



Making 'lateral entry' work

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Highlights

Governments are grappling with one particular challenge, irrespective of industry or geography: getting the right leadership talent. The Indian government has responded to this challenge by taking the initiative to invite executives from beyond the ranks of the civil service to apply for certain Joint Secretary posts.

How?

1. **Establish objective criteria:** The key decision makers involved in making a senior appointment rarely agree on what skills, qualities and experiences the role requires— Having objective criteria gives decision makers confidence that their appointments will be able to stand up to public scrutiny without fear of seeming biased towards or against candidates for caste, geography, political affiliation or other considerations.
2. **Target the talent you need:** Public announcements inviting lateral entry applicants for open government positions preserve transparency but are not very effective recruiting strategies. Top talent has many options outside of public service. Government, therefore, cannot sit back and wait for these candidates to present themselves. It must proactively identify and approach executives with the desired skills and experience.
3. **Less is more when it comes to selection panels:** More focused interviews should be supplemented with extensive referencing with finalist candidates. This combination of data will provide insight into a candidate's character, integrity and moral compass — all critical qualities for government roles.
4. **Accelerate the new hire's integration:** Successful recruiting is only part of the equation; the selected lateral hire must also be primed for success in his or her new organization. India's lateral entry programme has the potential to introduce new thinking and new expertise into key ministries.

Conclusion

- Our work with governments around the world suggests that in addition to the right motivation there are other key personal traits that predict success of lateral hires in such roles.
- The first is resilience. Government bureaucracy can be tough on outsiders; it is essential to have the ability to persevere in the face of constant pulls and pressures and aligning multiple stakeholders.
- Finally, they have the ability to engage others. The ability to build consensus among stakeholders is essential.