Will Virtual Hiring platforms be able to tame the hiring bias?

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Algorithmic hiring processes, automated resume screening, and auto-generated assessments took the pain out of hiring, but can historical and institutional bias still sneak in? How do virtual hiring solutions providers tackle the hiring bias concerns?

COVID could have been the biggest destroyer of jobs in human history, the way it shut the world down. UN labour experts fear that more than 200 million people worldwide might lose their jobs next year due to the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. However, Tech is one of those few sectors that took off during the pandemic, and even the pandemic could not dampen the hiring spree in Tech. By adding 138,000 people alone in FY2021, the Indian IT-BPM industry continues to be one of the top hirers of skilled talent. The hiring prospects look robust for FY22 too, with the top 5 Indian IT companies planning to add over 96,000 employees, reveals NASSCOM data.

So how did the sector continue to hire talents even at a time when face-to-face meetings became a risky business? The way COVID forced organizations and people to switch to virtual working environments overnight, the shift to Virtual Recruitment was just a natural corollary. A survey conducted by recruitment assessment solutions provider, MeritTrac says that 86 per cent of the organizations moved their hiring and assessment online during the pandemic.

▼ Virtual Hiring and Online Assessments are here to stay

Now, after investing heavily on remote hiring solutions and also spending so much time perfecting the virtual hiring processes, they just might stick to the model in the future also, even when things get back to normal.

Vishwastam Shukla, CTO of the leading developer assessment and tech interview solutions provider HackerEarth corroborated the same. "Even if some companies might like to do the interview rounds in person, other steps in the hiring process like take-home assessments have seen a significant uptick. In Q2 of 2021, we saw a 200 per cent YoY increase in remote assessments conducted via HackerEarth Assessments, and a 74 per cent YoY increase in

remote interviews conducted on our platform FaceCode, our platform for virtual interviews."

Even though face to face interviews are picking up for roles that require working out of the office, the Indian Tech sector continues to rely heavily on virtual hiring. So much so that these virtual hiring and assessment tools which were earlier used by organizations to eliminate candidates before proceeding to in-person interview rounds, are now getting widely embraced by the organizations to select the candidates and not eliminate them.

"In the last 12-15 months, assessment companies have continuously augmented their capabilities to provide an online hiring experience that is as close as possible to an offline experience with the same level of integrity. Remote proctoring and assessment are also evolving continuously, as systems and platforms keep on getting better. This, in turn, is strengthening the end-user confidence in virtual methods, and we've been seeing increased adoption of blended and digital modes of assessment," said Sujatha Kumaraswamy, CEO, MeritTrac.

"In the past, employers were sceptical about the sanctity of the process as the probability of impersonation was high. Even large IT services organizations would ask candidates from a different city to travel all the way to their office for an interview. But today, with the evolution of AI tools and technologies, employers are finding it easier

to screen, assess and interview candidates remotely," explained S. Pasupathi, COO, HirePro. The company offers an AI-powered platform to deliver fraud-proof assessments, video interviews, and the onboarding of candidates.

▼ Technology augmenting hiring and assessment experiences

Recruitment processes are complex and involve multiple rounds of sourcing, screening, interviewing, and selection which are undoubtedly a costly and time-consuming process. Recruiters and hiring managers working in silos often fail to discern what the job demands and thus lead to a bad hire. Hiring managers also don't always leave timely feedback to recruiters, causing unnecessary delays in the process. Organizations, therefore, are keen to replace their manual hiring methods with efficient and error-free alternatives. Virtual recruitment and assessment platforms have made their jobs easy by helping them screen twice as many candidates in less than half the time.

"The benefits of all online assessments boil down to three key aspects- time, cost, insights-backed assessment reports. Purely from a delivery standpoint, the shift from in-person hiring to online platforms results in significant time as well as cost savings for every hiring drive. As systems and platforms get better, real-time live candidate status, as

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well as post-assessment reports, will provide significant insights along with the assessment scores and results. This optimization of the entire end-to-end value chain will also ensure shorter cycle times from applications to the result publishing stage," said Sujatha Kumaraswamy, CEO, MeritTrac.

Technology can make hiring simpler, faster, and efficient. AI, automation, and analytics can help reduce time-to-hire drastically by doing away with laborious methods of selection. Virtual hiring solution providers use AI or RPA to automate resume screening, to auto-generate assessments according to the job descriptions/roles provided by the recruiters, for automated webcam-based proctoring. Employers can even leverage AI to automate evaluation, and for evaluating candidates for specialized skills such as coding, project development, UI development, and emerging domains such as analytics and big data. HackerEarth, for example, uses intelligent algorithms to assess plagiarism and a candidate's code quality. It also uses AI to auto-generate interview summaries by analyzing transcripts and other interviewer inputs during the interview.

In fact, instead of relying on the score alone, recruiters can use analytics to take a
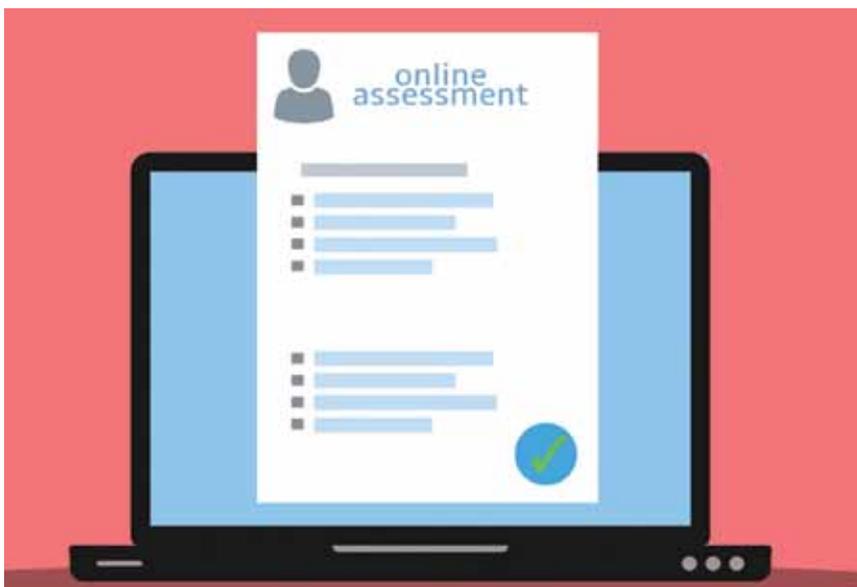
deeper look into the candidate's ability, said S. Pasupathi of HirePro. "Analytics gives deep insights about candidate performance which includes the time spent on difficult and easy questions or the steps in solving a coding assessment. If they are writing code, then it tells the number of times they had to compile before they got it right," explained he.

"AI and analytics will have a big role to play in assessments wherein trust scores for every individual can be computed based on their body language and other factors while taking an assessment. This will not only ensure the integrity of assessments but also make it convenient for recruiting organizations," pointed out Kumaraswamy of MeritTrac.

▼ Technology helping eliminate Human Bias in hiring

The biggest draw of using technology in hiring is the objectivity that it provides, pointed out Vishwastam Shukla of HackerEarth. Virtual hiring platforms and advanced analytics tools also promise a more transparent selection process leaving little room for human bias. A very common hiring bias, for example, is the 'similarity bias'. We get along with people who tend to look and think as we do. Another one is 'confirmation bias'. We tend to notice and remember information that validates opinions we already have, and tend to forget or dismiss information that conflicts with ours.

There are tried and tested scientific methods that address such biases during remote hiring. Unlike manual processes, tech and data-driven hiring platforms try to ensure that such biases do not have any influence on your decisions anymore and you are able to choose only the best fit for your team, without any prejudices.

"Manual methods are bias-prone and leave little to no room for a skill-based approach to hiring. Earlier, recruiters used signals like academic pedigree or work experience to choose good candidates. Today, someone who's never been to a college can learn to code online and build better apps than someone with a four-year degree from the best institution in town. The way we hire needs to reflect these changing 'signals', and put expertise over experience. Hiring for skills, and not resumes, is the way forward and technology platforms help you do that by infusing objectivity into the process," said Shukla.

Also, when organizations utilize the blind hiring practices or interview services provided by the virtual hiring solution providers, the focus completely shifts to the skills of the candidates, rather than on their age, gender, race, academic record, experience, etc.

SUJATHA KUMARASWAMY
CEO, MeritTrac

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This also prevents them from pre-judging candidates and helps them start the interview on an even, clean note.

▼ Are hiring algorithms enough to tackle deep-seated Hiring Bias?

Many believe that hiring algorithms result in fair, accurate and objective evaluations, but there are concerns too in terms of its tendency to replicate institutional and historical biases and create new risks of their own altogether. Researchers have already found evidence that even after consistent efforts to make the hiring algorithms debiased they might still treat certain job candidates inconsistently. That can happen when they get trained on historical data. Also, despite the hiring algorithms helping recruiters to remove the layers of subjectivity from the hiring process, humans are still very much involved in the final hiring decisions. The people who are putting those hiring solutions to work can also add to the bias. Every solution provider is trying to deal with these issues in their way.

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introduced elements such as facial analysis to evaluate candidates. Our focus is on evaluating the core skills of the candidate with precision, and hence, the data that the interviewer gets is straightforward."

Sujatha Kumaraswamy of MeritTrac believes that taking a conscious step towards incorporating a reliable assessment mechanism with the help of modern tools and methodologies can take those concerns away. "To understand biases and restructure assessments, we review the various assessment practices and questions and eliminate ones that serve no purpose for the candidate-job fit. Weights can be assigned towards questions having the most relevance and so on. By incorporating both quantitative and qualitative skill assessments, we get highly objective reports and scores. While hiring virtually, we use data-backed hiring. This means we mask all irrelevant details and selection is based largely on the performance in the remote assessments," she explained. ∎