

## Offshoring – Have I seen this CV before?

Shafi Chowdhury, Shafi Consultancy Limited, London, U.K.

### ABSTRACT

As companies grow and try to minimise cost without compromising on quality and efficiency, at some point in the meeting someone will mention offshoring. It is not the answer to everything and in a global environment it is also nothing to be feared. It is another option in the management toolbox which should be explored for its feasibility within the ever increasing global organisations. Although there are many aspects to offshoring which can be explored, this paper will look at some of the cultural differences and recruitment issues which companies may face on the road to offshoring, and why addressing these at the start is key to working successfully in a global team.

### INTRODUCTION

We have all applied for jobs over the years, and no doubt went on to be interviewed and hopefully employed. As an employer we usually expect the CVs to reflect the applicant, whether it is to do with their education, or that they enjoy reading and listening to music. We also know that some truths may be a little stretched and others may be over emphasised. However, if most of the CVs are very similar how do we determine who is selected for the interview stage?

Every country has its own methods for doing things, and this applies equally to recruiting. For example in the UK we never send our pictures with the CV, however in Germany this is normal and expected. Asian countries are no different, they too have their own traditions and standard recruitment methods. Recruitment methods have always evolved over time to keep up with the changes in people, attitude and techniques, so it is important to respect and appreciate local methods, and apply them as much as possible to ensure a successful recruitment strategy. Trying to apply the rules used in one country to another does not even work across Europe and the chance of it working for recruitment of offshore staff is even more remote.

End of a successful recruitment period is like passing a driving test, that is when the real challenge begins. Like any successful organisation in any country, teamwork is the key. Recruiting the right people will ensure they work effectively as a team, and understanding the culture and motivation of the team will provide another element which is key for any organisation to grow and develop, staff retention.

### RECRUITMENT

After deciding to open an offshore office in Bangladesh we took advice from local established managers on the best approach to recruitment. How would we attract the calibre of people we required for our organisation? Would the size of our organisation have an impact on the type of applicants? Where would we advertise the position to attract our target applicant? Through connections we knew that the

One piece of advice we received took us by surprise. It was suggested that we change the name of our organisation to an English name! People liked companies named after English or American cities, rivers or even just an English word. This was most certainly not what we expected to hear, and then we noticed in the city the number of companies with Thames, London, Washington and even Grand in the name. Companies with English sounding names were definitely popular and obviously this is a strategy used by many smaller organisations. However, this was not to be our approach, and we decided that it would be better to keep the name of our organisation as it was.

We advertised for programmers on a popular website used by graduates and IT professionals in Bangladesh. Within a few days we were inundated with CVs from across the country. Upon close inspection it was clear that this would be no walk in the park. Most of the CVs looked very similar. They all stated all the topics the applicant studied at university, and in many cases there were very few differences beside the personal details. It turns out that candidates often use a small number of people to check and prepare their CV, and obviously during this period some standardisation is done, and even templates used where only the personal details are changed. The unfortunate result for was that we had difficulty to distinguish between about 600 out of around 900 CVs we received.

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### INTERVIEW AND SELECTION

Selecting applicants for interview is always a difficult task, but with very little differences in the CVs and almost a thousand applicants, this was never going to be an easy task. The shortage of quality jobs means everyone applies for everything regardless of whether they are appropriate or not. This makes life difficult both for organisations looking to employ people and for candidates who have the credentials required for the job. We were informed that not everyone invited for an interview will turn up, even after accepting the offer, so it was important to invite more than we required.

There are many strategies for selecting candidates who should be interviewed, and getting this wrong could mean the best pool of candidates are not selected. A decision was made to spend no more than ten minutes per candidate for the first round of interviews. This is a common method used when there are so many applicants. We dropped CVs which looked as if they were from a template, and invited candidates who best matched our requirement. This short interview technique proved to be a very effective method, and with some candidates requiring less than three minutes of interviewing time we were able to eliminate the inappropriate candidates very quickly. After two days of these quick interviews we narrowed the list to a handful, selecting those who had a good understanding of English, logic and were comfortable using a computer.

The second round of interviews were more conventional, looking deeper into each candidate to establish their thought process and to determine how they will work as a team. In the world of equal opportunities, an interviewer in the UK is not even allowed to ask the age of the candidate, however, these laws do not apply in most Asian countries. Some very unusual personal questions were asked at the second interview, including details about what their parents and siblings did for a living. Such questions will most probably lead to court action in the UK, however, in Bangladesh this is as normal as asking about someone's hobby in the UK. It may seem unusual to associate an individual with his family, however, in Bangladesh one's family is often used as a measure of stability and somehow in a strange way, rightly or wrongly, the genetic make up of the individual. In a nation where people act appropriately to their place in society, so their place in society then becomes a measure of their expected behaviour. Although we may not agree with this, this is what happens and often how the locals think. The local managers consider these questions important when trying to determine who would work well together in a team. Is this right? Is this appropriate? The practice may be questionable, but it is none the less done in this part of the world, and perhaps if we are uncomfortable with it then we can provide alternative techniques we use to reach the same goal.

### JOB OFFER

After two sets of interviews and some team activities it was clear who would be offered a position. At this stage however, the recruitment experience was not very different from recruitment in the UK. The applicants are diverse with different motivational factors, bringing different skill sets with them. As we were setting up a new team it was important to select intelligent candidates who can learn quickly, adapt to the company core principles, and work effectively both as part of a team and on their own when required. In planning for the long term, it was also important to ensure there were some who could go on to become team leaders.

There are many stories about candidates accepting positions and not turning up to work on the first day. One organisation mentioned that almost ten percent did not turn up on the first day. It is therefore important to understand where an organisation fits in the society at large and to keep in touch with the candidate after an offer has been accepted. In a society where the greater family plays a vital role for the individual, it is also important to look at how the new employees can maintain their relationship with their families.

As parents in every country want what is best for their children, they advise their children to go for large stable companies. These are considered to be the best jobs. The next in line are foreign companies, they offer hope of a stable job and a better working environment. What is expected from foreign organisations are often different to domestic organisations, and if the management are also from abroad, this again offers the hope of a better working environment. These were the expectations of most of the applicants, and so our size would not be an issue provided we meet their expectations.

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## CULTURE

Every country has its own identity, built on the richness of its past. Bangladesh is no exception. Its colonial past is evident everywhere, and the educated members of the society are to a certain extent more British than the British people in the United Kingdom.

## BRITISH VALUES

I once read in a book that the Dutch in Pennsylvania are more Dutch than those in Holland. It went on to describe how they retained the traits their ancestors took with them, although the Netherlands have moved on since that time. In Bangladesh "British time" means being punctual, not a few minutes earlier or later. It may be forty degrees outside but that is no excuse to not wear a tie to work, and there is never an excuse for shoes not to be polished. It is too easy to dismiss these and just gloss over what they symbolise, but they are key to understanding the team. When they arrive at work they are there for work. There is no question about casual Fridays, a clear separation is made between work and home, and the more professional the work environment the more respect people have for that environment.

Family values are also key to most people. The culture is based on respecting the elder, a younger sibling does not call the older sibling by their name, the parents opinions are always listened to, although may not always be acted upon, and everything is done for the family, not for the individual. In the office this translates to loyalty to the team leader and respect for authority. One can expect hard work and that every effort is made to ensure the team is successful in their task.

## CONCLUSION

Setting up an office in a foreign country is always going to be a little different to setting up an office in the country you are familiar with. Hence seeking advice from local managers and using local techniques whenever possible cannot be overestimated to ensure a successful recruitment phase. Although we live in a world where globalisation means the material things are now very similar across the world, the deep rooted cultures still separate how we think and do things. It is important to realise that just as we go there with hope of finding a good team, so they join our organisations with hope of a better future.

We should not underestimate what a diverse culture we all live in already, and that perhaps we work with more people from different cultures than what most people are used to in other parts of the world. However, although having an Asian friend does not mean you know the Asian culture any more than someone drinking Guinness and thinking that qualifies them to play for Ireland, I think the transition to working with an Asian offshore office is not as great as is often stated. They are very professional and very motivated, and it is our responsibility as managers to ensure we harmonise the best working practices across our organisations to ensure overall success. Every country has its plus points and its negative sides, but understanding the people and meeting the individuals to see what drives them is the key to creating a successful team. This is a global concept and applies more today in this global environment than ever before.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Your comments and questions are valued and encouraged. Contact the author at:

Author Name : Shafi Chowdhury  
Company : Shafi Consultancy Limited  
Address : 7 Blossom Way, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB10 9LL, U.K.  
Phone : +44 770 288 7219  
Email : [Shafi@shaficonsultancy.com](mailto:Shafi@shaficonsultancy.com)  
Web : [www.shaficonsultancy.com](http://www.shaficonsultancy.com)