

BPOs: New hiring models gain steam

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Jan. 12: As global markets and businesses reel under the impact of the economic meltdown, Business Process Outsourcing organisations are adopting alternate hiring models, which will not only provide them with a diverse range of skill sets to help maintain their competitive edge but also contain the eternal problem of attrition.

BPOs which normally hire agents — graduates who are fluent in English — are now actively hiring temporary workers, housewives, students, expatriates, retired professionals and even differently-abled people ranging from the visually impaired to those affected by polio, to enhance productivity and retention.

For instance, Infosys BPO has launched a new hiring drive for part-time employment in Pune recently. "This pioneering initiative targets students and housewives who typically have 4-6 hours of free time, which can be devoted to gainful employment. Currently, we have 22 employees under this scheme. In addition, we are hiring differently-abled people, commissioned officers from the Defence Forces, who have completed their short service or have taken pre-release and expatriates who join us on contract to impart soft skills training," said K Raghavendra, VP & head-HR, Infosys BPO.

"The alternate staffing model gives us access to a diverse set of resources, each of whom brings to the table a varied set of experiences and skills. More important, this diverse talent pool is more loyal to the organization than our regular hires," he added.

S Nagarajan, co-founder and chief people officer of 24/7 Customer which employs 7,500 people and offers services in the customer lifecycle management space, agrees.

"The average age of our agents is 24-25 years and



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advantage diversity

Nirmala Menon, founder & CEO, Interweave Consulting, says non-traditional employee groups like retired people, returning mothers, expat/military wives and students, present a large, diverse pool of qualified talent and are a boon to organisations hunting for talent. Organisations must also leverage diverse perspectives and experiences of a varied resource pool of young and old team members to provide better solutions to customers. Part-time employment is an excellent way to add extra capacity and flexibility to fulfilling the short-term business needs of an organisation without locking itself into long-term costs.

these agents typically stay with us for 16-18 months, at best. This is not the case with the 50 odd, differently-abled people we have hired, who are still with us over the years."

The company has tied up with an NGO called 'Enable India', which

maintains a database of disabled people and sends suitable candidates in accordance with the company's requirements.

"Our approach is to look for abilities and skills rather than disabilities. While we have also hired housewives, ex-servicemen and middle-

aged professionals, we are currently facing a problem of scaling up, as the numbers from these segments cannot match the volumes we are seeking," averred Nagarajan.

While Wipro BPO has no temporary hiring model in place, it hires disabled people

for various processes, as well as expatriates to run processes which require foreign language specialization and has recently hired around 30 ex-servicemen at different ranks for various roles in business operations and support functions such as sourcing and administration.

"These ex-servicemen have completed a one year course in management from Management Development Institute, Gurgaon, and have extremely good management skills. As for employing the disabled, we are an equal opportunity employer and look at competency levels rather than deformities and disabilities," says Praveen Kamath, asst VP-People Supply Chain, Wipro BPO, who has recently hired a person afflicted with polio.

While there are enough reasons to justify the time and financial investments required in developing a strong alternate hiring programme, an effective and holistic alternate hiring initiative is the interplay of three distinct activities — identification of alternate candidate pools; effective and innovative hiring processes and very importantly, creation of an inclusive organisational mindset says Nirmala Menon, founder & CEO, Interweave Consulting Pvt Ltd, which specialises in diversity management solutions.

The first two are what most organisations focus on.

However, if organisations have not addressed the variable of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, they have missed out on an important element in leveraging the employee fully and keeping him happy and productive. On the contrary, it may lead to new tensions around their acceptance and utilisation.

Therefore, all employees, managers, internal systems and processes must work in tandem for the initiative to be successful, she said.