



The World of Work and Survival of the Trusted Advisor

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“This change is reshaping the staffing industry permanently. The role of a recruiter may diminish, but not that of a consultant. Clients will always need a trusted advisor by their side. And recruitment firms are the frontrunners to play that role.”

Hardly a day goes by when we don't hear words such as automation, artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotics, analytics, etc. What were considered buzzwords until not so long ago, are now undeniably redefining and disrupting several industries and job roles.

While there are some great and obvious benefits to improved efficiencies, the other side of the coin I worry about is the very real fear of jobless growth in a young country like India. I remember walking away quite disturbed from a conversation with the head of HR of a large Indian automobile company and the talk of robotics reducing the workforce by 50 percent while doubling production capacity over the next five years.

The very composition of workforce has changed in the last decade or so. A few key factors contributing to this change include:

Millennial talent: Their priorities are different and so is their decision-making process.

Job security is a thing of past: Employees are no longer tied to their organizations and do not hesitate in taking up new challenges, switching domains or even industries.

Agile workforce: People are more flexible, be it something as simple as working hours or something as complicated as a vague job-descriptions.

Temporary workforce is growing: Demonetization and GST have given a further push to bringing an entire segment of workers into the mainstream.

The Gig-Economy is very real: A labour market characterized by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs. This is even moving into the C-Suite with 'CXOs on rent' emerging (e.g. Project Director for six months to set up a factory unit, CFO for one year to help prepare for an IPO, etc).

Focus on workplace experience: Beyond the pay cheque, the workforce now looks at what's more?

Collaborative and connected workplaces:

Workplaces are quickly turning into open workplaces where anyone and everyone can collaborate on a project with the emergence of new age communication tools.

Three generations of the workforce with their own working-styles are reshaping our workplaces. While it may appear to be business as usual, a closer look will show that it's technology that's at the very heart of this smooth transition. Technology is disrupting the recruitment business as we traditionally know it. Some changes we see are:

- Technology has democratized data which everyone (including our clients!) has access to. So, recruitment businesses that viewed candidate sourcing as their core skill find themselves constantly swimming against the tide. We recently acquired QuezX -- a recruitment aggregator platform that is aiming to consolidate a disaggregated recruitment market and help us build a giant recruitment company without any recruiters!

- Machine learning-based screening tools help us source, screen, and filter through millions of CVs which would otherwise take hours.

- Robotics & AI are gradually being used to start eliminating routine tasks in recruitment like interview, scheduling, and coordination.

- Use of tools such as video interviewing, and online assessments are eliminating the time, money, and effort involved in first level of screening candidates.

- Platforms like Applicant Tracking Systems help us manage our vast databases better. We implemented Bullhorn at ABC last year with a simple thought: 'If only ABC knew, what ABC knows'. Every single interaction of every recruiter at ABC with every client and candidate is captured and accessible for others to leverage. We build a 'Community brain' and when I walk into a client office, I am backed by the power of every individual's knowledge.

This change driven by technology is not a passing phase that will just go away. This is fundamental and reshaping the staffing industry permanently. Traditional business models need to be remodelled and some bold and innovative calls need to be taken by recruitment firms. The role of the recruiter may diminish, but not of a consultant. Clients will always need a trusted advisor by their side. Recruitment firms are the frontrunners to play that role.

My one piece of advice would be - don't try and be everything for everybody. Find a niche that you can be the best at, and nail that niche.

