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SUNSTONE



**Reinventing
Fresher Hiring**

**TALENT
NXT**

The GCC Talent Landscape:
New Horizons of Growth

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Foreword

The backbone of an economy is its youth. We rely on the youth to innovate and invent new means of production and enhance the socio-economic firmament. For this dream to become a reality, higher education institutions need support from all stakeholders-Government, Industry, and academicians. Industry, and academicians to support effective learning. By driving educational excellence in transforming rural and urban India to improve learning quality via tangible programs like infrastructure upgrades and teacher training, the goal is to benefit students nationwide, fostering development across diverse backgrounds. The Indian government's emphasis on skill development, exemplified by policies ,such as NEP 2020, is reshaping educational landscapes. Plans for multidisciplinary universities mirroring IITs and IIMs promise global-standard education. Furthermore, opening

doors to foreign higher education institutions adds an international edge. Collaborations between academia and industry giants (like IIT Bombay-Tata Motors, IISc Bangalore-Honeywell, BITS Pilani-Microsoft, and NIT Jamshedpur-Tata Steel) enhance practical learning. A major stride is the INR 30.54 billion allocation to the National Apprenticeship Training Scheme (NATS) till 2027, offering 9,00,000 students apprenticeships in cutting-edge fields like AI. These concerted efforts are fueling educational growth, bridging rural-urban gaps, and ensuring India's competitiveness on the global stage.

The government's proactive initiatives underscore the significance of high-quality education in driving India's progress and global competitiveness, establishing a solid foundation for the country's future workforce.

Chapter 1

Introduction



The technologies of the fourth industrial revolution have shifted the nucleus of work, highlighting newer skills and competencies needed to succeed in the industry. Today, employers seek candidates who enduringly challenge the status quo to improve operational efficiency, innovate business models, and penetrate new markets.

To bridge the skill gap and meet future talent requirements at present and now, the industry relies profoundly on academia to churn out a highly deployable, industry-ready workforce. However, the road between the campus and the workplace is often, if not always, long and bumpy.

A paradoxical phenomenon exists whereby a ferocious talent war and unemployment exist at the same time on campuses. According to a recent report by the International Labour Organization, around 29 million skills will be in deficit by the end of this decade, which is expected to cause a \$1.97 trillion loss in GDP if not controlled.

The skills shortage is the primary reason for the declining employability quotient that is keeping the youth from realizing its potential of achieving unprecedented economic growth. Thus, in order to mitigate the skills gap and tackle the employability crisis, campus skill development at scale is imperative. Both industry and academia have to work together to ensure the success of graduating students.

This E-book aims to explore new frontiers in the industry and academia partnership to drive innovation, economic growth, and societal advancement, tackling complex challenges—optimizing resources, innovating processes, and enhancing employment to create a brighter future for both.

100-plus HR leaders from the industry have shared their knowledge, experience, and future plans to create this depository of information acting as a guidebook for all forward-focused industry and academia changemakers.

Chapter 2

Essential Skills Needed To Enhance Fresher Productivity



■ The World Economic Forum

Between 2023 and 2027, 44% of workers' core skills will be disrupted due to the rapid advancements in technology.

6 in 10 workers would require comprehensive training in areas like technological literacy, creative thinking, analytical aptitude, AI, and big data, as these will be the most coveted skills of the future.

The world has experienced a plethora of paradigm shifts over the years, but digital transformation has been the most disruptive of all. The shift towards digital, catalyzed by the global pandemic, is forcing companies to change their business models and adapt to the new market realities. Apart from challenging the rudiments of business, the digital revolution has shifted the skill landscape.

A recent report by The World Economic Forum concluded that, between 2023 and 2027, 44% of workers' core skills will be disrupted due to the rapid advancements in technology. According to the report, 6 in 10 workers would require comprehensive training in areas like technological literacy, creative thinking, analytical aptitude, AI, and big data, as these will be the most coveted skills of the future.

More Skills Needed for the Same Job

Furthermore, the World Economic Forum reveals the number of skills required to do a job is increasing by 6% year-on-year. Employees with domain-specific skills need new-age meta-skills such as digital intelligence, problem-solving, business acumen, critical thinking, and resilience to survive and succeed in the ever-changing business world.

Today, only 45% of Indian graduates who apply for jobs are employable, per "India's Graduate Skill Index 2023" report published by Mercer Mettl. The report further

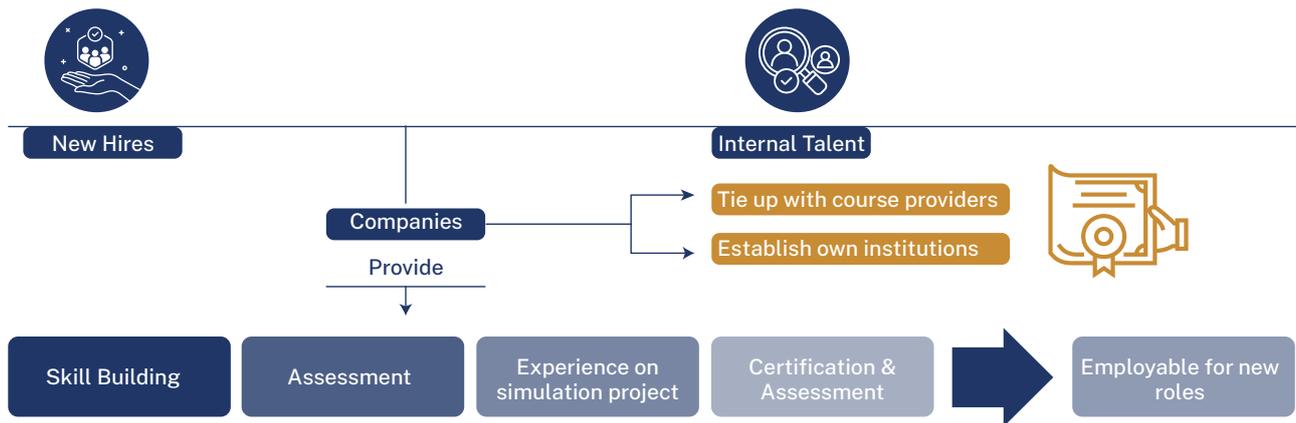
suggests that the disconnect between academia and corporate is the primary reason behind the skills gap. Thus, the increasing skill mismatch is the key challenge to youth employability and productivity.

Updating Campus Curriculum to Boost Employment

India's annual gross enrollment in higher education is close to 1 crore. Yet, the country is challenged by rising unemployment and dwindling employability among freshers. This is because of the linearity of the Indian educational ecosystem. Indian academicians (plural) and educational institutes must ensure that their curricula reflect the demands of the business in light of the quickly evolving nature of the labor market today.

Highlighting the thesis that emerges from the above observations, Abhishek Banerjee, VP, Student Outcomes, Sunstone, expressed, "While there is a focus on academics, the needle of higher education is yet to move toward making students more employable and job-ready through skill-based and industry-driven curricula." As per the industry's ever-evolving disposition, the freshers' skill sets must be upgraded and aligned with industry demands. However, it is challenging for the education system alone to adapt to the breakaway changes in the business environment, leading to skill shortages among freshly brewed human capital.

Industry - Academia Partnership | Bridging the skill-set gap



Source: AnandRathi Research

“While there is a focus on academics, the needle of higher education is yet to move toward making students more employable and job-ready through skill-based and industry-driven curricula.”



ABHISHEK BANERJEE

VP-Placement,
Sunstone

Lack of industry orientation plays a primary role in making our academic curriculum obsolete and ineffectual. Schools and higher education institutions across the country continue to train students in outdated skills that have little to no use in today’s digital-first economy. 40% of the curriculum taught to students at the high school level is now obsolete, while 90% of universities in our country still follow outdated syllabi. Owing to this polarity between industry and academia, India’s unemployment rate has reached unprecedented levels.

The Government of India has recognized outdated curricula as a major bottleneck impeding young India’s potential and productive capacity and introduced the New Education Policy (NEP) to overcome the pitfalls of misaligned and outdated syllabi. The main pillars of this policy are curriculum redesign, future-ready learning, improved

pedagogy, and increased emphasis on hands-on learning.

Reinventing Industry-Academia Engagement

In the context of preparing campus youth to hone job-ready skills, the pertinent question is how the industry can support academia in bridging the skill gap. Romy Dutt, Director TA, Flipkart, suggests, “Industry and academia must collaborate to co-design curricula (for consistency) that enable students to develop multidisciplinary and billable skills while on campus.”

Round-the-clock engagement with students and campuses is key to bridging the gap between industry and academia. And the best way to do so is through immersive programs like internships, externships, mentorships, and campus visits. Such initiatives can provide students with the highest degree of experiential and meaningful learning.

“The professional training journey of students should be spread evenly across the entire curriculum rather than rushing through it in the last six months. Thus, engaging students in long-term deep training programs is crucial to acclimatize them to the changing dynamics of the professional world.”



RAO AMBATI

Head of India Hiring-Technology Recruitments, Mphasis

Industry must engage with students to familiarize them with their needs and make them job-ready. Student-industry engagements put both stakeholders in this equation in a relatively better position. According to reports, in the years just after graduating from college, students who have had an internship are 15% less likely to be unemployed and earn 6% more as opposed to students who did not.

Priyanka Kumari, Head-TA, Piramal Finance, suggests that “Increasing the touchpoints between students and industry through bilateral engagement such as internships and externships can provide both stakeholders with adequate insights about the other. Thus, the industry must engage with students even before the campus hiring season begins to increase their understanding of what businesses want.”

Industry’s Powerful Impact on Learning Pedagogies

Internship and externship programs are crucial to students’ professional development. But, more is needed to make students job-ready. Making academic learning more future-ready and in sync with industry needs is imperative to enhance fresher employability, productivity, and retention at scale. Because our educational settings are still largely theoretical, students need help to keep pace with the fast-paced and practical world of work when they enter the job market as freshers.

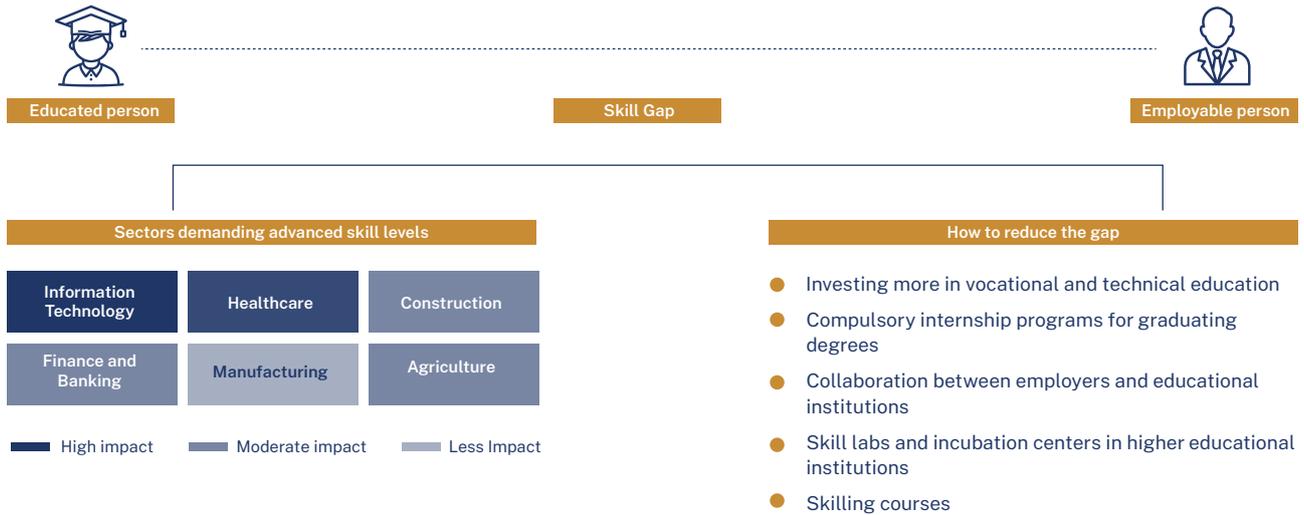
Joint research projects in interdisciplinary fields that deliver pedagogy-based learning modules to college students will enable them to learn and experientially recreate the project. Rao Ambati, Head of India Hiring-Technology Recruitments, Mphasis, propounds the idea of engaging with students at the early stages of their college education. He expressed, “The professional training journey of students should be spread evenly across the entire curriculum rather than rushing through it in the last six months. Thus, engaging students in long-term deep training programs is crucial to acclimatize them to the changing dynamics of the professional world.”

Meeting Employers’ Expectations

In addition to the changing skills landscape, freshers are also beset with the expectation of employers concerning in-depth functional skills and broad-based business knowledge. Today, students need a versatile skill set to survive and thrive in the new world of work. Karthik SM, Global Head of TA, Biocon Biologics, articulated this challenge through an empirical example.

“While we are a biotechnology company, we tend to look out for science graduates with a sufficient general management aptitude. Since we can’t realize our entire demand for talent just

Not every educated person becomes employable after completing a degree



Source: AnandRathi Research

“Skills like cloud computing, data analytics, storytelling, creativity, AI & ML, java full stack, and linguistic competence can make your talent the key driver of long-term success & sustainability,”



NILAM ATROY

Head-TA & Attraction-India, China, Indonesia & Philippines (GSC), A.P. Moller-Maersk

by sticking to tier 1 colleges, we must look for suitable candidates outside premium institutions. However, the major challenge we come across while hiring talent is lack of interdisciplinary and future-ready skills among the students,” he said.

Pointing out the diverse skill sets that modern-day employers look for in freshers, Anuradha Vellal, National Head-TA (Early Talent) & Employer Branding, The Coca-Cola Company, said, “STEM (science, technology, engineering, maths) skills, communication and collaboration skills, and business acumen are the core competencies that we look for while recruiting fresh talent.”

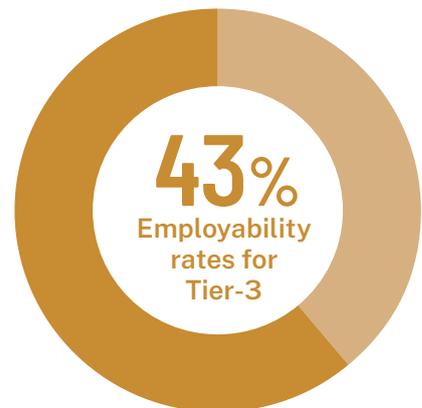
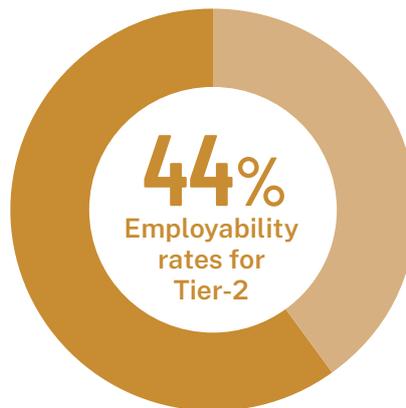
According to Nilam Atroy, Head-TA & Attraction- India, China, Indonesia & Philippines (GSC), A.P. Moller-Maersk, “Skills like cloud computing, data analytics, storytelling, creativity, AI and ML, java full stack, and linguistic

competence can make your talent the key driver of long-term success and sustainability”. Organizations increasingly seek operational personnel with the necessary skills to cover multiple job functions efficiently. While such talent is scarce in the domestic job market, the convergence of industry, academia, and students can produce a well- rounded and multi-faceted talent force. Creating curricula that holistically develop students through congruous and aligned multi-skilling efforts spearheaded by academia and industry will be instrumental to developing robust pipelines of future-ready, adept, and employable talent.

Chapter 3

Campus Hiring Challenges in Tier 2 & Tier 3 Cities





“Hiring talent from non-metro locations boosts the company’s bottom line as they are available at relatively economical rates”



KUSH WADHAWAN

Director TA,
Tata Communications

India has dominated global services delivery since the beginning of the outsourcing business. The country has consistently provided a virtually unparalleled talent-cost advantage in labor and a conducive business environment for the giant corporate behemoths. While most domestic and international organizations have turned to India’s tier 1 cities and colleges to fulfill their personnel needs, these talent pools are now gradually nearing depletion. Additionally, high turnover, shrinking talent pipelines, and rising inflation have shunted the job market of the Indian metro cities.

The Potential of Tier 2 and Tier 3 Campuses

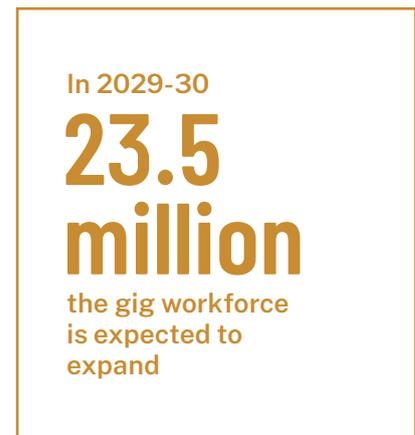
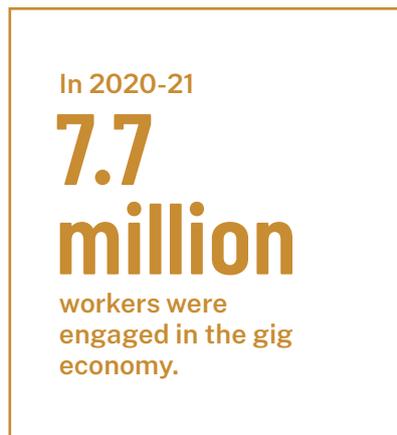
Given the changing dynamics of India’s tier 1 talent markets, non-metro cities like Ahmedabad, Kochi, Bhubaneswar, and Vadodara are gaining traction to become the next talent hotspots. Factors like an abundance of potential candidates, low risk of employee exodus, highly favorable

and economical business environment, and economical rates for talent have made non-metro cities the latest hub for talent attraction.

According to the India Skills India report 2023, employability rates for Tier-2 and Tier-3 colleges stand at 44 percent and 43 percent, respectively. In addition to the rising employability rates, the availability of talent at lower cost gives another reason to employers to hire talent from non-metro locations. “Hiring talent from non-metro locations boosts the company’s bottom line as they are available at relatively economical rates,” said Kush Wadhawan, Director TA, Tata Communications. Large conglomerates and MNCs want to tap the talent available in non-metropolitan locations.

“Organizations are increasingly moving their satellite offices to tier 2 and tier 3 given the talent-cost advantage and availability of bigger workspaces at cheaper rates,” Kapil Dawar, TA Leader, IBM, added.

■ NITI Aayog



“Organizations are increasingly moving their satellite offices to tier 2 and tier 3 given the talent-cost advantage and availability of bigger workspaces at cheaper rates”



KAPIL DAWAR

TA Leader,
IBM

A study report by NITI Aayog titled ‘Cities as Engines of Growth’ anticipates that India’s tier 2 and tier 3 cities will take on the mantle of economic growth and talent supply chain in the future.

Impediments in Hiring from Non-Metro Campuses

Tier 2 and 3 cities are the next hotbeds for growth and employment. Still, realistically, many issues must be addressed for this possibility to become a reality. Specific hiring woes still hold back large-scale hiring from smaller cities. Touching upon some of the significant challenges that organizations tend to face while hiring from tier 2 and 3 cities, Neha Kalia, Head- TA (India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan), AkzoNobel, suggested, “In tier 2 and tier 3 cities, parents have a major say in the professional decisions of their children, often leading to attrition among talent from such locations. Thus, parents’ and freshers’ conventional and conservative mindset towards career prospects is a major challenge that deters large-

scale hiring from India’s interior locations.”

Highlighting a primary unmet expectation, Shuchita Shukla, Head of TA, GlobalLogic, shared, “Lack of adequate business communication skills is the biggest challenge facing recruiters who are willing to fish talent from non-metro cities.” The issues are even direr in tier 4 and below cities. Apart from the vernacular and mindset incongruity, the lack of orientation and accessibility have rendered potential candidates in such localities utterly oblivious to the current market scenario. Thus, bridging the skills and employability gap in such zones is critical to elevating the quality of talent in tier 2 and below.

Breaking the Barriers: Making Tier 2 and Tier 3 Students More Employable

Collaborative efforts by industry and higher educational institutes can tackle these complex challenges. The first step, however, should be towards transforming

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NEHA KALIA

Head- TA (India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan), AkzoNobel

the training and education landscape. According to Abhishek Banerjee, VP, Student Outcomes, Sunstone, “The traditional model of education that most Indian colleges operate on leaves little to no scope for students to interact with the industry to get a flavor of what the corporate market wants. Conversely, there is an acute shortage of industry practitioners and educational institutions who can upskill students and teach them how to work with emerging technologies. Thus, the need of the hour is to create a robust and progressive education framework built on the strong foundation of strategic alliances between industry and academia.”

The Digital Drive: Making Learning More Accessible

Expanding the spectrum of educational infrastructure and creating an inclusive and equitable framework is overwhelming. Technology can be the greatest ally in this journey. Given the significant increase in internet penetration and advancements in Edtech, transcending the boundaries of traditional learning models has become more accessible. Both industry and academia can jointly leverage this opportunity to deploy extensive, forward-looking skilling programs even in non-metro, remote locations nationwide. Considering that the digital divide between metro and non-metro cities of India is constantly diminishing, the democratization of training and education should soon become a new reality.

Educators must address the digital revolution. They need appropriate training in digital teaching methods to build an inclusive learning ecosystem. On the other hand, the industry must also contribute to developing fresh talent by expanding its footprint in smaller towns and cities. Engaging with tier 2 and tier 3 talent through remote/virtual internship programs and setting up capability centres in such locations is the best bet for organizations to optimize the demographic dividend.

Remote Working Boosts Employment

The rise of flexible workplaces and employment prospects in the post-pandemic world has emerged as an opportunity in disguise to address the logistic challenges of hiring talent from non-metro locations. Businesses know they can now reach candidates previously out of the running due to location, so they are expanding their search across the nation in pursuit of the best talent.

With flexible work models like hybrid and Gig coming to the forefront, the professional avenues for tier 2 and tier 3 talent have multiplied. A study report by the NITI Aayog estimates that in 2020-21, 7.7 million workers were engaged in the gig economy. The gig workforce is expected to expand to 23.5 million by 2029-30. Thus, with the geographical barriers fading due to the emergence of flexible working models, tier 2 and tier 3 of India are in contention of becoming the new employment fulcrums.

Chapter 4

Rooting For Retention and Corporate Success of Fresher Hires



“Educational pursuits are one of the primary reasons for early attrition in our organization. However, we don’t consider it a regrettable loss since it contributes to their upskilling and career development.”



SONAL SINGH

VP of TA,
Deutsche Bank

Top Indian organizations are doubling down on campus hiring as they grapple with low retention in the new talent economy. Since the younger generation has grown up in the era of the digital revolution, their digital capabilities are virtually unparalleled. Thus, India’s most prominent IT and software enterprises depend on fresher hiring and campus recruitment drives to meet their quota. Research firm UnearthInsight revealed that, by the end of the fiscal year 2022, the fresher additions at the top IT services firms will be around 3,50,000-3,60,000. While India Inc. aspires to revive the talent economy through extensive campus recruitment drives, the exorbitant churn rate amongst freshers puts the industry in grave distress.

Deep Dive Into Roadblocks in Fresher Retention

Candidates fresh out of college tend to leave their jobs after six months of service, pushing their organizations into an endless loop of fishing for new talent, which causes both time and cost overrun. Therefore, the attrition-battered industry faces another binary challenge of talent attraction and retention.

To address the challenge of early attrition, organizations must first identify the key traits, pain points, challenges, and opportunities that prompt freshers to quit their professional journey at an early stage. Pointing out one primary reason behind fresher attrition in her organization, Sonal Singh, VP of TA at Deutsche Bank, said, “Educational pursuits are one of the primary reasons for early attrition in our organization.

However, we don’t consider it a regrettable loss since it contributes to their upskilling and career development.”

Lack of Clarity

Freshers need to be more aware of the corporate culture as they need more relevant experience to comprehend how working in a professional setting feels like. Students need clarity about the job and how a particular brand will add value to their professional journey. While information is abundant online, only some can be traced back to a credible or reliable source. Thus, when they finally join an organization professionally, they are often met with a colossal expectation mismatch, leading to employee dissatisfaction and, eventually, attrition. Sonal Singh suggests a solution: “The industry and academia must communicate with students before they enter the corporate world to set their expectations right. Painting a realistic picture of their career is key to avoiding any expectations mismatch.”

Gaps in Pre-Hiring Assessment

Smart hiring entails assessing and evaluating skills, aptitude, and alignment with the role. Hire in haste, and you must repent. Organizations are doomed to suffer from poor employee performance and attrition. Pre-hiring assessment is pivotal for organizations to unlock returns on college recruitment.

New to the corporate landscape, students need more context of the corporate value system and culture. Helping them find their bearings in the initial days to navigate the nuances of the workplace is another imperative

“New-age employees cannot be appeased by monetary incentives and retention bonuses. To retain them, building a flexible work environment that promotes work-life balance and workplace autonomy is key.”



PALLAVI PEDNEKAR
Talent Director,
Deloitte

to mitigating fresher attrition. Lack of clarity and a soaring job market lead to frequent job switches.

Crack the Code: Retention

Cracking the code to retain talent has become a strategic and cerebral task since the freshly brewed talent in today's job market demonstrates a distinct and diverse set of expectations. Expectation mismatch, lack of clarity, negative workplace experience, and higher educational prospects contribute substantially to fresher attrition predicament. However, they account for the tip of the iceberg. There are umpteen challenges to fresher hiring and retention, all deeply rooted in the traditional paradigm of people management that does not gel well with next-gen talent.

Flexibility at Work

While Freshers are highly driven, ambitious, and keen to make a difference, they also demand additional perks like workplace flexibility, work-life balance, mental health benefits, etc. According to Pallavi Pednekar, Talent Director, Deloitte, “New-age employees cannot be appeased by monetary incentives and retention bonuses. To retain them, building a flexible work environment that promotes work-life balance and workplace autonomy is key.”

Greater Sense of Purpose

Another essential characteristic of young talent is advocacy for CSR and ESG. They are highly cognizant of socio-economic concerns such as diversity, inclusion, and sustainability. Organizations that cannot

redesign their culture and policies as per next-gen talent's changing expectations and beliefs become highly susceptible to fresher attrition and talent crunch. Accentuating the correlation between CSR and employee motivation and retention, Pallavi Pednekar opined, “Employees of companies with well-executed CSR strategies tend to exhibit higher commitment levels, satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. Thus, CSR initiatives that reflect the values and morals of young talent within an organization can cultivate intrinsic motivation in employees and facilitate talent retention at scale.”

Empathy and Modern Policies

Sudhir Sharma, Head of TA at Kotak Mahindra Bank, said, “We are dealing with a generation that looks at work differently. They come from a secure background wherein their physiological and financial safety needs are already met, so we often see them job-hopping. Therefore, to retain them, people leaders must transcend the boundaries of traditional HRM and offer them a more empathetic and personalized workplace experience.”

Improving Hiring Experience

We're in a candidate-driven market, giving job seekers plenty of choices regarding where they want to work. Thus, providing the best fresher candidate and work experience is vital to mitigating attrition. Designing a strategic engagement model that is scalable and adaptable allows for building stronger relationships with students and bringing down the business loss of attrition.

Chapter 5

Unlocking Fresher Hiring by Bridging the Skill Gap





Specialized Degrees Gaining Popularity

Shift from demand in traditional degrees - medical, law & engineering to specialized degrees like robotics, finance & investments, entrepreneurship etc.



Emergence of Education Technology

The rise in internet penetration, coupled with benefits such as affordability and accessibility, has contributed to the emergence of Ed Tech.



Shift Towards Non-Vocational Courses

Courses that encourage critical thinking and creativity, such as graphic design, photography, writing, and others, are gaining widespread popularity



Increasing Use of Artificial Intelligence

Increased utilization of AI in different facets of education, like teaching, assessment, management etc aimed to enhance the efficiency of these processes.



Self Analysis and Gamification

The integration of game elements in higher education is gaining traction due to similar fundamental mechanisms of gaming and learning



Concept Based Learning

Concept-based learning is gaining more prominence, due to incorporation of project-based learning, field work and collaborative exercises in education

Source: IBEF, indiaai.gov, AnandRathi Research

“Only one in 10 graduates are employable in India because our higher education space focuses more on academic delivery than investing in bridging the employability gap through skill-based education.”



ABHISHEK BANERJEE

VP, Placement, Sunstone

India is grappling with a unique paradox that threatens to hamper its GDP and long-term economic prosperity. While there is an abundance of pass-outs from higher education institutes, India Inc. still struggles to meet its talent needs owing to a severe shortage of skilled candidates.

The India Skills Report 2021 by Wheebox reveals that only 45.9% of Indian youth are considered employable by global recruiters owing to a shortage of relevant skills and competencies. While employers desperately need skilled candidates to realize their human capital needs, academia is short in producing business-proficient knowledge workers. Abhishek Banerjee, VP, Placement, Sunstone, pointed out, “Only one in 10 graduates are employable in India because our higher education space focuses more on academic delivery than investing in bridging the employability gap through skill-based education.”

Industry-Academia Collaboration to Plug Skill Gap

The misalignment between

industry and higher education institutes requires a collaboration strategy and co-owning of students' learning outcomes to mitigate the skills gap and boost industry preparedness among freshers.

Industry's Early Engagement with Students

To unlock the full potential of next-gen talent, the upskilling journey of freshers should begin before onboarding. Industry must look at engaging with students early on through internships and campus visits to establish vital touch-points with potential hires while on campus. Such immersive engagement programs can acclimatize students to the industrial ecology so that they can be directly deployed to projects on graduation. Lavanam Amballa, National Head-Campus Hiring, Wipro, suggested, “We need to start engagement with students from the second year to provide them adequate and relevant industry exposure before the campus recruitment drive starts. Collaborating with academia to provide industry-oriented education to students at least 2-3 semesters before

Unemployment rate for educated class of population



“We need to start engagement with students from the second year to provide them adequate and relevant industry exposure before the campus recruitment drive starts. Collaborating with academia to provide industry-oriented education to students at least 2-3 semesters before the placement period is key to augmenting their industry-preparedness.”



LAVANAM AMBALLA

National Head-Campus
Hiring, Wipro

the placement period is key to augmenting their industry-preparedness.”

Internships are Instrumental

Strengthening the connection between students and corporates through engagement avenues like internships and externships is the best bet for the industry and academia to build a solid pipeline of experienced freshers. Balaji Srinivasan, Head TA & HRBP for EV, FCEV, H2 Business, Bosch India, opined, “Internships are the trump card for bridging the colossal student-industry chasm that fuels the unemployability crisis. We try to onboard interns for a definite period and provide them with cross-functional working experience. A well-defined job rotation plan for interns ensures they understand what the industry entails.” He added, “Alumni connect helps us reach out to students and enhance our brand’s positioning in the institute.”

Shift to Skill-Based Hiring

The recruitment paradigm gradually shifts from degree-based to skill-based hiring as skills become the new currency for business success and growth. With macroeconomic trends like inflation, supply-chain disruptions, and the digital revolution changing the

business landscape, new-age meta, technical and cognitive skills are critical to candidates’ success. Atirek Gautam, Global Head-TA, Sutherland, listed the crucial skills for 2023 and beyond: “Task-switching, monotony tolerance, and cognitive abilities are relevant skills in the new normal.” It has become increasingly clear that the best way forward for individuals, businesses, economies and societies is to embrace a skills-first mindset.

Sharing his strategy for assessing and evaluating freshers, Harsha Kumar, Head of TA (India), Falabella, said, “Our recruitment philosophy is skills and competence over academic excellence. We prefer to onboard a candidate with a vibrant profile over grades.” Sowmya Seetharamaiah, Sr. Director TA, Teleperformance, also pointed out that the candidate screening process in her organization is based on the predetermined standard minimum skills required for any job role.

The onus of filling the skills vacuum should fall equally on the shoulders of industry and academia. Creating an equilibrium between supply and demand of future-ready talent through all stakeholders’ collective and harmonious efforts is the key to unlocking fresher productivity in the new normal.

Chapter 6

Youth Skill Development: An Antidote for the Employability Crisis



■ LinkedIn Report

Skill sets required for jobs have changed by around

25%

since 2015

By 2027, Skill sets required for jobs will change by

50%

“There is certainly a gap between the curriculum that colleges are following and what actual job requirements are, due to which the employability and skills crisis persists in the Indian job market.”



SHOAIB SHAIKH

Associate Director of HR & TA, Virtusa

Constant technology disruptions and market uncertainties are recalibrating work, as a consequence of which, jobs are becoming more fluid, complex, and skill-heavy. As per a LinkedIn report, skill sets required for jobs have changed by around 25% since 2015, and by 2027, this number is expected to double. With expectations for work higher than ever, the needle is quickly moving towards cross-functional and cognitive power skills that can make the workforce agile, adaptable, and adept for the future.

Shortage of Skill-Ready Talent

The industry aspires to stack innate, timeless, and high-order skills through campus hiring. However, the ever-widening skills gap amongst freshers creates a significant rift between the demand and supply of future-ready skills. An extensive report by Korn Ferry suggests that, by 2030, more than 85 million jobs could go unfilled because there aren't enough skilled people to meet the talent needs of the industry as a whole. While the skills shortage in domestic talent circles keeps companies from unlocking talent potential, the ever-changing dynamics of the skills landscape and invariably

diminishing shelf-life of skills obstruct freshers from keeping pace with industry demands. This challenge is especially critical from the standpoint of university students as most of the skills they acquire during higher ed become redundant and are a mismatch with job market demands by the time they graduate.

Consistent Curriculum Update to Enhance Relevance

Lack of industry orientation plays a significant role in making our academic curriculum obsolete and ineffectual. Schools and higher education institutions nationwide continue to train students in outdated skills that have little to no use in today's digital-first economy. Owing to this polarity between industry and academia, India's unemployment rate has reached unprecedented levels. According to studies by Emeritus and IBM, most skills' utility spans decreased from 5 years to 4 years in just two years. In fact, more technical skills have an even shorter span of just 2.5 years, given the accelerated pace of technological advancement and innovation. According to Shoaib Shaikh, Associate Director of HR & TA, Virtusa, “There is certainly a gap

According to a UNICEF study, at least

47%

of Indian youth do not have the necessary education and skills to secure a job.

Source: UNICEF

“In the post-pandemic world of work, roles have become much more futuristic and forward-looking. Thus, skills like proactive thinking, far-sightedness, and analytical abilities have become critical from the perspective of the future of work.”



**IPSA
RATHA**

Director- TA,
JLL India

between the curriculum that colleges are following and what actual job requirements are, due to which the employability and skills crisis persists in the Indian job market.” Thus, higher education tailored and customized to meet the demands of the industry is the key to getting out of this bind.

Industry Shake-Hand: Road to Hyper-Skilling

Given that overhauling the curriculum as per industry requirements is mammoth, passing the buck to academia alone will only delay or stagnate the process of transforming education. The industry must wake up to the criticality of decoding the skills conundrum through collective actions towards upskilling, cross-skilling, and multi-skilling of budding talent on campuses. Some organizations have taken a giant leap towards early talent development by signing MoUs with educational institutions. In contrast, others have set up their internal academies to deal with the challenge of skill shortage.

The Pivot: Learnability Quotient

According to Ipsa Ratha, Director- TA, JLL India, “In the post-pandemic world of work,

roles have become much more futuristic and forward-looking. Thus, skills like proactive thinking, far-sightedness, and analytical abilities have become critical from the perspective of the future of work.” She added, “Building theoretical and practical knowledge around such future-ready skills by integrating them into the college curriculum is key to nurturing sustainable talent.” Today, the ability of individuals to stay adept and updated is a crucial determinant of their growth, sustainability, and success in the new world of work. Therefore, meta-skills like learnability quotient and skill mobility are the contemporary talent differentiators in the new talent economy.

According to Ganesh Kuppuswamy, Head - Global TA Programs & Initiatives, UST, “A global survey suggested that 68% of companies have started looking for candidates willing to learn rather than academic excellence. Since businesses must stay agile to survive in today’s highly competitive and dynamic marketplace, hiring candidates who exhibit learning dexterity and deftness is crucial.”

Chapter 7

In Focus: The Digital- Led BFSI Fresh Talent Landscape



“Around 61% of the BFSI workforce would have to acquire at least one new skill every year in the area of technology, digitalization or sustainability to stay relevant in the future of the banking industry.”



SATISH MOHAPATRA

VP & Head HR, Siemens Smart Infrastructure

The BFSI sector in India, encompassing banking, financial services, and insurance, plays a pivotal role in the country’s economic growth and financial stability.

The digital overhaul has profoundly impacted the BFSI sector and transformed banking paradigms forever. Today, customers expect complete digitalization of banking services, owing to which most financial institutions have moved towards mobile/ e-banking and contactless payment processing. BFSI players need digital-first talent with diverse skill sets to meet the operational requirements for deploying digital banking.

Approach to Skills and Workforce Development

The banking models are increasingly more digitally driven, and skill requirements are rapidly shifting. Satish Mohapatra, VP & Head HR, Siemens Smart Infrastructure, said, “Around 61% of the BFSI workforce would have to acquire at least one new skill every year in the area of technology, digitalization or sustainability to stay relevant in the future of the banking industry.”

While the digital revolution has changed the banking paradigms, soft skills like customer centricity are still central to the BFSI sector. According to Pallab Mukherji, CPO, Equitas Small Finance Bank, “While digitalization brings efficiency, effectiveness, accuracy, and enhanced security to the table, one important element that drives

the success and profitability of a BFSI company is customer satisfaction. Around 55-60% of all retail financial services revolve around sales. Therefore, softer and more humane skills like patience, resilience, empathy, persuasive speaking and effective listening are the essential skills that we look for apart from digital aptitude.”

Apart from digital aptitude and customer-centricity, work ethics and professional conduct precede stackable skills in the BFSI sector, given the volatile and ever-expanding compliance ecosystem that governs it. Elaborating on the same, Ruchira Bhardwaja, Joint President & CHRO, Kotak Life Insurance, opined, “While fresher recruitment offers the most cost-effective means for bridging the internal talent gap, finding adequate corporate know-how and professionalism is challenging. We give importance to freshers with strong work ethics, behavioral skills, and a robust value system.”

Getting the New Hires up to Speed to Perform

The BFSI sector is more data-driven than most other industries across the globe. The industry sitting on volumes of data about customers requires data analytics skills to offer tailor-made solutions and services. Therefore, building digital capabilities across teams is the need of the hour as the sector witnesses accelerated digital penetration. Kishore Poduri, Country Head HR (India), DBS Bank, shared, “To align our business to the



“Even students from premium tech institutes are disconnected from the banking and financial services world. We have started our skill development academy to acclimatize them to the business objectives and purpose.”



KISHORE PODURI

Country Head HR (India),
DBS Bank

changing consumer behaviour, we have started providing highly digitized products and solutions to our customers to improve their experience. Even students from premium tech institutes are disconnected from the banking and financial services world. We have started our skill development academy to acclimatize them to the business objectives and purpose.”

Banking on Netizens: Digitally Savvy Youth

According to McKinsey research, less than 30% of digital transformations succeed. Employees with inadequate digital inclination instinctively reject new software, tools, apps, and processes, even if such tech bids to improve work. Changing the mindset of teams is vital for organizations that aim to ride the digital transformation wave. While Gen Y and Gen X employees are often intimidated

by tech, their younger counterparts demonstrate relatively higher digital aptitude and maturity. According to Anand Sivashankar, Director of HR, CRISIL, “Gen Z and Millennials are digital natives with point-on digital maturity. Their comfort with digital makes them more susceptible to tech adaptation. Thus, all organizations have to do is create a framework that instills “digital discipline” among next-gen workers who generally tend to have a short attention span, and simplify the digital ecosystem by introducing easy-to-operate and intuitive systems so that people can latch on to the tech with ease.”

BFSI’s unprecedented need for digital skills, irrespective of function, has made it a proactive campus hirer. The time is only ripe for streamlining the recruitment practices to improve student deployment effectively.

Chapter 8

In Focus: New Horizons of Growth and Employability in the GCC Sector



“In the times to come, GCCs will become the primary source for organizations to insource tech talent from non-domestic and low-cost locations. Therefore, if India wants to attract more GCC investments in the long run, bridging the IT skills gap amongst fresh talent is imperative.”



PRIYADARSHI BHATTACHARYA

Head of HR,
Swiss Re GBS Centres
India

Over the past few years, India has emerged as one of the most lucrative and promising locations for Global Captive Centres (GCCs), given its vast and agile talent ecosystem, knowledge-driven workforce, solid infrastructure, supportive government policies, and immense cost advantage. Nasscom predicts India will add another 500 GCCs to its existing 1500 GCCs by 2026. And with global companies still looking for a substantial and diverse talent pool to bootstrap their digital transformation journey, India will continue to attract GCC investments from multinational conglomerates across the globe.

However, retaining the position of the world's leading talent pipeline in today's dynamic skills landscape requires thorough capability development programs that can be deployed on a war footing. According to Priyadarshi Bhattacharya, Head of HR, Swiss Re GBS Centres India, “In the times to come, GCCs will become the primary source for organizations to insource tech talent from non-domestic and low-cost locations. Therefore, if India wants to attract more GCC investments in the long run, bridging the IT skills gap amongst fresh talent is imperative.”

Career Opportunities for Campus Freshers

GCCs have a multipronged influence on the Indian talent landscape. Besides bringing in newer work opportunities for the youth, they prompt job-seekers to acquire new-age skills such as agility, design thinking, innovative mindset, and digital dexterity. As MNCs continue to establish global teams via GCCs to add to their value chains, a significant shift in the talent

landscape can be witnessed as candidates are encouraged to upskill and reskill to become worthy of the GCC talent marketplace.

Highlighting the importance of transforming the Indian talent landscape, Puja Sharma, Head TA, Global Technology & Ops, Honeywell, said, “For most multinational companies, having an Indian GCC centre means tapping into a cost-effective, high-volume, and scalable talent pool. However, we must change the global perception of the Indian talent landscape. Indian talent should be rebranded as value creators, innovators, and critical thinkers to drive up GCC investments in the new talent economy.” Thus, heavy investments in upskilling and reskilling are gradually becoming commonplace as India inches closer to becoming a preferred GCC hub for global companies.

The Need to Develop Scalable Skills to Succeed

Even though India has the world's largest talent pool, talent quality is a big factor that still deters a significant portion of global conglomerates from entering. As per Sushrita Bhowal, India HR Head, Cargill Business Services, “The global leadership is gradually moving away from cost-arbitrage and scalable hiring to a new standard of job-readiness and employability when it comes to talent pool assessment. While recruiting candidates for their offshore facilities, they seek easily deployable and highly billable skills such as business acumen, customer orientation, and techno-functional skills.”

Divya Parihar, Global TA Leader, EY GDS, highlighted linguistic



“The global leadership is gradually moving away from cost-arbitrage and scalable hiring to a new standard of job-readiness and employability when it comes to talent pool assessment.”



SUSHRITA BHOWAL

India HR Head, Cargill Business Services

skills. She shared, “For global companies, multi-lingual skills, and cultural understanding are part and parcel of the larger essential skills envelope. They demonstrate unparalleled demand for Indian talent with advanced language and communication capabilities.”

Global leaders expect more than just cost-effectiveness from their non-domestic talent pipelines. They want people equipped with relevant skills from more evolved and complex domain areas directly correlating with business operations and strategy.

The Hiring Outlook of This Sector

With the expansion of India’s GCC landscape, hiring across functions and job roles has gained momentum rapidly. Today, even global retail brands embrace Indian talent as the global economy gradually recovers from the pandemic

blow and consumer demand resumes.

Namita Vyas, Director of TA-India & China,, Nike, commented, “In the last two years, all major global retail brands have established GCCs in India to tap into the country’s massive and diverse talent pool. However, certain skill gaps in supply chain understanding and predictive analytics must be bridged early in talent development to provide international brands with a readily available, easy-to-deploy talent pipeline.”

Hiring young talent is imperative to build a robust pipeline of future-ready talent to keep the business running. Reinventing the campus hiring paradigms to eliminate biases and build a broad pool of potential employees is the best way forward for organizations that prefer staying ahead of the curve amidst the war for talent. Diversifying hiring practices is prudent for businesses to navigate the future of work.



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