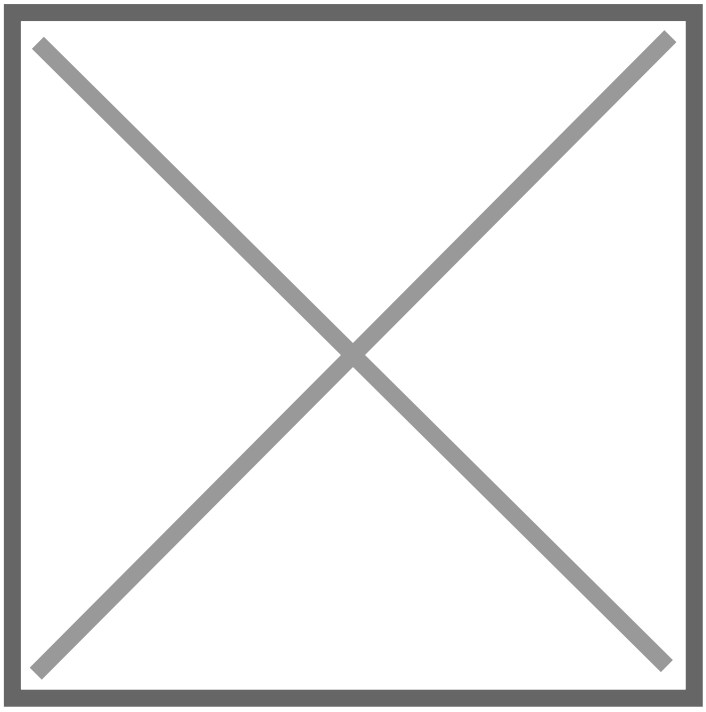


Reactions from the Bioinformatics Sector

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TCS, Ocimum BioSolutions, and Mascon are some of the leading players in the informatics space. Dr M Vidyasagar, executive vice president, Tata Consultancy Services, Anuradha Acharya, CEO, Ocimum BioSolutions, and Vibhav Garg, principal-business development, Mascon Global, give their feedback on the HR issues.

Is there a shortage of qualified workforce? How should it be overcome?

Dr M Vidyasagar: The Indian economy is growing spectacularly fast, be it in IT or in biotechnology. In such a scenario, there will definitely be a shortage of "qualified" and "trained" workforce, though not necessarily of "talented" workforce. The talented people will be like diamonds in the rough form, and it is up to the employer to train them. In short, we must hire on the basis of aptitude and potential, and not expect to find highly trained persons. If we find them, then that is a bonus.

Anuradha Acharya: Biotech is definitely facing a talent crunch of quality professionals. The current pool has to come from the west as a lot of Indian scientists are currently abroad. The way to get over this long-term is to inculcate better education to school children.

What is the present supply and demand situation in India?

Dr M Vidyasagar: There is a serious shortage of well-trained persons. We need to invest in people's potential.

Vibhav Garg: The current supply scenario is pathetic against the rising demand scenario. Niche segments like in-silico biology/chemistry where Mascon operates, supply is absolutely poor in terms of quality, while quantity is available plenty in the market.

What does your company look for in candidates during the hiring process?

Dr M Vidyasagar: TCS is an a typical employer, because we don't do "wet" biology. We do only computational biology. So we hire a lot of fresh PhDs in the life sciences, and a limited number of MScs in the life sciences. We don't hire BSc's. These persons are augmented by the normal engineering or CS-trained persons inducted through the normal TCS recruitment processes.

Vibhav Garg: We look for different things in the hiring of different categories of candidates specially business development and domain experts.

Business Development: n A suitable educational qualification (Bachelor in pharmacy, agriculture, biomedical engineering; Masters in biotechnology management, biotechnology, bioinformatics, life sciences etc. Having MBA is an added advantage)

- 2-4 years of relevant experience (We hire promising freshers also) with significant domain knowledge
- Understanding of market in reference to the operation areas of the organization
- Leadership/communication/convincing/team work/

Domain Expert: n A suitable educational qualification (PhD/Post Docs in life sciences, bioinformatics, pharmaceutical sciences etc.; ME/MTech/MPharm in life sciences, biotechnology, pharmaceutical biotechnology)

- 3-15 years relevant industry/academic experience
- Domain expertise in individual areas of interest

Are you satisfied with the students coming out from the biotech institutes?

Dr M Vidyasagar: We don't hire persons who specialize in subjects such as biotechnology or bioinformatics. We find that such persons do not know any one subject to any level of depth. We prefer to hire mainstream biologists even if they don't have any prior knowledge of computational skills and train them ourselves. The process takes a long time, perhaps six to nine months, but the end product is much better.

Anuradha Acharya: The situation is difficult for freshers, as most of them don't have practical exposure.

Is the biotechnology industry too facing attrition?

Dr M Vidyasagar: Not at all! Nothing special about BT. As is well known; TCS has the lowest attrition rate in the IT industry. The IT industry is much hotter than BT. Most persons who work in BT have simply no idea how hot Indian IT is at present.

Anuradha Acharya: Attrition is not that high because there aren't enough companies in biotechnology but it will start.

What are your suggestions to bridge the gap and increase the talent pool?

Vibhav Garg: Industry-academia collaboration should come into the picture well before academia seeking projects and/or placement for their graduates in industry and industry seeking collaborative research with academia. This relationship should actually begin with industry helping academia in designing the course curriculum and finalizing the course contents, so that the industry makes sure that they are sowing something today , which they want to reap tomorrow.