Evaluating Employers

Knowing the company you plan to join should be an important part of your job search.

It allows you to get a preview into the organization and find out if you will fit in and enjoy your new job. It should give you information to answer the question- Do your goals match with those of the organization?

You do not want any unpleasant surprises once you have changed your job. You world also not welcome a move, which turned out to be detrimental for your career. In order to reduce dissonance post a job-change, it is advisable then to research your prospective employer thoroughly.

When and how should researching the prospective employers be done?

Research the prospective employer before applying for the job

At the outset you need to draw up a list of organizations that you would be interested in applying to, based on broad indicators like industry, product/services offered and your prior experience. This would, of course, be done keeping in mind your career goals.

The second step would be to evaluate each of these prospective employers against a set of criteria established by you. This set should be as detailed and exhaustive as possible in order to give you as much relevant information as you can get regarding the organization. This evaluation should enable you to classify companies into two groups-the ones that you definitely need to apply to and the others that do not fit in with your career goals.

The third step would be to send your resume to the short-listed organizations and wait for interview calls. The information you have gathered during your research of the company would help you give better and well informed answers regarding the organization you are interviewing with, the work you think you could be doing there etc. This will project you as a keen and dedicated candidate who has done his homework and is aware of the company. And of course, once you are made a job offer your research will help you decide if the job and company fit in with your career plans.

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The focus of this article will be on the second step i.e. evaluating your prospective employers before you apply for specific job positions i.e. before you send out your resume.

Establish criteria and priorities what is important for your job

To evaluate prospective employers, you need to establish certain criteria. A detailed list of criteria should cover different aspects such as the organization culture, its market reputation, its growth prospects, requirements of your job etc. Once this exhaustive list has been drawn up, you also need to priorities what criteria are important for you in your job. This will help you to compare different job offers and choose the one that satisfies your requirements the most.

This is what your detailed list of criteria could look like. You could divide the criteria into different categories:

The company background

1.	The industry that the organization is in
2.	The products/services that the company deals in
3.	When the company was set up
4.	Number of offices/branches in various cities
5.	Size of organization-its turnover, employee strength

Performance of the company

1.	Its turnover and other financials-profits etc.
2.	Marker share of its products/services-is it a leader?
3.	Growth prospects of the company
4.	Current and future expansion plans/objectives
5.	Its competitors
6.	Company reputation amongst customers/suppliers
7.	Company problems/needs

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Human Resources

1.	Organization structure
2.	Quality of personnel
3.	Working environment
4.	Corporate culture/philosophy
5.	Company salary structure
6.	Increments pattern
7.	Performance appraisal systems-is company a meritocracy?
8.	Management style
9.	Importance of training programs
10.	Any plans for re-structuring.

About your prospective job

1.	Job description/requirements
2.	Match with your existing skills and education
3.	Frequency of travel
4.	Chances of transfers
5.	Benefits package
6.	Work hours likely
7.	Job location –city/upcountry; urban/rural
8.	Opportunities for promotions/advancement

This list has 30 criteria listed and you could add some others that you can think of. A research like this on your prospective employer would provide invaluable information to help you decide on the most suitable employer for you that would match your needs and your career goals.

Words-of mouth a significant source of information

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This list can serve as an excellent guide to gather information on the prospective employer but the important question here is from what sources? The information source needs to be reliable, accurate and up to date. You could use alternative sources of information for this purpose such as:

- Company home pages.
- Investment portals.
- Libraries.
- Stock exchange/CMIE compilations.
- Company annual reports/brochures.
- Trade associations like FICCI.
- Newspaper/magazine articles.
- Word of mouth.

A few comments on these information sources. Company home pages are useful, however you need to remember that they will tell you what they want you to know in order to project themselves positively. Not that there is anything wrong in that. It's just that you could also look elsewhere.

One of the significant sources is word of mouth that is talking to people currently working in the organization or people who have earlier worked in that organization and have since left. This could give useful information on work environment, organization structure, job content, management style and personnel. You world get a real feel of what the organization is like from these first hand accounts.

Let's hope an exhaustive research like this of your prospective employers ensures that you take the right decision and join a great place to work!