

IT RECRUITMENT EXPERIENCE DURING LOCKDOWN & JOB SEEKERS ON WFH MODE

A Dipstick Study on Recruiter's experience in IT

COVID19 hit us all in a quarter that was to be the best of the financial year with companies giving that one final push for a photo finish. The lockdowns brought multiple industries to a grinding halt overnight. The shock of stoppage sent shivers down literally every industry and business function. The sheer nature and extent of automation across industries also meant that the IT Sector was bracing for an impact. Some for good, some not so. Recruiters have always had a love-hate relationship with Tech Talent, with either side choosing when to be on and when to be off guard! The large scale WFH mode that IT and IT enabled workforce switched into, provided an additional window of opportunity for the movement hungry IT professional. The WFH IT workforce has found some extra time and mind-space to deploy on jobhunts and recruiter conversations. Many things about the World of Work has changed and is not expected to go back to where it was. Recruitment in the IT sector could well be one of them that is undergoing a change in repute and form.

Has the availability of extra time and mind-space changed anything for IT Recruiters who compete for candidate's time and attention? Do Recruiters experience tech talent differently now compared to pre-COVID times? Is Tech Talent more open and supportive as jobseekers in the current context? Has the IT recruiter's productivity improved due to candidate availability and openness? These are just some of the questions we sought to find answers for through this Dipstick Study.

The study was compiled from conversations and data from over 100 Specialist Recruiters in Technology. Participant recruiters came from Talent Acquisition teams, Corporate HR Functions, Recruitment Agencies & Staffing Companies.

Recruitment Load & Recruiter Activity Data

While the dipstick study is primarily about the experience and perception of Recruiters in this current context, it's important to give the backdrop of load and activity data from the field. Despite the lockdown, recruitment activity did not grind to a total halt. With an average of over 1.85 Lakh active job openings (live and accepting applicants) across India in the last 2 months, the overall reduction in hiring activity stands at over 40% due to the lockdown. The Top IT Services and Products companies contribute to over 15% of the open positions despite the slowdown. The Top IT Services companies in India that together offer employment for over 1.7Million employees are keeping their Hiring pipelines warm and active despite the overall slowdown in hiring due to the current inconveniences of the physical lockdown.

Looking at the period from mid-March to mid-May as the lockdown and WFH window, Recruiter activity parameters

looked at were candidate sourcing, candidate reach-outs and candidate callouts. The downstream end of interviews with clients and hiring managers, offers and onboards are parameters that have a strong connect to availability and logistics at the end client side. While these parameters are critical from a recruiter load point of view, they do not necessarily reflect the Recruiter experience in the Candidate interaction context.

The key parameters of load and conversion rates observed in IT Recruitment over the 2 month lockdown period are as follows:

Table A. Key Load and Activity Parameters

All data are measurements from the lapsed Lockdown period vis-à-vis the period immediately prior to lockdown:

% Change in Candidate Conversations and Candidate Sourcing by Recruiters	23% ▲
% Change in Interview sessions with Clients & Hiring Managers	37% ▼
% Change in Offers made by Clients & Hiring Managers	63% ▼
% Change in Joinees & Onboards by Clients & Hiring Managers	36% ▼

The drop in downstream activities has been largely due to infrastructural and logistic issues that emerged due to the lockdown. As notable from the data above, the steepest drop has been with regards to rolling out of fresh offers. The drop in other 2 activities of interviews and joinees have largely been enabled by virtual interviews and eOnboarding processes. In essence, Hiring Managers are keeping the recruitment funnel warm by taking interviews and completing the onboarding of candidates committed prior to lockdown and early into the lockdown. The staggered lifting of the lockdown will see more offer rollouts happening in the coming weeks in Technology sector.

Efficiency Ratios

Recruitment is all about the efficiency of the funnel from sourcing to onboarding. While size of the funnel defines the scale of operations, the efficiency ratios define profitability and ROI on hiring spend. Driven by conversion percentages at each stage of the funnel, the efficiency ratios are key to assess the health and quality of the recruitment activity and recruiters in general. Recruitment in Tech is often considered a specialist due to the challenges of supply and more jobs chasing lesser candidates in niche domains.

Table B. Conversion and Efficiency Parameters

Parameter	Pre-Lockdown	During Lockdown
Conversion from CVs Sourced to Interviews	38%	33%
Conversion Interviews to Offer Generation	18%	9%
Conversion from Offers to Onboarding of Employees	65%	69%

All data are measurements from the lapsed Lockdown period vis-à-vis the period immediately prior to lockdown.

In the sample studied, it is largely evident that despite the reduction in size of the funnel, recruiters have by and large retained the quality and efficiency ratios on functions in their control. A marginally higher conversion ratio on Offers to Onboarding defines a higher engagement level with successful candidates.

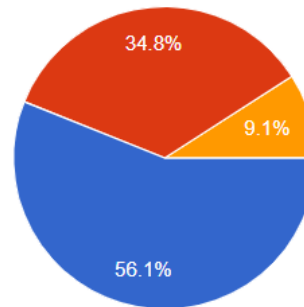
Recruiter-Candidate Experience Dimensions

The load and activity aspects of the Recruiter’s work are critical for the continued feasibility and functioning of this critical enterprise activity. However the newly emerged dimensions of remote working has impacted the engagement and experience levels of all stakeholders. The availability and affordability of technology platforms for communication and interactions management has ensured continuity. Beyond the continuity, the conditions have also enabled a finer sophistication of the Recruitment practice.

The following dimensions we studied in this research puts forth an overall shift on the engagement and experience parameters of the process.

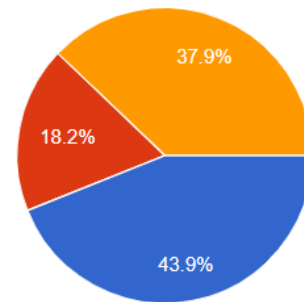
Duration of candidate conversations

● Has increased ● Remains the same ● Has reduced



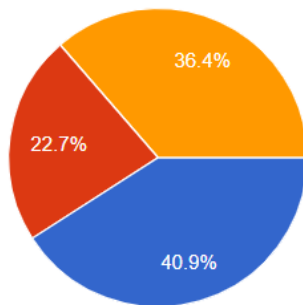
Candidates reaching out for opportunities

● Has increased ● Remains the same ● Has reduced



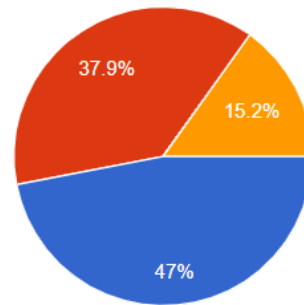
Candidate Conversations

● Has increased ● Remains the same ● Has reduced



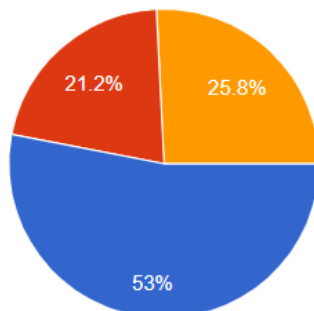
Candidate interest levels in follow-up and responses

● Has increased ● Remains the same ● Has reduced



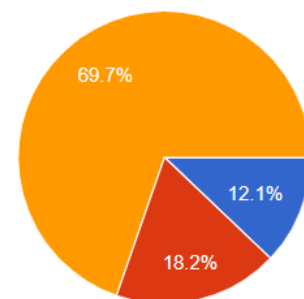
Candidate availability & openness for conversations

● Has increased ● Remains the same ● Has reduced



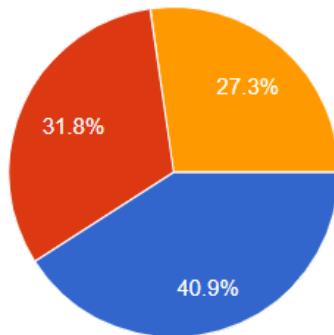
Interview dropouts & No-shows

● Has increased ● Remains the same ● Has reduced



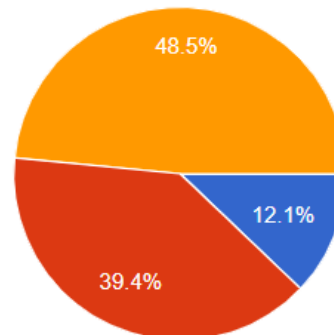
Candidate pool growth

● Has increased ● Remains the same ● Has reduced



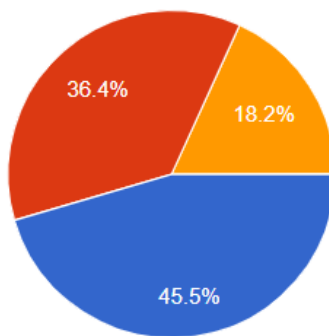
Post offer dropouts

● Has increased ● Remains the same ● Has reduced



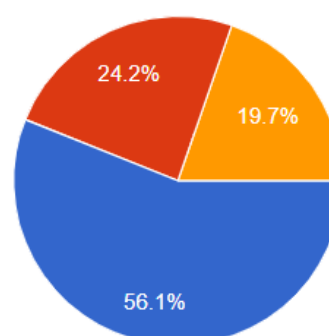
Access to passive candidates and niche skills

● Has increased ● Remains the same ● Has reduced



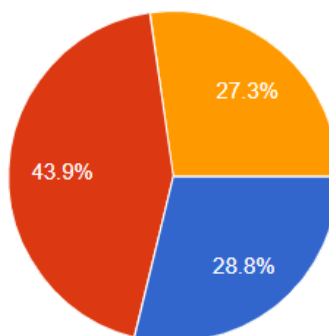
Overall recruiter productivity

● Has increased ● Remains the same ● Has reduced



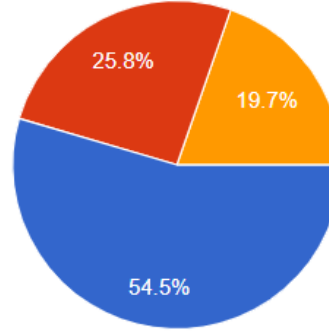
Ease of offer negotiations

● Has increased ● Remains the same ● Has reduced



OVERALL RECRUITER EXPERIENCE IN IT

● Has increased ● Remains the same ● Has reduced



Over 54% of IT recruiters gave a thumbs-up to an improvement in the overall candidate engagement experience while one-fifth state it has deteriorated in this period.

IF not anything else, COVID19 has introduced the IT and ITES Sectors to newer forms and norms of working, albeit in the short-term. Going by the findings of this Dipstick Study, IT recruiters hope to retain some, if not all, of the positives of the engagement experience. We will wait a while longer to see if Recruitment experience changes for good or will it go back to unreachable candidates, hurried conversations, ghosting and post-offer dropouts.

ANNEXURE:

Debrief on Parameters of the Experience Study

Candidate Conversations

40% of the recruiters in the study said the number of candidate conversations they are having has increased in this period compared to pre-lockdown figures. This denotes an overall increase in availability of time and mind space among candidates to get on calls with recruiters. The WFH mode has also enabled an increase in privacy and comfort as against taking the same from the candidate's workplace environment. 36% of respondents who reported a reduction in their call volumes attribute it to the overall reduction in the active job orders they are working on.

Candidate availability & openness for conversations

Majority of the recruiters (53%) experience an increase in their candidate's availability and openness to discuss job options. Adding that to the 21% who feel it has remained the same, and we have a healthy 3/4th of the respondents who experience better candidate availability now.

Duration of conversations

Candidates seem to be in less of a hurry in the WFH mode as 56% of Recruiters are experiencing longer and sometimes deeper conversations as compared to pre-lockdown times. This also has to do with the recruiter's own mind space and pace on WFH mode, as in a typical workplace setup the competitive presence around tends to speed up conversations. With most of the upstream performance indicators by and large met by recruiters, it is interesting to observe that quality conversations do not necessarily reduce output on quantity.

Candidates reaching out for opportunities

While the common imagery of recruitment and recruiters as ones who reach out to candidates, there is also a sizeable volume of in-bound conversations that recruiters engage in. These are conversations with candidates from previous engagements and walk-in candidates (virtual and in person). Majority of the recruiters in this study reported an increase in the number of in-bound enquiries and conversations around job opportunities and current availability. Many of the candidate conversations have also been advisory in nature with candidates seeking inputs and opinions on decisions to quit and stay in the current context. Apart from the mid to junior level candidates, the recruiters dealing with mid and above level candidates also note an increase in in-bound conversations. While sustainability of this waits to be seen, as a trend this is definitely new to the industry.

Candidate interest levels in follow-up and responses

Candidates Ghosting has in recent times been a concern slowing down recruitment activities and eroding recruiter morale. While 52% of respondents feel that has not changed or gotten worse in the lockdown and WFH phase, a massive

47% feel a dramatic improvement on this front. Candidates are found to be exhibiting better interest levels now with follow-ups and timely responses to requests for data, queries and documents. A collaborative working equation with candidates definitely goes a long way in impacting the overall effectiveness of the hiring process and the quality of hire.

Candidate pool growth

The rate of replenishing the candidate pool often defines the success of a recruiter and nearly 41% of the recruiters in the study said their candidate pool has grown with lockdown and WFH. Job boards and Gig platforms have also reported a growth in their subscriber base. While this need not necessarily mean an increase in active jobseekers, it definitely means an increase in the catchment size to work with for a recruiter.

Access to passive candidates and niche skills

Over and above the size of the candidate pool, the access to passive candidates and niche skillsets is a huge factor for a recruiter's success rate. Over 45% of our respondents in the study confirmed that their access to passive jobseekers and niche skillsets has improved since lockdown.

Has lockdown and WFH ushered in a whole new set of talent into the active job market is yet to be ascertained, but the indications seem clear that the movement has begun.

Ease of offer negotiations

With so much talk about job losses and slower hiring, we wanted to check if candidates were negotiating hard or soft on their job offers. Less than a third confirmed that the ease of offer negotiations has increased, while a majority of 44% said the candidates negotiate the same way like they did pre-lockdown! Nearly 28% experience candidates negotiating harder now than before.

Candidates negotiating from a point of strength happens in the absence of a push factor from current jobs and thereby transacting from a point of low or no desperation to take up the first offer coming by.

Post offer dropouts

Majority of the recruiters (48.5%) in the study confirmed that more candidates are honouring the offers they had accepted and thereby they are experiencing a reduction in the number of post-offer dropouts. Post offer dropouts are the nemesis for many recruiters and HR teams as the cost of recruitment increases when a recruiter who has to restart the process. Often at mid to senior positions, the backup candidate options are not aplenty and an offer drop at an advance stage often reboots the whole process. A reduction in the dropout rate is a great blessing to have, if it continues beyond the lockdown window.

Overall recruiter productivity

Amidst criticism that the productivity improvement that various enterprises state now are overrated and short lived, what is important is the personal sense and measure of productivity. In a mature space like recruitment where recruiters operate based on agreed KPIs and measurables, it is interesting to observe that over 56% of respondents feel that their overall productivity has increased. The data shared in the first section of this report also corroborates this, especially in the upstream functions of sourcing, screening, assessment and candidate presentment where the recruiter is more in control. The productivity at the downstream functions remain low and should be expected to improve as the lockdowns are lifted and work resumes even partially for end clients and hiring managers.

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