

THE HUMAN SIDE OF OUTSOURCING



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Training, apprenticeships and mentoring

With an obvious skills gap, many organisations are producing their own training programmes, mentoring opportunities and apprenticeship schemes in order to upskill their staff and meet the demands of the fast moving outsourcing industry.

Ganesh Pai, Senior Vice President & Head, Insurance, Mphasis, said: "Training programmes and a strong talent management framework are some of the key dimensions of a successful outsourcing partnership. In order to achieve this, outsourcers need to set up talent programmes to plan, acquire, develop and retain talent aligned to sourcing needs.

"This can be done with a strong HR programme, promoting the advantages and opportunities to learn from cross-cultural experiences and teams. An efficient way to encourage this is the development of a global, virtual workforce through the deployment of unified communication technology and enterprise knowledge management repositories."

Training

It is imperative for suppliers to ensure their staff are well trained in their jobs, as any failures could jeopardise their business. End-users are keen to avoid 'supplier lock in' so they will be able to take remedial action and move their services to an alternative supplier if they aren't getting the desired level of service.

Sitel's Newcastle Centre was awarded the 'Best Training Programme' at the Contact Centre Awards in November 2011. Sitel provides learning opportunities to enable employees to perform in their jobs effectively, and to assist in career

management. To support this company goal, 'Track-Training' was developed to provide a training, career-development and succession-planning programme.

Andrew McCobb, Site Director Newcastle, Sitel, said: "Track-Training supports the development of internal talent, utilising a combination of role-focused training activities, experiential learning, coaching and mentoring.

"Progress through role-specific and individual learning plans is supported via our internal Learning Management System (LMS), called Sitel University, which enables the integration of on-demand e-learning materials and virtual-classroom training from our Global Learning Team and providing automated and bespoke reporting to be able to track completion and quantify the success of training activities."

Apprentices

The government is also encouraging companies to take on apprentices of all levels to work alongside experienced staff to gain job-specific skills – especially those focusing on IT – to fill the skills gap. Off the job, usually on a day-release basis, apprentices receive training to work towards nationally recognised qualifications.

Karen Price, CEO, e-skills UK, said: "IT apprenticeship programmes are a good source of tomorrow's IT professionals. "In the public sector, where budgets are under pressure, IT professional apprenticeships can offer a very strong return on investment."

IBM's apprenticeship scheme, in partnership with e-skills, was launched in mid-2010 and has proven very successful with

IBM doubling the intake of apprentices taken on in 2011 and recruiting again in 2012.

Upon completion, apprentices will be at the advanced apprenticeship level, which is a formal government recognised level equivalent to two A-level passes. The apprenticeship takes two years to complete and includes classroom, online and on the job training. Their qualifications are tested along the way by internal and external verifiers.

David Burn, General Manager for IBM Global Technology Services in the UK and Ireland, said: "Apprentices work as IT specialists and as such will develop proof of concepts, design, develop, build, test and implement systems to solve our clients' business and IT problems. As an IT specialist, they become hands-on professionals and develop an in-depth understanding of IBM products, offerings and services.

David continues: "The term 'IT Specialist' is fairly all encompassing. In reality the role 'IT Specialist' can involve any aspect of IT including business analysis, application development, database design, package customisation and implementation, testing, support, networking and junior project management. They may also find themselves working alongside IBM sales teams, providing technical project knowledge and guidance to support the work that they do with our clients."

The rising costs of university tuition fees are another reason why many young learners are looking at alternative forms of education. From September 2012, universities in England are raising tuition fees to up to £9,000 per year, amid major budget cuts to institutions' teaching budgets.

The controversial policy, backed by parliament in December 2010, sparked angry street protests. It was developed as the government's response to a review of higher education funding by former BP chief Lord Browne.

Skills Minister John Hayes said, "The government is putting apprenticeships on a level with academic study, enabling young people to gain degree level qualifications while earning a wage and learning the skills employers need most. This new initiative is great news for the financial services industry, and for ambitious young people who want to forge careers in the sector."

Although that sounds promising, the number of apprenticeships, especially in IT, is still low compared to other sectors as the government continues to focus on broader skills.

Greg Rideout, Managing Director of Quantum Plus, said: "In the wider context apprenticeships are on the increase (279,000 in 2009/2010 up to 442,000 2010/2011) although the number related to IT remains small and consistent at around 4%. The focus in government has been more in the direction of wider skills development covering science, Technology, engineering and mathematics."

The Financial Skills Partnership has recently awarded the funds to develop an employer-led higher apprenticeship framework to nurture talent in other key areas such as banking and insurance. The funding was awarded to the Financial Skills Partnership as part of a £18.1m government funding package to support the development of 19,000 new Higher Apprenticeships in sectors including construction, advanced engineering, insurance and financial services.

Mentoring

Mentoring opportunities are likewise becoming more prevalent and are another way which organisations are able to develop and nurture talent. They are also an excellent opportunity for the more established organisations and business entrepreneurs to bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to SMEs.

With a report from Equifax recently revealing that 120 businesses are going bust in the UK every day, it is a difficult time for British SMEs. It is clear that despite hundreds of billions of pounds worth of quantitative easing, banks are simply not lending to the small businesses that need it the most.

The SME economy in the UK may be contracting, but it is still worth well over £1,000bn annually. Despite this purchasing power and relatively enormous wealth of the SME sector, too many businesses are still finding it difficult to survive.

British businesses, particularly SMEs, need to look beyond the negative headlines and look for positive ways to tighten their belt and continue building their enterprise. This can be achieved through mentoring, where mentees can be steered towards acquiring new skills and learning outsourcing best practice.

The Tech City Investment Organisation (TCIO), the body set up by UK Trade & Investment to foster a hub of technology start-ups in east London, has launched a mentorship programme that aims to connect UK business leaders with startups, with a view to providing training, speed mentoring, advice and aid collaboration.

Kevin Eyres, LinkedIn's former European managing director and talent champion for TCIO, said: "There's a huge value in having someone available who can say "I have been here before" to help others learn from their successes and failures."

"The basic assets for success are already in place in Tech City and momentum around the area is growing. With the mentorship programme, we want to ensure the area reaches its full potential by linking new, creative minds with established talent so they can benefit from their experience," he added.

TCIO hopes to have one hundred mentors signed up to the service by the end of 2011 and the scheme should serve as inspiration and guidance for individuals and SMEs throughout the UK.

Brent Hoberman, co-founder of Lastminute.com, said: "As an entrepreneur and as an investor, I've seen what a dramatic impact a good mentor can have on a start-up business. It's great to see a programme like this, in what is already a flourishing technology community. The programme will really help facilitate access to mentors, which will not only help amplify the growth of the area but help make start-ups in London and the UK more competitive."

Throughout 2011, British businesses had access to more knowledge and support as a new government backed mentoring scheme launched through 'mentorsme'.

Set up by the UK's five largest high street banks, the scheme offers support on a range of issues faced by businesses, from finance to marketing to HR. The website provides a single point of access for those seeking mentoring and those seeking to be mentors, covering the whole of the UK. Visit www.mentorsme.co.uk for more information.