1 | Employee Relocation Assistance | 34 | 35.41 |
| 2 | Joining bonus | 33 | 34.38 |
| 3 | Notice period reimbursement | 25 | 26.04 |
| 4 | Others | 4 | 4.17 |
| | Total | 96* | 100% |

\* Multiple responses

**Respondents' Views on Pre-Onboarding Engagement of Lateral Hires**

Majority of the respondents (70%) have mentioned that new hire engagement is a necessary initiative. Only a handful of the respondents (11.67%) have indicated that it is not necessary. Almost two-third of the respondents (65%) have stated that separate engagement methods for campus and lateral hires are carried out. Only two-fifth of the respondents (20%) have indicated that their companies have a definite policy for new hire engagement. Also, a little more than one-third of the respondents (36.67%) have mentioned that the organisations have a separate, earmarked budget for engaging new hires.

**Methods of Pre-onboarding Engagement of Lateral Hires**

The various engagement activities adopted by HR recruiters in order to engage new hires before onboarding are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Methods of Pre-onboarding Engagement of Lateral Hires adopted by HR Recruiters**

| Sl no | Methods | Never | Rarely | Some times | Always | Total |
|-------|---------|-------|--------|------------|--------|-------|
| 1 | Coffee meet | 12 (20%) | 9 (15%) | 26 (43.33%) | 13 (26.67%) | 60 (100%) |
| 2 | Team lunch | 11 (18.33%) | 14 (23.33%) | 23 (38.33%) | 12 (20%) | 60 (100%) |
| 3 | Meeting with Department Head | 1 (1.67%) | 13 (21.67%) | 18 (30%) | 28 (46.67%) | 60 (100%) |

| 4 | Simple phone calls | 2 (3.33%) | 5 (8.33%) | 17 (28.33%) | 36 (60%) | 60 (100%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | Welcome notes/mail | 2 (3.33%) | 3 (5%) | 11 (18.33%) | 44 (73.33%) | 60 (100%) |
| 6 | Interaction about the organization | - | 4 (6.67%) | 8 (13.33%) | 48 (80%) | 60 (100%) |
| 7 | Interaction about prospective roles and responsibilities | - | 6 (10%) | 14 (23.33%) | 40 (66.67%) | 60 (100%) |
| 8 | Interaction with seniors | 2 (3.33%) | 10 (16.67%) | 19 (31.67%) | 29 (48.33%) | 60 (100%) |
| 9 | Office tour | 15 (25%) | 16 (26.67%) | 17 (28.33%) | 12 (20%) | 60 (100%) |
| 10 | Sending welcome kit | 13 (21.67%) | 13 (21.67%) | 7 (11.67%) | 27 (45%) | 60 (100%) |
| 11 | Sending them business cards | 19 (31.67%) | 16 (26.67%) | 15 (25%) | 10 (16.67%) | 60 (100%) |
| 12 | Sending a portal of tasks to be completed (mile stones) | 14 (23.33%) | 4 (6.67%) | 19 (31.67%) | 23 (38.33%) | 60 (100%) |
| 13 | Providing newsletters or magazines | 9 (15%) | 14 (23.33%) | 12 (20%) | 25 (41.67%) | 60 (100%) |

Among the respondents, a little less than two-fifth (43.33%) have said that they sometimes invite their new hires for a coffee meet before onboarding and one-fifth (20%) of the respondents have said that they do not have such an initiative in the organisation.

One-fifth of the respondents (20%) have said that they always call new hires for team lunch before onboarding and a little less than two-fifth of the respondents (38.33%) have said that they sometimes call new hires for team lunch before onboarding.

Less than half of the respondents (46.67%) have said that they always organize meeting with Department Heads for new hires before onboarding and a little more than one-fifth of the respondents (21.67%) have said that they rarely organize such meetings with Department Heads.

Three-fifth of the respondents (60%) have said that they always made phones calls to keep track of new hires and very few (3.33%) of the respondents have said that they do not make such phone calls.

Majority of the respondents (73.33%) have said that they always send welcome notes to the new hires while a little less than half of the respondents (45%) have said that they always send welcome kits to the new hires.

Great majority of the respondents (80%) have said that they always give orientation about the organization and two-third of the respondents (66.67%) have said that they always give orientation about the roles and responsibilities of the new hires.

Almost half of the respondents (48.33%) have said that they always facilitated interactions with the seniors and a little less than one-third of the respondents (31.67%) have said that they sometimes arrange interactions with seniors.

Almost equitable proportion of the respondents never, rarely, sometimes and always organize office tour for the new hires prior to joining.

Almost half of the respondents (45%) have mentioned that they always send welcome kit as part of pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires.

One-fourth of the respondents (25%) have said that they sometimes send business cards to the new hires before onboarding and a little less than one-third of the respondents (31.67%) have said that they never send any business cards before onboarding.

Almost one-fourth of the respondents (23.33%) have said that they never give any portal of tasks to be completed and a little more than two-fifth of the respondents (41.67%) have said that they provide newsletters and magazines about the organization to the new hires.

Thus from the data, it can be inferred that the top three new hire engagement methods adopted by the recruiters in the IT industry are (i) interaction about the organisation, (ii) welcome notes / mail and (iii) interaction about prospective roles and responsibilities. These predominant methods are low-cost, low-risk initiatives. The three least used methods are (i) sending business cards, (ii) office tour and (iii) sending a portal of tasks to be completed.

**Benefits of Pre-onboarding Engagement of Lateral Hires**

**Table 3: Benefits of Pre-onboarding Engagement of Lateral Hires**

| Sl No | Benefits | SD* | D | NAND | A | SA | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Better ongoing engagement | 3 (5%) | 3 (5%) | 4 (6.67%) | 28 (46.67%) | 22 (36.67%) | 60 (100%) |
| 2 | Better understanding of prospective organization's culture and climate | 2 (3.33%) | 3 (5%) | 12 (20%) | 26 (43.33%) | 17 (28.33%) | 60 (100%) |
| 3 | Better understanding of their roles and responsibilities before joining | 1 (1.67%) | 8 (13.33%) | 12 (20%) | 23 (38.33%) | 16 (26.67%) | 60 (100%) |

| 4 | Reduced attrition at later stages | 5 (8.33%) | 9 (15%) | 10 (16.67%) | 15 (25%) | 21 (35%) | 60 (100%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | Better socialization between new hire and team mates | 2 (3.33%) | 2 (3.33%) | 7 (11.67%) | 27 (45%) | 22 (36.67%) | 60 (100%) |
| 6 | Better communication | 2 (3.33%) | 1 (1.67%) | 8 (13.33%) | 26 (43.33%) | 23 (38.33%) | 60 (100%) |
| 7 | Reduced onboarding dropout ratio | 2 (3.33%) | 3 (5%) | 11 (18.33%) | 19 (31.67%) | 25 (41.67%) | 60 (100%) |

* **SD=>Strongly disagree; D=>Disagree; NAND=>Neither Agree nor Disagree; A=>Agree; SA=>Strongly agree.**

From Table 3 it can be inferred that great majority of the respondents (83.34%) have affirmed that pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires helps with ongoing engagement. Majority of the respondents (71.66%) have stated that pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires enables a new hire to better understand the prospective organization's culture and climate.

Almost two-third of the respondents (65%) have opined that pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires equips a new hire to better understand their roles and responsibilities before joining.

A little more than one-third of the respondents (35%) have strongly agreed that pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires helps in reducing attrition at later stages.

Great majority of the respondents (81.67%) have affirmed that pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires enables new hires to better socialize with their team mates.

Handful of the respondents (5%) do not consider better communication as a benefit of pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires.

Majority of the respondents (73.34%) have affirmed that pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires helps reduce onboarding dropout ratio.

It is inferred from Table 3 that the most affirmed benefit of pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires is reduced drop out ratio. This indicates that pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires can serve as a panacea for 'no-shows' of lateral hires.

**Challenges faced in Pre-onboarding Engagement of Lateral Hires**

Table 4: Challenges faced by HR recruiters in Pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires

| Sl no | Challenges | No | Partially | Yes | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | New hire's understanding of the purpose of early engagement | 7 (11.67%) | 41 (68.33%) | 12 (20%) | 60 (100%) |
| 2 | Lack of management for initiating engagement activities | 37 (61%) | 19 (31.67%) | 4 (6.67%) | 60 (100%) |
| 3 | New hire's poor participation in the activities | 26 (43.33%) | 30 (50%) | 4 (6.67%) | 60 (100%) |
| 4 | Time constraints to implement these engagement activities | 23 (38.33%) | 27 (45%) | 10 (16.67%) | 60 (100%) |
| 5 | Difficulties in engaging Gen X | 14 (23.33%) | 32 (53.33%) | 14 (23.33%) | 60 (100%) |
| 6 | Difficulties in engaging Gen Y | 25 (41.67%) | 26 (43.33%) | 9 (15%) | 60 (100%) |
| 7 | Budget constraints to implement the activities | 26 (43.33%) | 29 (48.33%) | 8 (8.33%) | 60 (100%) |

From Table 4 it is seen that a little more than two-third of the respondents (68.33%) have partially accepted that new hires' understanding of the purpose of early engagement is a challenge to pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires.

Equal proportion of the respondents (6.67% each) have stated that lack of management support and inactive participation on the part of new hires were impediments to pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires.

More than one-third of the respondents (38.33%) have indicated that time constraints is never a challenge for pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires.

Almost one-fourth of the respondents (23.33%) have mentioned that difficulties in engaging Gen X is a challenge to pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires. However, less than one-fifth of the respondents (15%) have opined that difficulties in engaging Gen Y is a challenge to pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires.

Thus the top-two challenges in pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires are (i) difficulties in engaging Gen X and (ii) New hire's understanding of the purpose of early engagement.

## Suggestions

Softer methods of pre-onboarding engagement of lateral hires like induction about the organization, roles and responsibilities can be given to the candidates before on-boarding. Internal survey on new hires about on-boarding can be conducted after every drive. It gives feedback about the on-boarding process and the insights about pre-onboarding engagement. The study is done with HR recruiters as respondents. Qualitative and Quantitative studies among new hires may be carried out to understand their perspectives on joining an organisation. To reduce 'no shows', the joining date can be made as early as possible.

## Conclusion

Placing the right person for the right job at the right time is easier said than done. HR recruiters are often pushed to tight corners when required to identify experienced talent for upcoming openings. As the workforce market is in favour of employable candidates, prospective candidates are no longer willing to wait for prolonged joining dates. New hire engagement is a process of engaging new hires (whose date of joining the new company is not immediate) so as to reduce the probability of 'no-shows' by providing a platform to understand and create rapport with the lateral hires. Though the concept is nascent, opportunities and challenges for the same are immense.

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