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A Study of End-to-End Recruitment Cycle Management in an SME: Learnings and Insights from a Structural Repairs and Maintenance Company in Pune

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ABSTRACT

Recruitment in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is usually judged by how quickly vacancies are filled, with little attention to how well each sourcing effort actually performs. This paper studies the end-to-end recruitment cycle of a structural repairs and maintenance company in Pune, India, drawing on an On-the-Job Training (OJT) internship in its Human Resources function. It has two objectives: to assess the company's recruitment practices from vacancy identification to onboarding, and to analyse the effectiveness of sourcing channel with respect to job profiles and hiring locations. The study follows a descriptive and analytical design. Primary data came from direct participation in the hiring process, and secondary data came from the recruitment tracker, which gave a census of 1,745 applicant records and 101 candidates who reached the Selected Candidate list between June and September 2026. Sourcing was heavily concentrated, with Meta campaigns and Internshala supplying 93.2% of applicants. Conversion to the Selected Candidate list was 4.1% for Site Engineer against 5.7% for Business Development Intern, and it varied sharply by location, from 1.7% in Mumbai to 6.1% in Pune. Only 1.2% of sourced applicants became retained hires, and terminations after joining (34) outnumbered retained joiners (21). The paper concludes that more applicants will not fix the company's hiring problem. Better screening, role- and location-specific sourcing and stronger early-tenure support are more likely to.

Keywords: *Recruitment; Sourcing Channels; Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs); Recruitment Funnel; Human Resource Management; Employee Retention; India.*

1. Introduction

In a small firm, every hire counts for more. When a company has around forty employees, one poor appointment can slow a project, upset a customer or force the whole hiring exercise to start again. For this reason recruitment in an SME is better seen as a strategic activity than as routine paperwork [3]. India's SME sector employs a large share of the non-farm workforce and has moved quickly towards digital hiring channels, yet very few studies follow the complete recruitment cycle inside such a firm, from the moment a vacancy is identified to the point where the new employee is onboarded and staying on. Service SMEs outside manufacturing and information technology are especially under-studied.

This paper is based on an OJT internship in the Human Resources function of a Pune-based structural repairs and maintenance company, carried out between June and September 2026. During the internship the author handled candidate sourcing, telephonic screening, shortlisting, interview coordination, salary discussion, offer communication, documentation and onboarding support, and also maintained the company's recruitment tracker. Working inside the process while having access to a large body of structured data (1,745 applicant records) made it possible to describe how recruitment is actually done and, at the same time, to measure how well it performs.

The paper is arranged as follows. Section 2 introduces the company. Section 3 states the objectives. Section 4 reviews the literature, and Section 5 explains the methodology. Section 6 assesses the recruitment practices followed, and Section 7 analyses the effectiveness of sourcing by job profile and hiring location. Sections 8 to 11 cover the discussion, recommendations, limitations and conclusion.

2. The Company and Its Context

The company is a Pune-based, service-oriented SME with about 42 employees, working in structural repairs and maintenance. It provides repair, restoration and maintenance services to residential and commercial properties. Its employees deal with customers directly. A field employee may inspect a property, diagnose the problem, carry out the treatment and update the customer on progress, while a supervisor coordinates staff, materials and

schedules, and a sales employee explains the service and builds the relationship. Such work needs technical knowledge, good communication and reliability, so the recruitment process has to look beyond qualifications to practical ability and attitude.

The wider civil engineering and property restoration sector in India is fragmented. A few large engineering and construction firms operate alongside many regional and local players, and competition on service quality and delivery is strong. In that setting the company's ability to attract and keep suitable field and customer-facing staff is closely tied to how well it hires.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the recruitment practices in the company from vacancy identification to onboarding.
2. To analyse the effectiveness of sourcing channel with respect to job profiles and hiring locations.

4. Review of Literature

4.1 Theoretical Background

Several theories help explain why recruitment matters to a small firm. The Resource-Based View argues that a firm's people can be a lasting source of advantage, and the argument is strongest in small firms where each employee carries a larger share of the firm's total capability [3]. Human Capital Theory treats spending on recruitment and selection as an investment that should return productivity and service quality [5], which suits the cost-conscious way SMEs make hiring decisions. Contingency Theory says there is no single correct recruitment practice, because the right approach depends on the size, industry and strategy of the firm [11]. Social Exchange Theory sees recruitment as a two-way evaluation in which candidates judge the employer as much as the employer judges them [6], and Signalling Theory explains why culture, learning opportunities and clear communication matter for employers who cannot match larger firms on pay or brand [17].

4.2 Recruitment Sources and Their Effectiveness

The idea that recruitment sources differ in effectiveness has a long history. Zottoli and Wanous [18] reviewed the research on recruitment sources and found that candidates reached through different sources tend to differ in how they perform and how long they stay, with informal sources such as referrals generally doing better than formal advertising. Breaugh and Starke [9] made a related point, that recruitment research should look at what happens after the candidate is attracted and not stop at the number of applications received. Breaugh [8] extended this argument and suggested that recruitment should be judged by whether it brings in people who succeed in the role, and not only by how fast vacancies are filled. For an SME this is a cost question as well, since a poor hire costs proportionately more.

The channel itself has also changed. Parry and Tyson [16] found that online recruitment improves administrative efficiency and can widen the applicant pool, but they also noted that it does not guarantee better quality unless it is managed well. This matters for a company whose sourcing runs almost entirely through digital platforms.

4.3 Recruitment in SMEs and the Use of Simple Metrics

Small firms tend to depend on informal channels such as personal networks, referrals and direct applications. That keeps costs low but can narrow the applicant pool [10]. Many also lack structured HR policies, which leads to inconsistent hiring practice [13]. Employer branding is relevant even for small employers [2], although SMEs often invest little in it. On measurement, Boudreau and Ramstad [7] show that simple metrics such as source-wise yield and conversion rates give useful insight, and Marler and Boudreau [15] note that most SMEs cannot afford sophisticated HR analytics and must rely on plain tracking of this kind. That is the approach followed here.

Retention is the other half of the story. Klein and Weaver [14] and Bauer and Erdogan [4] both show that structured induction and early support lower anxiety and turnover among new employees. In the Indian context, Aswathappa [1] describes recruitment as a function in which weakness at any stage shows up later as attrition, delay and cost, and Gupta and Sharma [12] link structured selection to better job fit and performance in SMEs.

4.4 Research Gap

Three gaps stand out. First, most SME recruitment studies deal with manufacturing or technology firms, and service SMEs in the repair and maintenance sector get little attention. Second, sourcing is usually studied on its own and not as one stage of a complete cycle that runs through to onboarding. Third, few studies pair a quantitative funnel analysis of a large applicant dataset with first-hand observation from inside an Indian SME. This paper tries to address these gaps by following the whole cycle in one company and by asking how effective its sourcing is across different job profiles and hiring locations.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study is descriptive and analytical. It describes how the company recruits, from requirement to onboarding, and then analyses where the sourcing effort pays off and where candidates are lost.

5.2 Data Sources

Primary data came from the author's direct involvement in recruitment work during the internship. This included interaction with candidates, telephonic screening, discussions with the HR team and hiring managers, and personal observation. Secondary data came from the recruitment tracker kept by the company. For each applicant the tracker recorded the profile applied for, hiring location, sourcing channel, screening outcome, interview status, offer status, joining status and final outcome.

5.3 Coverage

No sample was drawn. The study used a census of all tracker records available for the internship period, which gave 1,745 applicant records in the live sourcing pipeline, of whom 101 reached the Selected Candidate list.

5.4 Analysis and the Measure of Effectiveness

The data was analysed with frequencies, percentages and conversion rates. For objective 2, effectiveness of sourcing was measured as the share of sourced applicants who reached the Selected Candidate list, calculated separately for each job profile and each hiring location. The share of each channel in total applicants was also examined. Conversion for a profile or location is the number of selected candidates divided by the number of applicants sourced for it. No inferential tests were used, so the findings describe this company in this period and are not statistical generalisations.

6. Recruitment Practices in the Company: From Vacancy to Onboarding

This section addresses the first objective. The process the company follows, as observed and carried out during the internship, has twelve stages.

1. Requirement identification. A manpower need is communicated by the department or hiring manager, with the profile, number of vacancies and location.
2. Job description. The responsibilities and candidate requirements are reviewed so that sourcing is aimed correctly.
3. Candidate sourcing. Candidates are sourced through Meta campaigns, Internshala, Indeed, LinkedIn, employee references and available databases.
4. Initial screening. Candidates are contacted by phone and checked against predefined requirements.
5. Shortlisting. Candidates who meet the basic requirements move to the next stage.
6. Interview coordination. Schedules are arranged between candidates and the HR team or hiring manager.
7. Interview and evaluation. HR and technical or functional discussions are held, depending on the role.
8. Salary discussion. Expectations and other employment terms are discussed with selected candidates.
9. Offer communication. The offer is communicated and the candidate's response is tracked.
10. Documentation. Joining documents are collected and checked.
11. Joining and onboarding. Induction and onboarding support is provided once the candidate joins.
12. Pipeline management. Backup candidates are kept ready in case a selected candidate drops out or does not join.

Overall the process is sensible and complete. It starts from the requirement and not from the candidate, which keeps sourcing tied to what the role actually needs. Every candidate's status is recorded in a single tracker, vacancies are prioritised by urgency and stage, and backup candidates are maintained, which reduces the cost of a drop-out. These are good practices for a company of this size.

The assessment also shows where the process is under strain. Screening depends largely on reaching candidates by phone, and a sizeable share of them cannot be reached or lose interest early. Recruiters also have to balance speed against quality, and technical and field roles are hard to fill. Channel volumes and final outcomes are reported separately, so the company has no routine view of which channel produces candidates who are selected and retained. Finally, the process is strong up to the offer stage but much less visible after joining, which is where the largest losses occur (Section 7.5).

7. Results: Effectiveness of Sourcing by Job Profile and Hiring Location

7.1 Where the Applicants Come From

Sourcing Channel	No. of Applicants	% of Pipeline (n = 1,745)
Meta (Facebook/Instagram) campaigns	1,203	68.9%
Internshala	424	24.3%
Indeed, LinkedIn, referrals, careers page and campus placement	118	6.8%
Total	1,745	100.0%

Table 1: Channel-wise distribution of applicants

Two channels supplied 93.2% of all applicants. Within the remaining 6.8%, Indeed accounted for 4.5% and LinkedIn for 1.4%, while employee referrals, the careers page and campus placement together added fewer than 15 applicants. The company's sourcing volume therefore rests almost entirely on paid, high-reach digital advertising, and the lower-cost channels that research links with better-matched candidates [18] are barely used.

7.2 Job Profile-wise Results

Profile	Applicants Sourced	Selected Candidates	Conversion
Site Engineer	897	37	4.1%
Business Development Intern	509	29	5.7%
Business Development Executive	331	18	5.4%
Three main profiles combined	1,737	84	4.8%

Table 2: Profile-wise applicants, selections and conversion

Site Engineer drew the largest share of sourcing (897 applicants, 51.4% of the pipeline) but converted at the lowest rate, 4.1%. Business Development Intern (509 applicants, 29.2%) converted at 5.7% and Business Development Executive (331 applicants, 19.0%) at 5.4%. Human Resource support roles accounted for only 8 applicants. The remaining 17 selected candidates came from specialised profiles (HR Intern, AI/ML Intern, Robotics Intern, Event Coordinator Intern, CAD Designer, Software Developer Intern and Site Engineer Intern), each in single digits. Because these profiles are not itemised separately in the pipeline counts, their conversion cannot be calculated, and Table 2 is therefore limited to the three main profiles.

In plain terms, the same channel-led sourcing produced roughly one selected candidate for every 24 Site Engineer applicants, against about one for every 18 sales or intern applicants. Technical, on-ground roles are harder to fill through general campaigns than sales or intern roles.

7.3 Hiring Location-wise Results

Hiring Location	Applicants Sourced	Selected Candidates	Conversion
Pune	992	61	6.1%
Delhi NCR	385	24	6.2%
Mumbai	296	5	1.7%
Hyderabad	53	11	20.8%
Ahmedabad	10	0	0.0%
Chennai	1	0	0.0%

Table 3: Location-wise applicants, selections and conversion

Pune generated the most applicants (56.8% of the pipeline) and also the most selections (60.4%), with Delhi NCR behaving much the same way at about 6% conversion. Mumbai is the outlier on the weak side. It supplied 17.0% of applicants but only 5.0% of selected candidates, a conversion of 1.7%, which is well below the company average of 5.8%. Hyderabad sits at the other extreme. From only 53 applicants it produced 11 selected candidates, a conversion of 20.8%, although with so small a base this should be read with caution. Ahmedabad (10 applicants) and Chennai (1 applicant) produced no selections.

7.4 Where Applicants Are Lost in the Pipeline

Pipeline Status	No. of Candidates	% of Pipeline (n = 1,745)
Rejected at screening	1,174	67.3%
Not connected (could not be reached)	209	12.0%
On hold	98	5.6%
Shortlisted	90	5.2%
Other statuses (balance of the pipeline)	174	10.0%
Total	1,745	100.0%

Table 4: Status-wise breakup of the pipeline

Screening is the biggest filter. Around two thirds of applicants (67.3%) were rejected at this stage, mainly on role fit, communication, salary expectation mismatch or location constraints. Another 12.0% could not be contacted despite repeated attempts. Together these account for close to four in every five applicants sourced. Because rejection reasons such as salary and location are tied to the job profile and hiring location, they help explain the profile and location differences reported above.

7.5 Offers, Joining and Retention

Offer data was available for 93 of the 101 selected candidates. Of these, 56 offers (60.2%) were accepted, 14 (15.1%) were declined and 23 (24.7%) were still at the offered stage when the data was captured. Final outcomes, however, tell a different story.

Final Outcome	No. of Candidates	% of Selected List (n = 101)
Terminated (separated after joining, generally during probation)	34	33.7%
Declined offer	27	26.7%
Joined and retained	21	20.8%
Rejected after initial selection	12	11.9%
Selected, outcome pending	6	5.9%
Resigned	1	1.0%
Total	101	100.0%

Table 5: Final outcome of selected candidates

More selected candidates were eventually terminated (34) than were confirmed as joined and retained (21). Offer acceptance, in other words, is not a reliable sign of a lasting hire. The figure of 27 final declines is higher than the 14 declines recorded at the offer stage because 13 candidates left the process before an offer was issued.

7.6 The Overall Funnel

Funnel Stage	No. of Candidates	% of Sourced (n = 1,745)
Sourced (pipeline)	1,745	100.0%
Reached Selected Candidate list	101	5.8%
Offer issued	93	5.3%
Offer accepted	56	3.2%
Confirmed joined and retained	21	1.2%

Table 6: Summary of the recruitment funnel

Only 5.8% of sourced applicants reached the Selected Candidate list, and only 1.2% are confirmed as joined and retained. The steepest fall comes between sourcing and shortlisting, and the second steepest between selection and retention.

8. Discussion

The first message of the results is that volume and effectiveness are not the same thing. The company has no trouble attracting applicants. Two paid channels bring in more than nine out of ten of them, yet only about one in seventeen reaches the Selected Candidate list. This fits the argument that recruitment should be judged on the quality of those attracted and not on how many apply [8], and it shows the limit of depending on online channels without good filtering [16]. The near absence of referrals matters here, since referral-type sources are the ones research tends to link with better-fitting hires [18], [10].

The second message concerns job profiles. Site Engineer is the profile that most needs a wider funnel and the one that converts least. Running it through the same broad campaigns used for sales and intern roles is probably inefficient, since technical field roles call for candidates with specific qualifications, site experience and willingness to work on site. A role-specific sourcing approach would follow Contingency Theory in treating recruitment as dependent on the context of the job [11].

The third message concerns locations. Pune and Delhi NCR convert at similar rates, Mumbai converts far below them, and Hyderabad converts far above, although from a small base. Sourcing effort was clearly not equally effective across cities. The tracker does not record why, so the explanation remains open. Local salary expectations, competing job options and commuting distance are plausible factors, and the screening data points to salary and location mismatch as common reasons for rejection. Whatever the cause, the pattern suggests that sourcing should be reviewed city by city and not managed through one company-wide campaign.

Finally, the downstream losses show that effective sourcing has to be judged all the way to retention. A channel or location that delivers selected candidates who are later terminated is not performing well, and in the present data terminations outnumber retained joiners. This is consistent with research showing that structured induction and early support reduce early turnover [14], [4]. It is also a reminder of why the simple, resource-light tracking recommended for SMEs [15] is worthwhile: it was the tracker data that made these patterns visible.

9. Recommendations

1. Report channel against outcome as a routine. The tracker already holds both the sourcing channel and the final status of each candidate, but they are not cross-tabulated, so the company cannot say which source produces selected and retained employees. A simple monthly source-wise yield table would close this gap.
2. Diversify sourcing. Employee referrals, LinkedIn and direct sourcing should be used alongside the paid campaigns, to reduce dependence on two channels that currently supply 93.2% of applicants.
3. Use role-specific sourcing for Site Engineer and other technical profiles, targeting candidates with the relevant qualification, site experience and willingness to work at the required location instead of relying on the generic campaigns used for sales and intern roles.
4. Review sourcing city by city. Mumbai's conversion should be examined for causes such as salary expectations and competing offers, while Hyderabad's strong result deserves a closer look to see whether it can be repeated as volume grows.
5. Add a structured pre-screening step, such as a short pre-call questionnaire or a WhatsApp filter covering role fit, salary expectation and location, to cut the 67.3% screening rejection rate and the 12.0% of candidates who cannot be reached.
6. Strengthen engagement before and after joining. Regular contact with accepted candidates before their joining date and structured check-ins during probation are likely to improve effective hiring more than additional sourcing volume, given that terminations (34) exceed retained joiners (21).

10. Limitations

The study has several limitations. The internship lasted about three months, so retention beyond the probation period could not be observed. The analysis depends on the tracker as recorded, and any gaps or errors in it carry through. This study reports applicant volumes by channel and selections by profile and location, but it does not cross-tabulate channel against outcome, so channel effectiveness is examined through profiles and locations and not through source-wise yield. Such a cross-tabulation is a natural next step. The specialised profiles are not itemised in the pipeline counts, so conversion could be calculated only for the three main profiles. Location results for Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Chennai rest on small numbers. Finally, the study covers one company over one period and is descriptive, so it identifies patterns and not causes, and its findings should not be generalised to other SMEs without further research.

11. Conclusion

This study looked at the end-to-end recruitment cycle of a structural repairs and maintenance SME in Pune, first by assessing its recruitment practices from vacancy identification to onboarding, and then by analysing how effective its sourcing is across job profiles and hiring locations. The practices are structured and sensibly organised, and the tracker gives the company the data it needs to manage them. The analysis shows, however, that sourcing effectiveness is uneven. The company depends on two paid channels, converts technical profiles such as Site Engineer less well than sales and intern

roles, and sees very different results in different cities. Even after selection, the early-tenure losses are large. The practical lesson is that the company should aim to convert and keep more of the applicants it already attracts through better screening, role- and location-specific sourcing and stronger early-tenure support. The study also shows that an SME without specialised analytics can use its own recruitment tracker to find where its hiring effort is being lost.

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