

Contemporary Employee Recruitment Practices and Areas of Future Research in Indian Railways

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Abstract

The modern business milieu is highly competitive due to vast technological advancement which makes employees a vital source of competitive advantage. Precisely, the recruitment process has become a key determinant of an organization's success and a logistic capital resource to the human resource; thus, the process should be entirely modern. A conventional recruitment and selection process comprises of job analysis, manpower planning, and recruitment and selection. The current study seeks to explore employee recruitment practices and proposes areas of future research in Indian Railways using secondary data. It also gives recommendations on how to improve the recruitment practices in the government-owned Indian Railways. The trends investigated in the study include the applicant tracking software (ATS), use of video resumes, Chatbots, the utilization of social networks, and increased focus on passive candidates.

Keywords: Recruitment, employees, future HR practices, selection, applicant attraction, social networking

Introduction

Human resource management is a key function in any organization given its role in searching for the most qualified employees throughout the recruitment process. Undoubtedly, the personnel selection process comprises of 3 major steps; recruitment, selection, and implementation implying that the process should be done efficiently since it affects an organization's future productivity [1]. By definition, recruitment is the process through which prospective employees are searched to apply for a particular job posting. The selection process commences after the recruitment process. Notably, organizations have diverse recruitment practices to attract the most qualified candidates. According to Chatterjee, the recruitment process employed in most Indian organizations is the drafting of the recruitment policy after which the policy is turned into an action [2]. However, traditional recruitment methods in the Indian human resource sector were transfers, referrals, promotions, advertisements, and walk-in.

Undoubtedly, the vast technological advancement witnessed over the past few years has revolutionized the recruitment process especially due to the invention of social media advertisement, online recruitment tools like LinkedIn, and the internet at large. Today, the recruitment process in India is widely affected by factors like working hours, culture, salary, facilities, brand image, welfare, location, and goodwill [3]. As already stated, the second step in workforce enrollment is selection where an appropriate candidate who matches the job requirements and skills is chosen to work for the organization. In other words, the selection divides the job applicants into 2 categories; shortlisted and not shortlisted, using a certain

criterion determined by factors like employment background, interviews, referral background, group discussions, and medical tests [4].

The study investigates the recruitment practices used, contemporary recruitment practices, and offers suggestions for the future recruitment process in the Indian Railways. The current recruitment practices in Indian Railways are time-consuming and the railway has proposed to reduce its recruitment time from 2 years to 6 months. In order to achieve the goal, the study suggests possible alternate recruitment processes which are in use in other industries. By its application in Indian Railways, it could probably reduce the recruitment time of Indian Railways. The use of alternative recruitment process or in combination with the current recruitment process could also possibly help Indian Railways recruit quality candidates and create a talent pool.

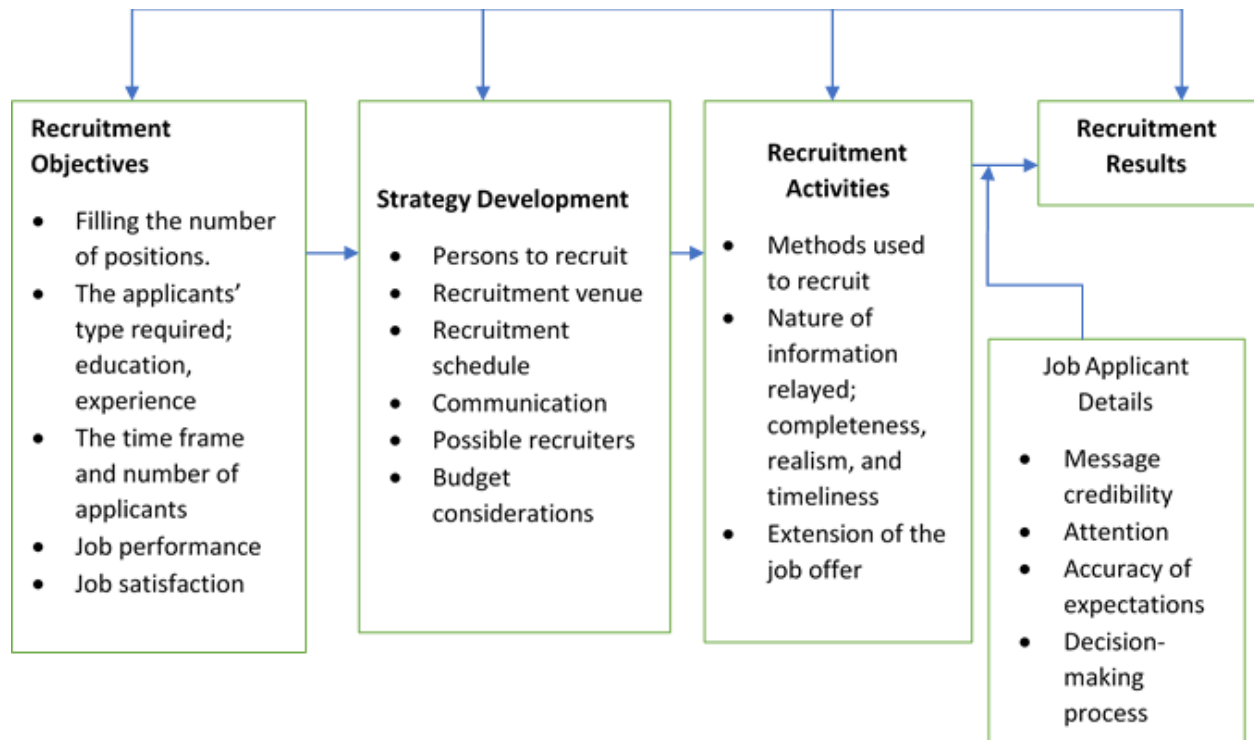


Figure 1: Employee Recruitment Process model [5]

The recruitment process in any industry usually consists of initially establishing a recruitment objective, were in some of the pre-hire requirements such as the number of positions to be filled and type or qualification of the applicant, time frame to fill the positions are determined. Some of the post-hire outcomes such as job performance, job satisfaction are also considered in the recruitment objectives. Once the objectives are ready, an action plan is developed, were the recruitment arrangements like venue, recruitment personnel, date and time, the budget is planned. Efficient development of recruitment strategy will maximize the effect of recruitment activities. Recruitment activity mainly consists of the advertising of the available positions in newspapers, websites and other portals to reach the targeted applicants, completeness of information conveyed, recruiters used and extending job offers. After completion of recruitment activities, the recruitment process is evaluated and checked whether the pre-hire and post-hire objectives of the recruitment are met. So far the recruitment process from the employer's perspective is focused upon. For efficient recruitment, job applicant's perspective also should be considered. Some of the factors considered are attention to targeted applicants, creating interest in job openings, position expectations from the applicant and applicant decision-making process. The recruitment process is summarized below [5].

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the recruitment process used in Railways owned by the Indian Central government.
- To recommend the most sustainable recruitment practices and areas for future research in the Indian Railways and the job market at large.

Contemporary Recruitment Practices in Indian Railways

The IRPS (Indian Railways Personnel Service) which came into force in 1976 controls the Human Resource Management of the Indian Railways [10]. Owing to its massive organizational structure, IR has been divided into 17 zones for simplicity of administration and recruitment purpose. Each zone is headed by a General Manager who in turn reports to the Railway Recruitment Board (RRB). Each zone has 10 functional branches that take care of major functional categories of railways like safety, maintenance, traffic, personnel, telecommunication, etc. The IR also consists of 6 production units which report to RRB. To fulfill all the wide variety of functions in the IR, the employee selection is also diverse ranging from non-technical, unskilled labors to highly specialized and top administrative staffs. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) which is an apex body and the RRB is responsible for the recruitment of employees into the organization. The Indian Railways categorizes its employees into 4 distinct groups ranging from A to D, group A being the highest-grade officers and group D being the lower grade staff members. Group A (Gazetted officers) are filled by UPSC examination, an all India competitive examination followed by an interview, Group B non-gazetted higher post staff, are filled by UPSC examination or by promotion from the Group C employees. Group C employees are selected through Railway Recruitment Boards (RRB) and Group D employees are recruited through Railway Selection Boards (RSB) with support of the local employment exchanges [11].

A review of a most recent advertisement for job employment by the Indian Railways shows that the company formally invites eligible and qualified candidates to apply for the jobs after which suitable tests are held to help eliminate some of the shortlisted candidates. The Indian Railways' recruitment process entails shortlisting and the selection process where a written exam, a

psychological aptitude test, document scrutiny, and medical examination are performed [11]. After the selected candidate is done with the selection process; which is merit-based, subject to the antecedents of verification, they undergo some training as needed in the post [12]. In a nutshell, the selection process comprises of a written exam, a psychological aptitude test, document scrutiny, and medical examination.

E-Recruitment

E-recruitment or online recruitment refers to the process of hiring potential professionals for a vacancy by employing electronic resources like the internet [13]. Contemporary organizations employ the internet to advertise their job vacancies and at the same time conduct interviews using technological devices like the company's website, Skype or other video conferencing platforms [14]. The merits of recruitment are that the cost of the recruitment process is lower compared to the traditional physical recruitment process, there is a wider geographical area that can be covered given potential candidates can be hired from various parts of the world, and the job seeker and employer can interact infinite times over the internet. According to India Today [11], the e-recruitment process is adopted in the Indian Railways which presents vast benefits considering the time, added value, and the stronger brand image given the HR department is exposed to more challenging technologies.

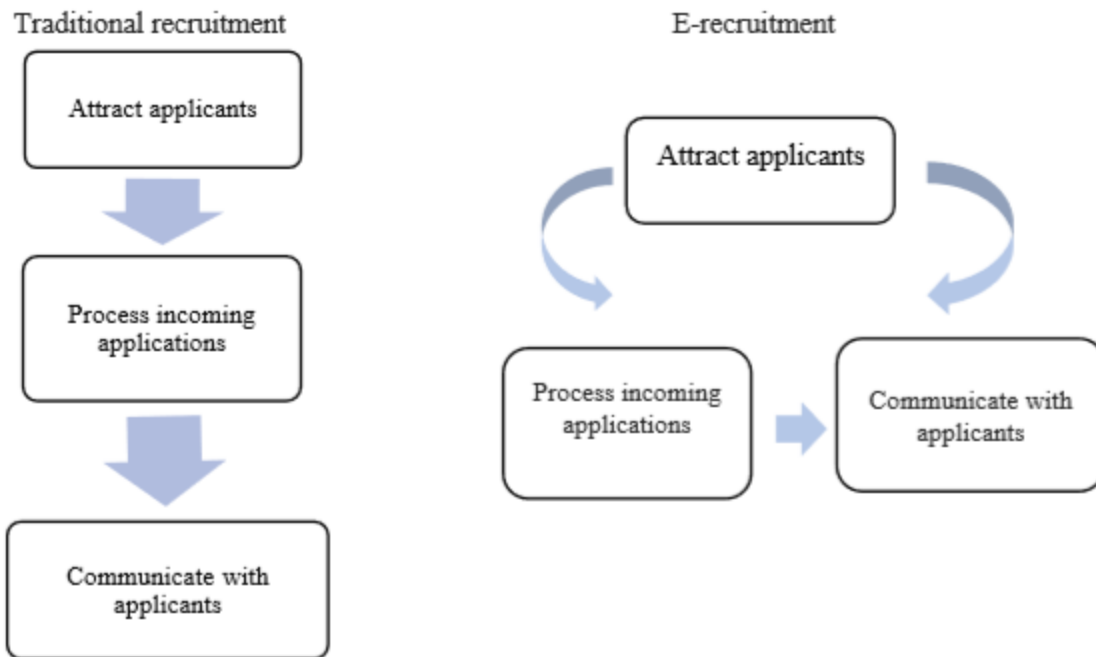


Figure 2: Recruitment Process Flow Chart [15]

The Indian Railways recruitment process can be summarized into issuing of the application notice, the preliminary interview, employment tests, employment interview, physical examination, and the final selection [16]. Under the application form, details about a prospective candidate like biodata, education, recreation, and work experience are considered. Further, the preliminary interviews are usually brief and are geared towards establishing the future suitability of candidates for the job [17]. The employment tests are dependent on the applicant's career which means that different tests are conducted to test a candidate's capability. The employment interview is the most common and it is used by Indian Railways to help understand a candidate's ambition, outlook, and motivation. The physical examination considers a candidate's qualifications and the final selection process assesses an individual's work dedication, ethic, honesty, motivation, and integrity [17]. The induction and placement processes help familiarize the candidate with the company's rules, regulations, and procedures and at the same time instill

some sense of trust, loyalty, and belonging. The Indian Railways has proposed to reduce its recruitment process time from 2 years to 6 months. Many of the candidates find alternate job opportunities during the recruitment process, which can further delay occupying the vacant positions [33].

Suggested Areas of Future Recruitment practices in Indian Railways

Applicant Tracking System (ATS)

The Applicant Tracking System; abbreviated ATS, refers to software specially designed to meet the needs of a company seeking to recruit potential candidates to fill an existing organizational vacancy. The ATS focuses on management of the entire recruitment process by creating the best candidate experience and monitoring the recruitment campaigns. Specifically, the ATS is useful in posting job openings, screening of resumes, and generation of interview requests to suitable candidates either by email or other technologically advanced means [18]. The other provision of the ATS is the individual applicant tracking, automated resume ranking, requisition tracking, pre-screening questions, customized input forms, multilingual capabilities, and response tracking [19].

According to the Korn Ferry Futurestep Survey, 53% of Indian respondents report using applicant tracking systems and video interviewing for recruitment as compared to 46 to 48% globally [20]. How Nu Skin conducted a study on the usage of the ATS tool by Skeeled over a period of one year. The company was following the traditional recruitment process by manually screening the applicant. This took the recruiters a lot of time to organize and prioritize the CV. The company integrated ATS software into their recruiting process. During the year, the company received 2045 CV's of which 1095 (54%) were rejected, by using the ATS tools

proprietary algorithm for not meeting the requirement. Of 950 accepted 342 were rated good candidates and 151 were rated as great candidates. Unlike traditional recruitment, the ATS tool focuses on good candidates and prevents recruiters from wasting time on unsuitable candidates. Before using the ATS tool, the recruiter spent at least 3 hours per vacancy posting in several international job boards. After the implementation of ATS, the recruiters posted vacancy across various job boards automatically just with few clicks, thus saving a lot of time. There was approximately 25% reduction in time spent on screening candidates [21].

As per a study conducted in the aerospace industry, there were approximately 90 applications received for each job vacancy. The company processed around 9000 application over a period of 2 months using the manual process. After the implementation of ATS software, the talent pool increased and it reduced applicant pool by 22%. With automatic screening, it removed candidates who did not fit the criteria. The time period for filling up vacancy was reduced by 42%. According to a case study conducted in Queensland Rail, Australia, the Company has a total staffing of 14000 employees across a wide variety of roles. Each year they hire about 2000 staffs. They spend \$100 million on staffing agencies. The company faced a number of challenges in its efforts to attract and retain the talents of the fast-growing transport industry. The ATS software came to their rescue. They saved significantly in the recruiting cost. The time to fill the position was reduced by 63% [34].

By the above studies and its analysis the use of ATS software can be suggested to the Indian Railways, integrating it with the human resource process it is most likely to attract a more skilled pool of employees and thereby enhance the organization's growth. This software can be used in the recruitment process of Group A and Group B employees initially and based on the requirement can be extended to C and D group employees too. The technology can make recruiting suitable candidates

easier and faster thereby helping to reduce the recruitment time as intended by the Indian Railways. The software will filter candidates based on key terms connected to the positions.

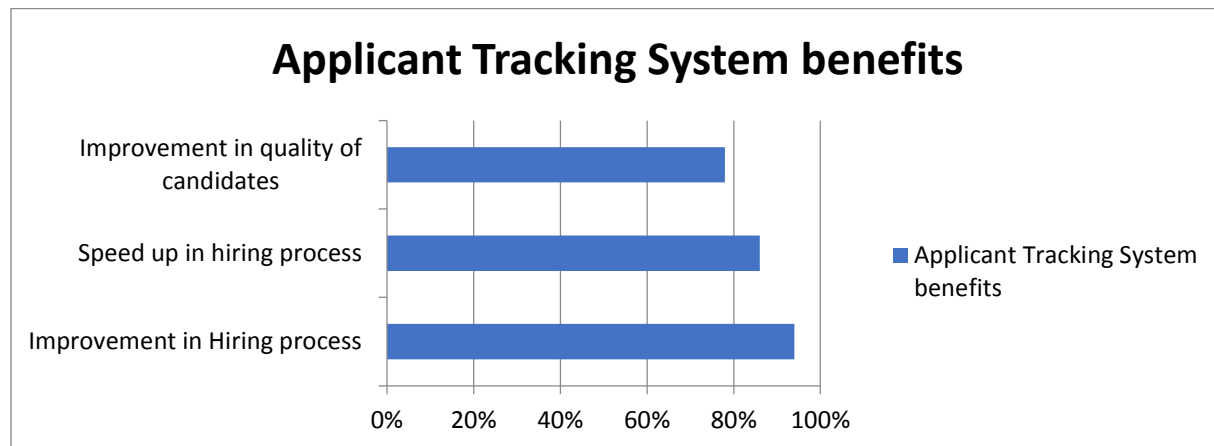


Figure 3: Applicant Tracking System benefits [32]

Video Recruitment

This is another emerging technology where the candidate interacts with the interviewer through a video which is usually recorded for future references. One of the merits of video recruitment is the fact that it reduces the cost of interviews by around 63% by deducting the travel and interview venue arrangement cost since the interviewer and interviewee can easily interact by video interviewing; thus, resulting to the attraction of the most qualified or talented candidates [13]. However, the challenge about this is the internet connectivity in some of the Indian regions even though candidates can be encouraged to access the internet for effective connectivity. The other unique merit of video interviews is that it helps speed up the entire recruitment and training process since there is closer virtual interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. It refines the interview process by removing scheduling issues and locational bias. The Institute of Student Employers 2018 Annual Survey, revealed that 49% of its respondents use video interviewing tools, and only 39% continue to use the telephonic interview

as a screening mechanism as part of their recruitment process[22]. The Hirevire Software Company conducted a study in 2017 on the recruitment process of Unilever Company. It took Unilever 4 to 6 months to recruit 800 candidates from 25000 applications using the traditional recruitment methods. After the implementation of Video recruitment, the hiring time was reduced to nearly 15 days which is about 90% reduction in hiring time. It also resulted in a significant reduction in hiring cost which is a reduction of 1 Million £ costs annually and also helped in recruiting candidates across the diverse population [23]. As per the above-mentioned statistics and analysis, Indian Railways can also adapt video interviewing for geographically far off candidates as this could cut down interviewing cost and reduce recruitment time.

Video resumes

A resume provides an insight into the work experience, educational background and special skills of the job applicant. A video resume is usually a 60-second video film on a job applicant's skills, qualification and work experience. The benefit of the resume over a traditional resume is the ability to see the candidate before the next step in the recruitment process. Kemp, K. J & Peyton, E. A. (2013), the study revealed that a candidate's energy level, oral communication skills, personality traits, accomplishments could be better assessed with video resumes as compared to traditional paper-based resumes. This provides the recruiter to do a better job in the initial screening compared to the traditional paper resumes. For example, the recruiter can judge the communication skills of the applicant better as the job seeker will be forced to display the communication skills [24] [25]. However, there are both pros and cons to technology. Video resumes could be informal and unconventional. If the recruiter would like to clarify a certain aspect of the applicant's resume, he can easily see the paper resume compared to a video resume, which might take time to load and play [26]. Hence to conclude, video resumes can serve as a

complement to the paper resume and not a substitute. If the resume sparks an interest to the recruiter, a video resume could give the recruiter more details about the candidate assisting him greatly for the initial screening process [27]. By assessing the pros and cons of video resumes, Indian Railways could consider video resumes as an addition and not a replacement to the already existing paper-based resumes. This will provide the recruiting team, better insight about the candidates and will assist them in the initial screening process.

Social Networks and Passive Candidates

With the emergence of social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn, the number of internet users has increased significantly implying that the use of such platforms can help improve the recruitment process. Moreover, Bhoganadam and Rao [28] elaborate that nowadays companies are shifting from focusing on new job seekers to the passive ones who are not actively seeking for one but are ready for new offers and opportunities. This is through platforms like LinkedIn where passive candidates post their profiles and credentials seeking to attract potential employers. Here are some of the social media recruitment statistical data which states the importance of recruiting through social media. According to one of the surveys conducted by Manpower Group, 37% of all employees are continuous candidates (passive candidates) who are always looking for the next best job opportunity. Recruiting passive candidates are becoming more and more popular, as per LinkedIn only 36% of candidates actively search for a new job. The research firm Aberdeen Group says that 73% of millennials found their last job through a social network. Marketing Sherpa commissioned an online survey which revealed that 82% of companies attract passive candidates by recruiting through social media. And those companies using social media for recruiting reported a 50% increase in the quality of candidates [30] [31]. Indian Railways can use social media platforms to advertise their job openings along with the

current method to attract a wider talent pool. A mobile-friendly job portal will be an added advantage for recruitment, considering a huge number of mobile users in India, which include IR career aspirants.

Chatbots

One of the most exciting modern recruitment practices is the use of Chatbots which allows the most qualified candidates to connect with the firm and resonate with its recruitment strategy. Chatbots is Artificial Intelligence software that conducts a conversation via voice or text message. They perform their job in 2 different steps. Firstly, it analyses the request, i.e., identify the user's intention and extract data and relevant things contained in the user's request. The second step is returning the response. Chatbots can be used as a recruitment tool to answer queries of the candidates on job profile, recruitment process, etc. A study was conducted on the efficiency of Chatbots by Alorica in one of their 17 branches. Their branch is the Philippines installed chatbots on their Facebook page. They were able to hire concurrently many queries, providing the candidates with real-time response and also conducting initial screening via facebook messenger. The process is 24/7, which drastically increased the number of candidates that can be accessed and can be hired. Before the introduction of Chatbots, the company interviewed 966 compared to 3088 candidates after the introduction of Chatbots over a period of 3 months. 2122 more candidates were interviewed, saving 1212 man-hours for the company during the 3 months period. Cost-per-hire was reduced by 84% [14] [32]. As per the above studies, we can suggest the introduction of Chatbots into Indian Railways recruitment website and their official social media portals to reply to the vacancy and recruitment related queries. This will facilitate addressing queries of potential candidates even off the working hours of the

Railways IT staff. Most of the frequently and commonly asked questions by the candidates can be answered by the Chatbots.

Conclusion

Operated by the country's Ministry of Railways, the Indian Railways is the world's largest railway network covering approximately 67,368 kilometers. Undoubtedly, most of the routes in the railway system are connected to a 25kV AC grid with 30% of them being multi-tracked [7]. On a normal day, the railways serve close to 30 million passengers on suburban and long-distance routes in the 8000 to 8500 stations across the country using 14300 trains [7].

The first railway train in India was from Bombay to Thane which commenced on 16th April 1853 introduced by the British government [8]. As of 2018, the Indian Railway had around 70,000 passenger coaches, 277,900 freight wagons, and around 11,400 locomotives making it the 8th largest employer globally and the 2nd largest employer in India; it has a workforce of 1.308 million. In the 2018 fiscal period, the Indian Railway recorded that it had ferried 8.25 billion passengers and 1.16 tons of cargo which attracted a revenue of \$27 billion U.S. dollars [9]. This presents the need for a competent workforce able to serve the thousands of customers checking in the railways daily.

The recruitment process is one of the most important and complex human resource functions in any organization. Being the largest railways network in the world, Indian Railways should ensure that the staffs employed are highly qualified and competitive to help reduce some of the challenges faced and improve its profit margins. Undoubtedly, research shows that the organization combines traditional recruitment methods with the e-recruitment technique. However, there is a need to employ internet-based technologies and other information systems or

software like ATS and tools like chatbots to help offer an effective selection and recruitment process. Implementing these additions to the current recruitment trend would require the recruitment department to be oriented and given suitable training about the latest additions and appropriate modifications need to be implemented on job portal to integrate with new technologies. Better recruitment process means selection and retention of talent in any organization. With good manpower, Indian Railways will achieve more success as an organization and as a transport service sector adding to the Indian economy.

Limitations of the Study

- Data collection from the secondary sources was extremely challenging since it is minimal and the topic is rarely explored.
- The study was based on previous literature; thus, the results are not sufficiently absolute even though the margin of error was as minimal as possible.

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