Purple Squirrels- Crown of the Talent Acquisition World

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, the global economy has seen the transformation from Capital centered to talent oriented. With the booming of the service sector and particularly the emerging first generation entrepreneurs, the shape of the industry is changing. There is more volatility and uncertainty in the business environment. Organizations are facing increased competition and more ambiguity. The present turbulent VUCA (Volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) environment of business thus, has created the necessity to fill the positions in the organizations, with the exceptional talent. The corporate is looking for the people who are not only the toppers but are the real thinkers, innovators, creators, imaginators.

People those who are the Game changers are in high demand and becoming the necessity of the industries to compete with dynamic challenges. These people are also known as the Purple Squirrels. (Haun 2013)

Growing complexities of the businesses have raised the demands of the talented workforce around the world. Every organization is looking and indulged in a talent war. The battle is not only to capture the best position in the market but also to win the race of competitive advantage through the hiring of the best personnel or rather one should say the hiring of the ninjas' or the game changers.

The VUCA environment of business calls for a more strict and revised version of the recruitment practices. Are there any best practices and strategies that can become the solution to the war of talent? Is it the responsibility of the hiring managers to shift or transform the traditional practices of recruitment to compete? What actually are the obstacles that make the company vulnerable in hiring the purple squirrels or potential candidates? The present article addresses the solution to this problem. In nutshell, the article specifies how purple squirrels can be recruited in a world where the competition is at the peak and the availability of the great people is low.

The article concludes that the traditional recruitment process is going through the transition phase. It is high time for organizations to rethink and align their recruitment strategies. The present challenges available in the business world calls for the hiring of the best potential available. With the involvement of latest and advanced recruitment techniques, talented people can be recruited and retained for a long period of time.It is the time to fill the positions through purple squirrels as they are the game changers and have always proved their mettle and brought laurels for the company. The present article can be utilized by the HR practitioners to revisit the recruitment procedure adopted by them and to realign it with the current needs of the business environment.

Key Words: Purple Squirrels, Recruitment, Business Environment, VUCA, Game Changers etc.

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"The current environment calls for boxing gloves as the trend of white gloves has gone"

-Drew, J. (2015).

INTRODUCTION

In the present turbulent business environment, it is mandatory for the business leaders to have out of box thinking. To sustain, an organization must have a flexible approach in terms of its strategies. To compete in the global world of business, companies need to focus on improving their workforce Arporn (2008). According to McKinsey (2008) in the next twenty years driving positions in the companies will be held by only technically literate and intellectually equipped people. Keeping in mind the present environmental challenges, top global companies are consistently working on their competency models, providing every facility to their managers to make them more efficient, experienced, knowledgeable and of course the best creators or originators of the big business ideas Gandossyet. al. (2007).Most of the organizations have created a talent pool by adopting best business practices that generate work environment filled with learning opportunities and fun. As a result, they got the best of the talent out of the world. These organizations have given their own names to their talent pool, for example, Facebook named them Pioneers or Ninjas, For GE they are the Game changers, IBM call them Wild Ducks etc. Although every good company wants to have the Purple squirrels on its board, most of them usually fail. Are there any specific ways with which the companies can hire Purple squirrels? The present article has cited various strategies with which the companies can fill their vacant positions with the Purple Squirrels.

Who are called Purple Squirrels?

People those who are made to change the game, those who convert threats into the opportunities are called Purple Squirrels.

The word, Purple Squirrel contains two Words Purple and Squirrel.

Purple is the color of the imagination. The strength of purple colour is that it comes from a mixture of red and blue. Red colour is an indication for fighters and blue colour indicates oceans which symbolizes mental peace and harmony. Thus, Purple colour indicates a combination of fighters those who think with a peaceful mind and then only act and react.

As squirrels are known for sharp sight deep thinking, quick analysis and immediate action. So we can say that purple squirrels are the rich blend of qualities like deep thinking, quick analysis, immediate action, decision makers. They are the true leaders and innovators those who can do miracles.

Purple squirrels can be defined as the candidates with extraordinary thinking power having the right mix of education, skills and experience. They are rarely available in the present ultra-competitive industry (Haun 2013)
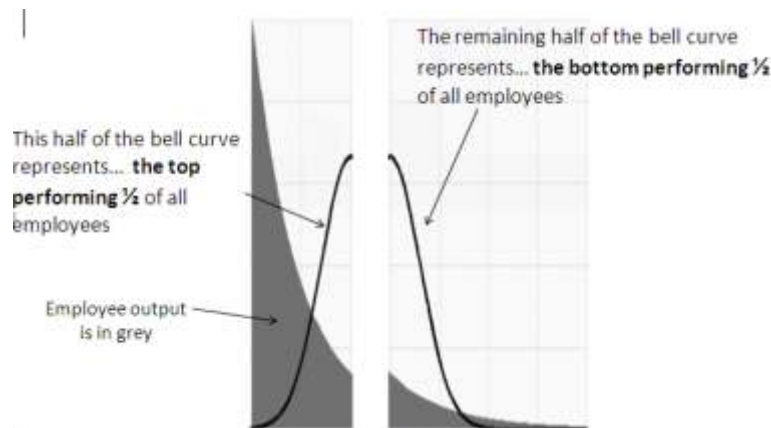
Purple squirrels can be recognized as the people those who are born with innate power and transform the companies by spreading positive vibes and makes the whole organization powerful.

There is no innate or inbuilt magical power that lies in the purple squirrels nor they have any exclusive patent right on the way they think and respond Taulbert, C. L. (2017) on the insights they take from the business environment, it is their habit of separating themselves from the box that makes them out of box thinker.

Why Purple Squirrels are the real corporate Hero?

Purple squirrels are the circlet of the talent acquisition world. They are the real heroes those who with their sharp skills do wonders in the business world. They are the star performers and worth 5-10 average performers. (Jack Welch,2001).

According to Steve Jobs, Great performers are 25 times stronger in their work as compared to the average performers. According to Aguinis, H. (2012)., Top performers of an organization bring success and generate the best output in an organization.

This half of the bell curve represents... **the top performing ½** of all employees

The remaining half of the bell curve represents... **the bottom performing ½** of all employees

Employee output is in grey

Source: Aguinis, H. (2012). The best and the rest: Revisiting the norm of normality of individual performance. Personnel Psychology, 65(1), 79-119

Purple Squirrels are the ninjas with magical brain power. These ninjas have the powers to break the records. They can be from the senior, middle or junior level executives. Once be given the opportunity to work across all the areas of the organization, they can change the fate of the company.

Purple squirrels act as a quick fix when the company faces any crisis. The recent example is of the turmoil at Infosys due to sudden change or resignation of Vishal Sikka, CEO and MD on 18th August 2017 which created a short term crisis in the company. Shares of the company slip to 16 percent on the National Stock Exchange and in the next few trading sessions, there was a huge loss as it wiped out more than Rs 33000 crores in investor wealth. (Wadhwa, August 2017) Nandan Nilekani, co-founder of the company joined as a non-executive chairman on 24th August 2017 to fix the issues. This move of the company raised the hopes of the investors and there was a surge in the market price of the shares by 3 percent on the same day when Nilekani joined the company as non-executive chairman. It is the trust of the people/investors/founders of the company like Infosys in the potential candidates like Nandan Nilekani that gives impetus to the concept of the Purple Squirrels. Purple Squirrels perform better even in stressful situations. The recent crisis at Infosys can be taken and learned as a case study on the actions and reactions of the Purple squirrels when the companies are in trauma.

Purple squirrels have all the potential to change the game, they are the knowledge workers those who know, how to keep the pace with the current business environment. They have the potential to seek a constant challenge. They not only address the solution to the challenge but also works for their own personal development (Brown and Williams2004). They have all the capacity to create, innovate and work on new business models as per the needs of the dynamic environment. Their nature of looking the things from a different perspective Sumithra, T. G. (2017) makes them unique and creative.

Examples of Purple Squirrels

There are lots of examples that justify the existence of purple squirrels. Jeff Bezos (Amazon), Larry Page(Google), Anne Mulcahy, (Xerox), Tony Fadell, A M Naik(L& T) etc.

Lee Iacocca joined Ford Motors as a trainee engineer. In 1956, when the company was combating with the poor sales, he as purple squirrel accepted the challenge and introduces a finance scheme known as 56 for 56. The scheme allowed the purchasers to pay 20% down payment and then follow up with three further installments of $56. The scheme was a great success as it resulted in a drastic increase in sales. Iacocca with his sharp sight and intelligence converted the threat of a company into an opportunity Goleman D.(2003)

Larry Page, despite a lot of criticism he moved with courage and clear the path of difficulty with his

strong determination and commitment. Today Google is the third world's most valuable brand. Larry Page as a purple squirrel opened every door of success with his intelligent thinking, sharp vision and great commitment. As a purple squirrel, he proved that nothing is impossible. (Carlson,2014). Today Companies like Google believe that hiring a top technologist will result in around 500 times more productivity and business impact that an average technologist.

Ed Whitacre as a ninja worked for General Motors and made a staggering IPO worth $23.1 billion in 2010. General Motors was facing the financial crisis in the year 2009 and received a bailout from the government when the company declared itself bankrupt. Whitacre joined the company at this phase, he was previously holding the post of CEO atAT& T. He joined as the CEO of General Motors and promised that he would leave the job once he would return GM to greatness. He streamlined various development projects and within a short span of sixteen months he changed the status of General Motors from a bankrupt company to a profit making company. Today General Motors is known as a blue chip company. It was the innovative thinking, sincere commitment and hard work of Ed Whitacre that converted threat of the company into the opportunity. (Economic Times,12th September 2017)

Anne Mulcahy, Xerox has also set an example of the uniqueness of purple squirrels. Strong determination, innovative thinking and high fortitude of Anne made the things better at Xerox when actually it was facing a financial crisis. Anne never aspired to be on the board or on the role of CEO, but neither did she shy away from the opportunity to lead when elected by the board of Xerox in 2001. (George,2008) During her tenure at Xerox, she proved that nothing is impossible. Forbes acknowledged Anne as one of the world most influential women in 2005 and 2009

A creative and innovative brain can do wonders in the business world and the statement has been proved by **Tony Fadell**. While working at Philips, Tony Fadell came up with the concept of MP3 player. But it was the APPLE that realized the worth of this innovative mind at the right time and recruited him and made billions from his innovation. Sullivan (2012)

AM Naik joined L&T in 1965 as a junior engineer. He is the purple squirrel who devoted more than 50 years of his life and generates value for L& T. In 1999 he was promoted to the position of CEO and Managing Director. He fought with various challenges and converted threats into the opportunities for L& T. He generated value for his company with his sharp brain and commitment. During his tenure, L& T faced takeover threats from big business conglomerate named as the Reliance group and the A.V. Birla group, Dongen, L. A., & Foulkes, A. (2012).   but with his strong determination and will power, he opted the best strategies and converted these threats into the opportunities.

Steve Jobs reversed the fate of the company like Apple when the company was at the verge of bankruptcy, Steve Job rejoined Apple Inc. In the year 1996, the company completed its fiscal year and was facing a tight spot as it faced a loss of 1 billion dollars. The company was in great trouble and was facing the threats from competitors like HP and Dell. Job joined as an interim CEO and turn around the company by reorganizing the development projects. Apple at that time worked on several projects and introduced iMac, iPhone, iPod and iTunes. Job continuous fight with the threats, commitment and innovative mind, grew the company by 9000 percent..(Economic Times, 12th September 2017)

Purple Squirrels treat the problems as the gift of God and knows how to transform the problems into the ways of achieving success. Example of **Mr. Suresh Narayanan**, chairman and Managing Director of Nestle India proves this statement. He joined Nestle India in July 2015 when Nestle most liked product Maggi was facing the crisis. Maggi was banned during the period starting from June 2015 to October 2015 in the country as FSSAI report claimed that samples of Maggi contained excessive lead. Under Narayanan's stewardship, Nestle India fought with various hurdles and now at present company has started demonstrating recovery from the Maggi crisis. It is the will power and strong determination of the leaders like Suresh Narayanan that gives the power to companies to struggle and survive in the phase of crisis. (Sinha,2016)

Dan Hesse proved that the innovative and out of box thinking can bring laurels to the company. Hesse joined as CEO of the company Sprint in 2007. At that time sprint was facing the losses valued at more than 29.6 billion$. The company lost numerous customers. Hesse revitalizes the company by stemming the plans that include improvement in the customer services, new rate plans, more emphasis on the prepaid cell phones, more number of retail stores etc. Sprint started with its turnaround Journey in 2010. In the year 2012 sprint reported revenue of $ 35.3 billion. Dan Hesse changed the game with his sharp insights, thinking and commitment. (Economic Times, 12th September 2017)

Why companies are not able to recruit Purple Squirrels?

According to Zolli 2007, labour markets around the world are facing the non-availability of a talented workforce. Multinational companies are looking towards small developing countries to meet the demand of the outstanding performers, required to compete in a tumultuous business environment. Silzer, R., & Dowell (2009). It is very difficult to spot the right talent. Most of the big business giants believe in the power of data. But an excess of data somehow creates challenges for the industries. It creates a dilemma who to recruit, who will be the best choice?

The position of the market is tight, very tight. There is a steep decline in the exceptionally talented workforce as the talent available is less and demand is more.

The biggest problem in hiring the potential candidate is the approach of the hiring managers. Most of them know the significance of hiring the best candidate at the very first time but sometimes insincere efforts bring the poor results and as such, they try to fix the problem after the results. The crux of the story lies in the fact that they go for the best talent acquisition strategy but fails in the execution of it. **Adler, L. (2013)**

Most of the hiring managers live in the misconception that by hiring a pool of the candidates, they will get exceptional talent out of them and thus will win the race of talent. Unfortunately, they over-relied on the talent surplus strategy to find the purple squirrels in the situation where there is talent scarcity. Lack of trust in the employer, weak image, poor employer branding, diminishing values, misdirected planning and ethos are some of the factors that create the obstacles for the companies to win the talent race.

Recruiting Talent/purple Squirrels – A challenging Task

Recruiting and retaining best talent is the need of every Multinational company today as the best of the talent not only helps in the adaptation of local culture but also helps the companies in their global integration. (Kostova & Roth, 2002). The corporate is looking for the people who are not only the toppers but are the real thinkers, innovators, creators, imaginators. They must know how to tackle, compete, realign and strategize their actions with the change in the business environment and that too with the team of a workforce of diversified background. Companies are in search of the best executive talents. According to the latest survey results of Randstad, approximately 75% of the companies participated in the survey accepted the fact, that to have the best-talented workforce, it needs more time and determination by an expert team of an organization. Companies are facing this crisis and as a result, 13% of companies are understaffed. Randstad's 2016 Workplace Trends Guide

To have the extraordinarily talented people on the company board, traditional policies and methodologies of recruitment need immediate review and updating. Companies usually put a lot of restraints on the specific positions which starts with the first step i.e. job description. Predefined rules, duties and policies not only bind the people on their job positions but also restrict them to have the creative approach. To have an extraordinary pool of talent, companies have to cross exceptional lengths.

Although Job description is good enough to guide the incumbent on its role it only works in the balancing situations which usually come in a stable environment. But what about the supple situation? Thus, the problem with the traditional approach is that it does not take into account how to address a company's needs in changed circumstances.

As a consequence, a company fails in finding a replacement. The applicant screening process is so rigid that no candidate is able to get through. It seems as that you, yourself have created a lot of boundaries and fire protection walls and now searching how to come out. If the companies want to be a leader in creativity and innovation, it is mandatory for them to rethink on every step of the recruitment and strategize it to align it with the current business requirement.

In most of the companies, the normal tendency to fill the vacant position is to seek a successor who can replicate the predecessor in terms of style of working. Although this practice is helpful in quick fill ups of the vacant positions but fails to give the real and practical solutions to the business problems. As the people those who are opted to fill the seats have the same thinking and the ways of doing the work, they are not the real game changers. Dumeresque, D. (2014)

To have extremely talented people, business leaders are required to change their approach. Selection methods such as a combination of general mental ability (GMA) tests along with the use of work sample measures and structured interviews are of great value when hiring at most levels within the organization (Schmidt et al., 1998).

Companies often look for candidates who have the skills that complement existing Staff. In other words, the people who are the best cultural fit. But it is rightly said that forgetting something best you have to give a few sacrifices also. Thus, to have the best pioneers, the people who have the ability to disrupt a company in a positive way, the company must have the guts to accept or follow a change in philosophy or culture of the organization and must allow the purple squirrels to flourish.

Strategies to recruit purple squirrels

To gain a competitive advantage, companies look for candidates having great potential. For acquiring the best talent, potential is one of the significant element. (Silzer and Church 2009). It is the potential of the outstanding performers that paves for the way of success. According to the research conducted by (Ulrich and Smallwood,2012), high potential aspect was found in very less proportion of the workforce.

If the organization want to flourish and survive in the present era, they need to reorganize their internal policies and procedures. (Sparrow and Makraam 2015) to exploit the organizational resources in terms of people. To have the extremely talented people the companies must ensure that it has completely brought into the idea of change. A significant turnaround in the organization may include a change in the internal set up of the organization both from the top of the organization and from the operational areas involved. Purple squirrels can be the source of sustainable competitive advantage for the companies as their innate talent create value for the organizations. To meet the expectations of the global knowledge economy, there is a stiff need to hire the potential candidates there with the use of traditional hiring policies; companies can never recruit Purple squirrels. To win the battle of talent, companies need to adopt appropriate strategies. Effective planning and persistence can pave the way of success.

To hire the purple squirrel is like to climb the uphill mountain. Recruiters must understand that the mountain will not come to them; it will be their planning and tools that will help them in climbing the mountain. Drew, J. (2015).

However, the following strategies can contribute to the recruitment of the best brains for an organization.

Use of Company Network
Purple squirrels are not easily identifiable. To have the best talent pool, a company can use its network. A company must build the appropriate network because ultimately it is the relationship that sometimes pays for you. Strong and harmonious relationships with the customers, suppliers, government agencies, financial institutions, employees and other stakeholders build the company network. Companies can win the talent race with the use of their strong network. In the present business scenario, companies are using their networks to fill the vacancies with the best of the candidates.

Employer Branding
Employer branding is the first and the best determinant of success in the war of talent. Sahay, P. (2015).Companies can hire the best talent by creating

a good brand. Most of the applicants want to apply for the job in the companies whose market value proposition and brand value is higher. According to the results of an interview conducted by Rao, P. (2015), applicants are always attracted towards the branded organization even if the non branded organizations offer them more salary and perks. A large pool of applicants in India wants to be associated with the illustrious organizations. To create and develop an employer brand in the market, organizations offer various attractive schemes for employee development, succession planning. Getting the tag of the best place to work can be beneficial to attract the best pool of talented people. Most of the Indian companies have realized this truth and they are continuously doing the effort to build the employer brand. Companies with long term orientation strategically align the interest of the employees with the company objectives. Llopis(2016)

Ground level preparation
To select the best and right candidate, people associated with hiring are required to do their homework properly because most Purple squirrels are dissenter who has the unconventional approach to business. These people can further become a challenge for a company to manage. Rather than a quick decision on hiring, best hiring companies generally reevaluate their decisions, keeping into consideration the data, facts and shreds of evidence available. According to the previous research conducted, Hasty decision can be avoided with the use of ground level preparations. Attentive work, integrated information and proper research before taking any decision always impacts mental representation and memory processes. Weber, E. U., & Johnson, E. J. (2009), thus hiring managers must consider all the perspectives before taking any final decisions. Decisions, under the time pressure, sometimes prove wrong. To fill the top most positions in the companies, hiring managers must focus and design the appropriate parameters.

Innovative and Creative work environment.
Innovation in the work environment attracts purple squirrels. It is the trust, connectivity and thrives that drive innovative behaviors in the workplace Carmeli, A., & Spreitzer, G. M. (2009). Companies must start with the practices that give full autonomy to its employees to work on their ideas, creation and innovation. For example, Ratan Tata while as a chairman of the Tata group started an annual competition in which the best-failed idea was rewarded by the company. By inducing such kind of competition, Tata group proved that innovation is the ultimate key to have success. Ghaswalla(2012). In the current global business environment, organizations know the importance of innovations and creative ideas. The recent practice of Mission Kurukshetra opted by the Mukesh Ambani led company Reliance Industries Ltd. also supports the importance and use of innovative practices in the companies. According to the article published in Economic Times, dated 6th August 2017, the Reliance group invited 1.43 lakh of its employees to come up with the best of their ideas. The practice was named as chairman grand challenge. (John, 2017)

Direct Poaching
To have the best talent pool companies can directly poach the employees associated with their competitors. Although poaching employee is not the best alternative as it is considered as a wrong practice but most of the IT companies utilize this strategy to fill the vacancies with world class business professionals and experts.

Replace Job Description with the performance objectives
Rather than deploying the tradition Job Description, hiring managers must opt the tool like performance objectives. When the organizations set the KPAs for the employees in terms of their performance objectives, it gives a clearer picture to the employees that what is expected of them. More clarity results in more transparency and thus attracts exceptional talent towards the organizations. According to Adler, L. (2013), he found this practice more suitable as compared to the traditional practices, as when he experimented this practice, there was a very less employee turnover and every year most of the employees got the promotion. Findings of an interview conducted by Rao, P. (2015) has also given the emphasis on the performance-based promotion. In Indian organizations, most of the public sector organizations are striving to go for the performance-based promotion as these organizations rely on the system of seniority-based promotions. But to compete in the race of talent war, most of the Navratna and Maharatna companies have changed their policies to hire and retain the exceptional performers. These companies include Bharat Heavy Electronics Limited, Bharat Electronics Limited,

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, Coal India Limited, Indian Space Research organization, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, Defense Research and Development organization etc. Companies in India have realized the fact that their employees are their precious assets and are the source of competitive advantage and as such are utilizing every best prospect to hire and retain the best ninja's.

Use of Social media sites

In the world of social networking sites, companies can use the tools like Linked In, Google plus, Facebook, Orkut, career builder talent network etc. These tools work as a magical wand. These tools are gaining more popularity as they have become the answer to the search of both the employer and the prospective candidate. Employers from the US companies are utilizing these sources to screen job applicants. (Shea and Wesley, 2006; Withiam, 2011). According to (Jacobs, 2009), the use of social media sites is more prominent these days as this practice has advantages over the traditional methods of recruitment. Easy accessibility with no cost makes it a stronger way of recruiting the potential candidates.

Replace short term packages with the long term career opportunities

The best candidates in today's dynamic business world look for the companies, where they found the opportunities to grow in their career. Companies must understand this fact and should strategize the organizational goals in alignment with the individual's long term career goals. Previous research work on recruitment practices has also proved this fact that companies who provided the long term career opportunities got success in their race of talent war.

Evidence based interviewing and assessment process

The modern trend to recruit the best of the talent is the use of evidence based interviewing process in place of the behavioural interview techniques. To have a more practical, concrete and robust decision on selection, it is better to go for evidence-based assessments of the candidates. The use of generic behavioural interviews results in emotional decision making as compared to realistic and logical decisions. Organizations in today's competitive environment can hire the best of the talent when they go with realistic and optimistic talent reviews.

CONCLUSION

Modern organizations have realized that human resource is no more a cost factor. Biesalski, (2003) and even the best human resource can be the reason for the growth and success of the company. De Alwis (2010).It is the human resource of the company that improves the operational and financial health of the organization. According to Sahay, P. (2015) Talent as a lynchpin has become the gateway to the economic success of the companies. But in today's ultra-competitive environment most of the organizations are not able to recruit the best personnel. To recruit, develop and retain the best talent has become the key challenge for most of the organizations. Van Dijk, H. G. (2008). Although Good people can be recruited through the traditional recruitment procedure it fails to recruit exceptional people. Thus to have the purple squirrels, business leaders have to change their approach of hiring. Although hiring extremely talented people is a challenge for business leaders but with the use of intelligent thinking and in depth analysis of versatile business situations, they can come out with the best results. There are no specific ways that have been identified by the elites in the field of talent hunt. It is recruiter's creativity, analytical power, decision-making skills, right intuitions that make them the best recruiter. As a talent recruiter one should have a sharp sight, deep thinking, quick analysis and immediate action skills. Companies with the use of their network, best employer branding, innovative and creative work environment can recruit the best-talented people. HR practitioners can learn the art of hiring by studying the success journey of the purple squirrels and the best recruiters. The economics of recruitment can contribute as an important factor to gain long term success.

To answer the challenges created by the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) environment, organizations have to change and shift their transactional ways of recruitment to the Modern recruitment channels as the new perspectives and thinking will help the organizations to better connect with the exceptional talent. Sahay, P. (2015).

In order to survive and flourish in the seismic business environment, Multinational companies are required to fine tune the fundamental practices of recruitment. It is the high time for the organization to rethink, realign their strategies of hiring to elevate the level of success in the war of talent.

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