

Local experience seen as a must for CXO positions

BY ANJALI VENUGOPALAN, ET BUREAU | APR 02, 2019, 08.26 AM IST

NEW DELHI: Companies operating in the country increasingly prefer candidates with considerable local experience for **CXO** and senior-level positions, and while foreign candidates or returning Indian expats are still preferred for certain roles, they no longer command a premium in salary, say headhunters.

Most companies, including scaling up startups, now prefer to hire from a local talent pool that has built up enough tech expertise and experience with large-scale business, combined with the ability to work in a disorganised environment and form relationships with local stakeholders, leaders at executive search and leadership firms like **Egon Zehnder**, **ABC Consultants**, **RGF-Executive Search**, **Executive Access** and **Accord India** told ET. This is different from the situation in 2014 and 2015 when several startups, flush with funds, got a number of people in senior positions from large tech companies in **Silicon Valley**. Some headhunters call them “trophy hires”. Many of them returned in a year or two.

Experts attribute this change to the coming of age of the Indian startup ecosystem and increasing availability of experienced world-class talent with technology expertise within the country.

Cash-rich startups earlier brought in otherwise expensive talent from Silicon Valley because they had both tech expertise and experience in working with large-scale businesses, said Sandeep Murthy, partner at venture capital firm Lightbox. Talent from Indian FMCG (**fast-moving consumer goods**) companies would have had big-business experience, but no background in tech, he pointed out. But now, people in Indian startups have both tech expertise and experience in local, large-scale business, Murthy said.

Shiv Agrawal, managing director at ABC Consultants, said, “Earlier, those coming from abroad would bring in best practices.” But now, in the auto industry, for instance, it’s equally important for the heads of sales and marketing to know the Indian dealer and distribution network, he said.

Many CXOs coming in from abroad found it difficult to adapt to the business environment in the country, experts said. “Everything is more structured abroad; here it’s more disorganised,” says Ronesh Puri, managing director of Executive Access.



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