



Attracting Faculty

Here are contradictory, but related, facts for you, the reader—Indian technical education hubs have been growing in the past two decades, despite a faculty scarcity. So, how does an institute ensure quality, or that it recruits “right”?

Types Of Tech Hubs

When I say institutions, I mean three types of schools: elites (IITs or IISc) that offer a decent salary and excellent research support. These attract quality faculty, though I believe they can do better. Then there are government-regulated institutions. These insist that their tuition is “so low” that they cannot think of recruiting quality faculty. A majority (indeed most) of our state and central institutions fall under this category.

But, my focus is on the middle group—private technical hubs that enjoy a degree of flexibility as far as tuition, salaries and recruitment processes are concerned. For an institution falling in this group, it’s possible to attract quality faculty in sufficient number—if its leadership has focus. However, in most of them, focus is on admission or placement. (Why? Because, placement boosts admission, which generates revenue.) In between, four years of coursework and faculty get sidelined. I believe that it’s possible for administrative staff to handle admission and placement, along with the question of faculty. Provided they concentrate on certain questions: How does an institute reach out to potential candidates? What should the recruitment process be? What type of package should be provided to those selected? What about short-

term or part-time engagements: as even such candidates can turn out to be “assets”.

ABC of Recruitment

When it comes to private schools, there are small and big questions that need to be covered: smaller ones later, let’s tackle the bigger ones first! First consider what is the simplest route to fresh recruitment? Typically, it could be hiring graduates of reputed institutions.

In that case, it’s best to start with a list of institutions that have strong graduate programmes. Once that list is ready, go make a presentation, just like companies do their pre-placement talk, in those schools. Or, invite faculty from top institutes (to your school) to present a seminar. If they are satisfied with the quality you offer, then he or she will advertise on your behalf to his students. While hosting a conference, consider inviting graduates from your list of institutions. Make sure that your school’s web page articulates why anyone should consider a career with you.

For these strategies to work, points need to be kept in mind. One: plans take time and money. If you depend solely on newspaper advertisements, there is a possibility that you won’t reach the ‘right’ candidates. Graduates belonging to reputed institutions don’t prefer to find jobs through newspapers. Point 2: selection should be quick. A candidate feels wanted when he receives a quick

response. Also, while running a private school your competitors are government institutes—slow to take decisions. This is particularly true while recruiting PhDs. In most schools, PhDs are treated unfairly. It's common for supervisors to not write a "letter of recommendation" till the thesis has been completed. Once a thesis is submitted, stipends stop. In such a situation, candidates have limited time to get a job. Decide fast—and get the best!

Long-Term Investment

Recruiting faculty is a long-term investment. A bad recruit can damage an institution's environment. Termination of services, while necessary, does send out a negative signal. Because of this: check credentials thoroughly, including a candidate's aptitude and attitude. Seek a detailed CV. Ask for copies of research publications. Make experts evaluate them. Look for letters of reference.

Make the candidate spend a day at your institute. Ask her to present a seminar. Make her check out the infrastructure, meet faculty mem-

bers and see if the school has the "right environment" for her. Such interactions also allow existing faculty and senior administrators to judge their compatibility with the new candidate, while the seminar helps assess teaching skills.

Be Polite, Be Honest

Make a candidate feel welcome. Ideally, the director or the principal should meet a candidate for a few minutes to explain the school's vision. It helps. If a senior faculty member (read: HoD) joins the candidate for lunch, it also helps. If train reservations are not available, or when a candidate travels a distance to get to you, then allow him to take a flight. It tells him that his time, and yours, too, is precious.

Be clear about the department's research profile. Be precise about the facilities that will be provided to him, policies for conferences, consultancy, industry interaction, leave rules and

such relevant details. "Special rules" must be pointed out! Believe me, honesty is the best policy during recruitment.

From the point of view of the potential candidate, three aspects are precious. Academic atmosphere (especially research support); teaching and administrative workload; and compensation package. The third is the easiest thing to handle. As far as faculty recruitment is concerned, private schools compete with national institutes of technologies—thus, we don't expect a "tight budget" from either.

Perks are small ways of making faculty feel welcome and wanted. A small research budget helps a candidate settle in his research faster. And it gives a lecturer the confidence that small expenses toward professional development will be approved.

Short-Term Investment

Short-term assignments are of two sorts: visiting faculty, who spend a whole semester as full-time consultants. Or, part-time faculty who visit institutes two days a week to teach specific courses. For most institutes, short-term faculty is hired

only when there is a shortage of teachers, or when there is a need to reduce costs. Most institutes don't see it as a "way to improving quality" at the institute. A quality-conscious institute, however, can use short-term assignments to rope in world-class faculty.

Or, experts who, after spending years in the industry, long for a "teaching experience". Not all of these candidates, fortunately, care for corporate salaries. But, they do seek flexible schedules. Also, inviting faculty from rival institutes allows an exchange of ideas. Some alumni, too, love to visit parent institutions to keep in touch with graduates and projects.

The bottomline: the question of quality is as cardinal for short-term assignments as it is for the long-term. Strategies mentioned here will not solve the national problem of teacher shortage. But, they will enable institutes with a genuine focus on quality to recruit ahead of others. **EDU**

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