



Human Resource Management System

6 degrees of separation

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ONE of society's most primal needs is communication. Through friends, acquaintances and relations, we form a profound network of interactions that spider-webs its way to hundreds, possibly thousands, of other individuals. In the 1960s, Stanley Milgram proved that any two people can be connected to each other by six other people, thus leading to the theory 'six degrees of separation'. It means that all of us are 'connected', and we all network in a

multitude of ways, sometimes without even realising it. It's true. No one is, or can be, exempt from these social linkages or networks, be it an individual or a corporation. And from an organisational point of view, dabbling in social networks has always been important, to learn and absorb more from the environment. But it has also gained importance from the point of view of recruiting - simply because networking is one of the easiest and fastest ways to find people with the right competencies and experience. In a world that is rapidly latching on to the use of technology to do everything in a better way, organisations have found that some old-fashioned social interaction can work wonders for them.



Well, not completely old-fashioned. Web-based and software-based social networking services for the purpose of recruitment are being used extensively by organisations. 'Social network recruiting' might sound like a loaded term, but it merely refers to the numerous ways in which an organisation leverages its relationships with its internal and external parties to become part of a larger network. This network is usually a talent pool, or people sharing similar interests or skills. Most of them are content in their own jobs, and are networking simply to build their own contacts or meet their peers from other organisations to share knowledge and experiences. The preferred vehicle for this kind of extensive networking is the Internet; naturally because of the massive reach it affords professionals and organisations.

The referral network

“Recruiting through referrals is more common in India. In the Indian context, it is a case of individuals, and not organisations, networking through various websites such as LinkedIn and Ryze. Many of them tend to network through websites of institutions that they have been part of, such as XLRI or the IITs,” says Epicenter COO Navanit Narayan. Epicenter has an employee referral programme about 20 per cent of its employees have come through recommendations from friends and acquaintances - and Narayan says that he would definitely consider taking the company's referral system one step forward, and recruit from a social network.



Advantage

It's not really that hard to get started. Many sites that originally started out as friends' networks such as Friendster and Orkut double up as contact points for industry members. The advantage also lies in 'passive' hires - people who are not really looking out for a job. This is considered one of the biggest advantages of social networking - the opportunity to communicate terms with the 'passives'. Another advantage is the volumes. The process of conventional recruitment is expensive, says Hitendra Patel, a consultant with Beta Hospitality. He adds, “Networking is definitely cheaper and you have an excellent choice.” Patel also feels that the Internet can be a great resource for finding people to fill senior level positions in the company. Since you cannot hire them at random, why not trawl your contacts and their contacts on a business network? You might just surprise yourself. You can also call the whole process fairly dependable, based on how your potential hire is connected to you, or who your common acquaintances are. Of course, the onus of converting a 'possible hire' into a hire lies with you.

So, it works?

The very concept of social networking for the purpose of recruitment is that everyone knows someone. And while social networking might not exactly be the next frontier of recruiting, it is certainly being seen as a strategy to complement more traditional hiring tools. Not only do they yield a wealth of results, you can also hire across geographical distances and gives your peers in the organisation to communicate with and evaluate the candidate online. Job portals offer pretty much the same thing in terms of candidate resumes, says Patel, but they're just resumes and don't come with much credibility attached. Of course, how far you should trust someone that you handpick from an Internet group is a moot point. But even if you're not actively looking for a 'scalp', these sites offer an excellent place for professionals to come together, exchange notes and pool resources. Recruiting through traditional methods is a little like fishing in a lake with your line - you know the bait to use and the best spot to fish in. But wouldn't you rather cast a net and take your pick of the lot?