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India Inc looks at talent from outside core business

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MUMBAI : A global retailer looking to hire a procurement head recently briefed its recruitment firm about its openness to look for candidates with an engineering company background. Similarly, a company in the online travel business, looking to fill a senior VP (product) role, has directed its search firm to look for candidates from outside the sector.

There have been several instances wherein strategy consultants from management consulting firms have moved to sectors like telecom, media and e-commerce within operations and P&L (profit and loss) responsibility roles. Hiring agencies told TOI the trend of companies looking for talent outside their core industry has gathered pace over the last three years.

Antal International India MD Joseph Devasia said companies believe candidates from outside their own industry bring in a different perspective. "There are quite some roles we have worked on where we had to look for candidates outside the client's industry. In the past three years, nearly 25% of candidates we have placed are not from the client's industry. Most of these candidates come with niche skill sets that are not easily available in every industry," said Devasia.

Executive Access (India) MD Ronesh Puri said the firm has witnessed demand for candidates outside the industry double during the last one year. "In the current year, we have about 30% placements outside the industry against 15% in the previous year. In 50% of cross-industry placements, clients specifically instructed us to not even consider candidates from the same industry as they did not want same mindset," said Puri.

Companies are looking at candidates from outside the industry because the lines between different industries are getting increasingly blurred. With every industry today at a risk of getting disrupted, Puri expects the trend to get further pronounced over the next few years. "Today, Uber or Ola could be termed to be in transportation, technology as well as services. Also, in recent years, research indicates that candidates who have actually moved from one industry to another have done phenomenally well. This has given confidence to others to do the same as success tends to get replicated," said Puri.

BRINGING IN A NEW CULTURE

➤ **Recruiting from outside own industry helps cos** get a candidate that can bring in a fresh culture

➤ Such a recruit also helps the co **make new connections** at a time when lines between industries are getting blurred

➤ Cos also find that expertise of executives **working for 15-20 years in same field becomes more functional**

➤ As a result, this practice



is **gaining currency across all segments** and sectors

➤ For instance, strategy consultants from mgmt consultancies have joined telecom, media and e-commerce

Over the last three years, executive search firm GlobalHunt has seen an average 15-20% rise in searches done for candidates from outside the client's industry. GlobalHunt MD Sunil Goel said, "It has been observed that when people work in the same industry for 15-20 years, their expertise becomes more functional. For overall success, a business perspective is equally important."

The trend is broad-based across industries and cuts across functions. BTI Consultants MD James Agrawal said, "We've also seen CEOs and MDs being hired from different industries but not so much as functional experts in areas including innovation, supply chain, HR, finance, technology and marketing. Overall, there's been a 20% increase in demand for candidates from outside the industry."

RBS Services' senior HR partner (shared operations-India) Maneesh Menda said, increasingly, roles within organisations are moving to specialised ones that offer a direct line impact to the bottom line of the business/organisation. "With the evolving nature of businesses as well as job functions, organisations are looking outside of a traditional 'job description' to fill in roles, and therefore moving outside of their own industry for talent, expertise or best practices that can be adapted," said Menda. He added that, year on year, there is an increase in the industry of agnostic talent roles that are in technology, legal and risk, as well as some others like HR itself.

On the other hand, at IBM, there has been no visible change in trend over the last three years. But IBM India/South Asia VP and HR head Dilpreet Singh said, "We have always been open to talent outside of the IT industry if there is sufficient industry and technical knowledge that can be applied successfully to the role. At IBM, the trend to hire domain/industry experts at senior levels is on the rise. We hire finance SMEs, oncologists, aviation experts, experts in cloud, security, AI, water technology, data scientists, etc, and the candidates need not necessarily be from the IT sector."

According to research by BTI Consultants, one of the main reasons behind the trend is the freshness in thoughts and ideas that candidates from outside the industry bring to the table. Other reasons include driving a different culture within an organisation and the interpersonal and professional connects that the person brings.