

THE 1% PREMIUM TALENT



How **Talent Gurus** are Shaping **Premium Talent**

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From the
CBO'S DESK

Pawan Goyal
CBO, Naukri.com



Premium Hiring is Now a Matter of **Business Consequence, Not Hiring Volume**

Recent quarters have made one thing clear: organisations are directing premium hiring towards roles that directly influence growth, transformation, and operational performance, making deliberate choices about where talent creates real leverage. Much like capital deployed into high-yield assets, these roles are expected to deliver outsized impact relative to their footprint. Even as overall hiring volumes have fluctuated, investment in positions tied to strategic outcomes has continued. This reflects a clear shift: hiring is being evaluated less on activity or speed, and more on business consequence, placing premium talent decisions firmly within the discipline of capital allocation.

The data reflects this. Demand for high-value talent grew consistently—18% in Q1, 23% in Q2, 20% in Q3, and 22% in Q4—whilst lower salary bands stagnated or declined. The pattern held across sectors. Companies continued to invest in roles that directly affect business outcomes, even as they pulled back elsewhere. Premium hiring decoupled from the broader market, and the logic behind it changed.

The roles being filled were evaluated differently. The question shifted from

"how quickly can we close this?" to "what does this role actually deliver?" Speed mattered less than clarity on outcomes; the bar for what qualified as premium went up.

The organisations featured in this edition, including JP Morgan, Snowflake, Hexagon, Embassy Group and other large enterprises, operate in environments of significant scale and complexity. Across these contexts, senior talent is expected to go beyond functional expertise to demonstrate broader problem-solving ability, adaptability, and the capacity to connect technical judgement with business priorities. Retaining and developing such talent also requires structures that allow specialists to expand their roles into areas such as business strategy and cross-functional influence. In practice, leading organisations are building talent pipelines that combine domain depth with real-world problem solving, preparing teams to operate through ambiguity and make decisions with incomplete information. The result is a consistent threshold for premium talent: the ability to work across functions, influence outcomes beyond one's immediate scope, and contribute measurably to broader business goals.

We tested this through a survey of over 300 talent acquisition leaders and 2,000 jobseekers. The findings were instructive. Leaders and recruiters have shifted how they define premium talent, moving from pedigree-led assessments to prioritising in-demand skills and speed to impact. Jobseekers, for their part, point to process execution as a persistent challenge, with delayed callbacks and misaligned compensation emerging as more common barriers than skill gaps or role complexity. A significant proportion also report that interview-stage promises don't always align with on-the-job reality, particularly around role scope and growth pathways. The findings highlight where expectations are evolving and where execution still needs attention.

What we're seeing isn't cyclical. Premium hiring has become a discipline that holds regardless of volume. The organisations that will perform in the next phase are treating talent decisions with the same rigour they apply to capital allocation. They're not hiring more or faster. They're hiring with a direct line to business outcomes.

Some organisations have already made that shift. Others are still optimising for throughput.

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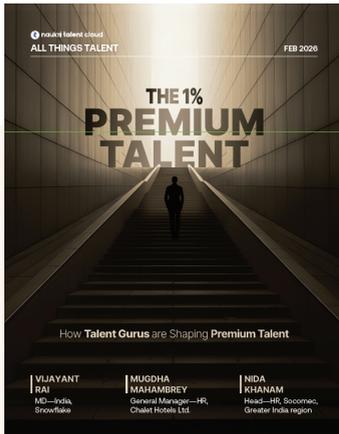
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This issue contains 40 pages including cover



COVER STORY

**Pedigree May Open Doors,
but Skill Decides Premium Value**
Insights from 300 Recruiters
and 2,000 Jobseekers



by

Niraj Seth

Executive Vice President, Naukri.com

COVER STORY

Across organisations in India, premium talent hiring is no longer confined to a handful of high-impact roles. It has become a regular, high-stakes hiring motion for many talent teams.

Yet, despite its **growing** importance, the term **premium talent** often lacks a clear definition and is shaped by varying interpretations by overlapping factors such as compensation, pedigree, skills, and talent scarcity. This survey sets out

to examine how these elements are being prioritised by speaking directly to those leading the hiring agenda.

Built to answer one core question for CHROs, TA Heads, and recruiters—*how is premium talent actually being defined today, and what does that mean for hiring outcomes?*

The survey draws on responses from 300 recruiters and TA leaders across industries including IT, BFSI, Healthcare, and other industries alongside insights from 2,000 jobseekers.

Together, the findings reveal how premium talent is being evaluated and what has gained or lost prominence in premium hiring over the last few years.



PART 1

The TALENT LEADERS' LENS

01

How Recruiters Define Premium Talent Today: Skills First, Pedigree Still Relevant

One of the strongest signals from the survey is a clear recalibration in how premium talent is defined. While premium institutes continue to matter, with 54% of recruiters associating premium talent with candidates from top-tier educational institutions, in-demand skills now carry greater influence. **60% of recruiters identify in-demand, modern skill sets**, particularly in areas such as AI, data, and emerging technologies, as central to premium talent, while compensation alone plays a far smaller role. When it comes to actual assessment, technical and modern skill depth dominates decision-making, emerging as the single most important validation signal. In effect, pedigree may open the door, but skill depth determines whether a candidate is truly considered premium.

What has changed: Pedigree may still open the door, but premium talent is now defined by depth of skill and demonstrated capability.



02

Premium Hiring is No Longer Episodic

Another important takeaway is the scale of premium hiring within organisations. The survey shows that premium talent hiring now accounts for a meaningful share of annual recruitment, with a majority of recruiters indicating that **over 20% of their yearly hiring** is for premium roles, and a significant segment hiring premium talent for more than half of their total requirements. This shift has transformed premium hiring into a continuous, operational priority rather than a sporadic strategic exercise, demanding sustained sourcing effort and faster alignment across stakeholders.

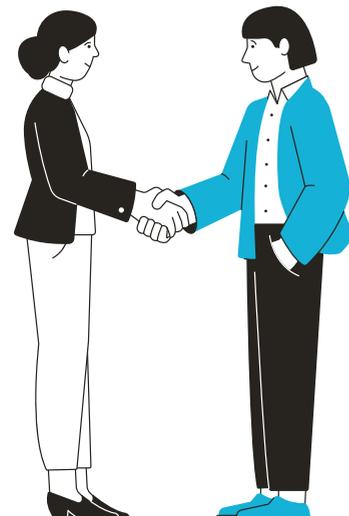
What has changed: Premium hiring has shifted from being occasional and strategic to being continuous and operational.

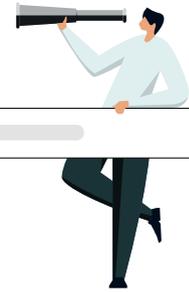
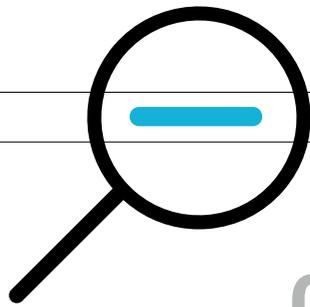
03

Sweet Spot The Experience: Where Premium Demand is Concentrated

Contrary to the assumption that premium talent equates to senior leadership, recruiters indicate that premium hiring is most active in mid-career experience bands. Talent with **4–7 years of experience**, followed closely by those with **8–12 years**, is seeing the highest demand, as these professionals combine speed to impact with adaptability and learning agility. *Premiumisation* is therefore occurring earlier in careers, particularly in skill-intensive roles.

What has changed: Premium talent is increasingly defined by speed to impact at mid-career stages rather than by seniority alone.





04

Time-to-Hire Has Slowed—and the Cost is Higher for Premium Roles

Recruiters overwhelmingly report that time-to-hire for premium talent has increased compared to the pre-Covid period. More than **86% of recruiters indicate some level of increase, with nearly 63% experiencing moderate to significant slowdowns** driven by deeper skill scrutiny, multi-stakeholder involvement, and elevated candidate expectations. In premium hiring, time becomes a critical variable. Candidates in strong demand often evaluate several options in parallel, and extended hiring cycles can dilute engagement and intent.

What has changed: Speed has moved from being a process metric to a decisive competitive advantage in premium hiring.

05

What Premium Candidates Value Beyond Pay: Growth, Exposure, Flexibility

Recruiters indicate that premium candidates are far more driven by career acceleration than by traditional markers of stability or brand. **67%** of recruiters cite fast-tracked career growth as the strongest non-salary draw, followed by **61%** who point to exposure to cutting-edge technologies and strategic projects. Work flexibility and autonomy also rank high at **53%**, reinforcing expectations of control over how work is structured. In contrast, leadership brand and company reputation matter to only **24%**, while job security and stability stand at **31%**, indicating their declining influence in premium decision-making.

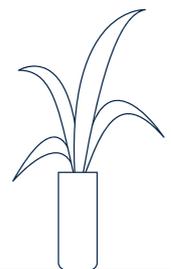
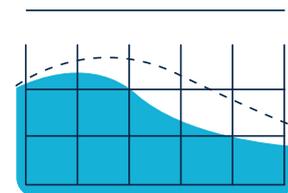
What has changed: Premium candidates are prioritising growth and relevance over organisational brand and job security.

06

The Most Fragile Stage of Premium Hiring: Final Closure

The survey identifies acceptance and final closure as the most fragile stage of the premium hiring funnel, with nearly **57% of recruiters citing this as the point of highest drop-off**. The dominant reason for late-stage fallout is *better competing offers*, far outweighing factors such as employer brand or role misalignment. This evaluates how premium candidates evaluate opportunities in parallel and respond strongly to timing, momentum, and decisiveness during final negotiations.

What has changed: Closure risk has intensified, making late-stage execution as critical as early-stage attraction.



PART 2

The **JOBSEEKERS' LENS****How Premium Talent Is Rewriting the Rules of Hiring**

For premium jobseekers, hiring has evolved from just being aspirational—it is evaluative and selective. Today's high-value talent is not chasing roles; it is actively screening employers for credibility, clarity, and long-term relevance, often benchmarking opportunities against multiple parallel options.

While compensation remains a critical marker of a premium opportunity (47.3%), it no longer operates in isolation. Nearly as many jobseekers (40.7%) define premium roles through autonomy and impact—the ability to influence outcomes, own decisions, and see tangible business results.

Despite sustained demand for high-impact roles, process failures dominate the premium hiring experience. Delayed callbacks (38.5%) and misaligned compensation (28.8%) outweigh skill gaps or role complexity as the most common barriers to securing premium employment. For a cohort that typically evaluates multiple opportunities simultaneously, slow or opaque hiring processes are not inconveniences—they are deal-breakers.

This friction feeds directly into a widening trust deficit. Over 86% of premium jobseekers report that interview-stage promises differ from on-the-job reality at least sometimes, with more than half stating this

mismatch occurs often or always. Role scope, growth pathways, decision-making authority, and access to meaningful work are frequently overstated or left ambiguous, forcing candidates to validate claims rather than rely on employer narratives.

Most in recent years is how premium talent defines career value. High-impact roles, exposure to advanced tools including AI, and cross-functional or cross-industry relevance now outweigh brand prestige or title progression.

What has changed: Premium professionals are increasingly optimizing for career durability and skill currency, not short-term status.

Looking ahead, jobseekers believe premium talent will be defined by capability under complexity—strategic AI fluency, multi-domain problem-solving, and the ability to operate effectively in ambiguous, fast-evolving, and distributed environments.

Premium Hiring, Reweighted**Gained**

1. Skill depth now outweighs experience breadth
2. Mid-career talent delivers the highest impact
3. Speed has become a hiring advantage

Lost

1. Pedigree key but not as a primary filter
2. Slow hiring repels strong candidates
3. Compensation alone is insufficient to close premium talent

Find the Missing Premium Skill

A quick mental espresso: A quick fill-in-the-blank twist on the rare traits you already champion in your top talent.

1 The Executive Edge

The top one percent talent can pivot rapidly without compromising their strategic _____.

Hint: *Staying true to the goal*

2 The Enterprise-Ready Trait

High-value talent can translate complex business problems into actionable _____.

Hint: *This skill distinguishes enterprise-impact players from individual contributors.*

3 The Cognitive Superpower

Top-tier professionals operate from first principles, not inherited _____.

Hint: *Questioning the obvious*

4 The Velocity Driver

Premium performers increase output by removing friction, not by increasing _____.

Hint: *Working smarter, not harder*

5 The Boardroom Differentiator

Those who influence at executive levels rely on narrative _____, not just data.

Hint: *The ability to craft strategic stories that move decisions.*

6 The Talent Market Rarity

Only a fraction of candidates can balance ambition with sustainable _____.

Hint: *Knowing when to push and when to pause.*

7 The Collaboration Gold Standard

Premium talent removes ego from discussions and replaces it with shared _____.

Hint: *Focusing on the team rather than oneself*

8 The Innovation Signature

Breakthrough thinkers protect 'mental white space' because they understand the cost of cognitive _____.

Hint: *The discipline that keeps distractions away*



Answers on the last page

Vijayant Rai on Snowflake's

Three-Year Plan to Turn India into a Global AI Talent Powerhouse

BY AKANKSHA THAPLIYAL



GET TO KNOW

Vijayant Rai

MD—India, Snowflake

Vijayant Rai is Managing Director at Snowflake India, where he leads growth strategy, customer engagement charter, and GTM priorities for the region. With 27+ years of experience across global technology companies, he has driven complex enterprise transformation programs, scaled businesses in high-growth markets, and built strong commercial momentum across industries. His leadership track record includes senior roles at Microsoft India, Salesforce, SAP, and CA Technologies.

INTERVIEW

In a bold move to solidify India's position as a global AI talent hub, Snowflake has unveiled an expansive strategy centered on empowering the next generation of data and AI professionals. Through a strengthened partnership with the **ICT Academy**, Snowflake is deploying its **Academia Program** to not only scale training but also instill the deep, industry-ready expertise required for high-impact roles.

The initiative is built on an ambitious three-year goal: to train over **250,000 students and 1,000 educators** across the country, creating a robust, AI-ready talent pipeline.

The Strategy: Building Depth at Scale

Snowflake's Managing Director for India, Vijayant Rai, articulated a plan focused on going beyond basic certifications to develop premium talent. At the core of this effort is the **Snowflake AI Data Cloud**, which will serve as the foundation for the curriculum.

"The program is designed to build deep, industry-ready expertise that prepares students for high-impact roles," Rai explained. "We are integrating courses on **cloud computing, data analytics, machine learning, and AI** directly into college programs, giving students cost-free access to the Snowflake platform and hands-on experience."

A crucial component is **faculty enablement**. Through a 'train-the-trainer' model, the program will certify over 250 educators annually on the **SnowPro Associate certification**, empowering faculty to deliver the curriculum effectively across the ICT Academy's extensive network of institutions in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities.

Bridging the Industry-Academia Divide

A major focus is ensuring that academic achievement translates directly into job readiness. Snowflake is actively bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application through several avenues:

- **Real-World Exposure:** Regular hackathons, seminars, and roundtables are connecting students with technology leaders and employers, offering exposure to real-world problem-solving.
- **Applied Projects:** Students gain access to advanced, real-world projects that mirror enterprise use cases, moving beyond textbook examples to hands-on skill development.
- **Flexible Learning:** Courses are offered in flexible formats—integrated into college curricula, embedded within existing subjects, or delivered as extracurricular modules—to maximize student participation and expertise building.

Investing in the Broader Ecosystem

Snowflake's commitment extends beyond academia. Rai highlighted investments in upskilling the broader professional workforce through collaborations with NASSCOM's FutureSkills Prime and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. This effort aims to enroll 100,000 students and professionals in free, on-demand Snowflake courses over the next two years.

For career transition, the company is leveraging its comprehensive ecosystem:

- **Snowflake University:** Offering instructor-led, on-demand, and self-paced courses for complex, enterprise-level projects.
- **Advanced Certification:** The **SnowPro Platform Associate Certification** ensures learners gain essential skills, including navigating the Snowflake UI, Notebooks, and even calling **Snowflake Cortex LLM functions**.
- **Flagship Events:** Nurturing developer talent through events like **Northstar, Snowflake World Tour, and the Data for Good Hackathons**.

The Vision: India as the Global AI Hub

Looking ahead, Snowflake envisions India fulfilling its potential as a global powerhouse for AI talent.

"India is already emerging as a global powerhouse for AI talent, with the second-largest developer community in the world," Rai noted. "Through our collaborations with ICT Academy and NASSCOM, Snowflake aims to accelerate this momentum by nurturing industry-ready talent and equipping learners with the skills needed to lead the next wave of global AI innovation from India."

The strategic partnership is a clear commitment to transforming India's vast talent pool into a source of premium, high-impact AI expertise, ultimately accelerating the nation's technological leadership on the world stage.

The Human Side of High-Impact Hiring

Lessons from Socomec's Nida Khanam

BY BISWAJIT BHATTACHARYA



GET TO KNOW

Nida Khanam

Head—HR, Socomec, Greater India region

Nida Khanam is the HR Head for Socomec's Greater India region, covering India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Bhutan, and Nepal. With nearly two decades of experience across automotive, manufacturing, and technology sectors, she has led HR transformation, organisational development, and change management initiatives. Before joining Socomec, she served as Chief People Officer at Omega Seiki Mobility and held leadership roles at GROHE, Lixil Water Technology, and Rockwell Automation. At Socomec, she oversees HR functions across commercial and plant operations, with a strong focus on talent development, employee engagement, and organisational effectiveness. A certified coach (ICF-ACC) and IIM Calcutta alumna, she has earned multiple accolades for her contributions to the HR field.

INTERVIEW

Premium talent rarely moves for titles alone — they seek culture, growth, and purpose. **Nida Khanam, HR Head for Socomec's Greater India region**, has spent two decades shaping HR strategies across industries and geographies. She focuses on engaging top talent through authentic experiences, leadership development, and meaningful career pathways. At Socomec, her approach blends global opportunities with local relevance, ensuring employees feel challenged, connected, and empowered to make an impact at the intersection of power, digitalisation, and innovation.

Premium candidates are rarely active jobseekers. What strategies do you use to engage and build relationships with high-potential leaders before a vacancy even arises?

Without a clear strategy, you are essentially throwing darts in the dark, and hiring becomes a game of chance. With skills shortages across industries and competition for quality professionals, this approach is simply unsustainable. A planned approach is required to find, attract, and hire the right people for your organisation. It is a deliberate and structured process designed to build a high-performing team.

There is a significant difference between reactive hiring and strategic talent acquisition. Understanding this distinction can help improve recruitment outcomes. Finding passive candidates is not always straightforward; it requires a different approach to the broader and more conventional hiring process.

Following are the key strategies for turning passive candidates into active:

Build and Leverage a Strong Employee & Employer Brand

An employee value proposition and a strong employer brand are among the most powerful tools when engaging passive candidates. People who are not actively looking for a job will still take note of a company's reputation, culture, and values. To attract passive jobseekers, ensure your brand is visible and showcases what makes your organisation unique.

Utilise Personalised Outreach

When approaching passive candidates, it is crucial to go beyond the standard template message. Personalisation is key. Review their experience, skills, and professional achievements, and reference these in your outreach. Tailoring your message demonstrates that you have taken the time to understand their background and explains why they are an ideal fit for your role.

Highlight Long-term Career Benefits

When engaging passive jobseekers, focus on long-term career growth rather than short-term gains.

Encourage Relationships Over Time

Passive jobseekers may not be ready to make a move immediately. Building relationships with them over time can be far more effective than pushing for an immediate commitment. Regular, thoughtful engagement, whether through emails, LinkedIn connections, or inviting them to company events, can help keep your organisation front of mind.

Offer Flexible Opportunities

Another effective way to convert passive candidates into active jobseekers is by offering flexibility. Whether through remote working options, hybrid roles, or flexible hours, these perks appeal to

many experienced professionals who value work-life balance.

Use Networking and Encourage Employee Referrals

Referrals are an excellent way to connect with passive candidates. Employees often know talented professionals in their networks who are not actively seeking new roles but may be open to the right opportunity. Encouraging your team to share job openings within their professional circles can lead to high-quality leads.

Provide Value Before Offering a Role

One of the most effective ways to engage passive jobseekers is by offering value before presenting a specific job offer.

Leverage Online Platforms and Social Media

In a recent survey by Gallup, **50% of employees** who had been recently recruited said they had been contacted by prospective employers through online professional networks such as LinkedIn. This shows how important leveraging professional and social media platforms can be in sourcing potential employees.

Have a Detailed and Clear Job Description

Job descriptions are often the first impression candidates have of your organisation and the specific role. When written well and optimised with relevant keywords, they not only attract the right candidates but also boost visibility on job boards and search engines.

Socomec's solutions power data centres, healthcare, and infrastructure — industries where reliability literally saves lives. Do you find that premium candidates are motivated by this

sense of impact, and how do you embed it into your talent pitch?

Socomec's solutions power data centres, hospitals, and infrastructure — sectors where reliability is not just important, it is lifesaving. I believe that power is life-critical. In environments such as ICUs, server farms, and transport networks, an uninterrupted energy supply can mean the difference between safety and catastrophe. This sense of purpose resonates deeply with premium candidates who seek meaningful work. In our talent pitch, I emphasise the real-world impact our teams create every day. Whether it is keeping a hospital running during a power outage or ensuring uptime for critical data infrastructure, our work keeps businesses operational and societies resilient. This clarity of mission is a powerful motivator for top-tier candidates.

Excellence in Demanding Environments

For me, excellence is achieved by delivering high-quality, trusted products that are engineered for the most demanding conditions. This commitment to reliability gives candidates the confidence that they are working with technology that genuinely makes a difference, not just in theory, but in practice.

Tangible Proof of Impact

To illustrate the scale of our impact, Socomec has supplied 50 GW of PV disconnect switches in India, protecting nearly 55% of the nation's installed solar capacity. This is a powerful example of how our solutions safeguard clean energy infrastructure across the country. Candidates are inspired by this kind of tangible proof of purpose.

Brand Value That Attracts Leaders

Socomec's strong brand reputation in

the market is a magnet for premium talent. Our name is synonymous with reliability, precision, and excellence. High-potential professionals want to be part of an organisation that stands for quality and trust. We make sure they see how their personal brand will grow alongside ours.

Purpose Beyond Profit: Sustainability Commitment

Equally important is our commitment to sustainability. Candidates today want to contribute to a future that is not only reliable but also responsible. Our EcoVadis Platinum rating has placed us in the top 1% globally, underlining our dedication to ethical, environmental, and social performance. This gives our work a purpose beyond profit and appeals to professionals who want to make a meaningful contribution.

“

Hiring premium talent across Greater India, spanning India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal, requires more than cultural awareness. It demands emotional and social sensitivity.

”

You oversee diverse markets across Greater India, from India to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal. How do cultural nuances shape the hiring of premium talent in these regions, and what

unique blind spots have you observed in the emerging markets of our neighbouring nations that organisations in India often overlook?

At Socomec, diversity and inclusion are a fundamental part of our DNA. We go beyond conventional categories such as gender to embrace a broader spectrum of perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds. This inclusive mindset enables us to thrive across varied markets.

Sensitivity to Cultural and Emotional Nuances

Hiring premium talent across Greater India, spanning India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal, requires more than cultural awareness. It demands emotional and social sensitivity. Each market has its own language, communication style, and professional etiquette. Even within India, regional differences in behaviour, language, and even food habits shape how candidates engage with employers. Recognising and respecting these nuances is essential to building trust with top-tier professionals.

Emerging Markets

While I would not call them blind spots, I have observed that organisations in India often underestimate the depth of local dynamics in neighbouring countries. For example, leadership expectations in Sri Lanka may be more consensus-driven, while in Bangladesh, relationship-building often precedes formal negotiations. These subtleties influence how premium talent perceives an employer's authenticity and alignment with local values.

Core Values as a Recruitment Compass

Our recruitment and talent management

INTERVIEW

practices are anchored in three core values:

1. **Openness**, which embraces a culture of inclusivity and dialogue
2. **Responsibility**, which ensures accountability in behaviour and decision-making
3. **Commitment**, which drives inclusion across all levels and functions

These values guide how we engage with candidates and build long-term relationships.

Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Our teams span nationalities, languages, and age groups — across technical, non-technical, sales, and leadership functions. Cross-cultural collaboration is not a challenge; it is our daily reality. We ensure that while our values remain consistent, our approach adapts to each market's unique cultural fabric. This balance allows premium talent to feel both anchored and empowered.

Localised Strategy for Regional Expansion

This approach has been instrumental in our expansion into Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. By tailoring our hiring practices to local dynamics, we have strengthened our regional footprint and built deeper connections with high-potential talent. It is not just about entering a market; it is about earning trust and creating space for talent to flourish.

As digitalisation and AI enter the power sector, the industry is no longer old-school engineering. How do you reshape perceptions so premium talent recognises Socomec as a place of cutting-edge innovation, not just traditional infrastructure?

We continuously invest in our internal systems and resources to empower our teams. Through upskilling programmes focused on AI and digital tools, our employees are equipped to succeed in a fast-changing environment. We also deploy advanced digital productivity platforms to help our teams work smarter and more efficiently.

Innovation in Action: Delphys XL UPS

A prime example of our innovation is the Delphys XL UPS, engineered in India, which achieves an impressive ~99.1% efficiency in Smart Conversion Mode. This breakthrough earned Socomec the **Frost & Sullivan Global Customer Value Leadership Award**, reinforcing our position as a leader in cutting-edge power solutions.

Empowering Tech-Savvy Teams

We prepare our employees to engage confidently with today's digitally aware customers. Our teams benefit from Co-pilot modules and regular training, and our communications are Co-pilot-enabled, ensuring a seamless and modern experience.

Attracting Premium Talent

This forward-thinking approach not only enhances our competitiveness but also positions Socomec as an employer of choice for top-tier talent. We offer a unique opportunity to build a career at the intersection of power, digitalisation, and innovation.

Many organisations brand themselves broadly, but premium hires want evidence of a strong leadership culture and clear growth pathways. How is HR showcasing Socomec's leadership culture in ways that resonate with senior candidates?

At Socomec, we understand that senior candidates seek more than just a recognisable brand. They look for evidence of a strong leadership culture and clear career growth pathways. Our approach goes beyond traditional training programmes; we believe in cultivating leaders who act as brand ambassadors of change and development.

Socomec's leadership culture is a rich amalgamation of global diversity and local relevance. As a global leader, we ensure that our leadership programmes are not simply delivered but co-created and evolved based on feedback and real experiences from our people, particularly across APAC and local markets.

We actively invest in structured leadership development programmes aimed at nurturing talent from within. These initiatives are designed to build strong, adaptable leaders who can thrive across functions and geographies.

Internal mobility is a cornerstone of our talent strategy. We encourage employees to explore cross-functional and cross-regional roles, helping them build diverse experiences and long-term careers. Our average tenure of over 10 years reflects the strength of our culture and the multigenerational, multicultural workforce that comes together as **ONE SOCOME C**.

Globally, Socomec invests 8% of its turnover into R&D, creating opportunities for employees to lead high-impact, innovative projects. This commitment to innovation allows our leaders to remain at the forefront of the industry and contribute meaningfully to our transformation.

We enable a culture of open communication and transparency, which builds trust and genuine engagement around all leadership initiatives. This approach ensures our leadership values are reflected in our daily actions, not just stated as intentions. At Socomec, leadership is part of our DNA. Our consistent focus on development, innovation, and inclusion makes us a compelling choice for premium talent seeking to grow at the intersection of power, digitalisation, and leadership excellence.

When premium hires join a specialised sector like Socomec's, they may feel their career pathways are narrower than in mainstream industries. How do you craft development journeys that retain top talent while showcasing global mobility?

As the Head of Human Resources, I understand that premium hires entering Socomec may initially feel that their career pathways are more limited compared to mainstream industries. We actively address this concern by ensuring that top talent receives high visibility and recognition from day one, reinforcing the strategic importance of their role.

At Socomec, we design customised learning paths for each employee. These journeys combine local responsibilities with global initiatives, allowing individuals to build deep expertise while gaining international exposure. For example, talent from Greater India has successfully contributed to cross-country projects, demonstrating the strong mobility and visibility available to high-potential employees.

We invest significantly in leadership and development interventions that support continuous learning and career advancement. These programmes are designed to help employees evolve into future leaders, with a focus on real-world impact, strategic thinking, and global readiness.

Socomec prioritises internal talent mobility. We encourage employees to explore new roles across functions and geographies, enabling them to expand their capabilities and build long-term careers. Our preference for promoting from within, rather than relying solely on external hiring, reflects our commitment to nurturing and retaining top talent.

Our regular development programmes bring together top talent from across regions, fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, and cross-cultural understanding. These interactions strengthen our global network and encourage career mobility and leadership readiness.

With a strong focus on global mobility, personalised growth, and internal promotion, Socomec offers premium hires a compelling career journey. We ensure that every employee feels empowered to grow, lead, and make a meaningful impact not only within their market but across the global organisation.

From your coaching lens, premium candidates often ask, "What will this role give me emotionally, beyond money and title?" How can HR leaders decode and address this emotional ROI without overpromising?

At Socomec, we understand that people join organisations for roles and careers, but they stay for the experience, connection, and purpose they find within.

We nurture a culture rooted in openness, responsibility, and commitment that are actively demonstrated in our everyday actions and decisions. Our work environment is designed to be supportive and inclusive, where employees feel heard, valued, and safe to express themselves.

Our **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** is a key part of our emotional support system. It offers resources for mental and emotional well-being, not just for employees, but for their families as well. This reflects our belief in caring for the whole person, not just the professional. We actively listen to our employees through structured feedback mechanisms, including New Hire, Stay, Onboarding, Exit, and Alumni surveys. These insights help us shape our culture and ensure that our people feel connected and empowered throughout their journey.

Socomec is consistently rated as one of the Top Employers globally, and we are continuously evolving to be a Great Place to Work. This recognition is built on the real experiences and voices of our employees, not just branding.

Our Employee Value Proposition (EVP) is grounded in success stories of hiring, retaining, developing, and engaging talent. We do not overpromise; we deliver through authentic experiences, transparent communication, and a culture that values growth and emotional connection.

Leadership Movement

Tracking the shifts shaping tomorrow's leaders

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Historic Appointment: **Shailesh Jejurikar** to Lead Procter & Gamble as CEO

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PB Balaji Named CEO of Jaguar Land Rover, First Indian to Hold the Role

“



Meghana Rao Appointed Chief Human Resources Officer at Tata AIG

“



Vishal Salvi Appointed Senior Vice President and Global Cybersecurity Practice Head at Cognizant

Targets, Tech, and Transformation

EPAM's Kalyan Vadrevu on the Evolving Craft of Recruiting

BY AKANKSHA THAPLIYAL



GET TO KNOW

Kalyan Vadrevu

Senior Director of Talent Acquisition,
EPAM Systems India Pvt. Ltd.

Kalyan Vadrevu is a seasoned TA leader with 25+ years of HR experience in hi-tech, IT services, and financial corporations. He is renowned for establishing GCCs from scratch at firms like UBS and Wells Fargo and elevating talent strategies at companies including Franklin Templeton and IBM. He currently serves as the Senior Director and Head of Talent Acquisition at EPAM Systems and leads a 100-member team.

The world of talent acquisition is currently undergoing a radical overhaul. Amidst aggressive hiring targets and constant disruption of new technology, recruiters are fighting to define their craft in a landscape driven by speed and algorithms. To understand this change, we sat down with **Kalyan Vadrevu, Senior Director of Talent Acquisition at EPAM Systems India Pvt. Ltd. (EPAM)**. As a veteran who has witnessed the journey from landline-based sourcing to AI-powered screening, Kalyan provides an essential perspective on how to balance the demands of modern business with the irreplaceable art of human connection. The core challenge today, he explains, is not just finding talent but mastering the complexity that begins once the best CVs have already been served up by a machine.

Kalyan, thank you for joining us. We want to centre our conversation around recruiters' reality, strategies, and the sourcing struggle. To start, what does it truly mean to be a recruiter today, especially with the silent shifts shaping the craft in 2025?

Recruitment as a function is going through a tremendous transformation right now. Over the last 8 to 12 months, AI has emerged and is driving a significant shift toward algorithmic decision-making. This is happening alongside decentralised recruiting, where many recruiters are now hiring from home.

This has created numerous efficiencies. For example, we can skim through thousands of CVs in no time, which used to take a long time, especially in India. The transactional part of recruiting is reducing. The crux of the role is shifting

to how effective or efficient you are as a recruiter after the tool has delivered the best-fit CVs.

This shift brings us to a challenge many face: feeling caught between targets and this rapid transformation. If you could give a single message or insight to these recruiters, what would it be?

Recruiters' lives are always based on targets because the demand-supply gap in talent exists forever. The core question is, how do you marry these targets with the ever-changing landscape?.

"The smart recruiters will quickly evolve. When new tools arrive, you have to build your work around those tools and quickly adapt." Targets won't disappear; the important thing is how you navigate this new environment while still achieving them. Targets and transformation will go hand-in-hand.

Let's focus on EPAM. You mention a consistent search for great talent, inheriting a culture of 'hiring the best talent' from the parent company. What defines the 'best talent' for EPAM?

At EPAM, we see ourselves as a home for the modern engineer: a place where strong fundamentals meet the future of technology. Our focus has always been on nurturing good engineers: individuals grounded in computer science principles, equipped with a solid math background, and fluent in the core technologies that shape the digital world, from operating systems to databases.

We believe that true engineering

excellence begins with strong basics. When a programmer deeply understands data structures, algorithms, databases, and design patterns, transitioning them into the world of AI programming becomes seamless. The foundation is already there; what follows is transformation. At EPAM, that transformation is enabled through structured learning and incubation labs—environments designed to help engineers build on their fundamentals and master emerging technologies with confidence and speed.

Regarding sourcing the 'best talent,' particularly for niche and emerging tech roles, what sourcing strategies are working for EPAM in India?

We look at sourcing in two large pieces, **Inbound Sourcing and Outbound Sourcing**.

Inbound Sourcing is where we post jobs on various platforms and candidates apply. Here, technology helps immensely, screening and shortlisting CVs from a 'big bucket'—it's almost like searching a needle in a haystack.

Outbound Sourcing is where we actively search the market, headhunt candidates, and pursue them. This is where the age-old recruiting skill comes in, requiring skills of persuasion, storytelling, and convincing the candidate why they should apply.

Currently, we are equally divided, with 50% of our profiles coming from inbound and 50% from outbound. Additionally, for niche and non-commoditised skills we are very active on social media groups like GitHub and Stack Overflow, where our recruiters contribute articles and entice tech folks to apply.

With all this data-driven, platform-driven hiring, what part of the recruiter's craft is slowly disappearing, and what do we risk losing?

What we are witnessing is an erosion in what we call intuitive pattern recognition. That's the art of talking to a candidate, reading between the lines, and developing that gut feel as a recruiter.

The risk is losing that intuitive grasp of the unwritten rules and cultural nuances. This skill is going away because the rush has been to simply 'get the talent.' Ultimately, the system can only take you so far; the final decision is made by a human being and requires human judgement.

We also risk losing good candidates because we, in India, are still learning the art of making good resumes. The art of determining a good CV from an incomplete one by looking at ten different things—from core technology to project work to learning new skills is a crucial, yet undervalued, human skill.

Let's move to the premium talent market. In an era of bite-sized content, how challenging is it for an organisation to attract, engage, and retain passive, premium talent?

With more Global Capability Centres (GCCs) coming to India, the brand image has been normalised. Candidates are asking a very relevant question: 'What is in it for me, finally, from a career standpoint?' If you offer the same work, it won't entice them.

To address this, we run a Candidate Engagement Program. Almost every weekend, we meet candidates, often

with the entire India leadership. We address two key questions:

- ▶ **What do you get if you join us?**
- ▶ **How relevant will your skills be five years down the line?**

For niche outliers, you need a compelling story to sell. You need to prove you are actively developing and going to use their skill, ensuring job satisfaction and a win-win solution. This requires an effort from the entire company—recruitment, hiring managers, and the team to put the Employee Value Proposition across

Kalyan concluded that while the anxiety around AI's role in the function is understandable, it must be embraced. He stressed that what can be automated will be, but the core focus

must shift to how effectively recruiters use the tools to enhance their personal productivity. He emphasised that the meaningful human touchpoint should always remain. Transparency with candidates, informing them they are being interviewed by a tool, for example, is essential. Ultimately, Kalyan believes that the core job of a recruiter—making the final decision, presenting the choice to management, and maintaining that vital human relationship—will always be the key, ensuring the recruiter remains the best point of contact for a person even after they join the company. The future of premium hiring is not about replacing the recruiter but equipping them with better tools to master the complexities of human judgement and connection.

Looking ahead, what does a recruiter's reality look like two or three years from now, especially for those hiring premium talent? What are the top three non-negotiables?

The recruiter's future will centre on three key areas:

01 Continuous Self-Transformation

Recruiters must keep a very close watch on the market and what's happening outside. Technologies are changing fast, and skills could get outdated if AI truly evolves. They must personally upgrade themselves.

02 Marrying Art and Rigour

They must effectively embrace and use new AI tools. The big ask is marrying the rigor of modern assessment methods with the art of human-connect recruiting. Use AI as an efficient tool to enhance productivity, but the core job of making the final decision will remain.

03 Mastering the Value Proposition

Candidates will always ask why they should join. Recruiters must have the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) "like the back of their hand" and be able to present it effectively.

Leadership Movement

Tracking the shifts shaping tomorrow's leaders

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Cipla Announces Leadership Transition – **Umang Vohra** to Step Down, **Achin Gupta** to Take Over

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Varun Berry Steps Down as Britannia CEO After a Decade of Transformative Leadership

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Reliance's **Ira Bindra** Breaks New Ground as First Indian Woman Leader in Prestigious Global CHRO Rankings

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Manju Kohli Appointed as Chief Human Resources Officer at Relaxo Footwears

SPECIAL FEATURE

When Engineers Outgrow Engineering Keeping Innovators Engaged and Growing

BY BISWAJIT BHATTACHARYA

FEATURING



**Yadhu Kishore
Nandikolla**

Human Resource Senior Director,
Evernorth Health Services India



**Prashanth
Nanjundappa**

VP of Product Development,
Progress Software



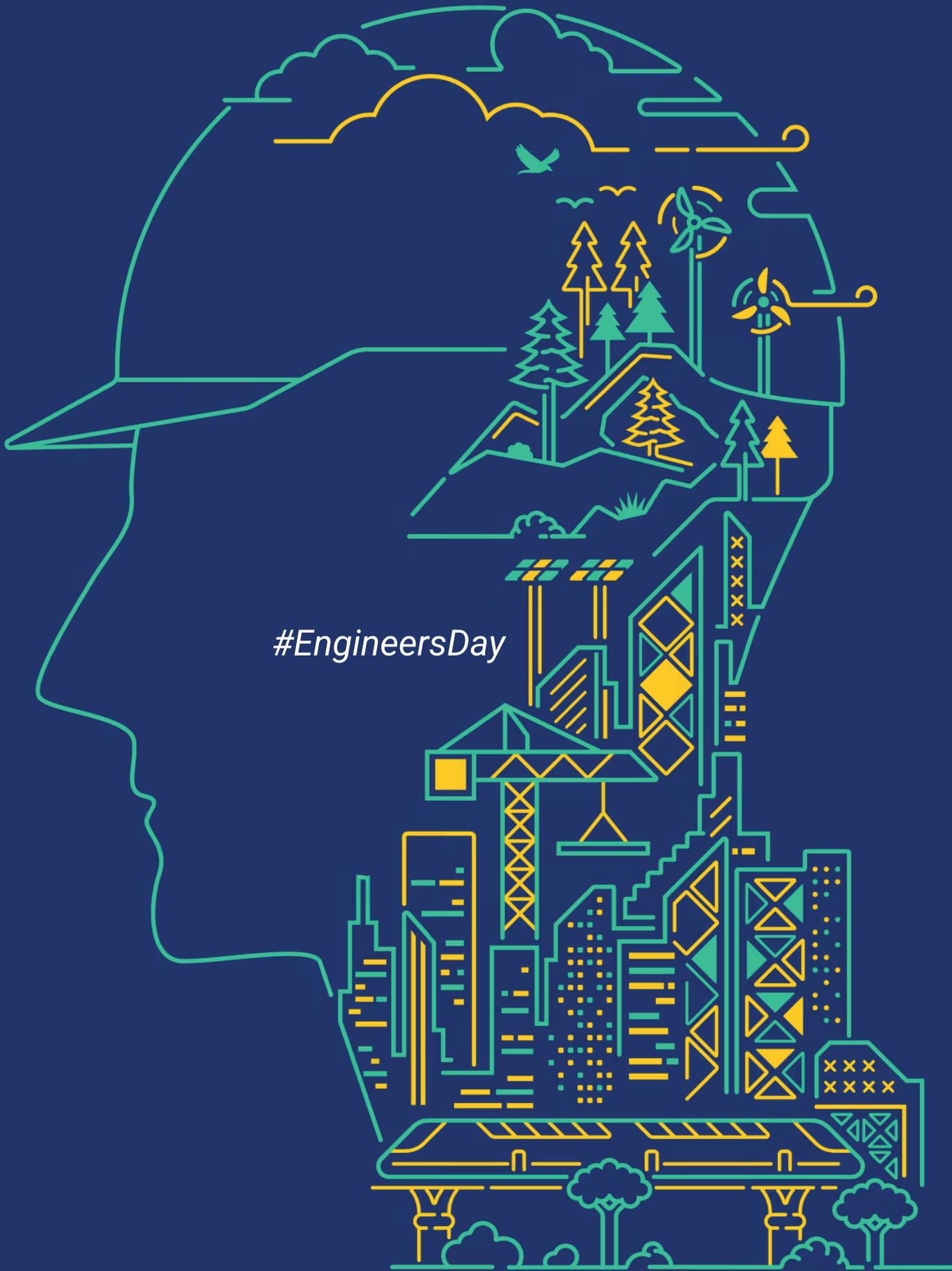
**Sandeep
Gupta**

Executive Director, JP Morgan,
GARP FRM certified professional



**Navaneet
Mishra**

SVP and Head, Hexagon
R&D India



#EngineersDay

Some engineers build bridges, some build algorithms, and a few quietly begin building futures—both theirs and the organisations they work for. They start with code, systems, and processes. Then one day, they look up and realise the role they signed up for no longer fits their ambitions.

This **Engineers' Day**, we are not just celebrating those who execute technical brilliance. We are celebrating those who outgrow engineering itself; the curious minds who move into product strategy, design thinking, and even entrepreneurship. The question organisations face is simple yet critical: how do you retain these engineers within the ecosystem, rather than losing them to external opportunities?

To explore this, we spoke with four leaders who encounter this evolution every day: **Navaneet Mishra, SVP and Head, Hexagon R&D India; Prashanth Nanjundappa, VP of Product Development, Progress Software; Sandeep Gupta, Executive Director, JP Morgan, GARP FRM certified professional; and Yadhu Kishore Nandikolla, Human Resource Senior Director, Evernorth Health Services India.**

Their insights reveal not only how organisations can engage engineers who transition beyond technical roles but also why redefining premium talent is essential.

Retaining Engineers Who Transition Beyond the Technical

Engineers, by training, are skilled problem solvers. Over time, many yearn to apply their skills to areas like strategy, design, and entrepreneurship. If organisations fail to offer these

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True retention happens when leaders actively sponsor engineers' growth ambitions, pairing them with mentors who understand both technical and business landscapes.

**Yadhu Kishore
Nandikolla**

opportunities internally, attrition becomes inevitable.

Navaneet puts it simply: “Retaining talent isn't just about keeping people; it is about helping them grow holistically and take on new challenges. Organisations will, in fact, grow faster when engineers expand into strategy, design, and new domains. By identifying those who show curiosity and cross-learning potential, and giving them exposure through new challenges, we help them evolve while retaining them. When they are empowered to learn, adapt, and lead, the whole organisation moves faster and stronger.”

Prashanth builds on this by highlighting real-world models. He points to Microsoft's large-scale private hackathons and Intuit's design-thinking framework, D4D, which create strategic pathways for engineers. “When organisations integrate design thinking into leadership and create

innovation platforms, they allow engineers to see futures for themselves beyond coding or development,” he explains.

Sandeep adds a financial services perspective: “Engineers are trained to solve problems with precision, data, and creativity. As they progress, many aspire to apply these skills beyond traditional tracks. Structured pathways, like rotations and exposure to business strategy, allow them to do so without leaving the ecosystem.”

For Yadhu Kishore, retention starts with culture. “True retention happens when leaders actively sponsor engineers' growth ambitions, pairing them with mentors who understand both technical and business landscapes,” he says. The message is clear: retention is not about blocking exits, but about **opening new doors inside the same house.**

“
Career progression should be recognised by an employee's impact and scope, not only their management responsibilities.

**Prashanth
Nanjundappa**

Creating Cultural and Structural Change

If retention is the “why,” cultural and structural shifts are the “how.” Engineers will not stay engaged if companies box them into a single linear track.

Prashanth stresses dual career ladders, where progression is based on impact, not just people management. “Career progression should be recognised by an employee’s impact and scope, not only their management responsibilities,” he argues. He also advocates for internal opportunity marketplaces that make it easier for employees to explore roles inside rather than outside.

Sandeep agrees, adding: “Culturally, organisations need to move beyond seeing engineers only as builders. Structurally, they must enable flexible pathways, whether in innovation labs, governance, or client strategy roles, that reward the application of technical thinking in non-technical domains.”

For Yadhu Kishore, culture is inseparable from psychological safety by noting, “Organisations must shift from linear career models to dynamic ecosystems. It requires hybrid roles, intrapreneurship programmes, and above all, the psychological safety where unconventional ideas are welcomed and diverse voices are amplified.”

Navaneet emphasises the importance of role-defining mentorship. “Organisations that highlight role models blending technical depth with broader skills inspire others to follow suit, building stronger teams and accelerating growth. Our goal isn’t just to execute tasks; it’s to add value, become decision-makers, and take ownership of priorities,” he says.

Programmes and Initiatives that Work

How do these shifts translate into practice? From hackathons to intrapreneurship funnels, leaders point to initiatives that meaningfully engage engineers.

Prashanth points to innovation days, intrapreneurship funnels, and test labs as vital. “When you fund stages of development rather than just ideas, and measure outcomes like time to first learning or pilot graduation rates, you give engineers a structured way to innovate,” he explains.

Yadhu Kishore lists hackathons, codethons, proof-of-concepts, and incubators as key levers. “A lot of organisations now have test labs that promote business ideation. Engineers even get opportunities to pitch solutions like entrepreneurs, connecting technology directly to business problems,” he says.



The real differentiator is providing platforms where engineers can apply structured problem-solving in broader contexts – digital transformation, risk management, or even new product.

**Sandeep
Gupta**



Sandeep cautions against treating such initiatives as one-off events. “The real differentiator is providing platforms where engineers can apply structured problem-solving in broader contexts – digital transformation, risk management, or even new product lines,” he notes.

Redefining Premium Talent

Perhaps the most provocative question is this: do we need to **redefine premium talent** to include engineers who move into strategy, leadership, or non-technical roles? All four leaders agree the answer is yes.

Sandeep is unequivocal: “Premium talent should not be limited to those excelling in technical innovation. Engineers who transition into strategy or risk-based roles bring a rare combination of quantitative acumen and cross-domain perspective.”

Yadhu Kishore calls it a necessity: “The definition of premium talent must expand. Today’s most valuable engineers are those who do not just build solutions but envision them, lead cross-functional teams, and drive strategic outcomes.”

Navaneet adds, “Talent should be called ‘premium’ only if a person is strong technically and equally shows soft skills, too. Organisations should value both skills and offer exposure to help people grow.” He envisions that this should be a practice not just during hiring, but also for promotions.

Prashanth concludes on a business note by saying, “Companies that truly reward ‘outcome makers’ and create opportunities for engineers to evolve can turn what looks like attrition risk into a powerful long-term advantage.”

The Road Ahead

Engineers' Day is a reminder of India's rich tradition of technical ingenuity that commemorates the life and times of the legendary Sir M. Visvesvaraya. But as the leaders remind us, today's premium engineers are not only coders or builders. They are strategists, intrapreneurs, innovators, and future leaders.

In the age of the **Premium Talent Imperative**, the organisations that thrive will be those that celebrate this evolution, create structures to support it, and boldly redefine what talent means,

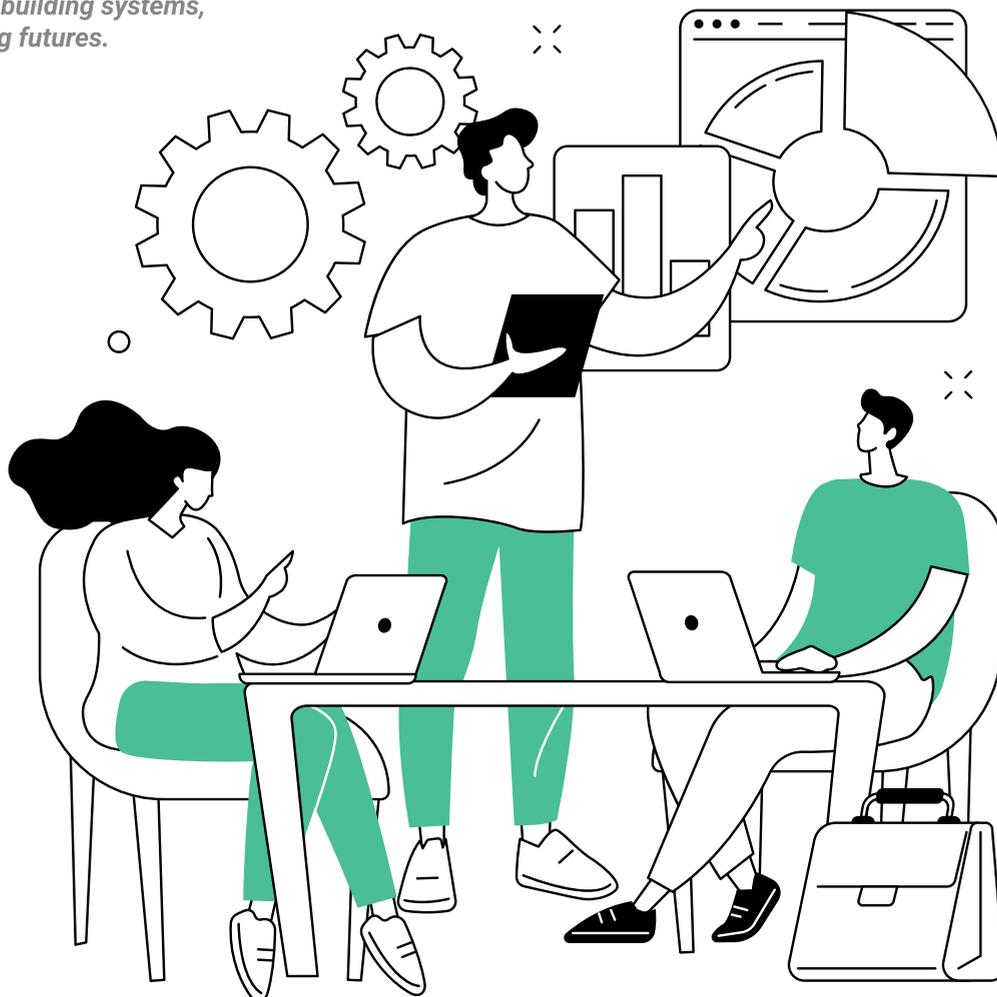
Because
the future of engineering is not only about building systems, but about building futures.

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Talent should be called 'premium' only if a person is strong technically and equally shows soft skills, too. Organisations should value both skills and offer exposure to help people grow.

Navaneet Mishra

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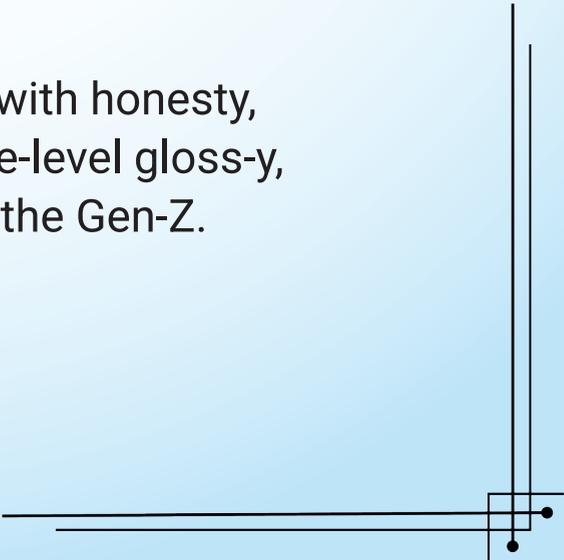
Up Next on
All Things Talent...

EVP in a Gen Z World

Z.E.N. Mode

The Gen **Z** Employer Value
Proposition **N**arrative

EVP with energy, branding with honesty,
Stories with soul, not surface-level gloss-y,
All that really lands with the Gen-Z.



The Premium Talent Forecast 2030

How Organisations Will Choose Their Best



GET TO KNOW

Suman Kumar Ghosh

CHRO, Bajaj Electricals

Suman Kumar Ghosh is the Chief Human Resources Officer at Bajaj Electricals Limited, India's leading consumer appliances, lighting, and engineering projects company. In his role, Suman leads the HR function of the multi-geography, multi-plant, diverse organisation. He drives transformation and contributes to business by building sustainable people processes and systems.

As we draw nearer to 2030, the landscape of what constitutes 'premium talent' is undergoing a remarkable transformation. The forces shaping this evolution are multifaceted: technological innovation is accelerating, business models are being reimaged, and global socio-economic realities are in constant flux. In this dynamic environment, premium talent will be defined not solely by mastery of technical skills but by a blend of adaptability, emotional intelligence, cross-disciplinary thinking, and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Organisations will increasingly value professionals who can seamlessly bridge the two worlds of human insight and digital transformation. Amid the rise of automation and artificial intelligence, those who will leverage technology while maintaining a deep understanding of human needs will stand out. Premium talent, therefore, is set to become synonymous with versatility, i.e., the ability to learn quickly, solve complex problems, and collaborate across cultures and disciplines.

The pursuit of premium talent by 2030 will be more intense than ever. Companies will compete on new fronts, offering not only attractive compensation but also enhanced flexibility, comprehensive wellness benefits, and the chance to engage in purpose-driven work. The modern workforce is seeking more than a paycheck; it is in search of meaning, autonomy, and opportunities for personal and professional growth.

In response, organisations must adjust their value propositions. Flexible work arrangements, such as remote and hybrid models, will become the norm, enabling access to a global pool of talent. Wellness programs addressing mental and physical health will be

crucial differentiators. Moreover, companies will invest in cultivating cultures that foster belonging, innovation, and inclusivity, creating environments where premium talent can thrive and aspirations can be realised.

Our approach at Bajaj Electricals is deliberately in that direction. We invest in curated leadership programs for employees at different management levels, focusing on developing their emotional intelligence, developing managers as 'coaches,' and putting them into real-time assignments. These programs are designed to produce people who do more than design change; they deliver it. We have tied promotion pathways and compensation to demonstrated outcomes, ensuring incentives align with execution.

What are we doing today to prepare for 2030?

- **Democratise digital learning:** Embed bite-sized, role-specific digital curriculum across the enterprise.
- **Build AI literacy and governance:** Create cross-functional AI councils that combine technologists, ethicists and business owners.
- **Reward convertibility:** Measure and reward the ability to move from prototype to scale—speed and reproducibility matter.
- **Invest in hybrid leaders:** Hire and grow people with both domain depth and system thinking; make rotational pathways mandatory for high-potential talent.



Premium (talent) in 2030 will be less about a certificate and more about contribution—those who can read the signal in the noise, ask the hard questions of new technologies, and lead teams to deliver outcomes at pace.



For organisations like ours, the mandate is clear. We want to shape systems that teach, test, and reward these capabilities. Talent strategy is no longer a support function; it is a strategic lever that will determine who wins in the decade ahead.

At Bajaj Electricals, our transformation is a work in progress. Still, our North Star is constant: to develop professionals who are simultaneously human, curious, and digitally fluent because this is what 'premium' will mean in 2030.



The Great Tech Talent Compression

Why Top Tech Talent is Becoming Harder to Find, Attract, and Retain



GET TO KNOW

Regina Thomas

Head—Talent Acquisition, India , Encora

Regina Thomas is a forward-thinking HR and talent leader with a proven record of shaping high-impact hiring strategies across global technology organisations like **Encora, HCLTech, Accenture and Amazon**. With deep expertise in digital transformation, people analytics, and strategic workforce design, she brings a sharp, future-ready lens to how companies attract and retain talent. Her leadership reflects a commitment to reimagining the recruiter's role in an AI-driven, skills-first world.

"The market isn't short of resumé's, it is short of relevance."

The Mirage of Abundance

If there's one phrase that defines today's talent landscape, it's the mirage of abundance.

We are surrounded by headlines of tech layoffs and restructuring across some of the industry's biggest names. The job market appears to be flooded with resumé's.

Yet on the other hand, there is an unmistakable scarcity. Finding truly premium tech talent is harder than ever. So, what's going on? How can the same market be both overflowing and starving for talent at the same time?

This is what I call **'The Great Tech Talent Compression.'**

The Rise of the Adaptive Engineer

The new premium talent is adaptive. A stack or a framework does not define

them, but how quickly they can learn, unlearn, and re-learn. They are curious by nature, agile by habit, and anchored by purpose.

At Encora, this belief shapes how we hire, grow, and empower our people. Our AI-native engineering DNA and Composable AI frameworks give our teams access to cutting-edge tools and real-world innovation challenges.

Their ability to think beyond code sets them apart.

We look for builders, not just coders, but people who can connect technology with purpose.

Reimagining What 'Premium Talent' Means

The Great Tech Talent Compression is forcing organisations to re-evaluate what 'premium' truly means. It's no longer about titles, tenure, or brand

logos, it is about relevance, adaptability, and creative resilience. The most valuable engineers are those who grow relevance as fast as technology changes.

And that's where the future of tech lies, not in abundance, but in alignment between talent and transformation.

To conclude, the tech industry may be in a cycle of layoffs and realignment, but the demand for great talent is not disappearing, it's evolving.

The next decade will belong to companies that don't just hire talent but build ecosystems that make talent thrive. At Encora, our AI-first culture and commitment to continuous learning reflect one simple truth: premium talent isn't found; it's cultivated.



Silent Skill Erosion

Why Senior Professionals Plateau Without Continuous Upskilling & How It Impacts Innovation



GET TO KNOW

Maria Rajesh

CHRO, Embassy Developments Ltd.

Across her 18-year journey with the Embassy Group, **Maria Rajesh** has evolved from managing corporate affairs to architecting the Group's people vision as a CHRO for Embassy Developments Limited. A strategist at heart and a connector by instinct, she has led enterprise-wide transformation projects spanning structure, culture, and leadership development.

OPINION

In today's rapidly evolving business environment, knowledge and expertise have a diminishing shelf life. The concept of silent skill erosion, where professionals lose their competitive edge not through neglect or laziness but due to a lack of consistent upskilling, is becoming a pressing concern. Nowhere is this more visible than among professionals, whose experience and wisdom, while invaluable, can quickly turn into rigidity if not complemented by continuous learning.

Organisations thrive when innovation flows through all levels, not just at the entry point or in R&D labs, but across leadership. When professionals cease to evolve, they unconsciously stunt this flow.

The Plateau Issue

As the routines that once ensured success start to lose their effectiveness, many seasoned professionals experience a plateau in their performance. Having mastered outdated procedures, legacy systems, and conventional delivery methods, they might not be able to adjust when business models or technology change. As the world progresses, their abilities subtly deteriorate. For businesses, this means lost innovation potential in addition to lost productivity.

Combating skill degradation must start with a change of mindset. **Mature professionals need to be self-motivated, adopting the Japanese principle of Kaizen, constantly improving, in their own growth experiences.** Learning cannot be a sporadic act but an intrinsic aspect of one's professional self.

Embassy believes in integrating ongoing learning into Key Result Areas (KRAs) so that upskilling is not discretionary but a

quantifiable task. This cultural enforcer is supplemented by concrete learning paths like certifications, workshops, and "Back to Basics" training programs, where even veteran employees revisit their foundation skills to suit changing business demands.

Additionally, job rotation and lateral moves are strong tools to reignite intellectual curiosity, encouraging the professionals to unlearn and relearn by engaging in new functional territories or technologies, which becomes a fundamental behaviour in adaptive leadership.

Infusing New Energy: The Power of Generational Collaboration

Another technique to bring a fresh perspective is when leadership or experienced professionals directly supervise the interns or recruits. This sets up a reverse mentoring cycle where recruits contribute curiosity, tech savvy, and bold concepts, and seniors provide context, experience, and strategic thinking. Such an intergenerational partnership not only speeds up innovation but also rejuvenates senior staff who can be stuck in habits. It's not just about imparting knowledge; it's about co-creation.

Technology as a Transformational Lens

Teams across levels need to be trained in new technologies, ERPs, and digital tools by investing in training. This is imperative in the present data-led, automation-empowered times.

Technology is the enabler as well as the disruptor; without the ability to harness it, even the most strategic experts risk obsolescence.

Specific technology adoption programs incorporating scenario-based learning, peer workshops, and simulated training can bridge this gap. Upskilling is no longer just about new jobs; it's about new attitudes.

The Way Forward

Upskilling is no longer a training initiative; it's a survival strategy, and evolving market demands require evolution in the skillset for all employees, including leaders, and this willingness to evolve and adapt safeguards the entire organisation by building resilience, agility, and a culture of innovation.



The Future of Hospitality Talent

Reskilling for a Tech-Enhanced Guest Journey



GET TO KNOW

Mugdha Mahambrey

General Manager—HR, Chalet Hotels Ltd.

As the General Manager of Human Resources at Chalet Hotels Ltd., **Mugdha Mahambrey** is a strategic HR leader with a track record of driving talent and performance management across various hospitality brands. Recognised as a People Matters Emerging HR Leader 2024, she champions initiatives that align HR plans with business objectives to create a future-ready work culture.

For decades, the hospitality industry has thrived due to its most timeless asset: people. From the warmth of a greeting at check-in to the care behind every curated experience, human connection has always been the bedrock of guest loyalty. Yet today, as technology quietly transforms nearly every touchpoint, the future of hospitality will not be defined by a choice between people and technology, but by how talent is shaped and reskilled to bring the two together.

Humans at the Centre, Tech as the Enabler:

The industry must reject the false narrative that automation displaces hospitality's human core. In reality, technology is at its best when it removes friction and routine, freeing people to deliver higher-value, empathetic interactions. A self-check-in kiosk may streamline arrivals, but it's the associate who notices a weary traveller's needs that turns plain efficiency into an experience.

Embedding Adaptability in Every Role:

In a sector where guest expectations shift faster than traditional training cycles, continuous learning must become a cultural norm. Reskilling cannot occur only in annual workshops; it must be conducted in real-time and embedded into training programs. What truly defines a modern hospitality professional is not just learning, but the willingness to unlearn and relearn as the world evolves.

The Blend of Digital Fluency & Emotional Intelligence:

Future-ready employees will be fluent in two essentials: technology and empathy. Digital fluency ensures they can navigate AI dashboards, mobile concierge apps, or predictive analytics tools. Emotional intelligence ensures those insights

translate into meaningful human responses. It is this duality, high-tech and high-touch, that will distinguish truly guest-centric brands.

Learning in the Flow of Work:

Agile learning models are reshaping training. Micro-learning, delivered in short bursts via mobile platforms, offers flexibility and speed. Multilingual content ensures inclusivity, while gamified modules sustain engagement. The idea is simple: training must adapt to the pace of hospitality, not the other way around.

The Value of Perspective:

A guest's experience is never governed by one function alone. Cross-functional exposure, a sales manager spending a shift in housekeeping, or a chef shadowing events planning — creates empathy, ownership, and a broader service mindset. In a future where seamless guest experiences matter more than departmental silos, opening employee perspectives provides a substantial competitive edge.

Beyond Operations: AI, Simulations, and Strategic Thinking:

Artificial intelligence and VR simulations are already elevating training. Crisis drills, cultural immersion, and role-play scenarios prepare teams for high-stakes realities. But the bigger unlock is strategic. AI models can anticipate guest behaviours, test new concepts, and sharpen decision-making. For leaders, this means reskilling is no longer operational housekeeping; it is strategic foresight.

Real-Time Recognition:

If reskilling is to succeed, recognition must be immediate. Annual appraisals are too late. Real-time dashboards, peer-to-peer acknowledgement, and

direct guest feedback loops validate new skills and build momentum. Recognition goes beyond rewarding effort — it helps people embrace change faster.

Preparing for New Guest Demands:

Tomorrow's traveller is wellness-conscious, digitally native, and increasingly global. Talent must therefore evolve along three vectors: **wellness and lifestyle curation, MICE precision and scale, and digital-first guest engagement.** The skills to design a wellness retreat, orchestrate a global conference, or build loyalty through online touchpoints will become as critical as traditional hospitality training.

Looking forward, Chalet Hotels has already been exploring ways to integrate technology into the guest journey while keeping service personalised, a glimpse into how the industry at large might evolve. The broader lesson for hospitality is clear: the future is not about choosing between people and technology, but about reskilling people to make the most of technology, without losing the essence of hospitality.

The future of hospitality talent is not about replacing humans with machines, nor about resisting technology. It is about reskilling people to thrive in a tech-enhanced world, where efficiency meets empathy, data meets intuition, and operations meet experiences. The winners will be organisations that see their workforce not only as brand custodians but as agile learners, capable of shaping guest journeys that are both digitally seamless and emotionally resonant.

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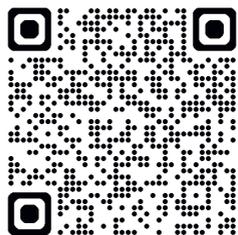
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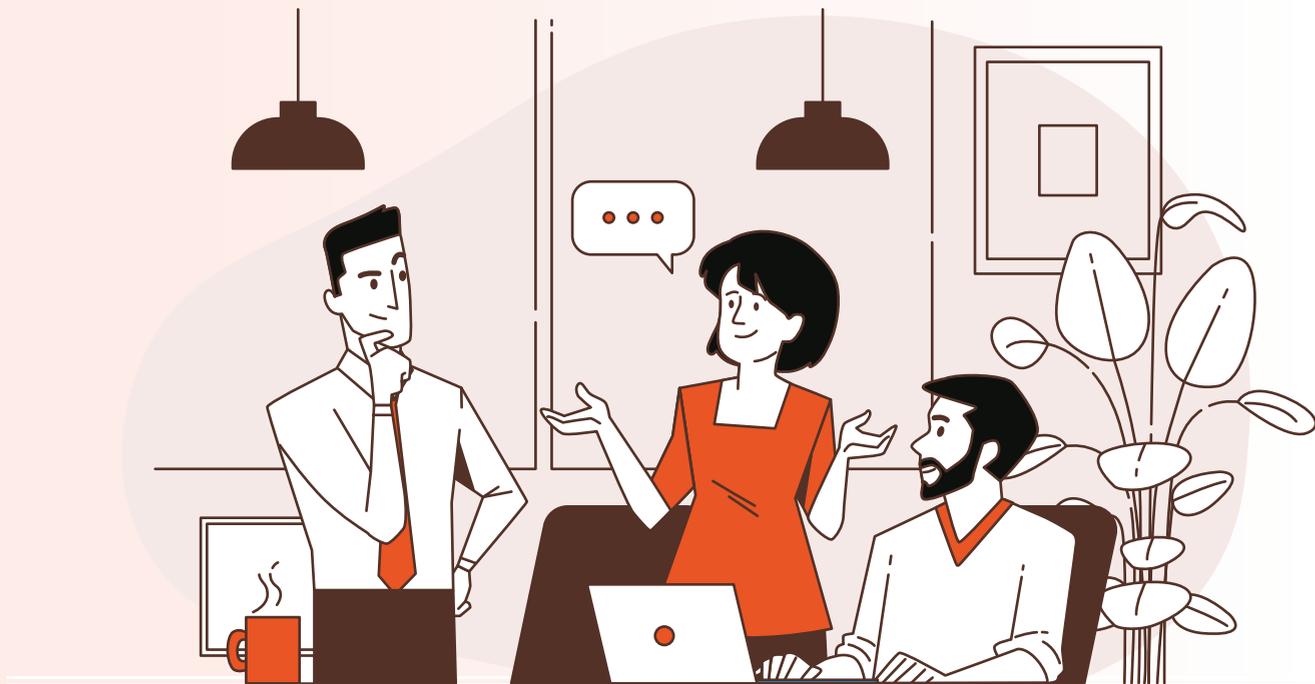


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