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Skills Dialogue - A Focus on BPOs

Expert Speak



Dr Sandhya Chintala - Senior Director
NASSCOM - Education Initiative
"The Sector Skills Council of the Government of India is eligible to ask for grants for the industry to train the trainers and create a facilitators guide. The manual will address listening/speaking/voice and accent skills. The train-the-trainers programme for the states will train 25% of the teachers with the training capabilities, with ICT to give support."



Subrat Chakravarty - Head Human Resources
HCL Technologies - Business Services
"Today educational qualifications are the only benchmark we have. Need to have some globally/universally accepted standards."



Vinod M - Vice President - Recruitment
24/7 Customer
"Language skills remain the biggest challenge for BPOs. There are nuances that need to be focused on, for fast understanding, quick resolution and therefore shorter call times for enhanced efficiency."



Shailaja Puranik - Country Head and Chief Operating Officer
Hays Business Solutions
"Corporate houses should collaborate with the academia to impart the right skills and even guarantee jobs to attract the right talent."



Alok Narain - VP - Employee Development
Quattro BPO Solutions
"The role of BPOs is to handle client transactions. Candidates do a fine job in the beginning but lose interest as they do not know client vision and policies and try to move to an industry where they are an integral part of the business."



Subir Ghosh - President
Aegis Global Academy
"Management academia has so far not touched the BPO industry. People are grossly unequipped to take up managerial challenges. With such people moving up in the ladder you face problems."



Sanjay Gupta - Global Head, Human Resources
EXL Service Ltd.
"Biggest problem with BPO industry is the perception about the industry. BPO industry is still not considered as 'here to stay' kind of company, it is still 'stop-gap opportunity'. The change has to start in the mindset"



Satyajit Menon - Head HR Business Partner
Vertex
"Some kind of common entrance exams should be mandatory to be eligible for a BPO job. This should be a drive for students and provide a competitive edge."



Coming together to fill the skills gap

TimesJobs.com Bureau

India Inc is hiring today and also battling a talent crunch of over 50%. What does it take to make this educated workforce employable too? TimesJobs.com alongwith The Economic Times has started a new initiative - The Skills Dialogue, to get to the bottom of the problem and come up with solutions, in partnership with the industry. In the first such dialogue, held in New Delhi on December 10, CXOs from across the BPO sector debated this issue. Excerpts of the debate.

India Inc is hiring at every level today. Finding the requisite skills is the biggest challenge for HR managers across industries. Corporate houses are resorting to training and setting up skill development centres to surmount the skills crunch.

Dr Sandhya Chintala, Senior Director - Education Initiative, NASSCOM, set the tone by exhorting the industry to work collaboratively on finding solutions to the malaise that is industry-wide. The BPO industry is one of the 20 sectors identified by the National

Skills Mission set up by the Government of India with a mandate to train trainers across states by working in partnership with the private sectors. While the southern states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have asked for value-added skills, others have asked for

Participants spoke about how the perception of the BPO job as a long-term career option has yet to develop. They referred to the misconception that this industry is a 'stop-gap' opportunity. Subrat Chakravarty, Head - Human Resources - HCL Technologies - Business Services, referred to the fact that though there is scope for a

The key take-aways:

- Changing the perception of a BPO job to a long-term career option
- Create multi-layered certification standards
- Focus on Customer centricity and customer empathy
- Media to play a critical role in enhancing the image of the BPO job
- Focus on management schools to skill the senior management in BPOs
- Forge Government, Industry and Academia partnerships
- Create inclusive education curriculum for voice-based processes

basic voice skills. She exhorted the corporate houses to adopt a district each so that the mission can be pushed across the country.

range of skills to be used here, the common perception is one of a voice-based call centre with basic functional roles and tedious working hours.

Vinod M, Vice President, Recruitment, 24/7 Customer, maintained that while language skills remain the biggest challenge, there are nuances that need to be focused on - fast understanding, quick resolution and therefore shorter call times for enhanced efficiency. The employees need to converse and understand global English and communicate in a grammatically correct fashion to Europe and US-based consumers. This requires short-term learning programmes, which he recommended should be taught at the primary and high school levels in government and aided schools in all states as they were the ones supplying employees to the voice-based call centres.

Subir Ghosh, President - Aegis Global Academy refuted the point saying that "Going forward, these opportunities will also come up in the domestic markets. Customer empathy and the right temperament to serve will then overtake the major skill that is in short supply."

Satyajit Menon - Head HR Business Partner, Vertex India, talked about making the BPO job aspirational by providing a "common entrance exam which should be mandatory to be eligible for a job in BPO. This will provide a competitive edge." Sanjay Gupta,

Global Head, Human Resources, EXL, added that "Management academia have so far not addressed the type of jobs in the BPO industry. As a result the skills crunch is at the senior management levels as well. We need courses/training certifications to prepare people for BPO jobs."

Shailaja Puranik, Country Head and Chief Operating Officer, Hays Business Solutions, advocated meticulous career counseling to combat the challenge of attrition. It is incumbent on the industry to document and address the qualitative and quantitative needs for the next decade to create a roadmap. "Can we forecast our human resources needs for the next decade," she asked?

Alok Narain, VP Employee Development, Quattro BPO Solutions focused attention on the problem of losing trained talent after organizations invest in skilling them on the job.

The dialogue concluded with the key pointers that BPO as an industry needs to have global acceptable standard certifications. Nasscom has taken the lead to consolidate the problems of the industry and the government is mediating between the industry and academia to provide assistance funds to skill the workforce.

BPO Industry to grow 28% in FY10

Over 700,000 employees nationally

Revenues of \$15b projected