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Recruitment analytics and process improvement in talent acquisition: A case study of a manufacturing company

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A B S T R A C T :

Recruitment data in large manufacturing firms is often scattered, hiding where hiring pipelines lose candidates. This paper uses a five-month internship in the Talent Acquisition function of a large automotive components manufacturer in India to examine the hiring funnel across three channels: external agencies, employee referrals and campus drives. Simple spreadsheet trackers were built to measure agency performance, referral conversion, gender diversity, offer decline and campus conversion. Findings show that all five agencies met volume targets but had 50–68% hiring-manager rejection against a 30% limit; 95 of 98 referral actions stalled after acknowledgement; women's conversion trailed men's from the first funnel stage; and only 3% of candidates declined offers. The funnel therefore leaks at sourcing and shortlisting, not at the offer stage. The paper recommends a profile-quality screen for agencies, a time-bound follow-up step for referrals, and earlier criteria-based filters in campus hiring.

Keywords: Talent acquisition; recruitment analytics; recruitment funnel; agency scorecard; employee referral; campus hiring

Introduction

Talent Acquisition (TA) in large manufacturing firms is a high-volume activity involving external agencies, employee referrals and campus hiring. Yet recruitment data often stays scattered across emails and individual spreadsheets, so bottlenecks remain invisible (Marler & Boudreau, 2017). Recruitment analytics addresses this by converting raw hiring data into trackers and dashboards that show where candidates are lost and who is accountable (Becker, Huselid & Ulrich, 2001).

This paper draws on a five-month On-the-Job Training (April–September 2026) in the Talent Acquisition (TA) function of a large automotive components manufacturer in India ("the Company"). It asks one question: where does the hiring funnel leak, and what low-cost process changes can fix it? The objectives are (i) to build simple trackers for agency, referral, diversity and rejection data, and (ii) to identify process improvements across the three hiring channels.

Theoretical background

The study sits between classical recruitment theory and data-driven HR decision-making. Six strands of theory informed the design of the trackers, and two further sections describe the organisational and sector context in which they were used.

Recruitment funnel model. Breaugh (2008) describes recruitment as a sequence of progressively narrower stages, such as sourcing, screening, interviews and offer, with a measurable conversion rate at each. The model mirrors the lateral hiring process, which runs from requisition to onboarding, and the group discussion, L1 and L2 funnel used in campus drives. It is the basis for the stage-to-stage conversion analysis in this paper.

Recruitment sources. Breaugh (2008) also reviews how recruitment sources such as agencies, employee referrals and campus outreach differ in the volume and quality of candidates they supply. This supports tracking each channel separately instead of reporting one combined hiring figure.

Person–organisation fit. Kristof (1996) argues that candidates should be judged on their fit with the organisation's values and culture as well as on their skills. This idea is reflected in the potential and competency mapping frameworks used to assess young talent beyond technical screening.

Employer branding. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) show that an organisation's reputation as an employer affects the quality and volume of its applicant pool. This is relevant to the referral programme and campus outreach, both of which depend on employees and colleges seeing the organisation as a good place to work. Recognition programmes that encourage employees to refer and support one another reinforce the same brand.

Vendor management. External recruitment agencies should be managed against explicit, measurable service-level indicators and not through informal trust. This principle is the direct basis for the agency scorecard, which scores each agency on weighted KPIs such as time to first profile, shortlist acceptance and feedback turnaround.

HR scorecard and HR analytics. Becker, Huselid and Ulrich (2001) encourage HR functions to track measurable indicators such as completion rate, conversion rate and turnaround time, so that HR becomes accountable and data-driven. Marler and Boudreau (2017) review the evidence on HR

analytics and show how HR data can be turned into insight for decisions. The agency scorecard, referral tracker, diversity funnel and rejection dashboard built in this study are a small-scale application of this thinking.

Organisational context. Talent acquisition at the Company runs as two parallel streams: lateral hiring, run through an applicant tracking system with an AI-assisted sourcing layer, and Young Talent (campus) hiring, run through direct outreach to college placement officers. The TA team, site HR, hiring managers and empanelled agencies must coordinate closely to keep requisitions moving. Sourcing follows a priority order: internal mobility first, then the internal talent pool, and finally external attraction through job boards, referrals and agencies. Campus selection uses a criteria-based funnel with aggregate percentage cut-offs and no active academic backlog. Because both streams are already divided into discrete stages, they lend themselves to funnel tracking.

Sector context. The Company operates in India's auto-component sector. Porter's five forces give a structured reading of the sector. The threat of new entrants is low because of high capital intensity and OEM approval cycles. Supplier power is moderate because of exposure to raw-material price swings. Buyer power is high because a few large OEMs drive most volume and negotiate on price. The threat of substitutes is low to moderate, and rivalry among global suppliers is high. A PESTEL reading adds a supportive policy environment (PLI schemes and Make in India), a younger workforce that supports talent supply, and a technology shift towards electrification and software-defined vehicles that requires new electronics and software skills. Compliance with labour regulation is mandatory. For talent acquisition, this means that growth raises hiring volumes, while competition for talent and changing skill needs make the quality and speed of hiring more important.

Methodology

1.1. Research design and trackers

The study is a descriptive, single-organisation case study based on operational data generated during the internship. Four trackers were built in spreadsheets and pivot tables: (i) a monthly Agency Scorecard of five empanelled agencies on 10 weighted KPIs (June–July 2026); (ii) a centralised Employee Referral Tracker (98 referral actions); (iii) a Candidate Rejection Dashboard (262 candidates); and (iv) a campus-hiring database and drive tracker for Young Talent (YT) 2027. Live requisitions were handled on the applicant tracking system.

1.2. Data

The analysis draws on the trackers and records worked during the internship period: the agency scorecard for five empanelled agencies; the employee referral tracker (98 referral actions); the candidate rejection dashboard (262 candidates); the campus database (8,134 eligible candidates from more than 60 colleges across eight states); and the records of the internship drive (83 candidates screened).

To protect confidentiality, the paper reports only aggregated counts and percentages. The figures are for indicative purpose only.

1.3. Analysis approach

Analysis was descriptive. Actual values were compared with the internal targets set for each indicator, and stage-to-stage conversion was calculated as the number of candidates clearing a stage divided by the number who entered it. A step that was both weak in conversion and large in backlog was treated as a bottleneck. Counts and percentages were obtained from pivot tables and cross-tabulations of the tracker data prepared in Excel.

Findings

1.4. Agency performance

All five agencies met sourcing-volume targets (100% requisition coverage) but fell short on profile quality (Table 1, Fig. 2). Hiring-manager rejection was 50–68% against a 30% limit, and CV shortlist acceptance was 32–50% against 70%. Because the pattern is common to all vendors, the problem is systemic rather than agency-specific. One agency had the best acceptance rate (50%) but the slowest response (7 days to first profile, 96 hours for feedback), showing a quality–speed trade-off by vendor.

Table 1 - Agency scorecard

KPI	Target	Range (5 agencies)
Time to first profile	≤ 3 days	2–7 days
CV-to-interview ratio	≥ 60%	14–31%
Interview-to-offer ratio	30–40%	0–14%
CV shortlist acceptance	≥ 70%	32–50%
Hiring-manager rejection	≤ 30%	50–68%
Feedback TAT	≤ 24 hrs	2–96 hrs

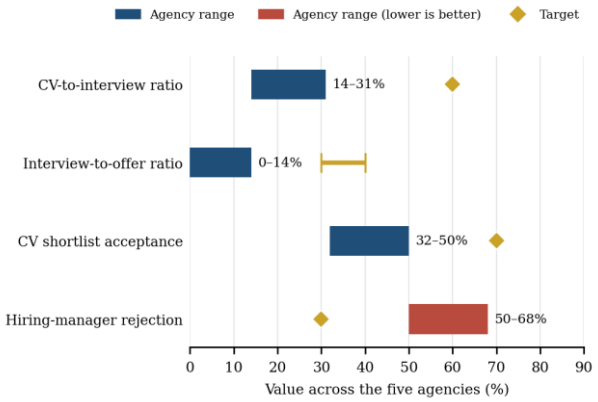


Fig. 2. Agency performance against targets (range across the five agencies).

1.5. Employee referrals

Of 98 referral actions logged, 95 (97%) stopped at the "thanks mail shared" stage, and only one led to an interview and one to an offer (Table 2). Employee participation is therefore strong; referrals stall after acknowledgement because no step assigns ownership for screening them.

Table 2 - Referral tracker status.

Stage	Count	Share
Thanks mail shared	95	97%
Interview scheduled	1	1%
Offer shared	1	1%
Thanks mail to be shared	1	1%
Total	98	100%

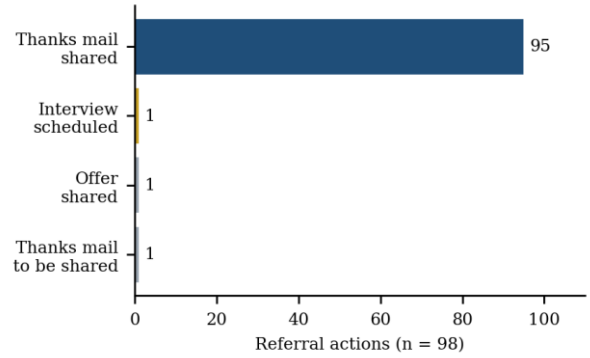


Fig. 3. Referral tracker status (n = 98 referral actions).

1.6. Gender diversity in the hiring funnel

Diversity was analysed at two points: the size of the candidate pool and the rate at which profiles became offers. On the first, outreach to more than 60 college placement officers produced a database of 8,134 eligible candidates across eight states, of whom only 38% were female. The imbalance therefore exists before any selection begins and limits how many women can reach later stages, whatever the quality of the process.

On the second point, women's offer conversion was lower than men's in both business segments (Fig. 4). In Business Segment A, 6% of female profiles shared reached offer against 9% of male profiles, so women converted at about two-thirds of the male rate. In Business Segment B the figures were 4% against 12%, so women converted at only one-third of the male rate. The gap is thus 3 percentage points in Segment A and 8 in Segment B, which suggests that segment-specific factors, such as role requirements or hiring-manager shortlisting practice, matter more than any company-wide policy.

The two gaps compound. As an illustration, if women made up 38% of the profiles shared, the conversion rates above would give them only about 29% of offers in Segment A and 17% in Segment B. A smaller pool combined with a lower conversion rate therefore reduces women's final

representation twice. These figures are based on small numbers and the reasons for the gap were not tested, so they are directional and should be read as hypotheses to investigate, not as proof of bias.

The implication is that diversity needs to be addressed at both ends of the funnel: at sourcing, by widening outreach to colleges and branches with higher female enrolment, and at shortlisting, by reviewing why female profiles are less often converted, particularly in Segment B, and not only at the final interview.

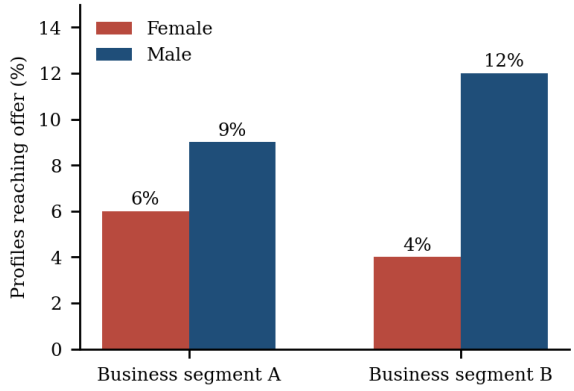


Fig. 4. Share of profiles reaching offer, by gender and business segment.

1.7. Campus drive conversion

The internship drive data shows how a campus funnel converts. Of 83 candidates screened, 54 cleared the group discussion, 35 cleared the L1 technical round and 6 received offers, about 7% overall (Fig. 5). The largest drop, from 35 to 6, came at the final L2/HR round, which acts as the main quality filter in this drive format.

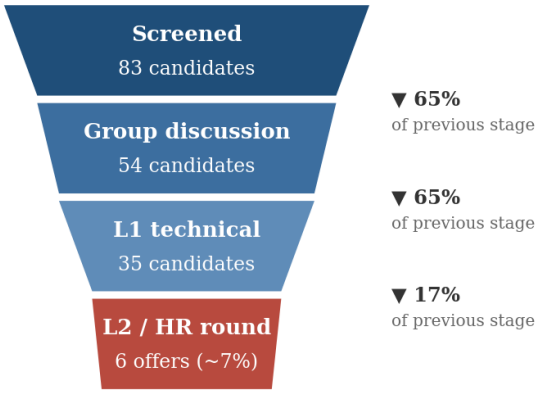


Fig. 5. Campus hiring funnel, internship drive (n = 83 screened; not drawn to scale).

1.8. Offer decline

Of 262 tracked candidates, 240 (92%) were hired and only 7 (3%) declined offers, mostly because their current employer retained them (43% of declines). The offer stage is competitive; the larger losses occur earlier, at sourcing and shortlisting.

Discussion and recommendations

Taken together, the evidence shows that the funnel leaks upstream, not at the offer stage. Agencies supply volume but not fit, referrals are received but not worked, and gender imbalance begins in the sourcing pool. Three low-cost actions follow.

1.9. Profile-quality screen for agencies

Since every agency exceeded the 30% rejection limit, the fix should sit at the point where CVs enter the system. A short checklist (skills, experience, notice period, compensation fit) should be completed before a CV is logged against a requisition. Each agency should then be reviewed against its own weakest KPI rather than under one blanket policy, for example speed for the agency with the best acceptance rate but 96-hour feedback.

1.10. Referral follow-through

The referral data shows that the problem is not employee participation, since employees generated most of the 98 logged actions, but what happens after the acknowledgement. Of these, 95 stopped at "thanks mail shared", so almost no referral reached screening. At present no one is responsible for moving a referral forward once the thank-you mail is sent, and referrals stall by default rather than by design.

A structured follow-up step should therefore be added between "thanks mail shared" and "interview scheduled". First, a recruiter should be named as owner for every referral on the day it is received. Second, the referred CV should be screened against the open requisition within a fixed time, for example five working days, and the outcome recorded in the tracker as shortlisted, held for a future role or not suitable. Third, the referrer should receive a short status update, so that employees see the result of their effort. Finally, the tracker should report the share of referrals reaching interview each month, so that the gap is monitored. These steps cost little, use the existing tracker and protect the referral channel, which is cheaper than agencies and supports employer branding because employees are visibly recognised.

Earlier, criteria-based campus filters

The shared competency and potential rubric should be applied from the group-discussion stage, so that panels running in parallel use the same criteria and weak profiles are filtered before the costly L2/HR round. Outreach should also be widened to colleges and branches with higher female enrolment, as the 38% female share in the database limits what later stages can achieve.

Conclusion

This paper examined where the hiring funnel loses candidates at the Company, using trackers and dashboards built for agencies, referrals, rejections, diversity and campus hiring. Its central point is that interactive dashboards matter for analysis and not for display. They bring scattered records into one place, let critical data be filtered and compared with targets, and so make it possible to draw clear results from it.

Trackers and dashboards do not exist to show numbers; they show where the process is lacking. Each tracker told a specific story and pointed to a specific way of solving the problem:

- **Agency scorecard:** all five agencies met volume targets but had 50–68% hiring-manager rejection, so the gap was profile quality and not supply. This points to a profile-quality screen before CVs are logged.
- **Referral tracker:** 95 of 98 referral actions stopped after acknowledgement, so employees were participating but nobody owned the next step. This points to a named owner and a time-bound follow-up.
- **Rejection and offer-decline dashboard:** only 3% of candidates declined offers, which moved attention upstream from the offer stage to sourcing and shortlisting.
- **Diversity funnel:** women were 38% of the campus database and converted to offers at a lower rate than men in both business segments. This points to wider outreach and a review of shortlisting.
- **Campus funnel:** the sharpest drop came at the final L2/HR round (35 to 6 candidates). This points to earlier, criteria-based filters.

In every one of these examples the tracker was built first and the data was then managed continuously. Because records were kept up to date as hiring progressed, pending, weak and delayed stages became visible while they could still be acted on and not only after the season ended. This turned scattered recruitment activity into measurable gaps with clear owners, and it gave the team evidence, instead of impressions, on which to base its decisions.

The study has limits. It covers one hiring season and point-in-time data, and some figures. Future work should track the same indicators across a full financial year, normalise decline and rejection data by recruiter volume, and test whether the recommended changes raise conversion. Even so, the study shows that well-designed dashboards give HR teams a continuous view of where they fall short and what to fix.

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