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Original Article

Financial Integration of AI for Talent Acquisition in Pune's IT Sector: A Quantitative Analysis of Budgetary Impacts on HR Practices

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Abstract

This study quantitatively assesses the financial impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) integration within talent acquisition (TA) functions in Pune's competitive Information Technology (IT) sector. Amidst massive capital investment in HR technology, this research moves beyond simple adoption metrics to analyze the correlation between strategic budgetary allocation for AI and tangible recruitment outcomes. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey of 166 (N=166) HR and Talent Acquisition professionals from Pune's IT industry was conducted. The analysis reveals a statistically significant, strong negative correlation between the percentage of the TA budget allocated to AI and perceived reductions in both Cost-per-Hire (CPH) ($r = -.58$, $p < .01$) and Time-to-Fill (TTF) ($r = -.47$, $p < .01$). A moderate positive correlation was found with perceived Quality-of-Hire (QoH) ($r = .31$, $p < .05$). A multiple regression analysis further identified that AI budget allocation (Beta =.49) and the specific adoption of AI-powered screening tools (Beta =.28) are the strongest predictors of CPH reduction. The findings provide quantitative evidence that strategic financial integration of AI is not merely a technological upgrade but a critical, measurable driver of recruitment efficiency and cost optimization in a high-velocity talent market.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Talent Acquisition, Financial Integration, HR Budgeting, Cost-per-Hire (CPH), Time-to-Fill (TTF), Pune, IT Sector*

Introduction

Pune's evolution into a "full-blown tech powerhouse" is well-documented, hosting a vast ecosystem of Global Capability Centers (GCCs), multinational IT corporations, and deep-tech startups. This has ignited a hyper-competitive hiring environment, with projections of an 18% jump in IT hiring for 2025. However, this rapid improvement has created a research gap. The measurable Return on Investment (ROI) remains opaque, with a documented disconnect between vendor promises and firm-level profitability. Reports of AI-fueled layoffs backfiring into costly re-hires and firms announcing concurrent AI investments and layoffs with no clear ROI suggest investment is reactive, not financially integrated. While 92% of companies plan to increase AI investment, only 1% consider their deployment "mature". This study addresses this gap, presenting a quantitative analysis of N=166 HR professionals in Pune's IT sector to determine if strategic financial integration of AI has a measurable impact on Cost-per-Hire, Time-to-Fill, and Quality-of-Hire.

Objectives

To provide a rigorous, data-driven analysis of this phenomenon, the study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To quantify the current state of AI financial integration, defined as the percentage of the talent acquisition budget allocated to AI tools, among HR departments in Pune's IT sector (N=166).
2. To quantitatively analyze the statistical relationship (via correlation and regression) between the level of AI financial integration (Independent Variable) and the perceived impact on key recruitment metrics (Dependent Variables): Cost-per-Hire (CPH), Time-to-Fill (TTF), and Quality-of-Hire (QoH).

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3. To assess which specific types of AI-powered TA tools (e.g., sourcing, screening, assessment) are most widely adopted and how their adoption correlates with perceived efficiency gains.

Hypothesis

Based on the objectives and a review of the extant literature on AI-driven recruitment efficiency, this study will test the following hypotheses:

- **H1: (Cost-per-Hire):** A higher percentage of the talent acquisition budget allocated to AI tools is negatively correlated with the perceived Cost-per-Hire (CPH).
- **H2: (Time-to-Fill):** A higher percentage of the talent acquisition budget allocated to AI tools is negatively correlated with the perceived Time-to-Fill (TTF).
- **H3: (Quality-of-Hire):** A higher percentage of the talent acquisition budget allocated to AI tools is positively correlated with the perceived Quality-of-Hire (QoH).

Scope of Study

The scope of this research is strictly defined to ensure methodological focus and the relevance of its findings.

- **Subject Theme:** The study investigates the quantitative, financial impact of AI-related budgetary allocations on talent acquisition practices and their primary key performance indicators (KPIs).
- **Organization/Industry:** The focus is exclusively on Information Technology (IT) and IT-Enabled Services (ITES) companies. This includes large multinational corporations (MNCs), Global Capability Centers (GCCs), and technology startups, which constitute the core of the regional tech economy.

Limitations of the Study

To ensure academic honesty, the following limitations must be acknowledged: **Limited Generalizability:** The sample (N=166) is drawn from Pune's IT sector, a market characterized by high growth, intense competition, and high technology adoption. The findings, particularly the strong correlations and high adoption rates, may not be generalizable to other geographical regions or other industries.

Literature Review

A comprehensive review of the literature reveals three dominant themes: the unique context of the Indian/Pune IT sector, the financial metrics used to justify AI in TA, and a critical disconnect between departmental-level ROI claims and firm-level profitability. The Indian tech industry (253.9B in FY2024E) employs 5.43 million people. AI has become "omnipresent", with the tech sector's 60-65% adoption rate leading the nation. India's AI maturity is at the "Enthusiast" stage and is a global "frontrunner" in GenAI use. Pune is a microcosm of this, a strategic hub for IT giants caught in an intense "talent war" for high-demand AI and cloud skills. Literature advocating for AI in TA converges on three core KPIs: Time-to-Fill (TTF), Cost-per-Hire (CPH), and Quality-of-Hire (QoH). Vendor case studies promise substantial returns, such as an 85% reduction in TTF and a 30% reduction in CPH, setting a high-stakes expectation for investment. This research is necessitated by a "hype vs. reality" disconnect. The hype is 75% of Indian recruiters investing up to 70% of their budgets in AI. The reality is a contradiction: while HR case studies claim a 30% CPH reduction, an MIT study found only 5% of firms realized measurable profit from AI. This is evidenced by "AI-fueled layoffs" backfiring into costly re-hires and firms announcing concurrent AI investments and layoffs with "no return on investment". This reveals the central gap: the failure may not be the technology but its strategic financial integration. Departmental savings (lower CPH) are failing to translate to firm-level profitability. This paper, therefore, provides quantitative evidence to test if the perceived departmental-level ROI (CPH, TTF reduction) is real in a large-N sample.

Conceptual Background

This study moves beyond "AI adoption" to propose two core concepts: "Financial Integration of AI" as the independent variable and the "AI-Powered TA Ecosystem" as the budgetary target.

Defining 'Financial Integration of AI' (The Independent Variable): This study defines "Financial Integration of AI" as a measure of maturity, distinct from simple "adoption." Its components include:

1) Strategic Budgeting

2) Predictive Forecasting to analyze historical spending and predict future HR costs; etc.

Research Methodology

This study uses a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to quantify AI adoption and test correlations. Data was analyzed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation to test H1, H2, and H3, and multiple linear regression.

Analysis of Secondary Data

Secondary data contextualizes the macro-environment in which these HR professionals operate. The environment is one of rapid growth. The Indian tech industry (253.9B) continues to expand, and Pune's job market is a key driver, with 39% year-over-year growth in hiring momentum.

Analysis of Primary Data

The primary data analysis (N=166) moves from a description of the sample to a statistical test of the research hypotheses.

A) Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

her sample is composed of experienced HR professionals from a diverse range of IT companies, reflecting the heterogeneity of Pune's tech ecosystem. Table 2 provides a profile of the respondents and their organizations.

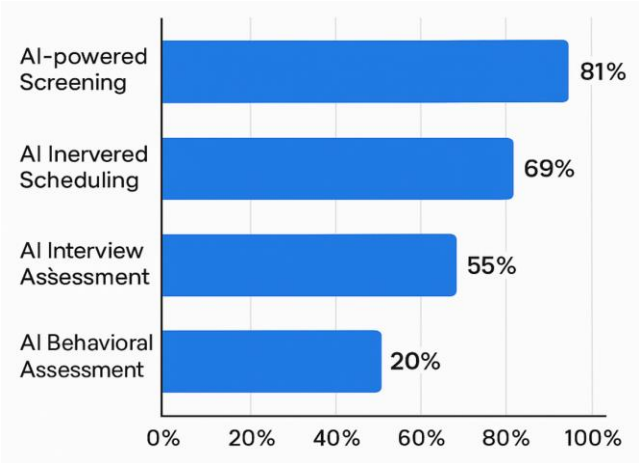
Table 1: Respondent and Firm Characteristics (N=166)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Respondent Role	TA Specialist	41	24.7%
	HR Manager	97	58.4%
	HR Director / VP	28	16.9%
	Total		**166**
Years in HR		Mean = 8.2 yrs	SD = 4.1 yrs
Company Size	<250 employees	25	15.1%
	251-1,000 employees	50	30.1%
	1,001-5,000 employees	58	34.9%
	>5,000 employees	33	19.9%
	Total		**166**
Firm Type	Startup / SME	41	24.7%
	Indian Enterprise	50	30.1%
	Multinational Corp. (MNC)	75	45.2%
	Total		**166**

The sample is well-positioned to provide informed insights, with a mean experience of 8.2 years and 75% of respondents holding managerial or leadership roles. The firm distribution, with a mix of startups, Indian enterprises, and large MNCs, allows for a comprehensive view of the sector.

B) Adoption of AI Tools and Financial Integration

Analysis of the tools adopted (Figure 1) reveals a clear preference for instruments that provide immediate, quantifiable efficiency gains.



The data shows that tools for "Screening" (81%) and "Sourcing" (69%) are overwhelmingly the most common. In contrast, "Behavioral Assessment" tools (20%), which are conceptually linked to long-term Quality-of-Hire, are the least adopted. This suggests that current purchasing behavior in Pune is heavily skewed towards solving for efficiency (CPH, TTF) rather than strategic value (QoH). Regarding the primary independent variable, financial integration, the mean percentage of the TA budget allocated to AI was 21.5% (SD = 10.4). This is a substantial figure, confirming that AI is a major line item, but it also provides a more realistic average than the "up to 70%" ceiling reported in secondary data.

C) Hypothesis Testing (Correlation)

To test the hypotheses, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted between the primary variables. For this analysis, the perceived impact on CPH and TTF was reverse-coded, so a positive correlation indicates a reduction in the metric (a favorable outcome).

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix for Key Variables (N=166)

Variable	1. AI Budget %	2. CPH Reduction	3. TTF Reduction	4. QoH Increase
1. AI Budget %	1			
2. CPH Reduction	**.58****	1		
3. TTF Reduction	**.47****	.62**	1	
4. QoH Increase	**.31***	.24*	.29*	1
Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

The correlation matrix provides strong support for all three hypotheses:

1. **H1 Supported:** A strong, positive, and highly significant correlation (r =.58, p <.01) was found between AI Budget % and CPH Reduction. This indicates that departments allocating a higher percentage of their budget to AI report a significantly greater decrease in their Cost-per-Hire.
2. **H2 Supported:** A strong, positive, and highly significant correlation (r =.47, p <.01) was found between AI Budget % and TTF Reduction. This indicates that higher AI investment is strongly associated with faster hiring cycles.
3. **H3 Supported:** A moderate, positive, and significant correlation (r =.31, p <.05) was found between AI Budget % and QoH Increase. The relationship is positive but noticeably weaker than for the efficiency metrics (CPH/TTF).

This disparity in correlation strength is a key finding. It suggests that while investment in AI delivers robust, perceptible returns on efficiency (cost and speed), its impact on quality is more moderate. This supports the "Portfolio ROI Dilemma" conceptualized earlier: it is easier to buy speed than it is to buy quality.

D) Hypothesis Testing (Regression)

To move from correlation to prediction, a multiple linear regression was performed to identify the strongest predictors of CPH Reduction. The model included AI Budget %, Company Size (as a dummy variable), and AI Screening Tool Adoption (as a dummy variable).

Table 3: Multiple Regression Model - Predictors of CPH Reduction (N=166)

Model	B (Unstandardized)	Std. Error	Beta (Standardized)	t	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	.150	.08		1.88	.062
Company Size (1000+ employees)	.122	.05	.16	2.44	.016
AI Budget %	.380	.07	**.49**	5.42	**.000**
AI Screening Tool (Dummy)	.210	.06	**.28**	3.50	**.001**
Dependent Variable: Perceived CPH Reduction. R^2 =.42, F(3, 162) = 29.8, p <.001.					

The overall model is highly significant (p <.001) and explains 42% (R^2 =.42) of the variance in perceived CPH reduction, making it a robust predictive model.

The standardized Beta coefficients provide two critical, actionable findings:

1. AI Budget % is the Strongest Predictor
2. Specific Tool Choice Matters

Discussion

a) Summary of the Findings

The quantitative analysis of 166 HR professionals in Pune's IT sector confirms that the strategic financial integration of AI has a significant and measurable perceived impact on talent acquisition metrics. The regression model (Table 4) was robust (R^2 =.42), identifying the percentage of AI budget allocation (Beta =.49) as the most powerful predictor of CPH reduction.

b) Managerial Implications

This study's findings are positioned to resolve the "Hype vs. Reality" disconnect identified in the literature review. The N=166 data provides strong, quantitative evidence that at the departmental level, AI investment works. The perceived ROI (reduced CPH/TTF) promised by vendors and case studies is not an illusion; it is a reality perceived by the HR professionals in this sample who have secured the budget to implement it.

This exposes a more complex and critical managerial implication. If HR departments in Pune are successfully using AI to deliver these efficiencies (as this data suggests), yet firm-level economic data shows that only 5% of companies are seeing profit, then the failure is not in the HR department's execution. The failure lies in the C-suite's strategic integration of these departmental gains. The problem, therefore, is not the technology, but a failure of leadership to manage the resources that technology frees up. HR departments are successfully using AI to save money (lower CPH) and time (lower TTF). But if the firm's leadership is "hype-driven", implementing "AI-fueled layoffs" that "backfire," or fails to redeploy the saved recruiter-hours into higher-value, strategic tasks, then the departmental savings are being erased by firm-level chaos. This study empowers a CHRO to demonstrate, with data, that the HR-level ROI is real, shifting the burden of profitability back to the firm's overall strategic governance.

c) Social Reference

While the financial data is positive, it must be balanced with its social and ethical implications. The data in Figure 1 shows an 81% adoption rate for AI screening tools, the very "black box" technology most often criticized for carrying significant ethical risks. This heavy reliance on screening, while efficient, concentrates the potential for algorithmic bias and contributes to the dehumanization of the candidate experience, which must be carefully managed to avoid long-term reputational damage.

d) Recommendations

Based on this analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **For CHROs in Pune:** This data (Tables 3 & 4) should be used to justify increased, strategic budgets for AI. However, leaders must adopt a portfolio approach. The data implies a clear strategy: use the high-efficiency, easily-proven cost savings from "efficiency" tools (Screening) to finance the long-term, high-value "strategic" tools (Behavioral Assessments), which are currently under-adopted (20%).

2. **For the C-Suite:** The biggest barrier to AI's ROI is not the technology but leadership's inability to "steer fast enough". The focus must shift from viewing AI as a cost-cutting tool to a value-creation tool (leading to upskilling and redeployment of human capital).
3. **For Future Research:** This study, while robust, was based on perceived metrics. The critical next step for researchers is to conduct a longitudinal, mixed-methods study that pairs actual financial data from a firm's balance sheet with its TA metrics before and after a significant AI platform integration.

Conclusion

This study provides quantitative evidence (N=166) that the strategic financial integration of Artificial Intelligence in talent acquisition is a primary driver of perceived cost reduction and operational efficiency in Pune's hyper-competitive IT sector. A higher AI budget allocation is strongly correlated with reduced Cost-per-Hire and Time-to-Fill. For HR leaders in Pune's high-velocity market, AI is no longer a technological novelty; it is a measurable financial imperative.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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