

Chapter 7

Multi-Faceted Industry– Academia Collaboration

K Guruprasad
TCS BPO, India

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines ways in which industry and academia collaboration can happen, keeping in mind the current generation of graduating students, current business needs, and global market competition. Mainly IT, ITES and BPO industries are in the scope, although BPO is given more focus owing to huge growth that is happening in Indian BPO industry. BPO work demystification and its impact on the Gen-Y workforce are addressed, which plays an important role in building paradigms that enhance academic collaboration. Some best practices happening currently are mentioned and recommendations suggested. In addition, the benefits of collaboration to both industry and academia, challenges involved in implementation, and exceptions to some of these approaches are discussed. Some case studies are explained in detail.

INTRODUCTION

University-Industry interaction is not new and is in existence in one form or other for long. While it appears to be more profound in advanced countries, today it is happening in India too. But it needs to happen more and in a more systematic way as India has started figuring prominently on the world map in both the university and industry spaces.

The advent of knowledge society has seen many efforts in higher education to make it more close to societal needs. The two important aspects for this are how we prepare our students for them to fit in work and real life situation, and how we make provisions for lifelong learning. It is rather necessary that industry and academia work in close relation complementing and supplementing each other. It is in this context that the chapter discusses

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the multifaceted industry-academia collaboration for corporate education taking the case of BPO/KPO industries.

Need of Multi-Faceted Collaboration

Let us first understand the employee life cycle in a typical corporate. Fresh hires from campus go through a rigorous long duration campus to corporate transformation training and get ready to function on the job (normally referred to as Initial Learning Program or ILP). With growing demand for trained and billing-ready resources, IT companies (includes ITES, BPO, KPO and others in the family) struggle to fulfill the customer demands at short notice. Although numbers churned out from academic institutions are high, majority of them are not directly deployable on the job. Significant amount of time, money and effort go in inducting and training these fresh hires to make them function effectively and efficiently. There is always a learning curve that is affecting the profit margins, apart from the fact that loss of business can occur if resource fulfillment does not happen on time. All this makes ILP a mandatory step in corporate, which can be completely or at least partially skipped if academia works hand in hand with industry. Universities need to revise the curricula to suit industry requirements and take the responsibility of preparing the students to face the real life on the job. ILP mainly concentrates on soft skills and behavioral abilities on one side, and actual technicalities of the job requirements on the other side. ILP will accordingly have two phases, one being a common set of modules for all streams, and then a customized set for different streams/domains. For example, the fresh hires joining a Telecom domain in BPO will go through a couple of weeks of behavioral training (common to all hires) and then a couple of weeks of domain specific training which includes overview of Telecom domain, actual work being done on the floor, tools used, processes, applications, etc. The latter phase also can include simulation labs to get a feel of actual application used by clients.

After the employees get trained and start functioning on the job, the companies need to now worry about their continuous learning (normally referred to as Continual Learning Program or CLP). CLP is critical for achieving high performance levels, ensuring high customer satisfaction, internal career growth, minimizing senior level external hiring and long-term employee loyalty. Employee engagement is a key factor in controlling attrition of high performers, enhancing performance of medium and low performers, getting high associate satisfaction index (ASI), and achieving a higher customer satisfaction. There is a strong correlation among training, career growth and attrition. An analysis of recent data on training vs. attrition in TCS BPO shows that tendency of not-trained employees to attrite is approximately 3 times more than that of those who got some form of training. Root cause analysis of attrition also shows that it is highest in the first couple of years of joining and it seems to be mainly due to career growth opportunities and learning exposures. It is always more economical and beneficial to grow people internally than externally hiring senior people. All these aspects make it imperative that the training and career development is a critical success factor for the companies. It is here that we need to find how academia can support and play a big role.

Higher education for associates is another aspect, which helps enhance employee satisfaction by providing the much-desired additional/higher qualifications while working and earning. This is what is normally thought of as one of the common areas of collaboration where industry specific certification/diploma/degree programs can be offered to working professionals.

Knowledge management is becoming one of the focus areas in the corporate for setting up a “sharing and learning” culture in the organization. It helps in networking, tapping of implicit and explicit knowledge, ensuring intellectual assets are created and shared across the organization for reuse. Reuse of intellectual assets brings in a lot of savings in terms of cost and effort for both the

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