

^{1st} Flight



How Leaders **EMPOWER** Early Talent

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From the
CBO'S DESK

The Hunger You Cannot Teach: **THE STRATEGIC POWER OF EARLY TALENT**

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There is a moment in every great enterprise's journey when a leader recognises that the future has already walked in through the door. Sometimes they arrive in polished shoes, armed with years of experience and a ledger of proven wins. Other times, they arrive with nothing more than a resume, a spark in their eyes, and the unshaped potential of someone stepping into their first professional chapter.

I am reminded of a scene from a well-loved sports drama. The seasoned coach watches a young, untested player fumble through the first few minutes of a match. This makes his assistant agitated. Yet instead of pulling her off the field, the coach leans forward and says quietly to the assistant, *"Give him time. You cannot teach the hunger he has."* That 'hunger' is what keeps organisations relevant.

The **First Flight** edition of our magazine is both a reflection and a resource. To understand this 'first flight' better, we listened, really listened to **1.5 lakh freshers** across the country. Our **nationwide survey** dug into what freshers truly want from their first jobs, and it surfaced their hopes, frustrations, and quiet fears. It was not just about pay cheques or perks; it was about belonging, growth, and feeling seen. You will find the detailed analysis of this poll in the coming pages.

What emerged is a portrait of a generation ready to soar but hoping for someone to guide them through the turbulence. In the coming pages, you'll journey through the findings of our survey, uncovering the dreams, doubts, and driving forces shaping India's future workforce.

Alongside these insights, you will find perspectives from hiring leaders from **Dell, Cognizant, FirstSource, Wells Fargo, Hexagon, Yotta, Evernorth, John Deere, Ericsson** and more who share what it takes not only to attract early talent but also to help them thrive and stay invested in the journey.

The convergence of these voices, from those at the starting line of their careers to those who have navigated decades of change, creates a rare dialogue. It is a dialogue worth your time because it is not just about the next hire. It is about the legacy we leave, the culture we shape, and the readiness we instil for challenges we cannot yet see.

I have seen this transformation first-hand at Naukri. Graduates who entered with raw potential and a tentative handshake now lead critical projects, manage high-stakes clients, and inspire teams of their own. Their journeys are proof that when organisations make space for early talent to learn, experiment, and even stumble, they accelerate their readiness for leadership. Their growth is not just their stories, but testimonials to their organisations' success. The leaders reading these pages know well that the skills we prize today may not be the ones we rely on tomorrow. This makes early talent a strategic investment, not a cost centre.

As you turn the pages of this edition, you will encounter ideas, strategies, and stories from leaders who have understood the power of nurturing the next generation. They speak not just of recruitment, but also of responsibility. For the future does not simply arrive; it is invited, welcomed, and shaped.

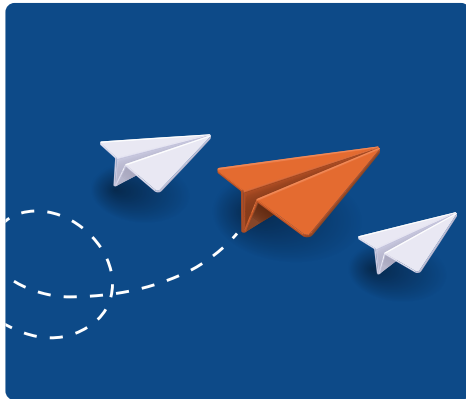
Let's explore the future together. Happy reading!

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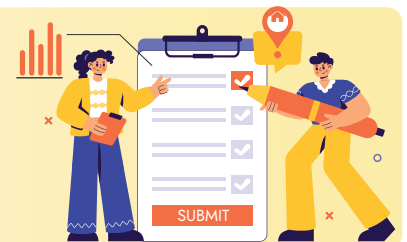


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ALL THINGS TALENT

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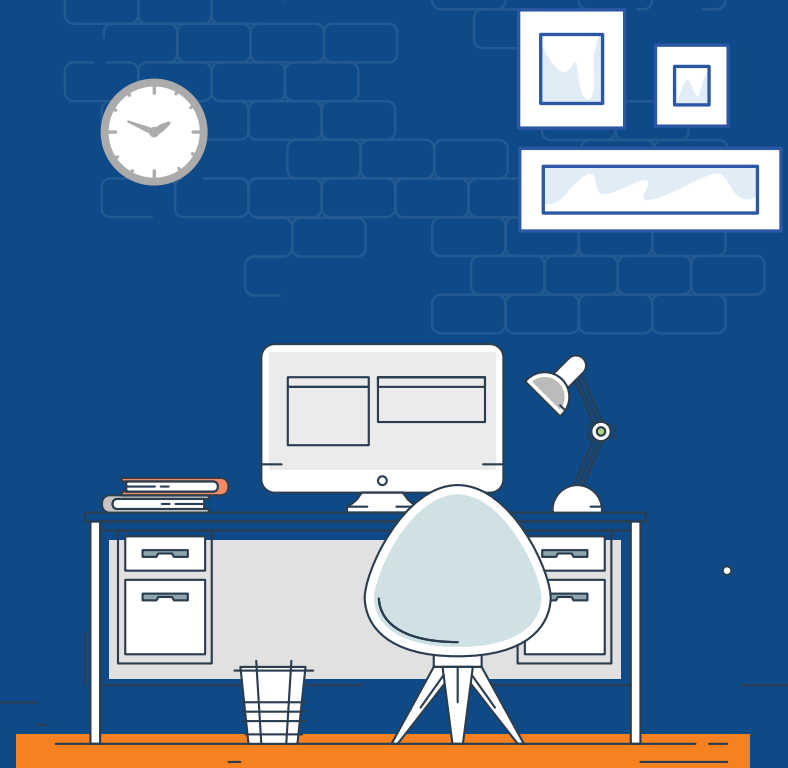


TALENT LEADERS EMPOWERING NEW PROFESSIONALS TO SOAR

PILOT EPISODE

The First Job

Every unforgettable series begins with a pilot. It does not spill all the secrets, but it sets the tone, hooks the audience, and hints at greatness ahead. A **first job** works much the same way. In this special edition, we celebrate the transformation of early talent—not just how they are onboarded, but how they are uplifted. Progressive organisations are **flipping the script** on the outdated ‘sink or swim’ narrative and choosing instead to build launch pads where young professionals soar.



First-hand Insights: Shaping the Next-Gen of Talent

The recurring theme across every story in this edition is intentionality. Today's CHROs, L&D architects, and TA heads are no longer viewing onboarding as a checklist but as an opportunity to plant seeds of confidence, belonging, and future-readiness.

At Marsh McLennan, Jaspreet Bakshi shares how early talent is nurtured not just to fit in, but to grow into leaders through structured exposure and intentional mentorship.



Kavita Mehra breaks down how Dell is redefining what it means to be 'future-ready'

Why learnability is the new currency with **Anshul Bhargava** from Firstsource, weighing in on building a culture that nurtures adaptability in young talent.



Yotta's Priyanka Amonkar talks about "Day Zero belonging," where learning and leadership access go hand in hand.

Cognizant's Atul Sahgal breaks down the "first job philosophy" where freshers are encouraged to voice ideas and own outcomes early.



From **Gameskraft** to **Hexagon**, new-age employers are giving freshers real stakes from day one—converting classrooms into boardrooms with a skill-first learning environment.

At Ericsson, Priyanka Anand highlights how culture, care, and access to leaders are redefining what it means to belong—especially for first-generation talent entering the corporate world.



Pitney Bowes' youth strategy focuses on building tomorrow's leaders today—with layered learning pathways and a deliberate culture of enablement.

FINAL TAKE



A **first job** is not a foot in the door. It is the first scene in a much larger story. And the best workplaces know: when you get the pilot right, the series writes itself.

So, as this generation boards its first flight into the workforce, the real question is, “**Will we hand them a safety manual or wings?**”

WHY COGNIZANT'S FIRST JOB PHILOSOPHY STANDS OUT:

Atul Sahgal Breaks It Down



GET TO KNOW

Atul Sahgal

Senior Vice President and Global
Head of Talent Acquisition —
Tech and IOA, Cognizant

Atul Sahgal is a Talent Acquisition virtuoso with 25+ years of experience in high-impact hiring. He leads a team of creative, goal-oriented recruiters focused on large-scale hiring without compromising quality. A firm believer in collaborating with business leaders, he ensures recruitment aligns with business expectations. His strengths include scalable hiring strategies and continuous process improvement, making him a trusted advisor in the evolving talent landscape.

“A fresher’s first job is no longer a training ground, it’s an experience zone.”

Atul Sahgal, Senior Vice President and Global Head of Talent Acquisition — Tech and IOA, Cognizant, captures the essence of a hiring mindset that is both empathetic and future-forward. With over 25 years in the talent acquisition space, Atul leads with a refreshing blend of business acumen and human instinct. At Cognizant, recruitment is not a transaction; it is a transformation, starting as early as the fifth semester through co-owned curricula, hackathons, and mentorship-driven bootcamps. Whether it is designing readiness over demanding it, or preparing hiring teams for today’s ‘expectation economy,’ Atul’s approach reflects Cognizant’s commitment to building not just careers, but confidence.

We are seeing a generation that is less interested in what jobs exist and more curious about why they exist. Could you reflect on how Cognizant India is rethinking entry-level job design to match this shift in the student mindset?

Yes, it is truly inspiring to witness this change. Entry-level talent is increasingly interested in understanding the impact of their work and their overall contribution to the 'big picture.'

In response to this evolving mindset, Cognizant India is prioritising purpose-driven roles and career growth for today’s students. As we transition from generic hiring to skill-based or service-line driven hiring, we are focusing on providing more clarity on how each role contributes to larger organisational goals and societal benefits, thereby offering a sense of meaning and fulfilment to new hires.

We follow a differential hiring model to recruit and train students with varying skill levels and exposure to IT. Currently, we have three hiring categories for engineering graduates: **GenC, GenC Next, and GenC Pro**. Engineering graduates in the GenC Next and GenC Pro categories possess high-end skills and product expertise. Additionally, we recruit three-year arts and science graduates primarily for specific units. We also hire graduates from B-Schools, design schools, and with niche domain skills like B. Pharm, Chartered Accountancy, etc.

Recognising that entry-level talent seeks a career, not just a job, we provide them with clear career paths when they are onboarded. Additionally, we offer in-house learning opportunities to transition between roles, upskill, and accelerate their careers.

How is your organisation leveraging interdisciplinary talent in its early hiring programmes? Are you seeing patterns of hybrid skills emerge?

At Cognizant, we recognise the value of interdisciplinary talent in our early hiring programs. We actively recruit students from diverse educational backgrounds, including not only students from circuit and non-circuit branches of engineering,

but also those from Arts, Science, and Commerce. This approach allows us to tap into a wide range of skills and perspectives, enriching our talent pool.

While technology is at the core of every specialisation, we also target specific domains and functional skills aligned with business requirements. For example, we offer opportunities for MBA graduates and individuals with specialised skills such as design, Chartered Accountancy, and pharmacy. This diversity ensures that we can meet the unique needs of our clients across different industries.

While leveraging existing talent, we are also enabling such interdisciplinary learning through our flagship programs like the **Nurture Partner Network**. We provide one-credit courses through academic partnerships that combine both technical and non-technical aspects, enabling a multidisciplinary approach. For instance, we are training biotechnology graduates in programming languages.

Moreover, we prioritise social impact and responsible innovation by incorporating ethical perspectives and the humanities into our training programs. This comprehensive approach not only equips our new hires to contribute meaningfully to their roles but also aligns with our broader organisational goals.

“As we transition from generic hiring to skill-based or service-line driven hiring, we are focusing on providing more clarity on how each role contribute to larger organisational goal and societal benefits, thereby offering a sense of meaning and fulfillment to new hires.”

What role does data play in helping you design differentiated hiring tracks, say, for engineers versus coders or tech specialists versus product thinkers?

By leveraging data, we are studying the unique skills, experiences, and attributes that are most indicative of success in each specific role. For instance, our data might show that engineers who excel in problem-solving and have a solid grasp of algorithms tend to thrive in their positions. Conversely, coders with deep knowledge of a particular programming language and framework might do better in certain roles. This is also the foundational understanding behind our differential hiring system of GenC, GenC Pro, and GenC Next.

Our hiring process involves multiple stages that allow us to evaluate candidates across various dimensions and accordingly hire them for the roles that best align with their capabilities. Access to skill credentials, industry, domain, and product certifications, as well as innovations showcased through hackathons, helps us identify, engage, nurture, and source talent for specialised hiring.

I'd like to add that data provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of our hiring strategies. By **tracking metrics** such as time-to-hire, candidate satisfaction, and long-term employee performance, we can continuously refine our processes. This iterative approach allows us to adapt and improve our strategies based on what the data reveals is working best, ultimately leading to a more efficient and effective hiring process.

How can industries move from demanding readiness to designing readiness, perhaps

through co-owned curriculum, skilling bootcamps, or semester-embedded projects?

Understanding the dynamic nature of today's talent landscape, driven by evolving industry needs, is crucial. To ensure that academia keeps pace with these changes, building a robust industry-academia ecosystem is essential.

At Cognizant, we have established a scalable and structured ecosystem through the formation of **Regional Councils (RCs)**. Led by Cognizant leaders, these RCs nurture knowledge and innovation at our partner colleges beginning as early as the 5th semester. They facilitate seamless talent skilling and sourcing through various pre- and post-hire campus engagements.

Some of our flagship programs include:

- **Nurture Partner Network:** We have established academic partnerships to build talent pools in niche skills by adopting batches of AI/ML engineering stream students. This initiative includes designing one-credit courses, profiling, hackathons, and hiring, aiming to create a ready-to-deploy talent pool of engineering students. By shifting skilling to campuses, we ensure that students are industry-ready upon graduation.
- **Digital Nurture:** This program pre-assesses and deep-skills final-year students in areas like Salesforce, ServiceNow, Full-stack Java, and Cybersecurity, hiring them through a structured process. Using a multi-touchpoint intervention model, we offer a seamless learning experience through a four-stage approach. Successful candidates are offered internships, leading to full-time employment.
- **CARE (Cognizant Academia Research Ecosystem) for Industry Innovation:** This program exposes students to futuristic digital technologies, business

use cases, industrialised processes, and methodologies. It enables students to collaborate and solve real-world problems by applying the latest technologies through innovation.

These examples demonstrate how we collaborate with campuses to enhance skill readiness. Cognizant leaders also serve as advisors on the Boards of Studies and participate in the Academy Council Meetings, providing valuable insights to develop industry-aligned curricula.

A fresher's first job today is no longer a training ground but an experience zone. How does Cognizant India partner with academia not just to evaluate talent but to elevate the campus-to-corporate transition?

Cognizant has always played a role beyond that of a recruiter, particularly when it comes to engineering campuses across India. In India, our Generation Cognizant (GenC) Recruitment programs serve as a strategic bridge between Cognizant and the academic institutions.

Through the establishment of Regional Councils, led by Cognizant leaders, we have established strong partnerships with over 500 top-ranked colleges and universities across India. These partnerships are designed to engage with entry-level talent at multiple touchpoints throughout their campus-to-corporate journey.

Our flagship programs empower students, faculty, and other academic stakeholders, preparing them for the ever-evolving technology landscape while positioning Cognizant as an employer of choice.

With programs like Cognizant Academia Research Ecosystem (CARE) for industrial innovation and **Digital Nurture Technoverse**, we have been expanding our innovation ecosystem to campuses. We run

hackathons, conduct joint research, and provide a platform for students to gain mentorship from Cognizant SMEs while working on real-time use cases.

To ensure holistic development, we also offer **one-credit courses** that focus on both hard and soft skills, preparing students to face corporate life from day one. We are also working closely with women's colleges to create a level playing field for girls from tier-2, tier-3 cities who often fall behind due to a lack of guidance on career, personal finance, and other essential life skills.

We have also established strategic knowledge partnerships with campuses as part of our programs like Digital Nurture and Nurture Partner Network, offering deep-skilling opportunities as early as the fifth semester to better prepare students for career pathways.

Through hackathons, workshops, and mentorship programs, students develop practical skills and innovative solutions, while faculty members stay updated on industry requirements. Our active contribution to the Board of Studies and co-owned curriculum helps build readiness in academia.

To further support this transition, our fresher skilling program offers tailored and targeted learning interventions to enhance various soft skills. Additionally, initiatives like **POD-based development**, the **GenCynergy Club**, and the **Be.Gritty Program** (designed exclusively for women) help our hires build professional skills through collaboration and peer learning. These programs also instil grit, a growth mindset, and resilience in our new hires. All these engagements across the GenC lifecycle ensure a seamless transition from campus to Cognizant.

Could you share how Cognizant's L&D, mentorship, or upskilling culture

is being communicated even before Day One?

All young talent within our partner academia ecosystem has access to various pre-hiring initiatives and regional council-driven programs that help them experience Cognizant's L&D ethos even before formally joining the organisation.

One such initiative is 'Hello Cognizant', through which we invite campus selects to experience our workplace and culture first-hand. These include exclusive leader connects, mentoring sessions, experience-sharing sessions, webinars, and professional development opportunities, all available even before our hires join as full-time employees.

We also work closely with academia as Panel Members, Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), and Curriculum Counsellors, allowing campuses to experience the Cognizant difference first-hand. These collaborations enable campuses to experience Cognizant's values and culture up close, while also embedding industry-relevant learning pathways into the academic journey.

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We are always looking for candidates who are passionate about 'engineering intuition' and eager to explore it with us.

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Beyond technical acumen, what behavioural cues, soft skills, or future-readiness indicators are becoming non-negotiable in your evaluation framework?

We are always looking for candidates who are passionate about '*engineering intuition*' and eager to explore it with us. Beyond technical skills, we consider communication, adaptability, and learning agility as non-negotiables. These qualities ensure our workforce can collaborate seamlessly and effectively navigate challenges.

This process not only serves as a gating mechanism but also helps benchmark and further groom our hires as part of the fresher skilling program. Once the entry-level talent joins us, we provide them with multiple professional development opportunities and access to training libraries to ensure a successful career and holistic development.

What roles or capabilities do you see emerging in the next 12-18 months that were not even on the radar five years ago?

The engineering profession is undergoing a paradigm shift. *The World Economic Forum* is projecting that AI and automation will significantly alter **22%** of existing jobs by 2030, creating **170 million new roles** while displacing 92 million. For fresh graduates, this signals both a challenge and an opportunity to specialise in emerging fields that combine traditional engineering knowledge with cutting-edge technological capabilities.

Some of the capabilities we anticipate gaining prominence in the near future include:

- **Low-Code/No-Code Proficiency:**
The ability to work in low-code/no-code environments and agility with AI

co-pilot tools (e.g., GitHub Copilot, ChatGPT for coding).

- **Cross-Disciplinary Learning:** Blending fields such as AI and ethics or engineering and psychology. For instance, embedded technology specialists now need to understand IoT systems, while electronics engineers increasingly require fluency in software development skills. This convergence is creating entirely new career paths.
- **POD-Based Development:** The ability to work in POD-based development is becoming increasingly important across all services, a trend that was virtually unheard of five years ago.
- **AI and Automation Proficiency:** Every engineering graduate should have at least a basic understanding of how machines can be trained to think and learn. Working with AI-powered solutions for automation, real-time analytics, and design optimisation is becoming standard across engineering fields.
- **Data-Driven Engineering:** Data Scientists and Data Engineers have become essential across all engineering disciplines. The integration of big data analytics into traditional engineering fields has created new hybrid roles that didn't exist in their current form two years ago.
- **Digital Privacy and Compliance Awareness:** As data becomes central to engineering solutions, so too does the understanding of digital ethics, privacy frameworks, and regulatory compliance.
- **Sustainability and Green Technology:** Engineers specialising in renewable energy systems, particularly offshore wind farm engineering, are seeing a surge as industries transition toward sustainable practices. This field represents a significant shift as

companies prioritise environmental considerations in their engineering processes.

The biggest disruption in campus hiring might not be AI; it might be expectations. How are you preparing your recruitment teams to meet this new 'expectation economy' among students?

We acknowledge that today's graduates value much more than a job; they seek flexibility, meaningful work, clear career progression, and seamless digital hiring experiences. Our recruitment teams are trained to understand and cater to these preferences, ensuring that our hiring process aligns with what students value most.

We are also enhancing communication and transparency. By providing clear information about career paths, growth opportunities, and organisational values, we aim to build trust and engagement. Leveraging digital platforms allows us to offer real-time updates and insights into the hiring process, making it more accessible and informative.

Technology plays a crucial role in our approach. Integrating AI and automation into our recruitment process helps streamline operations and enhance the candidate's experience. AI-powered resume screening, predictive analytics, and automated interview scheduling make the process more efficient and engaging.

By adopting these strategies, we aim to meet the expectations of today's students and create a more engaging and fulfilling recruitment experience.



AS TALENT EVOLVES, SO DOES STRATEGY

Kavita Mehra on Dell's Learning-First Approach



GET TO KNOW

Kavita Mehra

Senior Director,
General Management
at Dell Technologies

Priyanka Anand, VP and Head of HR at Ericsson for Southeast Asia, Oceania, and India, has over 24 years of experience in innovating HR solutions. She specialises in talent management and organisational development, and she's committed to fostering a culture of excellence and collaboration. Priyanka is also a renowned speaker, coach, and mentor in the HR community.

As the hiring playbook moves from quantity to quality, **Dell Technologies** is redefining what it means to be 'future-ready'- investing deeply in internal mobility, role-relevant AI upskilling, inclusive university partnerships, and community-driven innovation. In an exclusive interaction with All Things Talent, Kavita Mehra, Senior Director - General Management at Dell Technologies, sheds light on the strategic talent pivots shaping the future of Global Capability Centres (GCCs).

Mehra also talks about:

- Why **AI isn't just for specialists**
- How Tier-2 cities are emerging as talent powerhouses and,
- What it takes to build a **sustainable talent pipeline** in the age of intelligent transformation..

The hiring landscape is shifting from volume hiring to value hiring. How is Dell Technologies' India CoE balancing internal mobility and upskilling, especially as AI continues to reshape job roles?

Dell Technologies is embracing the industry shift from volume to value hiring, focusing on talent that drives meaningful impact and

innovation in an AI-enabled world. While we continue to hire externally for critical, niche roles, a strong emphasis is placed on enabling internal mobility and upskilling our team members so they can grow with the business.

Our approach to talent is rooted in continuous learning and adaptability. By investing in people and embedding AI in their journeys, we are not just preparing them for the future; we are empowering them to shape it. The result is a dynamic, future-ready workforce that brings both depth and agility to the business.

GCCs like Dell's Centre of Excellence are emerging as innovation hubs. How are you aligning talent development with fast-evolving areas such as GenAI, cybersecurity, and cloud engineering?

At Dell Technologies, innovation isn't optional-it's core to our DNA and how we create value. Whether operating within a traditional service delivery model or transitioning toward full-spectrum product ownership, we are embedding next-generation capabilities-such as GenAI, cybersecurity, and cloud engineering-into our solutions to ensure they are future-ready

and innovation-led. In parallel, we're equipping our team members with the skills and experiences needed to lead this transformation.

Our talent development efforts are tightly aligned with this transformation. Initiatives like AI Academy and India Innovation Forum enable a culture of applied learning, cross-functional collaboration, and continuous upskilling. With over 2,400 active members, the AI Academy is more than a training platform - it's a community where hands-on experimentation and learning converge.

The India Innovation Forum has institutionalised a culture of cross-functional problem-solving through its Inspire-Ideate-Implement framework. We also invest in early talent by partnering with leading institutions like RVCE, NIT Calicut, and VIT Vellore to co-design cloud-native, cybersecurity, and AI/ML curricula, ensuring future-readiness from campus to career.

By combining deep internal capability-building with strategic academic and industry collaboration, we are powering next-generation innovation, seamlessly aligning talent to technologies that define the future.

As companies move away from campus blitzes toward deeper, long-term university partnerships, how is Dell building a future-ready talent pipeline through academia?

Dell Technologies is moving beyond traditional campus drives to build meaningful, year-round academic partnerships under UniCon, our university engagement program inspired by Dell's innovation framework - Inspire, Ideate, Implement. We have collaborated with institutions such as RVCE, NIT Calicut, VIT Vellore, PICT Pune, and Manipal University Jaipur to co-create impactful learning experiences, ranging from cloud-native

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AI, to us, is not a fixed domain reserved for specialists; it is a powerful enabler that augments existing strengths. We have designed role-relevant learning paths that help team members across functions, from engineers to services, build AI fluency and apply these skills meaningfully in their day-to-day roles.

”

curriculum at RVCE and AI/ML immersion at NIT Calicut to data management electives and mentoring at Manipal and PICT, Pune.

Whether it's designing cloud-native curriculum, launching AI/ML immersion programs, or mentoring students through electives and industry projects, we're investing in early talent with intent. These partnerships have led to a measurable impact, ranging from IEEE publications and internships to full-time hires across diverse roles.

Beyond campus hiring, we are engaging at scale through national skilling initiatives such as Intel's AI for Youth, with a focus on building a talent pipeline that is not only future-ready but also closely aligned with the evolving needs of industry and society.

There's growing curiosity in Tier-2 cities as emerging hiring hubs. Is Dell Technologies tapping into this trend, and how do you ensure consistent training and cultural integration for these new hires?

With India's talent landscape rapidly expanding beyond metropolitan hubs, Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are emerging as vital contributors to the tech workforce. At Dell Technologies, we recognise trends and have strategically extended our talent outreach to these regions through strong partnerships with institutes. These collaborations have not only strengthened our hiring pipeline but have also enabled impactful programs in cybersecurity, data management, and career readiness.

While we may not have physical offices in every Tier-2 city, we actively tap into their high-potential talent pools, often witnessing higher retention and engagement levels. What bridges the geographic gap is our standardised and inclusive approach to hiring and integration. We leverage AI-enabled platforms to ensure fairness

in recruitment and maintain a consistent onboarding experience across locations.

What types of skill-building or reskilling programs are being run within the GCC to help existing employees stay future-ready, especially in light of rapid AI adoption?

“

Our emphasis on early-career talent is a cornerstone of this strategy. Through the India Innovation Forum, function-specific rotations, and the Recent Graduates Program, we provide structured pathways for growth and innovation. Moreover, our eight active Employee Resource Group (ERG) chapters across India foster a culture of inclusion, helping every new hire, regardless of where they come from, feel connected, supported, and empowered to thrive.

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At Dell Technologies, continuous learning isn't just encouraged, it's embedded in how we operate. With AI becoming integral to every role, we're focused on helping team members across all levels build the right skills to collaborate effectively with emerging technologies.

Our structured learning paths span from foundational to advanced topics, covering AI fundamentals, prompt engineering, neural networks, and agentic AI. Through initiatives like the AI Academy and PNO certification programs, teams gain role-specific expertise in areas such as GenAI, AIOps, and cloud operations. These aren't one-off sessions; trainings are held quarterly or more frequently, with leadership also engaging in

mindset and capability sessions to foster an AI-first culture.

Beyond internal programs, we're equally committed to inclusive skilling. Through initiatives like the Solar Community Hubs and girl child empowerment programs led by our ERGs, along with collaborations with non-profit organisations, we're enhancing AI literacy in underserved communities.

In alignment with the Government of India's Apprenticeship Program, we actively hire from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, reinforcing digital inclusion and employability across the country.

How are you rethinking fresher onboarding and training to align with an “AI-first” approach and what lessons can other organisations learn from your experience?

At Dell Technologies, every new team member is equipped with AI from day one. From tools like AI Copilot to Sales Tech Academy modules and collaborative learning platforms, AI is embedded into the

daily workflow, not treated as a separate track. This integration ensures early familiarity and fluency in applying technology across functions. from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, reinforcing digital inclusion and employability across the country. We strengthen this foundation with structured mentorship, cultural onboarding, and cross-functional rotations across teams like services, finance, and marketing. The aim is to develop both technical fluency and a strong business mindset from the outset.

For organisations without dedicated L&D infrastructures, the key lesson is clear: start by investing in your people. Building AI capabilities doesn't demand a four-year degree or expensive infrastructure. Peer-led learning, certifications and accessible online tools can drive greater impact. That's where the transformation truly begins.

Ultimately, the goal isn't just to adopt AI, it's to build a culture where AI enables individuals to innovate, solve real-world

problems, and deliver greater impact. That's where transformation truly begins.

“

We believe in learning by doing. Hackathons, innovation challenges, and mentorship programs enable hands-on skill development, while the L.I.V.E. program (Learning, Innovation, Value, Engagement) supports early-career professionals. Cross-functional rotations in departments like Finance and Marketing further build versatile, future-ready talent.”

”



FRESHERS, FORWARD MARCH:

Navigating In-Demand Skills in India's Surging GCC Ecosystem



GET TO KNOW

Dr Pavan Gurazada

Sr Faculty, Great Learning,
Adjunct Lecturer, Northwestern University

Dr Pavankumar Gurazada, an expert in AI and Data Analytics, is a Faculty Member at Great Learning, where he leads Generative AI course development for enterprises. He also teaches as an Adjunct Lecturer at Northwestern University and the University of Arizona. Author of *Marketing Analytics for Strategic Decision Making* (OUP, 2021) and *AI for Business* (Vikas Publishing, 2024), he provides deep insights into leveraging analytics and AI for strategic advantage.

As India cements its reputation as a preferred destination for Global Capability Centres (GCCs), the sector is entering a transformative growth phase that signals both economic opportunity and a reshaping of the talent landscape. With GCCs expected to create **one million jobs** over the next six years, total employment in this sector is expected to reach a staggering **3.3 million by 2030**. Notably, these centres are now outpacing traditional IT services in job generation.

Unlike conventional outsourcing models associated with IT services firms, today's GCCs are taking ownership of digital transformation efforts in-house. This evolution is diminishing dependence on third-party vendors and shifting the focus towards building robust, future-ready talent pools within India.

According to India's Talent Takeoff — *The GCC 4.0 Story*, a report by NLB Services, **35%** of GCCs are planning workforce expansions of 50-100%. NASSCOM data corroborates this trend, indicating that over **2 million** professionals will be employed by GCCs by 2026, with a significant **30-40%** of new hires expected to be entry-level talent.

Industries Driving Fresh Talent Demand Within GCCs

Within the GCC landscape, certain industries are emerging as key engines for hiring fresh talent. BFSI (Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance), healthcare, retail, and telecom are at the forefront. These sectors are leveraging their capability centres in India to accelerate digital transformation initiatives, from launching customer-centric digital platforms in banking to implementing AI in retail inventory.

Case Studies: Steady Investments by Global Players

Global giants like **JPMorgan Chase**,

Wells Fargo, and **Goldman Sachs** have significantly increased their hiring from Indian campuses to power their India-based GCCs. Similarly, healthcare leader **UnitedHealth Group** has set up large capability centres in Bengaluru and Hyderabad, actively recruiting freshers for data analytics, AI/ML, and cybersecurity roles.

“

Recent hiring data also reveals that tier-2 cities are also witnessing a rise in GCC recruitment drives. Companies are moving beyond metro hubs and tapping into talent from cities like Pune, Kochi, Coimbatore, and Jaipur.

”

For instance, **Wells Fargo's India GCC** is investing heavily in building talent pipelines for roles in cybersecurity and enterprise technology. In fact, two leading global professional services companies have collaborated with **Great Learning** to train their employees in AI/ML and Generative AI. Recent hiring data also reveals that tier-2 cities are also witnessing a rise in GCC recruitment drives. Companies are moving

beyond metro hubs and tapping into talent from cities like Pune, Kochi, Coimbatore, and Jaipur. Additionally, hybrid working models have made it easier for GCCs to diversify their recruitment beyond traditional engineering and business schools to include specialised institutes and coding bootcamps.

Skills Roadmap for Freshers Eyeing GCC Roles

As the country strengthens its position as a preferred destination for GCCs, here are some skills for fresh graduates looking to qualify for high-demand positions. These competencies will not only drive tech advancement but will also aid in building resilience in a competitive job market.

- **AI/ML for Innovation and Automation:** With AI-driven decision-making and automation becoming core priorities, GCCs are using machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI) to improve efficiency and streamline operations. From AI-powered chatbots to predictive analytics, companies are leveraging these technologies to optimise processes. Freshers looking to stand out should focus on mastering Python and Natural Language Processing (NLP), which are essential for building chatbots, sentiment analysis, and other AI applications.
- **Data Science for Decision-Making:** As global businesses become increasingly data-driven, GCCs are at the forefront of managing and analysing vast amounts of information. Turning raw data into actionable insights is key to shaping business strategies, making data analytics a critical skill for freshers. Proficiency in SQL, Power BI, and Python-based analytics will be essential for extracting meaningful insights, identifying patterns, and forecasting trends.

- **Cybersecurity to Strengthen Digital Infrastructure:**

Global capability centres in India are increasingly transforming into cybersecurity centres of excellence. According to a NASSCOM report, at **25-27%**, the demand and supply gap in India's technology talent is the lowest among the global technology leaders, including the US, Australia and the UK. GCCs are leveraging this talent pool to build world-class cybersecurity teams capable of addressing complex threats. Skills in ethical hacking, cloud security, and risk assessment, along with certifications like CEH and CISSP, will be highly valued.

- **Cloud Computing for Scalable Operations:**

GCCs are embracing hybrid and multi-cloud strategies to enhance their IT infrastructure, ensuring greater flexibility, scalability, and resilience to meet diverse business needs. GCCs often need tailored solutions that seamlessly integrate with their global technology ecosystem while adhering to local performance standards. Freshers proficient in AWS, Azure, or GCP will be in demand for roles in cloud engineering, DevOps, and IT infrastructure management.

India's GCC journey is not just one of numerical growth but of technological and strategic depth. For freshers, the message is clear: the time to invest in future-facing skills is **NOW**. By cultivating the right mix of technical know-how and industry relevance, early-career professionals will not merely enter the job market- they will shape its evolution.

In the race to become future-ready, it is those who learn, unlearn, and re-learn that shall ultimately lead.



What **1.5 Lakh Freshers** want from their First Jobs?

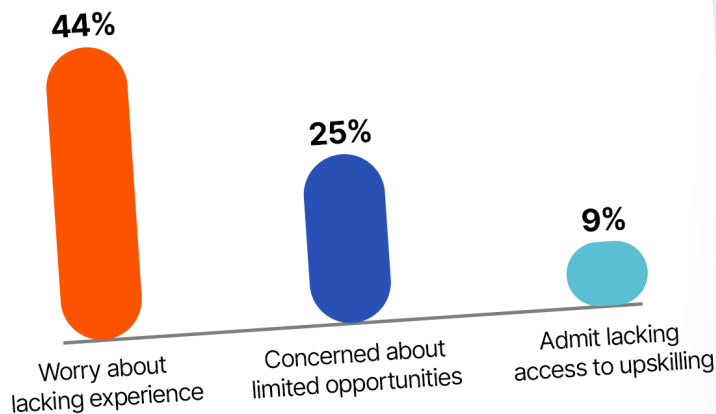
Insights from the All Things Talent Survey

We asked **1.5 lakh fresh graduates across India** what matters most in their first jobs. The answers revealed more than preferences; they showed **a shift in mindset, priorities, and workplace expectations.**

1

WORRIES

What is Holding Them Back?

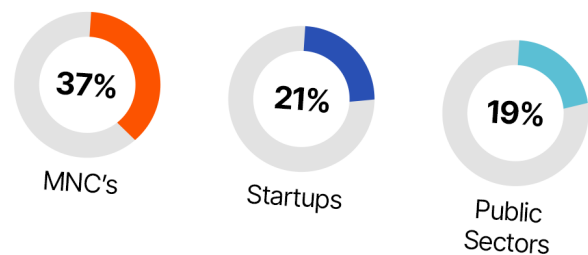


They feel underprepared to enter the workforce. There is a noticeable gap between academic learning and industry expectations. **44% worry they lack job-relevant experience**, 25% are concerned about limited career opportunities. While 9% admit, they don't have access to the right upskilling options.

2

PREFERENCES

Big Brands over Big Bets and 'Sarkaari Naukri'



First-time job seekers are favouring stability over speed. **37% prefer MNCs for structure and brand value**, compared to **21% who are excited by startups and their agility**. While **19% opted for public sector stability**.

3

MYTH v/s REALITY

WFH Work From Office

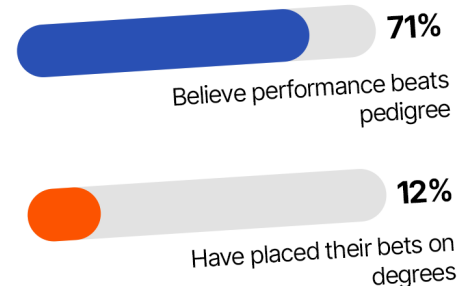
'Gen Z wants only remote' myth is busted.



4

SKILLS > DEGREE

Degrees are fine, but Skills is the Real Deal

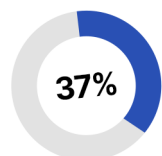


71% freshers believe that in today's job market, performance beats pedigree. Only **12% have placed their bets on degrees.**

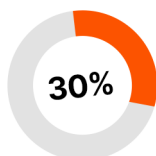
5

FRUSTRATION

First Job Hurdles



Frustrated by lack of feedback



Point to misleading job description



The hiring process while exciting often leaves freshers confused, unheard, and frustrated. **37% are frustrated by lack of feedback** while **30% point to misleading job description**.

6

FEEDBACK

Onboarding Isn't Hitting the Mark

37%

Wants Clear HR Updated

29%

Ask for hands-on training

Freshers don't just want a desk and a login ID; they want mentorship and clear communication. **37% want clear HR update**. **29% ask for hands-on training**.

7

BARRIERS

Lack of Placement Support

44% didn't get placement support



Fresh Takes

Job-hopping = Growth: **73%** see early exits as smart career moves; **76%** of women agree

Well-being is Non-Negotiable: **49%** prioritise mental health; for women, it's **54%**.

ERICSSON'S VISION 2025:

Priyanka Anand on Talent, Innovation & the Future of Telecom



GET TO KNOW

Priyanka Anand

VP and Head of People
for Southeast Asia, Oceania
and India at Ericsson

Priyanka Anand, VP and Head of HR at Ericsson for Southeast Asia, Oceania, and India, has over 24 years of experience in innovating HR solutions. She specialises in talent management and organisational development, and she's committed to fostering a culture of excellence and collaboration. Priyanka is also a renowned speaker, coach, and mentor in the HR community.

The telecom industry is undergoing one of its most transformative phases. 5G rollouts, AI-driven automation, Satcom, and IoT expansion are redefining how networks operate, creating unprecedented opportunities and challenges for companies worldwide. In India, the telecom market is projected to reach \$48.61 billion by the end of 2024 and grow to \$76.16 billion by 2029. However, while technology is advancing at lightning speed, the real competitive advantage lies in the people who design, implement, and drive innovation-the talent of the telecom industry.

The telecom sector currently has a **demand-supply gap of 2.41 million skilled workers, expected to grow 3.8 times by 2030**. The question is no longer just about keeping up with technology but how to build a workforce that stays ahead of it.

In this exclusive conversation, **Priyanka Anand, VP and Head of People for Southeast Asia, Oceania & India at Ericsson**, shares how the company is empowering young talent, strengthening academic collaborations, and redefining leadership in an AI-driven world.

The telecom industry is evolving rapidly, driven by 5G, IoT, and other emerging technologies. How does Ericsson prioritise empowering early-career talent to stay ahead in such a dynamic landscape?

At Ericsson, we recognise that the future of the telecom industry depends on a skilled, future-ready workforce. As 5G, IoT, and AI redefine the digital landscape, we are committed to empowering early-career talent through structured learning programs, industry partnerships, and real-world exposure.

To equip them with future-ready skills, we have initiatives such as the

Digital Academy, 5G Academy, and RISE UP which provide training in emerging technologies like AI, IoT, and advanced network solutions. Ericsson's approach extends beyond technical skills - mentorship, hands-on learning, and a strong culture of ownership enable individuals to take charge of their careers. Our **ASCENT and the EricssonEdge Academia Programs** connect us with young graduates offering them knowledge material and real-world exposure to cutting-edge technologies like AI, IoT and 5G.

Internal mobility is another cornerstone of our growth strategy, with nearly **45% of roles filled through internal movements**, reinforcing our commitment to upskilling and career development.



INTERNAL MOBILITY FUELS GROWTH

45%

of roles filled through
internal movements

**Reinforces Focus on Upskilling
& Career Development**

As we move from 5G to 6G, we are intensifying our investments in partnerships with universities and reskilling initiatives. By nurturing the next generation of telecom professionals, we not only future-proof our workforce but also solidify Ericsson's position as an employer of choice in the industry.

Could you share an example of a successful collaboration between Ericsson and academic institutions that has significantly impacted employability or innovation?

Ericsson has a strong track record of collaborating with academic institutions to bridge the gap between industry and academia, fostering innovation and enhancing employability. One notable example is the **EricssonEdge Academia Program, which partners with leading universities to equip students with industry-relevant skills in 5G, AI, IoT, and cloud technologies**. Through this program, students gain access to cutting-edge curriculum, hands-on training, and real-world case studies, enabling them to transition seamlessly into the telecom industry.

As part of this program, **Ericsson has partnered with over 40 leading universities across Southeast Asia, Oceania, and India with an aim to upskill pre-final year students in key areas like AI, 5G, Cloud, and other emerging technologies**. By combining in-person sessions hosted by Ericsson experts and online learning modules, we provide students with a well-rounded, hands-on education that enhances their employability and prepares them for challenges in the telecom and AI sectors.

Through this initiative, we aim to foster a future-ready workforce while inspiring innovation and problem-solving among students. **Those who complete the program are also eligible for our Graduate Recruitment Program, further connecting education with career opportunities**. Ericsson employees actively participate as mentors, which not only benefits the students but also allows our team to enhance their leadership and mentoring skills.

This collaboration has significantly contributed to both student employability and the development of a skilled workforce ready for the digital economy.

In your previous conversation with All Things Talent, you had stated your priorities for 2024 which included hiring next gen talent, commitment to upskilling and revolutionising new talent. Could you update us on what has happened so far?

We continue to remain focused on building a future-ready workforce by hiring next-gen talent, upskilling our people, internal mobility, and redefining recruitment strategies. Our hiring strategy has been aligned with the evolving demands of the telecom industry, particularly in areas like 5G, AI, cloud computing, and automation. We have actively recruited early-career professionals, bringing in fresh perspectives and digital-first mindsets that are essential for shaping the networks of tomorrow.

As we move forward, Ericsson will continue to **invest in skilling, career pathways, and diverse talent development**, ensuring that we remain at the forefront of telecom transformation while creating meaningful opportunities for the workforce of the future.

How has the role of a people leader changed in the transformational AI age?

It has evolved from being a traditional manager to a strategic enabler and coach. AI is driving automation, enhancing decision-making, and streamlining workflows, which allows leaders to shift their focus from operational oversight to more people-centric priorities. One of the most significant changes is the emphasis on cultivating a learning mindset—leaders must now ensure their teams are continuously upskilling to stay relevant

in a dynamic, technology-driven world. Data-driven insights provided by AI allow leaders to make more informed, personalized decisions about career development, performance management, and employee engagement. However, it's the human element—empathy, trust-building, and adaptability—that has become more critical than ever. Leaders must foster an inclusive environment that encourages creativity, innovation, and collaboration, ensuring that team members feel supported in navigating the change.

At Ericsson, we enable our leaders to manage their teams with empathy and humanness. Our **'Leaders as Coaches'** program is aimed at nurturing leaders to inspire and uplift their teams.

Ericsson's 2025 People Priorities

- **Continuous Learning & Upskilling:** We will double down on cultivating a learning mindset, ensuring our employees are equipped with critical skills in AI, IoT, cloud, and 5G/6G technologies through initiatives like the Digital Academy, 5G Academy, Degreed etc.
- **Empathetic Leadership:** We'll continue to prioritise empathy-driven leadership aimed at fostering trust, inclusivity, and collaboration. Leaders will play a pivotal role in supporting employee well-being and career growth.
- **Diversity & Inclusion:** Aim to create even more inclusive teams that reflect the communities we serve, driving innovation and collaboration through diverse perspectives.
- **Internal Mobility & Career Development:** Enhance internal mobility tools and personalised career paths, empowering employees to explore new roles and take ownership of their development.

- **Talent Agility:** With the telecom industry evolving rapidly, our focus will be on agile talent strategies—adapting hiring, skilling, and leadership practices to ensure we attract and retain the best talent to meet future business needs.
- **Industry-Academia Partnerships:** Strengthening collaborations with universities and academic institutions, we will continue to bridge the gap between academia and industry, providing students with hands-on learning, certifications, and exposure to cutting-edge telecom technologies to boost employability and drive innovation.

How does Ericsson evaluate the effectiveness of its learning and development initiatives?

At Ericsson, we employ a comprehensive approach to evaluate the effectiveness of our learning and development (L&D) initiatives. We begin by analysing key performance metrics, such as employee retention and promotion rates, to assess the tangible impact of our programs. Additionally, we conduct detailed business impact analyses, gathering feedback from employees to understand how L&D has influenced their skills, job satisfaction, and performance.

This includes measuring outcomes like productivity, innovation, and customer satisfaction to determine the return on investment. We also observe changes in employee behaviour and organisational culture, recognising that shifts in these areas indicate the qualitative success of our initiatives. For instance, our "Ericsson on the Move" cultural movement integrates L&D efforts to promote a dynamic company-wide culture, with employee engagement surveys tracking its effectiveness. By combining these methods, we ensure that our L&D programs not only enhance individual capabilities but also contribute significantly to our overarching business objectives.

THE MORE YOU LEARN, THE MORE YOU EARN:

Why Firstsource Bets Big on Learnability and Skill-Based Hiring

GET TO KNOW

Anshul Bhargava

SVP & Global Head
Talent Acquisition, Firstsource



Anshul Bhargava is the Senior Vice President and Global Head of Talent Acquisition at Firstsource, with extensive experience across leading global organisations. He has held key talent leadership roles at Tech Mahindra, Infosys, HCL and WNS. Anshul was recognised among Forbes' Top 30 Talent Leaders for his contributions to shaping future-ready workforces.

“The day you stop learning is the day you start becoming irrelevant.”

That's the mantra Anshul Bhargava lives by and encourages young professionals to embrace from day one. In this exclusive conversation with **All Things Talent**, **Anshul Bhargava, SVP & Global Head - Talent Acquisition at Firstsource**, spoke about the evolving dynamics of **early talent hiring**. He unpacked how Gen Z are reshaping expectations from employers, why a strong campus engagement strategy is crucial, and how Firstsource is shifting from a qualification-first to a potential-first mindset.

While looking for topics to discuss with you, I came across this compelling insight by the Compass Group. It says that employees who are more engaged in a workplace are more productive and feel less lonely, and are more drawn towards an organisation's vision. I would like to know your thoughts on these findings, and with regards to FirstSource, where do you stand in creating such a culture for early talent?

Each generation comes with a different idea of what work, engagement, and happiness look like. At Firstsource, that means designing employee experiences and benefits with intention. For example, where older employees may seek financial security and stability, Gen Z is looking for meaning, purpose, and social interaction from ESG involvement to vibrant social events.

The company actively tailors its approach. We have broken down our engagement strategies based on generational behaviours. Even something like a social gathering, what excites Gen Z is very different from what motivates someone nearing retirement.

Off-Campus Talent: A New Frontier

In another telling shift, Anshul notes how the traditional pride associated with campus placements has faded.

Firstsource is tapping into this trend with **a greater focus on off-campus hiring**, targeting candidates who may not have taken the conventional route but demonstrate agility, drive, and entrepreneurial energy. “We are going to IITs, IIMs, and private universities not just to recruit, but to support the idea of exploration and innovation,” Anshul explains.

Post-COVID Perspectives and AI-Driven Evolution

The pandemic marked a turning point. “COVID changed people at a psychological level,” Anshul reflects. “Work-life balance is now non-negotiable for many. Early talent wants defined hours, productivity within that time, and the freedom to enjoy life outside work.”

Anshul spoke at length about the shift the AI has brought in the way hiring happens now. “At least for me, I check how fast someone can learn. I used to ask only two questions:

1. *What have you learnt recently and,*
2. *Tell me one learning from your favourite subject.*

He adds, “To me, it opens the ethics and learnability scale of an individual. So, from the competency framework, we have moved into the skill framework. This is the change AI has brought because what you know today might (is going to) be obsolete tomorrow.”

You have often said, “The more you learn, the more you earn.” What lies ahead in terms of talent priorities? How are things shaping

up over the next few years? engaged in a workplace are more productive and feel less lonely, and are more drawn towards an organisation's vision. I would like to know your thoughts on these findings, and with regards to FirstSource, where do you stand in creating such a culture for early talent?

I believe cognitive skills and learnability are going to be key. If you focus on these, your domain skills will naturally improve. Whether you are studying math, healthcare, or banking, those are your domain areas, but your cognitive and learning abilities form the foundation. Gone are the days when a degree alone guaranteed employment. What lies ahead is a future of skill-based recruitment.

I'm not sure about the next five years, but over the next two, this shift will become very evident.

“

Keep it simple: pick one domain and sharpen your learnability and cognitive skills. If you are technically sound, go deep into a domain and complement it with strong cognitive capabilities. That's the future.

”

Tell us how Firstsource approaches skill-based hiring. How do you assess and hire talent beyond degrees?

We look at hiring in two parts: campus and volume hiring. Campus hiring is mostly from B-schools and tech campuses, but 85% of our hiring is volume-based, especially for IT and operations roles.

When hiring freshers, domain expertise is limited, so we focus more on cognitive skills. How well candidates adapt to situations.

We use the STAR interviewing methodology and have developed our framework to assess three types of skills: perishable, semi-durable, and durable.

Perishable skills are tied to specific domains. Durable skills like attitude, communication, and learnability form the foundation.

For example, in healthcare, the specific technical knowledge is perishable, but your ability to learn, communicate, and adapt is durable.

“

We use an AI tool based on the STAR method and competency-based interviewing (CBI) to assess these traits. We've trained the AI to ask the right questions, and it's now central to our hiring process.

”

We often talk about upskilling early talent. But what about reverse learning? Where do managers learn from fresh hires? Do you think leaders need to be trained to handle the new generation better?

Absolutely. The word 'unlearning' is very big for Firstsource right now. Our CEO introduced the concept of "un-BPO," which is essentially about unlearning 20–25 years of legacy thinking as we move into an AI-led future.

Agentic AI is here, and it is changing everything. So we must upskill and reskill constantly. That means unlearning and relearning are key if you want to grow in your career today, and that is true for organisations equally.

One major insight from them? Work-life balance. They don't want to burn out like older generations, and they are vocal about it. From AI in recruitment to value stream mapping (VSM), many ideas we implemented came from our trainees. They helped reduce our hiring process from 9–10 hours to 45 minutes per candidate by identifying non-value-adding steps.

India has the world's largest fresh talent pool, but employability remains a challenge. How do you bridge that gap?

It's a very real issue. NASSCOM reports that only 40–45% of graduates are employable, which means 60–65% are not, and that's worrying. We approach this in two ways: traditional and modern. Traditionally, we do academic partnerships, training professors so they can better prepare students. The modern way is co-creating industry-relevant curricula with universities.

The government has also made internships longer from three to six months,

which is a great move. But it must be done sincerely, not as a checkbox. Right now, we have 30+ interns working with us across departments, and they are gaining solid experience.

This kind of talent, those who come in with cognitive skills and absorb domain knowledge, becomes highly valuable.

Is there a better way to make industrial training or internships more impactful?

Yes—make internships mandatory, meaningful, and performance-driven. Students should be paid, evaluated on KPIs, and mentored seriously. Some private universities already do this, and I help them evaluate internship outcomes.

“

I make it a point to personally hire at least three to four management trainees from B-schools each year. They bring in fresh perspectives and contagious energy. They're blunt, too—you can't use a five-year-old playbook with them.

”

If scaled nationally, this model can raise employability from 40—45% to at least 70%. There's a demand-supply gap; we are hungry for good talent. We just need to bridge that gap effectively.

Another important area: communication skills. India has amazing raw talent, but many candidates miss out only because they can't communicate in English, which remains the primary business language. Especially in customer-facing roles, this becomes a deal-breaker.

How is AI helping in making recruiter connections with the candidates more meaningful?

AI has made evaluations more structured and consistent. Earlier, different recruiters

would assess candidates differently. Now, AI handles the initial process with calibrated feedback. This gives candidates clarity on why they were selected or not. It is no longer just a 'yes' or 'no.' Our goal is to share this feedback more proactively and transparently. For recruiters, AI has removed the paperwork. They now have time to focus on meaningful conversations with candidates, learn new skills, and even contribute to content development for talent assessments. That's real value-add.

I would like to summarise that the times we are living in are changing. The way we hire, the people we hire, are changing. Now, we are doing fixed-time resource hiring, contingent hiring, part-timer, gig workforce hiring, and lastly is agentic AI hiring. Even

though we are creating bots, they are part of the workforce too. We now hire people for their cognitive skills.

That brings me back to what I always say: the more you learn, the more you earn. So keep learning!



SHAPING FUTURE-READY TALENT IN BFSI

A Perspective from Wells Fargo's Campus Strategy



GET TO KNOW

Ashish Garg

Head of Talent Acquisition, Wells Fargo India and the Philippines Region

Ashish Garg is Head of Talent Acquisition for Wells Fargo's India and Philippines region, with a track record of building high-potential, mission-driven teams since joining the leadership team in November 2023. A certified SPHR professional, he brings a growth-oriented mindset to talent strategy, emphasising emerging technologies and leadership pipelines. Before his current role, Ashish led early-talent programmes and strategic hiring across the broader Wells Fargo organisation. He holds an MBA from the Indian Institute of Management and champions initiatives that align hiring with digitalisation, resilience, and future-ready culture.

Ask a final-year student what a bank wants from them, and the answers will likely hover around grades, coding skills, or a crash course in finance. What they rarely mention is judgement. Or resilience. Or the ability to work through ambiguity without losing grip on accountability. Yet these are precisely the qualities that matter in modern banking and financial institutions. At Wells Fargo's Global Capability Centre in India, campus hiring has shifted from merely checking boxes to identifying thinkers who can navigate risk, uphold trust, and adapt to a sector in flux. Our approach to campus hiring has had to evolve with it. What we seek now is not just potential, but preparedness, for a world where the stakes are high, and the learning curve is steeper than ever.

The Strategic Evolution of Our GCC and Its Impact on Campus Hiring

As Wells Fargo in India and the Philippines region has transitioned into a strategic capability centre, our campus hiring lens has shifted significantly. Earlier, we focused primarily on core traditional capabilities and skills, but today, we are seeking high-potential talent with a strong foundation in emerging technologies such as AI, cybersecurity, cloud, data analytics and modelling, and business banking, areas where India is playing an important role in Wells Fargo's global strategy.

We value candidates who bring a blend of technical proficiency, functional knowledge, and strategic thinking, as our teams are deeply involved in digitising our banking experiences globally. Competencies like collaboration, adaptability, and a global mindset have become just as important as technical skills. This evolution has sharpened our campus pitch and made it more purpose-driven, aligning with our goal of developing future-ready professionals.

Breaking Myths About GCCs Among Campus Talent

While awareness has improved, many students still perceive GCCs as back-end service delivery centres rather than as engines of strategic advancement, an impression that no longer reflects reality. At Wells Fargo, we invest in shaping this understanding through deeper campus engagement, mentorship sessions, and by showcasing our work in areas such as fraud detection, risk management, model development, cybersecurity, and risk and controls domains where our India team plays a pivotal role in global operations.

Why Resilience Matters More Than Degrees in BFSI

That's a critical point. In high-stakes domains such as banking and financial services, resilience often determines long-term success more than technical scores. We have a robust selection process to assess a candidate's ability to work in a fast-moving, high-paced, and dynamic environment, all of which are part of the daily landscape at an organisation like Wells Fargo.

We also use real-world problem statements during hiring simulations, which reveal how a fresher navigates stress, prioritises, and collaborates. Our early talent programmes include mentorship and mental wellness resources to support long-term resilience post-hire. Emotional intelligence, cultural adaptability, and a growth mindset are qualities we deliberately screen for, as they form the foundation of leadership readiness in our environment. Resilience, for us, is the bridge between potential and performance.

Hiring with AI Without Losing the Human Lens

Process automation has helped us improve efficiency and objectivity, but interviewing is still, at its core, a human endeavour. Our interviewers are trained to identify traits like integrity, cultural alignment, and grit.

Ultimately, we believe technology should augment, not replace, human judgement in the hiring process. That's how we ensure we hire not just for skills, but for character.

Caution or Creativity? BFSI Needs Both

The core beliefs of the banking and financial services sector are trust, stability, risk and controls. They remain non-negotiable. However, as India centres evolve into strategic hubs, we are actively seeking talent that brings a fresh lens to problem-solving. With campus hires, we don't expect them to choose between caution and creativity; we train and encourage them to navigate both. Our onboarding and early-career programmes are designed to empower young professionals to ask bold questions, experiment responsibly, and learn from outcomes. We encourage them to take calculated risks, grounded in data, aligned with business priorities, and informed by mentorship. Bridging this paradox is precisely how tomorrow's leaders are shaped.

Preparing Graduates for Tomorrow's Challenges, Today

The banking and financial services landscape is being redefined by technologies such as AI, cloud, and regtech, and our approach to campus hiring reflects that shift. We are looking for adaptive thinkers who can connect the dots across domains. Our hiring pitch now emphasises real-world problem-solving, impact at scale, and the opportunity to work on future-forward platforms. Assessments have moved beyond theoretical knowledge to test practical applicability, learning agility, and ethical reasoning. Once onboarded, graduates enter tailored learning pathways that blend technical upskilling with industry-contextual training, such as cloud infrastructure with a focus on financial compliance, or AI with frameworks for

responsible use. The goal isn't just to fill today's roles, but to future-proof talent pipelines that will drive transformation across the enterprise.

Hiring Risk-Aware, Not Risk-Averse, Talent

We are seeing early talent play a pivotal role in fulfilling the evolving demand for

future-ready skills across the organisation. This talent pool is increasingly aligned to the requirements of all our business groups, be it technical, functional, or the growing demand for hybrid techno-functional capabilities for the future.

By strategically mapping early talent pipelines to our line-of-business talent

priorities, we are not only meeting current needs but also building capacity for what the future demands. Our regional business leaders are closely connected with their global counterparts, enabling a cohesive and forward-looking integration of talent supply with enterprise goals.



FRESH OUTTA CAMPUS, STRAIGHT INTO THE GAME:

How Gameskraft Is Powering Early Talent

GET TO KNOW

Nitin Nahata

CHRO at Gameskraft

Nitin is a TISS 2003 graduate and is currently at Gameskraft as their CHRO. He has played a key role in successfully scaling up startups to 5X growth and in establishing HR as a strategic business partner. Nitin has managed HR Centres of Excellence globally and provided HR Business Partnering support for all Global Support functions. His previous assignments include working with HSBC, Standard Chartered Bank, and Wipro e-Peripherals.



As online gaming carves out a distinct industry identity, India's gaming sector has surged to a valuation of Rs 23,000 crore (US \$2.8 billion) in 2023, growing at a brisk 20% CAGR and expected to touch Rs 70,000 crore (US \$8.6 billion) by 2027. A major driver within this is the skill-based gaming segment, which alone was worth Rs 33,000 crore in 2023 and is poised to double to Rs 66,000 crore by 2028, expanding at 14.5% CAGR. Fueling this momentum is India's rich pool of tech talent. According to a study by the E-Gaming Federation and the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, 73-84% of tech students and professionals see skill gaming as a viable career path, and 68% believe it boosts their skillsets.

In a fascinating conversation with Nitin Nahata, CHRO at Gameskraft, we dug into what fuels their hiring engine. Is it a passion for gaming, sharp problem-solving skills, or sheer drive? Nitin shared how Gameskraft is shifting away from lateral hiring by building fresh talent pipelines. The company actively recruits from top campuses, including the IITs and BITS Pilani, for roles in tech, product, and design.

And above all, he believes that Gaming in India is no longer a niche.

Gaming as a career choice is still niche. How do you position Gameskraft as an 'Employer of Choice' among top engineering talent?

Gaming in India is at a fascinating inflection point. It is no longer just a niche, but a rapidly growing industry with massive potential. Yet, we recognise that for most young professionals, the sector still feels new and unfamiliar. That's exactly why we believe it's our responsibility, as industry leaders, to guide early talent with the right insights, help them make informed choices, and open their eyes to the kind of career they can build here. It is designed to show

young minds how the world of gaming offers unparalleled complexity, scale, and innovation - marrying systems thinking, behavioural science, and real-time architecture in ways few other industries do.

Our proposition is simple: make real impact from Day 1. We've built a culture where early talent gets to work on meaningful, high-stakes problems - with ownership, speed, and the chance to craft products for millions of players.

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In our 2025 hiring cycle, we extended 50+ offers across Tech, Product, and Design roles, after engaging with 12 top campuses including IIT Guwahati, BITS Pilani, NID, IIIT Allahabad, and NSUT.

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We are selective because we hold a high bar, and in return, we promise a workplace where talent is not just welcomed but accelerated.

Gaming is the next big thing, and India has only just scratched the surface. At Gameskraft, we are proud to give early talent the head start they deserve in a sector that's just getting started.

How do you assess passion for gaming or game-tech in a technical hire without making it a mandatory filter?

At Gameskraft, we have consciously chosen not to reduce talent evaluation to a single trait like 'passion for gaming.' While that passion can be a great bonus, what matters more to us is whether someone has the flair, curiosity, and intent to make a meaningful impact in this sector. That belief is reflected in how we shape our entire narrative to candidates - we don't just ask them to fit into the gaming world; we invite them to build it with us.

Hence, instead of looking for pre-existing knowledge of game-tech, we focus on core intrinsics like strong problem-solving ability, learning agility, and a hunger to grow. Our "Bar Raiser" rounds specifically look for long-term potential, evaluating how candidates think, adapt, and align with our culture of ownership and velocity.

In a selective hiring model like yours, how do you ensure that every hire scales impact, not just headcount?

When we step in a campus, we're not just filling roles; we're looking for that unmistakable spark - a combination of potential, intent, and clarity of thought. If the right foundation exists, our Generation-G program is built to shape that into high-impact careers.

We've seen that a fresher's impact trajectory isn't defined by pedigree - it's shaped by how they think, how quickly they learn, and how well they respond to feedback. These are the signals we focus on during our hiring process.

Once onboarded, what surrounds them is a high-performance culture that accelerates outcomes. We have found that high expectations don't intimidate the right hires - they activate them. And that's how

we ensure every individual contributes meaningfully to our vision, not just our metrics.

What long-term value does the Gen-G program bring to a business where each hire can directly impact product agility and user experience?

Generation-G was never about just filling roles; it was a strategic intervention to solve deeper challenges in how we attract, develop, and retain early talent. Before its inception, our dependency on lateral hires often introduced legacy thinking that limited agility and innovation. We needed a system that could scale not just talent, but also culture, and Gen-G delivered on that vision.

The program has become an enabler for long-term workforce planning and succession for critical functions.

From a business lens, this cohort has been instrumental in driving product agility and elevating user experiences. Their early exposure to high-stakes projects accelerates learning and impact.

The numbers speak for themselves: **an offer-to-joining ratio of over 95% year on year, and attrition of less than 8% over the last two years.** That's not just talent.

Does Gameskraft Involve Freshers in live product cycles early on, or is there a structured ramp-up period?

At Gameskraft, we believe in immersion, not isolation. Our Generation-G hires aren't kept on the sidelines - they are embedded into our manpower planning from day one. The goal isn't just onboarding; it's acceleration.

Every fresher goes through a thoughtfully designed ramp-up journey that includes a three-week bootcamp, domain-specific immersion, and interactions with leadership.

From within the bootcamp itself, they start working on live projects - not simulations, but actual business problems - where the expected outcome is often a fully functional application. This builds the confidence and capability to contribute to running product cycles almost immediately.

We've seen that early exposure to live products not only boosts functional readiness but also deepens their understanding of customer-centric thinking. That's how we ensure that our freshers don't just start strong, they stay impactful.

What role does cross-functional collaboration play for early hires at Gameskraft? Do they engage with product, design, or analytics teams early?

In a dynamic product ecosystem like gaming, where user experience evolves in real-time and decisions are deeply data-informed, cross-functional collaboration is foundational.

That's why from Day 1, our Generation-G hires are immersed in environments where product thinking, design sensibility, and analytical depth intersect. During their onboarding bootcamp itself, they're exposed to co-creation with various functions to get a fully functional application ready within three weeks!

These experiences aren't just enriching - they're transformative. We have witnessed how early exposure to these touchpoints accelerates professional maturity:

- Engineers begin to ask "why" before they get to the "how" - and that shift is what turns coders into creators.
- Designers move from crafting screens to shaping experiences, thinking not only about UI but the intention behind every interaction.
- Product hires evolve from

requirement-gathering to problem-framing, learning how to define what's worth building - and more importantly, why now.

At Gameskraft, our goal is to build full-stack problem solvers who can thrive in ambiguity, think holistically, and collaborate with purpose. Cross-functional immersion is one of the most powerful ways we make that vision real.

What makes a high-bar, low-volume early talent strategy sustainable in a business like yours and how do you see this model evolving over the next few years?

At first glance, our early talent numbers may appear modest when compared to big tech giants - but behind those numbers is a high-impact strategy that's both deliberate and deeply sustainable.

Without this structure, we'd be locked into a cycle of lateral hiring - and with that comes inefficiency. For example, to hire 50 lateral candidates, you might need to roll out 150 offers. That's a tremendous operational burden and a significant bandwidth drain on the business. If our model makes our hiring numbers "look low," it's because we've chosen quality over churn, and that's a trade-off we are proud to make.

Over the past few years, this model has already scaled across Tech, Design, Product, and Analytics. We've embedded it into manpower planning and succession pipelines, and the results are measurable. Consultant costs for hiring at an early talent level have dropped to 0%, and we've built a future-ready bench that deeply understands our systems, culture, and pace.

We see Generation-G not just as a hiring initiative, but as a strategic advantage - one that continues to shape how we scale people, performance, and product excellence together.

FROM HYDERABAD TO THE WORLD:

Narane Gundabathula on Nurturing Freshers into Global Contributors at Hexagon

GET TO KNOW

Narane Gundabathula

Executive Manager -
Talent Acquisition at Hexagon R&D India

Narane is a seasoned HR leader with over 20 years of experience across talent acquisition, HR tech, and strategic business partnering. He has led high-impact initiatives in M&A, HR transformation, and workforce strategy across complex, global environments.



Hexagon AB, a global leader in digital reality solutions like digital twins, GNSS, and LiDAR, continues to make strides in advancing R&D and agentic AI. Interestingly, the Stockholm-based company attributes a lot of this **R&D to its Hyderabad Global Capability Centre (GCC).**

Reflecting on the significance of the centre, Burkhard Boeckem, CTO, Hexagon AB, was quoted as saying that Hyderabad is one of Hexagon's three main R&D hubs globally, alongside Switzerland and the US. "The focus here is primarily on R&D, with some service functions closely aligned to our innovation initiatives," Boeckem said.

Hexagon's R&D efforts span 28 industries, from geosystems to autonomous solutions. And at the heart of this innovation lies its people. In Hyderabad alone, a 400-member team drives the company's global innovation agenda.

"The talent pool here is phenomenal," Boeckem noted. "We are excited about the future of agentic AI and its potential to transform industries." 15% of the company's revenue is reinvested into R&D, and Hyderabad is one of the biggest contributors to that engine.

So what's the secret behind nurturing such high-impact talent from the ground up?

Narane Gundabathula, Executive Manager-Talent Acquisition at Hexagon R&D India, offers an inside look into how the Hyderabad centre grooms fresh graduates into innovation-ready professionals, ready to take on complex, industry-defining challenges.

Freshers Are Future-Ready from Day One

"At Hexagon, we foster a culture of continuous learning and development," Narane begins.

For freshers, that journey starts with structured diagnostics to assess technical and soft skills. Based on these insights, new hires undergo immersive training focused on core technologies, Hexagon's proprietary solutions, and industry best practices.

But what sets Hexagon apart is its seamless transition from theory to real-world impact. Within months, freshers are deployed onto live projects - guided closely by team leads, peers, and mentors. **"Handholding isn't an afterthought; it's a deliberate part of onboarding,"** Narane emphasises.

Each fresher is also paired with an experienced mentor, who acts as a sounding board and support system. This mentoring, combined with progressive responsibilities and exposure to complex tasks, enables a rapid yet thoughtful ramp-up.

Data-Led Personalisation: Training with Precision

Hexagon doesn't rely on generic training paths. While core modules align with business needs, learning journeys are fine-tuned to individual capabilities.

"We use diagnostic tools and individual development plans to tailor the experience," Narane explains.

This results in fresher-specific project assignments, targeted learning interventions, and mentorship pairings that play to their strengths while addressing growth areas.

It's a balance between organisational strategy and personal potential, and one that ensures freshers feel both guided and empowered.

Tapping Hidden Talent, Beyond Tier-1 Campuses

In keeping with Hexagon AB's global

emphasis on inclusivity and innovation, the Hyderabad team has actively widened its talent lens.

"We have moved beyond Tier-1 institutes and are now engaging talent from Tier 2/3 colleges and non-traditional education pathways," says Narane.

Internships, campus partnerships, and adapted assessments help Hexagon identify raw potential over polished resumes.

"We're not just hiring credentials - we're hiring curiosity, drive, and learnability," he adds.

This shift has not only diversified the talent pipeline but also enriched team dynamics and long-term capability building.

Accelerating Growth for High Potentials

While the average ramp-up time for freshers is between 3 to 9 months, those who demonstrate exceptional aptitude can fast-track their development.

"We have paths for early movers,"

Narane shares. High-potential hires get access to accelerated training, high-impact projects, cross-functional exposure, and direct mentorship from senior leaders.

The goal? Cultivate tomorrow's experts and leaders - the kind that fuel Hexagon's R&D powerhouse across geographies.

From Hyderabad to the World

From Burkhard Boeckem's global perspective to Narane Gundabathula's on-ground view, one thing is clear: Hexagon's Hyderabad centre is more than just a GCC. It's a launchpad for talent, a training ground for innovation, and a strategic pillar in Hexagon AB's global R&D blueprint.

At Hexagon, freshers do more than onboard they innovate, contribute, and lead from day one.

CAN AI TRULY UNDERSTAND FRESH TALENT?



Dinesh Menon

Founder's Officer-People &
Strategy at Onsurity

Regina Thomas

Head of Talent Acquisition,
India at Encora

Leaders Discuss **Biggest Challenges:**

- ✓ AI and the New Age of Fresher Hiring
- ✓ Designing Fair and Inclusive AI Systems
- ✓ Balancing Efficiency with Empathy
- ✓ Humanising AI in Talent Discovery



Gunjandeep Kaur

Director – HR Business Partner
at Model N

Yadhu Kishore

Sr. HR Director, Evernorth
Health Services India

As companies scale globally and recruitment volumes surge, artificial intelligence is playing an increasingly critical role in how organisations identify and hire young talent. For fresh graduates, this presents both opportunity and uncertainty. Can AI-powered tools truly see beyond a traditional resume? Are they equipped to evaluate potential, especially in candidates from non-traditional backgrounds?

To explore this question, we gathered insights from senior professionals deeply involved in shaping the future of talent acquisition across leading global organisations. Their perspectives offer a nuanced view of how AI is being deployed in fresher recruitment and where its possibilities intersect with its limitations.

As GenAI continues to reshape AI and the New Age of Fresher Hiring

Global firms are increasingly relying on AI to streamline the recruitment process for entry-level roles, particularly in campus hiring. The ability to process large applicant pools quickly and objectively has made AI a powerful ally for talent acquisition teams.

“At Onsurity, our approach to fresher recruitment emphasises agility, diversity, and future readiness,” said Dinesh Menon, Founder’s Officer — Strategy, Governance & People. “We prioritise skills and cultural fit over resumes alone. To ensure accuracy and relevance, we leverage AI-powered tools to assess real capabilities, helping us cut through exaggerated claims and identify genuine talent aligned with the role and our values.”

Yadhu Kishore Nandikolla, Senior Human Resources Director at Evernorth Health Services India, described a similar approach, highlighting how AI is already embedded in the hiring workflows of global firms. “AI-powered tools are rapidly gaining popularity in campus recruitment and

fresher hiring, especially in high-volume markets like India. Global companies are using AI to streamline tasks like resume screening, skills assessments, and candidate ranking,” he said.

He added that these tools can offer deeper insights into a candidate’s abilities through methods such as gamified assessments or situational judgement tests. However, he also warned of the downsides of excessive automation: “Over-reliance on automation can lead to impersonal candidate experiences, limited interaction with recruiters, and missed opportunities to understand a candidate beyond test scores.”

Assessing Potential vs. Matching Skills

While AI has significantly improved the efficiency of screening, its ability to assess the potential of a candidate, as opposed to simply matching skills, remains a subject of debate.

“New-aged tools help identify better skill fit, not potential,” noted **Dinesh Menon**. “The output of all AI tools is based on its learning model and data that’s been labelled over time. It also depends on how well the job description has been detailed with clear outcomes.” Nevertheless, he acknowledged the advantage AI offers in creating more equitable and objective assessments, stating that it “fosters a merit-based process that goes beyond traditional resumes.”

Designing Fair and Inclusive AI Systems

The effectiveness of AI in identifying talent is directly tied to how thoughtfully it is designed. When used without intention, it risks reinforcing systemic biases. But when developed responsibly, it can serve as a leveller.

“At Encora, we believe in evaluating potential over pedigree,” said **Regina Thomas, Head of Talent Acquisition — India**. “That means

designing AI systems that are fair by default: trained on diverse datasets, continuously audited for bias, and calibrated to identify qualities like adaptability, curiosity, and creative problem-solving, not just academic credentials.”

She emphasised the importance of blending automation with human insight. “We take a human+AI approach. Our AI tools surface patterns, highlight behavioural signals, and accelerate initial screening. And it’s our recruiters who apply context, empathy, and nuance, especially when evaluating candidates from non-traditional backgrounds, including self-taught coders, career switchers, and talent from Tier 2 cities.”

For **Gunjandeep Kaur, Director — HR Business Partner at Model N**, fair AI begins with responsible data. “It’s critical to ensure that [AI] promotes equitable access to opportunities for all talent, including individuals from non-traditional or underrepresented backgrounds,” she said. “This begins with training AI on diverse, representative datasets to reduce bias and developing algorithms that recognise potential, not just conventional markers like educational background or past employers.”

Balancing Efficiency with Empathy

One of the biggest challenges recruiters face is finding the sweet spot between efficiency and inclusion. AI can certainly speed up shortlisting, but ensuring a fair and transparent experience requires deliberate human intervention.

“At Onsurity, our commitment is clear: every candidate gets transparent feedback, unconscious bias is actively minimised, and our hiring process is as inclusive as it is efficient,” said Menon.

Regina Thomas outlined a structured framework that Encora follows to balance both goals. “Efficiency and inclusivity are not

trade-offs; they are twin goals,” she said. “We embed three core practices: structured evaluation through role-specific scorecards, inclusive sourcing by reaching out to underrepresented talent pools, and human oversight in all final decisions.”

She also stressed the importance of feedback in maintaining fairness: “Explainability isn’t just an AI principle, it’s a human one.”

Gunjan reinforced this, highlighting that hiring must remain human-centric even in a tech-heavy world. “Incorporating structured, skills-based assessments and blind evaluations can help identify candidates

from non-traditional backgrounds,” she said. “Ultimately, the goal isn’t just to speed up hiring; it’s also about making hiring smarter and more equitable.”

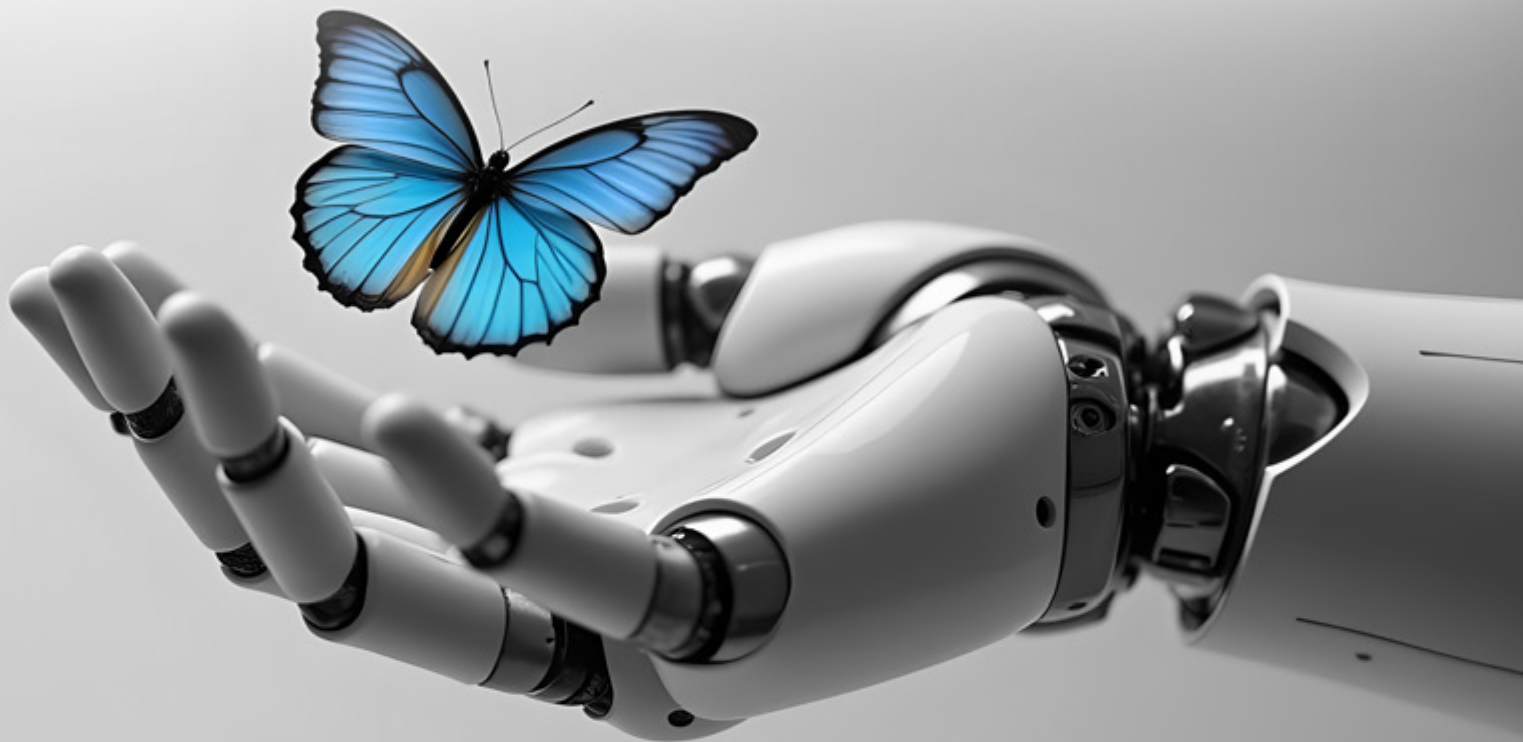
Yadhu Kishore agreed, adding that “fresh graduates from diverse or non-traditional backgrounds may not always fit standard algorithmic profiles, and relying only on AI risks overlooking their true potential.”

According to him, companies must ensure that “AI is a valuable tool for initial screening and assessments, but it must be complemented by human insight to ensure an inclusive, balanced, and just hiring journey.”

Humanising AI in Talent Discovery

As these voices make clear, AI is transforming fresher recruitment, but it is not a silver bullet. The quality of its impact depends on how consciously it is applied. With the right balance of data and discernment, automation and empathy, recruitment can become faster, fairer, and more future-ready.

In the words of Dinesh Menon, “Operational excellence means nothing if we overlook real human potential.” The promise of AI lies not in replacing judgement, but in enhancing it, ensuring that potential is never missed just because it does not fit neatly within a digital profile.



RISK, RESILIENCE, AND THE RISE OF GCCS:

Jaspreet Bakshi on Marsh McLennan's Early Talent Vision



GET TO KNOW

Jaspreet Bakshi

Partner & India HR Leader,
Marsh McLennan India

Jaspreet Bakshi has 25+ years in HR and business, specialising in building future-ready organisations and driving transformation. As Partner & HR Leader at Marsh McLennan India, he leads strategic HR for the GCC, supporting Mercer, Marsh, Guy Carpenter, and Oliver Wyman. Previously Managing Director—HR at NatWest, he has shaped change across BFSI, risk advisory, telecom, FMCG, and GCCs. An AoEC Executive Coach, Six Sigma Black Belt, and contributor to 2 incubators for business modelling and talent, he champions the future of work with academia and industry.

When Jaspreet Bakshi walks into a campus interaction, he is not talking about the 'highest package' or 'fancy designations.' He is asking a bigger question: "Are we equipping students for the future of work?" **As Partner & India HR**

Leader at Marsh McLennan India, Jaspreet has been driving the evolution of its Global Capability Centre from a support function to a strategic innovation hub. With over 25 years of experience, he has led transformations across industries and champions a bold approach to early careers. In this conversation, he shares why risk roles need curiosity more than credentials, how GCCs create global opportunities, and what it takes for Gen Z to thrive in an ecosystem where purpose and adaptability matter as much as skills.

As the HR leader of a global GCC hub, how have you shaped Marsh McLennan's early-career talent strategy to ensure freshers build risk awareness through real, live project exposure from day one, not just simulations?

To put this in context, Marsh McLennan operates across multiple business lines. Mercer works in three major areas: *Health*, *Wealth*, and *Career*. Marsh is the largest insurance broker globally, with Oliver Wyman and Guy Carpenter focussing on reinsurance, respectively.

For the kind of work we support in India, our teams here need to understand the business very well and appreciate the impact they create for clients, as well as for colleagues based in other countries. One of our key priorities has been to provide more clarity, visibility, and understanding for our teams in India regarding the nature of work we do.

To give you an example, one of the teams we have significantly ramped up in India is focused on **Catastrophic Modelling**. Over the last four years, we have seen significant

changes, whether due to natural calamities like earthquakes and floods, or man-made events such as wars. These are the kinds of risks we help clients manage, and helping our teams understand this context well is critical.

When I joined, we had approximately 5,500 to 6,000 colleagues. Today, we are almost at 11,000. So our focus has not only been on scaling our existing talent from a learning and exposure standpoint but also on building strong early-career programmes. We have implemented structured onboarding plans and a strong focus on what we call '**Grow Our Own**,' rather than relying solely on the external market for talent.

The questions we ask are: 'How do we help them understand the business better?' 'How do they better understand their clients?' 'How do they understand the end objective?' That understanding shapes their awareness of business risk, enabling them to see how they can make an impact from India.

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We have implemented structured onboarding plans and a strong focus on what we call 'Grow Our Own,' rather than relying solely on the external market for talent.

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Could you provide more clarity on the concept of 'Grow Your Own'?

'Grow Your Own' stems from how our India teams have evolved over the past few years. About four or five years ago, most of the work here was focussed on operations and technology. However, in the last four years, the teams in India have progressively demonstrated the value they bring.

This has enabled us to move from purely back-office work to a front-to-back model. In other words, our teams have delivered results that have built trust and, as a result, we are now receiving more value-added work in India - work that sits closer to the middle office and strategic layers.

Now, instead of going to the external market to hire for these higher-value roles, we invest in our existing teams. We upskill them, develop them, and enable them to take on more complex, higher-order responsibilities. This approach ensures we build strong internal capability and create meaningful career growth for our colleagues.

The results speak for themselves. While the average attrition for GCCs in India is between 19 and 21 per cent, Marsh McLennan's GCC stands at **8.2 per cent**. Colleagues are staying, growing, and contributing significantly to the business, which is the true essence of Grow Your Own.

Why do you think risk management has become a top hiring focus across industries today?

That is a very pertinent question, not just for our industry but globally. When we look for talent in the market, there are a few foundational elements that guide our approach.

First and foremost, across functions, whether Marsh, Mercer, technology, or corporate, our core objective is to bring in skill sets that help us move the business forward. However, when hiring fresh talent, prior experience is not something we can expect, so our focus shifts to qualities like intent, mindset, ability to learn, and initiative. These attributes become critical because they indicate adaptability and growth potential.

Cultural fitment is absolutely non-negotiable at Marsh McLennan. We place strong emphasis on work ethics and alignment with our values, and this often comes through in conversations during the selection process.

When it comes to functional skills, especially in risk-oriented roles, we look for depth of thinking. This may come through educational background, academic projects, or any exposure that demonstrates analytical and structured problem-solving abilities.

At the same time, we are very mindful that some of the specialised work we do will not always find “ready-made” talent in the market. That is why we invest heavily in immersive onboarding and skill-building programmes. Some of these run for six to nine months, focusing on understanding the business, building a risk mindset, and strengthening control frameworks.

So, it is essentially a two-pronged strategy: finding people for who they are and what they bring to the table, while also enabling their growth through structured learning interventions.

What qualities or skills do you believe companies look for when hiring entry-level talent in risk roles?

I'll explain with an example. Mercer, one of our most powerful brands, is also the largest employer of actuaries in India. When we think about the future of skills and the kind

of work we want to do, we do not simply hire from the market or campuses without building a long-term engagement first.

Most of our leaders are closely connected with actuarial and wealth management colleges. We do more than just facilitate conversations or mentor students; we also actively contribute to shaping their curriculum. The idea is to help build content that aligns with industry needs so that students are better prepared with ready-to-deploy skill sets.

We follow a similar approach with institutions such as IIT Bombay and a few others in India. This forms a critical part of our early-careers strategy. Alongside this, we focus heavily on internships, which serve as a strong pipeline for us. Many interns who demonstrate genuine interest in the organisation and the nature of work receive pre-placement offers or are absorbed into the company.

This means that instead of waiting for the placement season, there is a lot of groundwork happening behind the scenes to identify, engage, and prepare talent early on. Of course, if we hire freshers outside these specific backgrounds, we ensure we invest in their training and development to bring them up to speed.

To answer your question directly, the skills we look for include functional and technical capability wherever relevant, strong intent, cultural fitment, adaptability, and an eagerness to learn. These qualities help us identify candidates who can grow and thrive within Marsh McLennan.

Why do you think risk consulting requires people from diverse academic backgrounds?

Risk is one of the core skill sets we look at, but we also consider a broader context when hiring, especially for early-career roles. At Marsh McLennan, we work within

a well-defined competency framework and a structured value system that guides hiring across levels.

When it comes to fresh graduates, there are a few critical traits we prioritise. One of the most important is **curiosity**, which is a genuine eagerness to learn. For example, we often meet candidates from finance backgrounds who have focused only on finance without exploring operations, HR, marketing, or technology. In today's world, we need professionals who can think beyond a single discipline.

Why? Because the way we work is evolving. We rely heavily on agile teams, bringing together colleagues from finance, HR, technology, strategy, and operations to deliver on complex projects. These teams work in a dynamic environment and then disband, so having a front-to-back view of the business and the ability to integrate across functions becomes essential.

We also look for tech-savviness. Out of our 10,500 colleagues, nearly 7,000 are Gen Z and Millennials, with the average age of 27. We expect them to stay updated on emerging trends, from AI and digital ecosystems to developments in banking, insurance, and risk.

Adaptability is another non-negotiable quality. We have designed a structured career path for our junior grades that includes three rotations over 2.5 years, giving early-career professionals exposure to different facets of delivery. This helps them discover where their strengths lie and ensures long-term career alignment.

For this model to succeed, we need people who are open to change, willing to take risks, and comfortable stepping into unfamiliar areas to learn. These qualities, like curiosity, adaptability, and an appetite for cross-functional experience, are what make diverse academic backgrounds valuable in risk consulting.

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Our global leadership lives by a philosophy that places 'Colleague, Community, Client, and Shareholder' in that order, never the reverse. That principle comes alive every day in how decisions are made.

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How do you differentiate Marsh McLennan from other GCCs when you speak to students on campus?

Let me answer that with a reflective thought on what prompted me to join Marsh McLennan, because those are often the same things students look for when evaluating an organisation:

- How strong is the brand?
- What is its standing in the industry?
- What is the nature of work and culture?
- What kind of career and learning opportunities exist?
- What about corporate titles and compensation?

When I put all that together, Marsh McLennan stood out, and this is something we proudly call our **Colleague Value Proposition (CVP)**.

When we go to campuses, we talk about who we are a 150-year-old organisation with a rich legacy and global presence. Very few companies today can claim that kind of history. Beyond heritage, we highlight our culture, which is deeply rooted in inclusion and colleague-driven initiatives.

Beyond that, our culture is a defining factor. Inclusion is not a policy; it is *colleague-driven*. We have **Colleague Resource Groups (CRGs)** that lead various initiatives, including gender balance, LGBTQ+ and disability inclusion, veterans' integration, along with supporting returning mothers.

One example I take immense pride in: over the past 12 to 18 months, of *around 250 women colleagues who went on planned maternity leave, 234 returned*. This is not accidental. We work to ensure flexibility, continuity in career growth, and equal opportunities during such transitions.

Another differentiator is how Marsh McLennan prioritises colleagues, not just in words but in actions. Even during the pandemic, the support extended to employees was extraordinary. Our global leadership lives by a philosophy that places 'Colleague, Community, Client, and Shareholder' in that order, never the reverse. That principle comes alive every day in how decisions are made.

When we speak to students, we share these stories, along with our industry-leading benefits, structured career paths, robust learning frameworks, family support models, and strong insurance benefits. All these elements bring our CVP to life and clearly set us apart from other GCCs.

What onboarding experiences or training interventions have you found most effective for early talent in your GCC?

I think the first and foremost thing is to

keep in mind that when you bring in early-career talent, you need to map them with the kind of roles and the front-to-back model you have chosen. We follow something called the '**Follow-the-sun**' model. We look at where talent is available, what the cost advantage is, learnability, and other macroeconomic factors, and then base our location strategy on that.

When we engage with early careers, we really invest from the very start. We look at how we can give them more exposure on the campus-to-corporate journey and help them understand what is happening in the business context.

We are also doing a lot of work on innovation. We have about 1,800 colleagues in technology. We look for people who can ideate, think, and create solutions. We sponsor hackathons, like the *Innovation Week* at IIT Mumbai, where we attract people interested in designing innovative solutions for client needs. When we go to these campuses, we can spot talent with the learning mindset and orientation we want to invest in.

From there, when they join us, we have a very structured learning and onboarding plan. At the junior grade, there is a defined career path. Every nine months, there is a journey that says: this is the skill set you join with at the beginner level, this is what you will achieve in the next three to six months to move to intermediate, and this is where proficiency sits.

We do this using a skill-based competency assessment model across the organisation. We *hire for skills*, we focus on developing those skills, and we *measure* them. This is done at multiple levels. When someone joins, they know what we will do to enable them in their role. They do a self-evaluation, their line manager evaluates them at six months, and their peers give open feedback.

Learning is not just about a training programme. We follow the 70-20-10 model, so there is formal training, on-the-job learning, and cross-functional projects. It is a multifaceted approach to help colleagues grow in the organisation.

GCCs increasingly contribute to strategy, not just operations. What does that mean for how freshers should prepare themselves?

I think it is very important to demystify what strategy means. For someone coming into an organisation through an early-careers role, you may not be directly creating or designing a strategy. But it is important to understand that if a strategy is created at the group level, the GCC plays an integral role in connecting to that strategy and designing its own approach.

From that connection stems our colleague value proposition, our learning and training plans, and the skills we are trying to hire and develop. We try to establish that relationship very early and explain what this means in practical terms.

Earlier, I spoke about how we moved middle-office roles to India over the last two to two-and-a-half years. These are not operational roles. This means someone sitting in India is now directly interfacing with or enabling a consultant in another geography. That person needs to understand the direct or indirect impact on the top line and bottom line. GCCs are no longer just cost centres. We are directly impacting revenue, and that is where the value comes in.

This is all linked to strategy at a very high level. Questions like why India, why these skill sets, and what this individual or team will do to create value for the business define everything. That defines our job descriptions, our hiring approach, and the kind of people we bring in.

For example, we are creating an AI hub in India. If we are hiring for AI, we could have people with 20 years of experience or people with 3 years of experience. To support this, we have moved away from rigid career paths and introduced alternate career paths. This means if someone is a coder and wants to stay close to core coding work, we give them a path to grow in level and responsibility without forcing them into a manager role.

These are the kind of changes that help us build the GCC of the future. Many companies are on this journey to move away from being seen as cost arbitrage or pure execution centres. That model no longer works.

What have you learned about engaging Gen Z in a GCC context, especially when their aspirations move faster than traditional structures?

I believe a GCC is an ecosystem where people join, but the real question is how you understand the current generation and what their core drivers are. Once you know that, you can figure out what to create for them.

A lot of the younger population is not guided only by designation or salary. Many of them are looking for purpose-driven career paths. We often ask ourselves, we say we are an inclusive organisation, but do we really practise it? One example is our Colleague Resource Groups. Many of these are led by colleagues themselves, which shows that inclusion is not just a statement but something we live every day.

Gen Z has a voice, and they do not hesitate to use it. Do we give them platforms to speak? Do we engage with them and involve them in decision-making? We have five generations in the workforce. Are decisions only top-down, or are they co-created? In our case, a lot of innovation

is driven bottom-up because the best ideas often come from people closest to the work.

We provide opportunities where anyone, regardless of level or location, can submit an idea and, if shortlisted, receive sponsorship and resources to take that idea to execution. This is about creating a voice and building the infrastructure to support it.

Their aspirations move at a fast pace, so we think about career velocity and accelerated skill development. Some are deeply skilled and want to explore more. For example, someone in actuarial might also be passionate about technology. If there is a project where they can combine those skills to create something new for the client, do we give them that opportunity? We do.

It is a multi-pronged approach to engagement because that is the only way to connect with this generation.

“

I felt we were losing focus on skill development. Whether you are a GCC or any other company, the question should be how we are helping students build capabilities for the future.

”

In a post that you addressed via LinkedIn, you raised a powerful question: “Are we equipping students for the future of work?” From your perspective, how can GCCs better align with the evolving nature of risk roles at Marsh McLennan?

I wrote that post after a few campus interviews and interactions. I still make time to go and meet students because it keeps me connected, and it also humbles me. You realise there are students out there who are remarkably smart.

What struck me during those sessions was how many conversations were focused only on packages and compensation. I felt we were losing focus on skill development. Whether you are a GCC or any other company, the question should be how we are helping students build capabilities for the future. Many Indian companies like TCS and Infosys have done this very well through strong campus associations.

That is exactly what we are trying to do. We partner with colleges and institutes to review curricula and see if they are preparing students for what lies ahead. The campus-to-corporate gap is often very high because curricula have not evolved fast enough. So, we work with faculty to make them future-ready. For specialised skills, we curate modules and give students exposure to what is happening in the ecosystem by bringing them to our offices, offering internships, and creating mentorship opportunities.

The idea is to help students understand what a role actually involves. For example, if someone is studying actuarial science, do they really know what an actuary does?

How is technology changing the way actuaries work? What will that role look like in the future? We invest heavily in giving that clarity. Once they join, our onboarding process builds on that foundation.

We are also active participants in industry forums because one organisation alone cannot solve this challenge. India sees nearly 1.5 million graduates entering the job market every year, but if you look at employability and readiness for future skills, there is a big gap. That gap cannot be bridged by one company or even by government initiatives alone. It requires collective effort.



TOMORROW'S LEADERS, BUILT TODAY:

Inside Pitney Bowes' Young Talent Development Journey



GET TO KNOW

Renu Shekhawat

Director and Head
of Human Resources,
APAC at Pitney Bowes

Renu Shekhawat is the Director and Head of Human Resources, APAC at Pitney Bowes, bringing over two decades of HR leadership across global and multicultural environments. She has been instrumental in scaling the India team. Her focus on inclusion, innovation, and talent-led growth continues to shape business impact across the region.

As organisations race to transform in the era of AI, one question persists: how can companies stay agile and innovative while supporting the evolving aspirations of their people?

At Pitney Bowes, the answer lies in strategic alignment, talent mobility, and a future-focused learning culture. In this exclusive discussion, Renu Shekhawat, Director and Head of Human Resources, APAC at Pitney Bowes, shares how the organisation is building a future-ready workforce by combining learning-led growth with global mobility, inclusive leadership, and a modern, flexible workplace experience.

As GenAI continues to reshape the workplace, how does Pitney Bowes ensure that empathy, flexibility, and human connection remain at the heart of its workforce strategy?

Advancements in AI and GenAI are transforming how industries approach talent acquisition, workforce planning, and innovation. These technologies enable organisations to optimise recruitment, predict skill needs, and make smarter, data-driven decisions to stay ahead of the curve in an evolving market.

While we leverage AI to enhance decision-making and operational efficiency, we are committed to fostering empathy, adaptability, and collaboration qualities that remain uniquely human and irreplaceable. **We see AI not just as a technological tool but as an opportunity to amplify what makes us human.**

At Pitney Bowes, our talent strategy is meticulously crafted to uphold these values. We emphasise continuous learning, provide cross-functional exposure, and champion inclusive leadership to ensure our workforce is equipped to collaborate with technology rather than being supplanted by it. Our

organisational culture is built on the conviction that technology should liberate our capacity for creativity and human connection, thereby making the workplace more human-centric.

Beyond policies and programs, what does a truly human-centric culture look like at Pitney Bowes in everyday practice? Could you share some tangible examples?

In today's fast-evolving workplace, a truly human-centric culture is becoming a key differentiator for organisations. Beyond policies and programs, companies are realising that fostering environments where employees feel empowered, supported, and valued is critical to driving innovation, engagement, and long-term success. A human-centric culture isn't just about offering benefits—it's about embedding practices that **enable individuals to grow, take ownership, and collaborate meaningfully** every day.

This philosophy comes to life through our commitment to **continuous learning and empowerment**. We provide employees with the time and resources to develop new skills and align their personal growth with business strategies. Leaders play a crucial role in inspiring teams to take charge of their development, cultivating a mindset of adaptability and resilience. For example, cross-cultural training programs equip employees to work effectively in global teams, ensuring seamless collaboration across geographies.

Our culture is also built on **accountability and trust**. Employees are encouraged to take ownership of their work and contribute meaningfully to organisational goals. This is reinforced by leaders who foster transparency and encourage open dialogue. **Additionally, we leverage AI-driven insights to personalise employee experiences, ensuring that each**

individual feels recognised and appreciated. These insights help us tailor development opportunities and support mechanisms to meet the unique needs of our workforce. We focus on upskilling and reskilling initiatives to keep our workforce adaptable and prepared for future challenges.

These everyday practices ensure that our human-centric culture is not just a concept but a lived experience, one that empowers our people to thrive and drives meaningful impact for themselves and the organisation.

What is one unexpected insight you've gained through mentoring emerging talent through Young Talent Development Program and how has it influenced your leadership approach?

The Young Talent Development Program (YTDP) at Pitney Bowes has been instrumental in preparing early-career professionals for success across critical business functions like Engineering, IT, Product Management, Data Science, Sales, and others. By bridging the gap between academia and industry through initiatives such as **Campus Connects, short-term projects, and internships**, the program ensures a steady pipeline of future-ready leaders equipped with real-world experience and technical expertise.

One unexpected insight from mentoring emerging talent is their ability to challenge traditional processes with curiosity and a drive to innovate. Their fresh perspectives often uncover opportunities for improvement, prompting a shift in leadership styles toward a more inclusive and collaborative approach. Mentoring has become a two-way process where listening and co-creating solutions are as important as guidance, fostering growth for both mentees and mentors.

By focusing on purpose, rapid learning, and meaningful contributions, YTDP not only nurtures future leaders but also drives continuous evolution in leadership at Pitney Bowes. This dynamic approach ensures that our leadership remains agile, empathetic, and forward-thinking, ready to embrace the challenges and opportunities of the future.

leaders stay relevant and adaptable in a fast-changing environment.

Reverse mentoring has transformed how leaders engage with the workforce in our organisation. Senior leaders actively learn from younger employees, gaining insights into contemporary cultural shifts and

“

One instance that stands out is when a mentee suggested a novel approach to project management that significantly improved our team's efficiency. This experience reinforced my belief in the power of diverse perspectives and the need to create an environment where every voice is heard and valued, recognising that excellence can come from any corner of the organisation.

”

Reverse mentoring often challenges traditional corporate hierarchies. Since introducing it at Pitney Bowes, what cultural or behavioural shifts have you observed across the organisation?

In an era where workplace dynamics are rapidly evolving, organisations are increasingly turning to reverse mentoring to foster collaboration and bridge generational divides. This innovative approach allows younger professionals to mentor senior leaders, offering fresh perspectives on areas such as digital trends, shifting customer expectations, and modern work practices. By flipping the traditional mentorship model, reverse mentoring not only empowers early-career talent but also helps senior

technological advancements. This practice has broken down hierarchical barriers, fostering open communication, mutual respect, and a stronger culture of learning across all levels of the organisation.

This exchange of ideas has led to more innovative solutions and a stronger alignment with client needs, ensuring that our offerings remain relevant.

The impact has been profound—early-career employees feel valued and empowered to share their ideas, while leaders have become more attuned to emerging trends and better equipped to drive change. Reverse mentoring at Pitney Bowes has not only strengthened intergenerational trust but also contributed to creating a more agile, inclusive, and forward-thinking organisation

Internal mobility and global assignments are powerful growth accelerators. How do you navigate the balance between supporting individual career aspirations and maintaining business continuity?

We view these as essential opportunities for fostering innovation, developing leadership, and ensuring business continuity. Our Indian workforce plays a pivotal role in driving global operations by contributing to innovation, client-centric solutions, and operational efficiency. By aligning individual aspirations with organisational goals, we create pathways that empower employees while maintaining our competitive edge.

To support employee development and global readiness, we offer comprehensive programs such as **global mobility opportunities, leadership development initiatives, and global fluency training**. These efforts are complemented by structured career journeys that provide employees with diverse experiences, prepare them for global roles, and enable clear growth opportunities within the organisation.

Our culture of agility, accountability, and ownership ensures that internal mobility and global assignments are mutually beneficial. Employees are encouraged to take charge of their careers through job rotations, stretch goals, extended job roles, and mentorship, which develop their skills and prepare them for desired roles.

As AI increasingly augments client-facing and operational roles, how is Pitney Bowes equipping its workforce with the right capabilities, both technical and human, to thrive in this evolving landscape?

We recognise that while AI enhances efficiency and decision-making, it is the combination of advanced technical skills and essential human qualities like adaptability, collaboration, and empathy that will drive long-term success. To this end, we are investing in initiatives that future-proof our workforce and align their growth with our organisational goals.

Our Learning and Development (L&D) programs are at the forefront of this effort.

Through enhanced digital learning platforms, employees gain access to personalised training experiences tailored to their specific needs. Partnerships with leading educational institutions provide cutting-edge courses and certifications in high-demand areas such as data analytics, AI, and cybersecurity. In addition to technical upskilling, we emphasise soft skills development by offering modules on leadership, communication, and collaboration.

To complement these initiatives, we are also driving programs that enhance domain expertise and business acumen.

Together, these efforts enable Pitney Bowes to not only adapt to the rapidly changing technological landscape but also empower our people to drive innovation, foster meaningful connections, and achieve impactful results.

“

We launched the Executive Storytelling Program, a business communication and strategic storytelling initiative designed to help employees overcome communication challenges, enhance clarity, and strengthen professional presence. This program takes a dynamic, interactive approach to elevate their communication skills through role-playing exercises, group discussions, case studies, and real-life simulations. The sessions encourage self-reflection and peer feedback, fostering personal growth, and a collaborative learning environment.

”



WHY LEARNING NEEDS A BOLD RETHINK TODAY:

Insights from Dr Antarpreet Singh



GET TO KNOW

Dr Antarpreet Singh

Director (Academics), WILL Education,
Ex-Director of Digital Learning
at Indian School of Business

Dr. Antarpreet Singh is a prominent thought leader in AI-driven digital transformation and EdTech strategy, with expertise spanning AI-HRM, Strategic HRM, Digital Leadership, Industry 5.0, AI Ethics, and Product Management. Backed by over 40 years of global experience, he has held C-suite and Asia Pacific leadership roles across top MNCs including Lucent, AT&T, Alcatel-Lucent, Fujitsu, Tellabs, Reliance Jio, and Flipkart.

“We talk so much about digital skills, but honestly, that is only one-third of the story,” says Dr Antarpreet Singh, Director (Academics), WILL Education, Ex-Director of Digital Learning at Indian School of Business.”

That set the tone for what turned into a fascinating discussion on the evolving world of education and workforce transformation.

A veteran of over four decades with roots in learning, dating back to his days at **Reliance Industries Limited** as **Chief Learning Officer**, Dr Singh brings clarity and nuance to a topic that often gets reduced to buzzwords. In a world where digital disruption is the new constant, upskilling is no longer optional. And yet, both campuses and corporations are playing catch-up. Why?

As we sat down with Dr Singh to explore the future of executive education, mid-career talent, and the persistent gap in digital capabilities, what emerged was not just a critique but a call to action for reimagining learning from the ground up.

Beyond Digital: The Three Pillars of Future Skills

The pandemic didn't just disrupt, it rewired the way we work, learn, and lead. As Dr Singh points out, this forced digital transformation exposed a deeper truth: **digital skills alone aren't enough.**

Referencing the [World Economic Forum's](#) 'Skill First' framework, he explains that the future of work rests on three interconnected pillars:

1. **Digital and AI skills**
2. **Learning and innovation skills**
3. **Leadership and life skills**

“These aren't standalone ideas,” he notes. Learning fuels digital adoption. Innovation builds relevance. No matter how advanced AI gets, algorithms won't replace human leadership.

So why does the skilling gap persist?

“Because the pace of disruption is outstripping our capacity to adapt,” Antarpreet says. Institutions are still shackled to outdated pedagogy, legacy mindsets, and rigid curricula. What is needed is agility in learning ecosystems, where hybrid delivery, self-directed learning, and continuous faculty evolution become the norm, not the exception.

From Inside-Out to Outside-In: Rethinking Indian Education

Most Indian institutions, according to Singh, follow an **inside-out approach**, delivering what they have always taught instead of what the world now demands. “What we need is an **outside-in model**.

A curriculum that starts with what is changing outside the classroom: in business, government, and society.”

The change won't come overnight, but it must begin with an honest acknowledgement: **a large majority of campuses are still behind the curve.** Only a forward-looking, responsive system can ensure graduates are not just job-ready, but future-ready.

Corporate Learning: Still Missing the Mindset Shift

While corporates tend to be more structured in their skilling efforts, they too face three

chronic challenges:

1. **Resistance to change:**
Managers often hesitate to unlearn and relearn.
2. **In-the-box thinking:**
Leadership that's stuck in past models stifles progress.
3. **Complacency:**
A “chalta hai” attitude delays necessary transformation.

The Overlooked Middle: Mid-Career Professionals

In most skilling conversations, the spotlight stays fixed on freshers and senior executives. The mid-career workforce (those with 10-20 years of experience) is often left in the shadows.

And yet, this cohort is pivotal. They possess institutional memory, operational depth, and people management skills, but are at risk of stagnation without the digital fluency required for the future.

Here's Antarpreet's simple but powerful prescription:

1. **Make learning aspirational, not remedial.**
2. **Create bridge programmes** that blend experience with tech-forward training.
3. **Personalise learning** so it aligns with role-specific needs.

“

What's missing, Dr Singh says, is the mindset that treats learning as a strategic investment is no different from capital expenditure on new plants or technology. “We plan for five-year horizons in business-why don't we do the same for talent?”

”

“This group is the bridge between strategy and execution,” he warns. “Ignore them, and you create a hollow middle.”

Co-Creation with Tech Partners: Not a Nice-to-Have, But a Must-Have

With tech evolving faster than internal teams can keep up, co-creating executive programmes with external partners has become non-negotiable. But here’s the caveat: **“You can co-create, but you cannot outsource your thinking.”**

While delivery and design can be supported by partners, the intellectual ownership and alignment with business goals must remain internal. In other words, treat edtech and learning consultancies as part of your learning ecosystem, not as transactional vendors.

This, Antarpreet believes, also opens up enormous entrepreneurial potential. “Education is going to be one of the biggest business themes of the future,” he adds.

“Smart, meaningful partnerships will define who leads that future.”

So, how do we get executive education to move from reacting to future-proofing?

For Singh, the answer lies in rethinking learning investments the same way we think of infrastructure or R&D: long-term, strategic, and proactive. “If you wait for a crisis to act, it is already too late,” he says.

He also makes a timely and important point:

The Road Ahead: Agility, Accountability, and Anticipation:

In a world racing toward Industry 5.0, the shelf life of skills is shrinking. And whether you are a campus dean or a corporate leader, the challenge is no longer whether to reskill, but how fast you can adapt.

As Antarpreet Singh puts it, “The faster we transition, the narrower the gap. But in some ways, the gap will always be there. And that’s a good thing. It means innovation hasn’t stopped.”

“We must begin addressing digital diversity in the workforce. With multigenerational teams, today’s workplaces have digital immigrants and digital natives working side by side. Executive education needs to help bridge that divide, not widen it.”



REIMAGINING CAMPUS HIRING:

Building Future-Ready Talent Pipelines



GET TO KNOW

Sudha Vutukuru

Head - Talent Strategy &
Acquisition Leader - India, Asia, MEA
John Deere

Sudha Vutukuru is a strategic talent acquisition and transformation leader with 20+ years of experience across global and high-growth companies. She builds borderless talent strategies, tech-enabled recruitment ecosystems, and scalable workforce models. A trusted advisor and **Gartner Peer Ambassador**, she has led digital talent transformations across geographies, shaping agile, innovative, and inclusive talent engines.

Introduction: From Placements to Pipelines

Over the last decade, I've watched campus hiring evolve from a seasonal checkbox to a strategic lever. And yet, most companies still treat it as an "event" — not an ecosystem.

As we look ahead, early talent strategies must rise from the transactional to the transformative. Today's students are not just job-seekers — they are **career designers, problem-solvers, and digital natives** looking for purpose, meaning and momentum.

If organizations want to win the talent war, they must **move from hiring for roles to cultivating for readiness**.

The Shift: Forces Redefining Campus Recruitment

1. Tech-Led Discovery, Not Just Assessment

Campus hiring now begins long before Day Zero. AI-based platforms are helping organizations:

- Identify top talent through behavioural and skills data
- Use intelligent assessments that measure potential, not just academic
- Run immersive, bias-free evaluations at scale

The new TA toolkit includes AI-matching, digital storytelling, and gamified simulations — not spreadsheets and aptitude tests.

2. From Premier League to Inclusive

The future is **pedigree-neutral** and **potential-first**. Companies that limit hiring to select schools will miss the real magic.

- Talent today comes from various bases — be it tier 2/3 cities, women's colleges, rural
- I've seen powerhouse coders emerge from campuses no one visited five years ago

- Diversity starts at the intake level — and campus is where it should be intentional

If your funnel is narrow, your future will be too.

3. Academic Collaborations: Real Curriculum Meets Real Work

The smartest organizations will **not just focus hiring from colleges — they will build alongside**.

- Partnering to co-create future skills curriculum in AI, mobility, sustainability, and analytics
- Deploying faculty immersion programs and mentoring cells
- Setting up industry-ready labs and certification pipelines

It's no longer about placements — it's about **long-term workforce incubation**.

4. BAJA, TIFAN, Smart India Hackathons: New Age Campus Arenas

In my experience, platforms like **BAJA**, **TIFAN**, and **Smart India Hackathon** will be goldmines for spotting:

- Engineers who can **design, build, and pitch**
- Talent that blends innovation with grit
- Students who've applied knowledge under pressure

Companies investing in these programs don't just hire talent — they build brand equity among creators.

5. Always-On, Hybrid Engagement

We will evolve beyond the era of "drive dates." Campus hiring will become round the year omni channel.

- Virtual campus fairs + physical meetups
- On-demand mentorship + structured student communities
- Foster long-term engagement through interactive experiences on social and professional platforms.

More of Talent Nurture

Cloud — a model where your brand lives in their learning journey



6. Campus DEI: Equity Begins at Entry

In the future of talent, if you're not designing your campus strategy around diversity, equity, and voice — you're already playing behind the game

- Focused outreach to underrepresented groups
- Inclusive assessments and onboarding
- Intentional hiring from colleges serving PwD, LGBTQ+, and rural scholars

DEI is not a CSR initiative. It's your competitive advantage.

7. Workforce Strategy x Early Talent

Let's be honest — the days of hiring “just because” the semester is ending are over. The future will be **data-backed, demand-aligned, and dynamically forecasted.**

- Match hiring plans to long-term capability needs
- Use analytics to guide how many, where, and what to hire
- Cross-collaborate with business, L&D, and tech to design talent that scales

Campus should sit within your **strategic workforce planning**, not operate in a silo.

Rethinking the Talent Playbook- From Process to Purpose

1. **Lead with story, not roles.** Campus strategy isn't about filling jobs — it's about shaping how talent sees you, what they believe is possible, and why they belong in your story.
2. **Design with nuance, not templates and history.** Talent expectations vary by region, mindset, and moment. Relevance is the new scale- based on industry, sector and business.
3. **Shift from headcount to impact.** Success isn't just hires — it's capability, retention, and future readiness. That's the real return on your talent investment.

Reflections as a Talent Strategist

Clarity beats charisma - Our job is not to impress but it's to co-create — with humility, inclusivity and with strategic intent.

Conclusion: Campus is a Capability Engine

The future won't reward the fastest offer — it will reward the deepest commitment to potential.



Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are the author's personal opinions and do not reflect the views of any current or past employers.

CAREERS TAKE FLIGHT FROM DAY ONE AT YOTTA:

**Priyanka Amonkar,
Head -
Talent Excellence,
People Growth
& Development**



GET TO KNOW

Priyanka Amonkar

Head - Talent Excellence,
People Growth & Development
at Yotta

With over 16 years of HR leadership experience, Priyanka drives enterprise-wide talent transformation at Yotta Infrastructure Solutions, one of India's leading cloud and data centre providers. She leads high-impact initiatives that build future-ready capabilities, elevate workforce performance, and fuel business growth through people.

“We hire for potential, not just pedigree...”

In a job market that still leans heavily on big names and polished resumes, Yotta is betting on something different: raw potential. At India's homegrown digital infrastructure and AI cloud company, this isn't just a hiring philosophy; it shapes how early-career talent is discovered, mentored, and given room to grow.

In this special feature, Priyanka Amonkar, Head - Talent Excellence, People Growth & Development at Yotta, shares how the company is rethinking the early careers experience, starting from the ground up.

Real Work, Right from the Start

Onboarding at Yotta isn't about slowly easing new hires in. It is about throwing open the doors. With its Yotta Campus Connect initiative, the company has created a fast-paced environment where early talent is given actual responsibility from the get-go. Instead of trailing teams, they contribute directly to projects, whether it is shaping the backbone of India's AI cloud infrastructure or helping automate large-scale data centre operations.

“

Big Tech may attract with their brand, but we offer visibility, autonomy, and the chance to create something from the ground up.

”

Working with Academia, Not Just Recruiting From It

Yotta's approach to campus hiring goes well beyond job offers. It actively partners with academic institutions to bridge the gap between classroom learning and industry needs.

This includes co-developing AI and cloud-aligned curricula, running industry bootcamps, and offering mentorship through project-based engagements. For students, this means earlier exposure to real tech challenges and for Yotta, a steady pipeline of better-prepared candidates.

Not Just Jobs, but Growth Paths

At Yotta, career acceleration isn't limited to performance reviews years down the line. High-potential early hires are placed on structured growth paths, with rotational roles across product, infrastructure, and innovation teams.

Some go on to join the Build-to-Lead program, a leadership track that offers early ownership, cross-functional learning, and mentorship from senior leaders.

“We want them to learn to lead while still learning themselves,” Priyanka notes.

The Case for Building Over Branding

Yotta knows that in a world where Big Tech is aspirational, it must offer something more tangible: impact.

And for many of its early-career employees, that's exactly the draw. From innovation challenges to hands-on tech projects, early talent is given space to contribute, learn, and even stumble without getting lost in layers of hierarchy.

Priyanka offers a glimpse into the projects that Yotta offers for its young workforce. These include running AI challenges, tech talks, innovation sprints, and student

fellowships that help us tap into passionate young minds across the country, those who see themselves as future innovators, not just employees.

“At Yotta, early talent isn't seen as junior; it's seen as foundational.”

We are not just preparing them for jobs; we are preparing them to shape the future of AI, data, and digital infrastructure in India. By combining startup agility, industry partnerships, strong mentorship, and real-world problem-solving, Yotta is creating a blueprint for what early talent development can look like in the AI era.

“

Our retention strategy is simple. We focus on growth, meaning, and helping people feel part of something real.

”

A Culture That Encourages Learning, Not Just Performance

Structured onboarding at Yotta doesn't stop at logistics. It includes cohort-based learning, values workshops, and continuous feedback. The aim is to help new hires understand not just what they do, but why they are doing it. And that continues well beyond Day 1. With mentoring from senior leaders, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and constant access to learning platforms. From building India's digital backbone to shaping a new kind of talent pipeline, Yotta's approach is a reminder that careers don't have to start with a brand name—they can start with real work, honest mentorship, and the freedom to grow from Day 1.

And for Priyanka and her team, that's exactly the point.

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