

Pressure is on employers

It is important to **hire the best** but the challenge is to **keep the best**

By Arvind Aggarwal

It is an interesting phenomenon that is happening in the premium business schools of the country in terms of campus placements. Like the Sensex, campus recruitment figures are an interesting revelation of the growth of the economy and choices that youngsters have in the jobs on offer. I am trying to recollect my experiences and trying to put it in a structure where I reflect on how our campuses, students, and corporates have changed over a period of time. The critical aspect to know is that these three are acting in tandem and the value of the system is derived through their interdependency.

With the opening of the economy and spurt of new age sectors, organisations in India are wooing the highly ambitious and go-getting profile of MBAs from premium business schools. With the success of professionals from these schools came an increase in demand as well. The other interesting aspect is the understanding that special care and development opportunities should be given to these inexperienced yet ambitious and talented professionals.

For example, while RPG Group hires close to 100 summer interns and 75 final recruits from the premium campuses, the internal focus is to create and manage an environment that empowers performance and meritocracy. Competitive salaries and perks are just hygiene factors while recruitment happens. The candidates have become more aware, choosy, and demanding as well.

What make the recruits from

these campuses stay with us are the work content, high growth, and a supportive work culture that helps them display their talent. Modern HR practices like best in class induction, mentoring, job rotation, special assignments, movements across functions and businesses are a few that we employ to match the aspirations and make the talent deliver in a short period of time.

Another, interesting development that is happening in campuses like the IIMs is the growth in the number of new programmes that is driving the number of students available. IIM Ahmedabad for instance has the PGP programme, a specialised agri-business post graduate programme and the fellow programme (doctoral).

Targeting executives and specialists they now have the PGPX (for executives with considerable experience), PGP PMP (public policy management), and certificate courses like that for the Armed Forces. This adds to the variety that is available for recruiters and campuses are no longer looked upon as places where candidates are hired for the starting level management positions. Last year RPG hired a specialist who is heading the fish and meat category at the national level in their retail stores from IIM Ahmedabad PGPX.

Hence, institutes like IIMs, from the industry perspective, are changing from a basic objective of creating future leaders to role-ready experienced and finessed managers. I have put my thoughts on how campuses have evolved from the 70s to the present in the tables given alongside.

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Outlook change

STUDENTS OF 70s

Profile

The brightest lot. Largely from IITs. Only a few x work experience. Mostly male—my class had only three female students.

Aspiration

Big corporate jobs. Favorite used to be HLL, First National Citi Bank, ICI, Metal Box, ITC, L & T, and Tata. Not very clear of jobs and areas where we will work—for example, I was unclear whether to take up marketing or HR.

Placement

A lot got placed in the above mentioned jobs. Some in new companies like Alok Udyog and government companies like IBP/BL, besides planning commission. No processes like pre-placement talks. No day 0-1-2 pressure (companies came in a spread out fashion)

STUDENTS OF PRESENT

Profile

Diversity of experience and longer experience: Software; PSUs; corporates. More women students.

Aspiration

Peer pressure driving decision making. Brand name of companies a critical factor. Plus overseas posting a big push. Salaries varied and touching very high levels. Confused as ever and wider choices on offer. Instant gratification of aspirations.

Placement

Variety of companies and specialised stream of companies to suit the aspirations. PSUs rarely get a slot. Highly organised placement process. Pre-placement talks a must. A lot of effort needed from companies to attract talent. High pressure of slots and days. Focus on salaries and range of salaries offered.

CORPORATE OF 70s

Hiring companies

A few evolved corporates hired bulk of management trainees.

Demands much greater than supply.

Jobs and salaries

Only three jobs to be taken on campus to choose from.

Salary ranged from Rs 800 to Rs 1250 a month. Not too much variance. (Approximate equivalent to around Rs 80,000 correcting for inflation over years.)

CORPORATE OF PRESENT

Hiring companies

Large number of corporates. Large participation of foreign companies. Lateral hiring for role ready managers.

Jobs and salaries

Multiple job options—often restricted in numbers though. Internships and pre-placement offers from companies. Salaries around Rs 10-14 lakh a year for a fresher in premier campuses to 1 to 2 lakh USD if placed overseas.

Another aspect we find amusing in the campuses is the unrealistic understanding of an organisation and the roles that candidates have. While the yesteryear leaders of organisations were made after hands-on work that started with management trainee stint to multiple rotations and experimentation, today's management graduates are in for instant gratification of their career goals. The evolution of students and corporates in the last three decades has been quite remarkable.

The key organisational challenge is to keep a balance of career expect-

tations of high calibre talent from the campuses and the organisational goals. Coaching and mentoring play a key role in this area. It is also important that institutes do not lose focus on their job of preparing the future managers. Also, the lack of qualified faculty with multifaceted exposure to various industry activities and research is now beginning to be felt.

The key here is that organisations in India are prepared to hire high calibre talent from premier institutes and invest in them but it also the responsibility of the institutes to prepare them worthy of being given

Lack of qualified faculty with exposure to various industry activities and research is now beginning to be felt.

special treatment. Expectations of the corporates from the students are also different today than what they were two, three decades back.

The other aspect from the students' perspective, although I have mentioned that they are more aware and demanding, is that many of them do not spend enough time on making a decision on an organisation or the role that they will be getting into. As institutions are fighting each other on publishing that they have finished placements in one day or two slots as it is a major selling point, what they forget is that an interviewer is given just half an hour and many a times the candidate comes to the interview room without having a basic background of the organisation.

But placements have become a very organised process in many campuses. This situation is worsening as the number of organisations visiting institutions for recruitment is increasing every year. However, what organisations like RPG are doing is to make use of the available time with best in class recruitment practices reducing recruitment errors.

One appreciable aspect is that more female students are taking up same roles and responsibilities that males used to take up. The increase in participation of the female candidates both in terms of numbers and responsibilities is a very positive outlook. Overall, it is important to hire the best but the challenge is to keep the best so that it speaks volumes about us while we visit the campuses next time.

Aggarwal is group president, HR, RPG Group.