

## Careers

# Why are BPOs tying up with B-schools

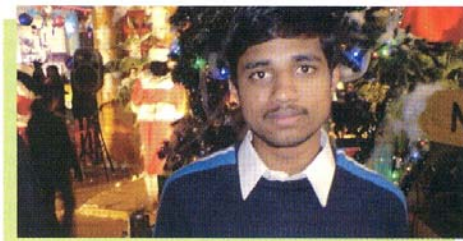
by Dhanya Krishnakumar

Most BPOs are offering their employees higher education programmes in tandem with some of the best B-schools

*"You don't need fancy high-brow traditions or money to really learn. You just need people with the desire to better themselves."*

– Adam Cooper and Bill Collage

Picture this – Chella Kumar is a 12th standard pass out who opted for a job after school due to financial difficulties at home. He joined the BPO industry in 2003-04 as a customer care executive at Convergys in Bangalore. He is now doing his second year of Bachelor of Computer Applications (BCA) from the Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India (ICFAI) courtesy a tie-up between the institute and Convergys. Chella Kumar explains his reasons for joining ICFAI, "I have wanted to study further for a while now. But given my personal means, I could only dream of something like Alagappa University in Tamil Nadu where a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) costs Rs 1,500 per year. That would not have taken me too far in my pro-



Chella Kumar, a customer care executive, has joined the Convergys sponsored ICFAI programme.

fession. But thanks to my company's tie-up with ICFAI – I am not only pursuing a course from a well recognised university, but also getting financial assistance from my company." He goes on to add, "When you join

the frontline, your basic qualification does not matter so much, but to progress in your career you need to have a degree backing your work experience."

### Fast-tracking

Seconding this thought is Padmanabha Rao who is head of a process at 24/7 Customer. Having worked for 7 years in the industry, Rao, a B.Com graduate grew up the ranks. He handled operations in first few years of his career and now heads a Rs. 24-crore business unit with 400 people reporting to him. He says, "I realised that to maximise my growth potential, I decided to join Beyond Programme, which is sponsored by my company. It is a leadership/entrepreneurial 18-month diploma in association with one of the top MBA institutes in the country. The programme helped me understand the theory behind what we practice on the shopfloor. But more importantly, it has fast-tracked my growth and in about five years from now I can expect to become a VP."

Getting a job in the BPO industry is a dream come true for many a young graduate looking to gain some work experience and make money. But given the minimum qualifications of the majority, do careers in the industry tend to stagnate a few years down the line? In order to prove this theory false, to give employees a long-term career growth plan and to stem attrition, many large players in the BPO industry have begun to offer excellent training and higher education opportunities. Even though the industry itself is on a learning curve and most companies are conducting the first or second batch of the tailor-made course, the number of people wanting to sign up for the same have seen a dramatic increase in the last couple of years.

Most companies are offering their employees a plethora of choices when it comes to higher education programmes in conjunction with some of the best B-schools or institutes in the country. Nina Nair, vice-president, human resource development, 24/7

Customer says, "We offer our employees multiple options to study further, providing them with opportunities for future growth, and also fast-track people who know more than just generic skills. More than 20% of our employees are interested in higher education since they are in a hurry to scale heights in their career. Besides, these are people who want to retain their jobs, even as they pursue a higher degree/diploma. They want the best of both worlds and that's where the organisation steps in to offer help."

### Upgrading skills

Infosys BPO's Higher Education Programme (HEP) works on upgrading skills and competencies of employees. The objective of providing an HEP is to address the career aspirations of employees by providing them with education in areas which are desired and also in those subjects, which are relevant to the organisation. Infosys also offers its employees the chance to opt for courses at the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore (IIM-B). For Yogesh Poddar, an assistant manager at Infosys BPO, this has proven to be a boon. Yogesh, who joined the industry with just a B.Com four years back, now heads a team of over 150 people, and is currently part of the leadership programme that Infosys offers in tandem with IIM-B. He feels that this will make him a better leader and people manager and says, "Earlier I made decisions on the basis of previous experience or gut feel. Now I am able to visualise a strategy keeping in mind my company's overall growth plan."

### I-versity programme

Intelenet is another company trying to help its employees in their pursuit of higher education. The company has a programme called I-versity, which is the Employee Professional Development Programme. Under the I-versity umbrella, Intelenet has come up with an MBA programme, which is a part-time one-year diploma programme with Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies (NMIMS) enabling employees to study and earn at the same time. Jill Shah, AGM-operations and core training at Intelenet, intends to leverage this opportunity offered by her company to improve her career prospects in the long run. After her



Jill Shah, AGM-operations and core training at Intelenet, is pursuing the one-year diploma programme at NMIMS.

B.Com, Jill was pursuing her C.A. and when she did not make it through to the finals; she decided to take a break from her studies and joined Intelenet. "I started at the entry-level and am now an AGM. Having worked for over 7 years now, I have realised the need to do an MBA to enhance my career growth. Now that I can pursue something part-time without losing my job, I intend to join the next batch of MBA aspirants from my company."

### Gauging employees' needs

Explains Manuel D'Souza, chief human resources officer, Intelenet Global Services, "We recently conducted a survey to gauge employees' needs with regard to how they would like us to support them with higher education. The survey results tell us that an overwhelming 73 per cent of our employees would like to pursue post-graduate education. To be precise, 40 per cent would like to do MBA. Other requests were for courses on computer graphics, animation, and personality development." There is an overwhelming majority of BPO employees who are joining company-aided programmes to enhance their educational qualifications in order to ensure a bright future.

Pradeep Daniel who is a team leader with Oracle's unit for their global financial processes says, "I always wanted to do MBA after gaining some work experience. But I could not afford to take time out to pursue academics. I had almost given up the idea of getting a postgraduate degree when I came to know about the satellite programmes offered by XLRI. I did that course over the weekends and it was self-funded. An MBA helped me get a job with Oracle, a global brand."

But with lifestyles becoming expensive, some companies are offering incentives for employees pursuing higher education. For instance, Infosys offers employees conditional reimbursements upon the successful completion of the course. Most companies like Convergys, support staff by partly sponsoring the programme of their choice. Explains Supriya Ghosh, senior manager, human resources at Intelenet, "I have over 12 years work experience and all I have is a B.Com degree. When I found out that I could take my educational qualifications a notch up without having to give up my job, my pay packet or even compromise on my work-life balance, I jumped at the in-house MBA offer. Otherwise I might not have thought of studying right now."

Whatever might be the compulsions to pursue higher education, the fact is that BPO employees are slowly transforming themselves from the traditional mould of young graduates looking for work experience and some big money. And with the emphasis moving to top rungs being more reachable for people with more qualifications behind their names, it might not be long before we see more people flocking back to B-school! ▲

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