

# Boomerang hiring: Strategy for sustainable development in COVID-19 era

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## Abstract.

**BACKGROUND:** Many companies are forced to restructure themselves by right sizing due to unexpected fall in demand for their products and services created by the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID 19 not only affected the health of human beings but also their wealth across the world. Global economic parameters are showing a sign of positive growth with decreased number of COVID 19 cases across the world. Many companies are in a dilemma to rehire their former employees or to hire the new candidates to meet the increased demand.

**OBJECTIVES:** The objectives of study are i) to analyze the key drivers for boomerang hiring and ii) to develop a conceptual process for boomerang hiring.

**METHODS:** An exploratory methodology was designed to identify the key drivers of boomerang hiring by studying the various successful stories of those companies which had rehired their former employees. Various papers were reviewed to develop the process for boomerang hiring.

**RESULTS:** Study showed that knowledge about the culture of the company, cost of hiring, morale booster for the existing employees, and customer retention, are the key drivers for boomerang hiring. This hiring process requires special skills from HR Managers, as this decision will impact long term success of the company.

**CONCLUSION:** The process of boomerang hiring cannot be standardized as each organization culture is different and companies cannot have the same strategy for each candidate as every individual is different. Boomerang hiring will work as the right strategy during pandemic situation as former employees would have built relations with the customers. The customers will be happy to see the former employees who had served them better.

Keywords: Boomerang hiring, key drivers for boomerang hiring, training for former employees, return of former employees



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## 1. Introduction

COVID 19 has thrown fresh challenges to the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world on talent acquisition and management. To maintain sustainable success, the companies should build customer retention successfully. To have successful retention of the customers, companies should retain the employees successfully. Fourth industrial revolution which is indexed as 4.0 lead to many like industry 4.0, Work 4.0, in both human resources plays an important role [1]. It is the time for re opening of the industry and economy across the globe, however the second wave of new positive cases has put a threat to this [2]. However, the pandemic situation has forced to rewrite the HR strategies. In the name of restructuring, right sizing, many companies had reduced their employees count irrespective of their contributions and competencies. With improved economic conditions many organisations are optimistic about their future growth. However, these companies are in a dilemma. Is it better to hire new candidates or re hire the former employees? Rehiring of former employees is not a new concept which is known as ‘boomerang hiring’. In this pandemic situation boomerang hiring will work as right strategy due to various benefits of the same. It might be in terms of fitting into the culture, savings in cost of recruitment and training, etc., Once company decides to go for boomerang hiring, again the question arises, shall we rehire all the employees or selected employees only? If so, what should be the basis for it? It is common phenomenon to attract the high performing employees who have joined other organizations and enhance their competencies that suit the job requirements of present and future [3, 4]. This is quiet common among MNCs, for example Mr. Steve Jobs was a boomerang hired employee who rejoined Apple after 12 years of gap. The success of Apple will be attributed to iPod and iPhone which are brainchildren of Mr. Steve Jobs. During his second tenure he was able to take the company’s market capitalization from \$3 billion to \$347 billion. It happened in the sports also. Michel Jordan was another boomerang hired employee who quit NBA for three championships of professional baseball and back to the parent team who made the history [5].

According to Karle Group H R Manager Mr. Vasudev “do not expect that all the employees who left or forced to leave, will come back and join.” In his company during the lockdown period some of the employees were forced to resign. However, after

the improved economic condition, they want those employees to come back but many of them did not turn up. Of course the company had offered lower salary this time.

However, acceptance of this concept is not so ease among the companies unless they are aware of the benefits and the key drivers for boomerang hiring. Strategy give an action plan for achieving the objectives. Boomerang hiring as a strategy should develop the process for attracting the former employees successfully.

## 2. Boomerang hiring: Theoretical perspective and drivers

There are three types of employees who left the organization. They are a) early leavers who leave the company within one year of joining. They leave the organization in search of suitable jobs according to their ambitions and some of them will leave for higher studies. Organizations had spent a lot of investment on them in terms of recruitment and training. These employees may not be interested to come back to the organization. Boomerang hiring is not suitable strategy for such candidates as these candidates are still in learning stage and building competencies. b) Top performers who quit after contributing their best to the organizations. Their loss might have affected the company in a considerable way and they might have acted as growth engines of the company. These employees constitute a major portion. These are the target candidates for boomerang hiring strategy since they have required competencies. During pandemic era searching for the potential candidates with such competencies from the general pool is a challenging job. Human resource Manager can plan a suitable boomerang hiring strategy to attract these former employees to rejoin the company. c) Universal leaders who were responsible for sustenance and daily operations and worked with the organization for considerable period. They are the part and parcel of building the organization culture and value system. They are completely aware about the organization business. Again these candidates are also target group for boomerang hiring strategy if they wish to come back. HR Manager should be able to convince such suitable former employees because they had proven track record [6]. Every organization should identify the right candidates with good performance and plan for rehiring such employees [3, 4]. Of course until now we are discussing from organization’s point of

view, it is equally important to think from the former employee's point of view. Former employee's perception and intention towards rejoining the same company is equally important. These candidates have to plan their stay with the organization and some of them might demand for key roles in the organization [4, 7]. After conducting an interview with 1800 HR professionals, [8] Majority of them ready to consider rehiring former employees and there is a growing desire among former employees to rejoin the previous organization. This is because former employees also enjoy certain benefit from this strategy. Familiarity with the culture, familiarity with people, policies, processes and guidelines make them to return to the organization.

The Corporate Culture and Boomerang Employee study by Workplace Trends after doing survey with HR Professionals had come up with some interesting findings. The percentage of employees who had rejoined the company is 15%. Interestingly the percentage of employees who will consider to rejoin the previous company if given a chance is around 40%. However, the number of HR professionals who are ready to accept hiring boomerang employees is 76%. The positive rate of hiring the ex employees who had shown interest is only 50%. 60 % of the HR managers are not ready to take the ex employees [9]. One should know both sides of the coin about employees and employers. American Society of Employers had done a survey with employees and found the reasons what make them not to come back to the previous company. According to the study 22% of them dissatisfied with the management or superior, 17% of them opined that they are not able fit into the organization culture and 13% opined that they are not able fulfil the job requirements and 13% opined that it was not smooth exit and they have burnt the bridges between the company and them [10]

### 3. Research methodology

Various research papers are reviewed to study the concept of boomerang hiring and to develop the process of boomerang hiring process.

#### 3.1. Objectives of the study

1. To analyze the key drivers for boomerang hiring
2. To develop process for boomerang hiring

## 4. Analysis and findings

### 4.1. Drivers of Boomerang hiring strategy

The following are the key drivers of boomerang hiring strategy regarding its stake holders.

#### 4.1.1. Culture

Fitting into the culture of the organization is most important than any other element for an employee. The familiarity of the organization culture is a positive aspect in boomerang hiring strategy [11] (Raj & Hundekar, 2013). Ex-employees are completely aware about the culture and fit into the culture easily when compared to an external candidate. Many employees who left the organization after working long period of time find difficulty to fit into the new organization culture. Every organization will have its own unique culture. Employee engagement is possible when the employees fit into the organizational culture. Taking a chance with new candidates who were selected on the basis of competencies or skills may backfire when they did not fit into the organization culture. Thus boomerang hiring is the suitable strategy during this tough times. At the same time the commitment levels of such employees will be much higher as they have seen real world outside the organization and the desire to succeed will be more [12].

#### 4.1.2. Cost

'A penny saved is a penny earned' is the suitable proverb during all the times and in particular during the economic slowdown. All the stakeholders should make saving wherever possible in the organization. By using boomerang hiring strategy organization will save lot of funds. Because when compared to other sources of recruitment, boomerang hiring cost of hiring will be the lowest. Cost of advertisement, cost of conducting interviews and many other costs like induction program are saved to the company. At the same the candidate might have learnt some new competencies when he was outside of the organization. All these will add value for supporting boomerang hiring strategy during economic slowdown [3]. Because of his new assignment, employees are expected to spend more time in the organization and thus contributing to the organization.

#### 4.1.3. Cost of training

New employees have to go through the induction process and training. However, in case of boomerang

252 hiring there is no need for induction and training as  
 253 they have already gone through the process. There is  
 254 a possibility that ex-employees might have acquired  
 255 new skills or competencies in the other organizations  
 256 which is an added value to the organizations. With  
 257 the boomerang hiring strategy the former employee  
 258 may also bring some of the best practices of other  
 259 organizations.

#### 260 4.1.4. Increased morale

261 Boomerang hiring can act as strategic in nature  
 262 when the organization actively targets the skilled for-  
 263 mer employees. They realized the real worth of the  
 264 employee and poach him to return to the organization.  
 265 This is not a new practice in the global organiza-  
 266 tion [13]. It is common practiced in the MNCs like  
 267 Mc.Kinsey, E & Y, Deloitte and so on. In these com-  
 268 panies, boomerang hiring is one of the prime recruit-  
 269 ment methods [14].

270 Reactive boomerang is possible when the former  
 271 employees of the organization apply for the posi-  
 272 tion in their previous organization. The boomerang  
 273 hiring becomes ease when the employee has clearly  
 274 communicated his willingness to return to the com-  
 275 pany in future in his exit interview [15]. When the  
 276 organization conduct the proper exit interview with t  
 277 respect, ensuring that the employee leave with a pos-  
 278 itive note, thereby paving way for favorable post exit  
 279 relationship [16].

280 The founder CEO of Integrity Marketing Con-  
 281 sulting opined that boomerang hiring will boost the  
 282 morale of the employees and it will spread a sense  
 283 of belonging ness and happiness in the workplace  
 284 which will be helpful to increase the employee reten-  
 285 tion. The reappearance of former employees is a real  
 286 validation of brand of the employer [17].

287 New employees are better or ex employees are bet-  
 288 ter is cleared by MakeMyTrip Chief human resource  
 289 officer, the success rate among the new hires is only  
 290 75 i.e. 25% might turn out to be average performers,  
 291 while success rate with boomerang strategy is 100%

#### 292 4.1.5. Behavior intention

293 The intention of the former employees is cru-  
 294 cial for rejoining. Behaviour intention is a degree  
 295 to which a person has consciously planned to per-  
 296 form a behaviour. However, the exit of the former  
 297 employee should be smooth and in healthy manner.  
 298 In such cases the Behaviour intention will be positive  
 and chances of returning is more [18].

#### 299 4.1.6. Alumni relations and communication

300 The long lasting relationships are not build in one  
 301 day. It requires continuous effort by not only from  
 302 HR department but also from the other department  
 303 employees. The regular interaction and sharing of the  
 304 required information will be helpful for building the  
 305 relationship. When such relationships are maintained  
 306 the rejoining of the former employee will be more.  
 307 Technology plays an important role in communica-  
 308 tion. Organizations can have a separate website for  
 309 its alumni and maintain good rapport with formers  
 310 employees. This is in addition to email communica-  
 311 tion [19] (Mael, & Ashforth, 1992). Former employee  
 312 might be happy to participate in the functions of pre-  
 313 vious organization because this is an opportunity for  
 314 them to meet all his former colleagues. Boomerang  
 315 hiring can be started from these function where  
 316 there is social gathering of many friends. Managing  
 317 Director EMEA and AMER at Resource solutions  
 318 observed, "One should make use of all channels to  
 319 procure best talent including regretted leavers".

#### 320 4.2. Boomerang hiring process

##### 321 4.2.1. Identify the employees who are eligible

322 Not all the employees who left are good and  
 323 potential. HR manager should have complete data  
 324 regarding the employees who left the organization  
 325 and the reasons for leaving. If any employee is sent  
 326 out on disciplinary grounds he need not to be consid-  
 327 ered for rehiring. Any former employee with attitude  
 328 and ethical problems need not to be considered.  
 329 Employees who left for salary alone may again leave  
 330 the company. Candidates with good track record and  
 331 left the company for valid reasons can be considered  
 332 provided they have regularly upgraded their skills.  
 333 Those skills may be useful for the company in the  
 334 present or future. MakeMyTrip, one of the Nasdaq  
 335 listed company assign a code to employee who leave  
 336 the company or asked to quit. The employees who are  
 337 assigned code 1 can be hired later depending on the  
 338 requirement. The employees who are assigned code  
 339 2 can be considered for hiring after due diligence and  
 340 those who are assigned with code 3 will be not be  
 341 hired at any cost [20] (Singh, 2020).

##### 342 4.2.2. Conduct the formal interview and on 343 boarding

344 Rehiring the farmer employees does not mean  
 345 without interview. HR manager can treat them as  
 346 new candidate and candidate has to be introduced

347 to the latest changes in the company and the current  
 348 projects. Of course the company need not spend as  
 349 much time as it spends on an outsider. After accept-  
 350 ing the job by former employee, put them through a  
 351 formal on boarding process.

#### 352 4.2.3. *Communicate the current employees* 353 *about the employee's return*

354 To get the desired benefits of the boomerang hiring  
 355 it is important to inform to all the employees about the  
 356 employee's return. It will act as the morale booster  
 357 for the existing employees.

#### 358 4.2.4. *Feedback and review*

359 Unless the employee has positive contribution, the  
 360 purpose of the boomerang hiring will not be met.  
 361 Listen to their suggestions and implement whatever  
 362 feasible in the organizational context. At the same  
 363 time he or she has to be observed regularly and  
 364 feedback has to be taken from such employees so  
 365 that he will not leave the organization again [21]  
 366 (hrexchangenetwork,2020). Joel Paul, GM India of  
 367 RiseSmart, is so optimistic about the performance  
 368 of boomerang employee, he said that they will start  
 369 delivering the goods from second week onwards.

370 Software Advice surveyed and found that 80% of  
 371 workers opined that their former employer does not  
 372 have any policy or strategy in their human resource  
 373 plan [17]. However there are exceptions in term of  
 374 Mr.Nadeesh from KPMG who himself is returned  
 375 employee to KPMG, " the policy decision of the  
 376 company is such that any employee who is return-  
 377 ing the company will be taken in the same position  
 378 and lower position but definitely not higher positon  
 379 in the company".

380 "Not only have boomerangs already been through  
 381 the company's learning curve, we actually think they  
 382 are more loyal not less, because it shows they have  
 383 affection for us" Mike Blackburn, MD of digital mar-  
 384 keting agency I-COM.

## 385 5. Conclusion

386 Before concluding about this paper the following  
 387 interesting case let about one of the leading software  
 388 giants.

389 Learning from Boomerang hiring: WIPRO  
 390 Infotech is India's second biggest software company,  
 391 which is known for its service quality throughout  
 392 the world. It has written policy for boomerang

393 hiring except those who are forced to leave with  
 394 flag. (Flag is given to the employees who are gone  
 395 against the values of the company, or done some  
 396 malpractices). All other employees are allowed to  
 397 apply to return to the company. Mr. Avaneesh was a  
 398 project leader and left the company. He was expert  
 399 in that particular project. After six months he would  
 400 like to come back and the company welcome him,  
 401 however Mr. Avaneesh had successfully negotiated  
 402 for higher salary. This tactic of Mr. Avaneesh's had  
 403 become as trend for many employees. Company  
 404 learnt the lesson and re written the policy such that  
 405 no boomerang-hired employee will be taken for  
 406 higher salary and there should be minimum gap  
 407 of two years before returning the company. Now  
 408 one has to plan the strategy how to deal with such  
 409 employees like Mr. Avaneesh.

410 However, E & Y runs a 'post-exit probe', under  
 411 which the company reaches out to employees two  
 412 months after their departure, to reinstate contact and  
 413 ask how well they may be settling in at the new work-  
 414 place. "If things aren't working out, we explore the  
 415 opportunity for that employee to return to us," said  
 416 Sandeep Kohli, national director-HR.

417 Fitting into the culture, savings in recruitment pro-  
 418 cess and training are some of the key drivers of  
 419 boomerang hiring strategy. In addition to the above  
 420 there are some qualitative benefits which will arise  
 421 through this strategy. Boomerang hiring will be a big  
 422 morale booster for the existing employees in the orga-  
 423 nization. The process of boomerang hiring cannot be  
 424 standardized as each organization culture is differ-  
 425 ent and the company cannot have the same strategy  
 426 for each candidate as every individual is different.  
 427 Boomerang hiring will work as right strategy dur-  
 428 ing pandemic situation as former employees would  
 429 build the relations with the customers. The customers  
 430 will be happy to see the former employees who had  
 431 served them better. Even though many companies are  
 432 ready for rehiring former employees, they do not have  
 433 a documented re hiring policy. Mr Jagadish Ahuja  
 434 CEO of Financial services opined that "it depends  
 435 on the need of the hour, it did not work for me in  
 436 the past and it is too difficult to take action against  
 437 such employee if they underperform". The chance of  
 438 boomerang hiring will increase when there is shorter  
 439 period between person leaving and rejoining. This is  
 440 the exact situation where we are today, due to pan-  
 441 demic situation there are temporary fluctuations in  
 442 business environment. With improved economic con-  
 443 ditions, boomerang hiring will be right strategy for  
 444 the organizations.

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