

AN IT FINISHING SCHOOL- A STRATEGIC MODEL TO GENERATE REPEAT SOFTWARE CLIENTS

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ABSTRACT

An it Finishing School-A Strategic Model for Acquiring Repeat Software Contracts

In a highly competitive and globally dynamic sector like information technology, acquiring repeat large contracts on a consistent basis to India as an off-shore vendor from abroad clients is a challenge faced by the Information Technology industry. For both SME's and large companies, "An Information Technology Finishing School" as a strategic model can be a path to strategize into consistent and continuous outplacement portfolio. This model will provide the impetus and enable the company to look for Outplacements of software developers/ engineers both in the Domestic Markets (To large software organizations) and in the international market (To both SME and Large companies) as consultants/contractor. This portfolio would result in constant revenue and lead generation to the company. This is an investigative study on the inception of learning campus in Symbiosis technologies, a SEI CMMi level 3 & ISO9001; 2000 certified organization. It is a full life cycle Information Technology services Development Company. The methodology involved in depth interview analysis of 30 Information Technologies companies, Top functional heads of Symbiosis technologies and 20 domestic and international clients.

Keywords: *IT Finishing School, Repeat Contracts, Strategic Model, Information Technology Sector.*

Introduction:

Inception of an Information Technology Finishing School– A strategic model for acquiring repeat software clients for Information Technology Professionals which would provide the impetus and enable the company to look for Outplacements of software developers/ engineers both in the Domestic Markets(To large software organizations) and in the international market (To both SME and Large companies) as consultants/contractor. This portfolio would result in constant revenue / lead generation to the company.

Symbiosys Technologies is a Software Services company and undertakes Software Development from its Visakhapatnam location which is very much positioned to strategize into consistent / Continuous outplacements portfolio. For this to happen intake of fresher's is very much required as the current employees can continue working on the ongoing projects and make themselves available for the outplacements as well in between projects.

The Information Technology Finishing School was oriented by the Senior Employees of the organization on a well laid training calendar which would cover Soft Skills, Technical, and Certifications and on the desk hand holding as well. Since there would be continuous intake of fresher's, the IT Finishing School Program indirectly addresses the problem of attrition.

The senior employees of the company would also go to the Information Technology Finishing School (outplacements cell) that need / Client requirement specific orientation would be provided by external consultants / Project Managers to further enhance their acquired skills and make them ready for an outplacement. The outplacements division would support the Business Development Teams (The leader department of this initiative) in the sales & marketing functions by focusing the onsite placements (both Domestic & Marketing). These consultants who would eventually go onsite and work as contractors at client locations would generate constant revenue streams and also would provide on ground / on site important lead information's. These leads would be followed up for Project Based off-shore development which would also generate more revenues into the company. The strategy details, Sales & Marketing Plans are a part of my study.

Need for study:

Acquiring repeat large contracts on a consistent basis to India as an off-shore vendor from abroad clients has been a challenge and would remain so as well. Current Sales & Marketing to the company happens through a small Business Development Team which predominately operates from its Visakhapatnam location and also through Associates/partners who operate from their respective geographic locations abroad.

Rationale of study:**Tangible:**

- 1.) Help in controlling attrition in the organization
- 2.) Enable the company to create revenue streams from domestic and overseas market in the form of outplacements
- 3.) Provide an opportunity to the top performers in the organization to get out placed thus resulting in promoting healthy competition among the employees.

Intangible:

- 1.) Elevate the knowledge and confidence of the Interns and also increase the resource pool of the Information Technology industry
- 2.) Release the Information Technology industry from the arduous task of recruitment and training which in turn will enable the companies to concentrate on their core competence.
- 3.) Succeed in creating a new Business Model and a Brand Image for Information Technology Finishing School

Research objectives:

- To understand the influence of Information Technology Finishing School concept on company's revenue stream through outplacements
- To evaluate the impact of Information Technology Finishing School on attrition in the Organization
- To study this concept as marketing strategy for acquiring repeat software contracts from new clients.

Literature Review:

After conducting a thorough review of journals, websites and other secondary sources, it has come to my understanding that literature is available mostly on finishing schools as a tool which is instrumental in personality development. The concept of finishing school in a corporate environment is not obviously evident. Despite the absence of literature on this precise topic, I was able to review articles which establish a need for an IT finishing school in a corporate environment.

1. The author examines the phenomenal growth of the Indian Software industry over the last two decades. Based on the content analysis of 25 cases, the paper identifies several human resource challenges like shortage of software professionals having sufficient knowledge and competencies. High employee turnover and other HR related problems associated with the use of contracted employees are dealt with by the author.
2. The authors examine the scope and implications of corporate education. The author describes the historical developments, methods used in classrooms and strategies for delivery of corporate education. The author also provides a substantive review of corporate learning enterprise.
3. In this article the author argues that the rapid growth of the outsourcing industry has resulted in both higher labor turnover and labor shortage. The author has examined the variety of recruitment and retention strategies that companies in the industry are experimenting with.

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1. Narendra,M.,Agrawal.,Naresh,K.,Srinivasan,R.(2012).Managing growth & human resource management challenges facing the Indian software industry. *Journal of world business*, 7(2), 159-166.
 2. Nell,P.,Eurich.,Barbara,K.(1986).Corporate classrooms: Learning business. *The Journal of continuing higher education*, 34(1). doi:10.1080/07377366.1986.10401059.
 3. Sarosh, K.,Aruna,R.(2010).Globalization and outsourcing: Confronting new human resource challenges in India's business process outsourcing industry. *Industrial Relations Journal*,4(2), 136-153.
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4. According to NASSCOM, Indian universities produce 3 million graduates, including half a million engineers, every year, but recruiters say that many of them are not employable.
5. The author states some persistent issues and unresolved questions in the education of information professionals, issues that can be characterized collectively under the broad rubric of convergence or divergence in professional education. The purpose of this paper was to identify forces within the field that tend to bring educational programs together by contrast with forces that tend to separate academic programs.
6. In this article the STPI (Software Technology Parks of India) Director states that the BPO sector would become a \$60 billion industry by 2010 and there is a need to fine tune the skills of the engineering graduates so that they could adapt to industry requirements. According to this article barely 30% of the engineering graduates fulfill the requirements of the BPO industry. He also stated that many companies would be offering training to new recruits. The STPI director said that the STPI would be starting an IT finishing school and incubation centre opposite to Infosys campus.
7. According to this article the STPI plans to replicate the success of its finishing schools in Chennai at other 50 centres across the country. This was started as a pilot study in the city with the centre of development of advanced computing (C-DAC), the writer states that the finishing school would provide training in soft skills, communication and embedded systems to engineering students. According to the article the STPI officials had discussions with 12 Chennai IT companies to send their employees to finishing schools.

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4. Geeta,P.(Director).(2010).Finishing school for IT graduates.BBC.
 5. Thomas,J.G.(1995). Convergence or divergence in education for the information professionals. A51S annual meeting at Chicago.

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6. STPI to start IT finishing school this year.(2008,February 25). Retrieved from <http://the.hindu.com/article208567.ece>.
 7. Rajasimhan,T.E.(2009,September15).Finishing schools at more STPI centre's likely. The hindu.business.line.in./2009091550540400.htm
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8. The article states the directorate of information technology of Pondicherry has launched an IT finishing school. The main aim of this initiative is to increase employability skills of the students. The ICT has stated the program would cover final year students of both public and private sector educational institutions in the Union Territory. As per the article the purpose of the training is to equip the students with employability skills to meet industry need. It would empower them with innovative ideas according to B.Anuthambi of the ICT Act.
 9. According to this article NASSCOM the premier trade body if the IT software and services industry in India has planned a series of programs aimed at improving the required skills of the students. NASSCOM has started Finishing School concept with the support and partnership of the Ministry of Human Resource development. As stated by NASSCOM the Finishing Schools covered the curriculum provided on technical and soft skill development. The paper States that students would get an opportunity to reinforce some basic engineering skills in addition acquire industry specific knowledge, soft skills, management skills and employable skills delivered by trained faculty and practicing IT and ITES consultants.
 10. From the above stated reviews we can substantiate that the Information sector of India has witnessed the establishment and evolution of development of finishing schools. The industry with the support of STPI and NASSCOM is benefitting from this kind school for employing the correct talent which would enhance their employee retention capacity in the long run.
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8. Pondy gets an IT finishing school.(2013,October26).Retrieved newsindianexpress.com/article856350.exe.
 9. NASSCOM plan to improve student skills. (2007, August). <http://www.hindu.com/edu/2007080650720200>
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We also see that the finishing school have also attempted to involve corporate employees in these finishing school to give the cutting edge they require to survive sustain and grow in this cut throat competitive landscape. It is at this juncture that the present article comes to light where a symbiosys technology has successfully attempted to create an in house finishing school for its own employees.

Research methodology:

The source of Information for this Investigative Study was obtained through Interview Method. The Vice President Operations, Finance, HR, Business Development & CEO were interviewed for construction of the Information Technology Finishing School Model. To further investigate the procedure for Formation / Inception of Information Technology Finishing School VITA (Visakhapatnam Information Technology Association) members were also interviewed.

The feedback from clients was also taken to understand the consulting and outplacement demands as this is an integral part of the Information Technology Finishing School. For this Investigative Study Management Team of Symbiosys (10 People), Member companies of Visakhapatnam Information Technology Association (VITA) (30 Companies) and Existing Clients of Symbiosys (20)

Interview Questionnaire Types: 2

Type 1 - Questions

- Management of Symbiosys & Member companies of VITA

Type 2 - Questions

- Clients of Symbiosys

Limitations:

- As this concept of Information Technology Finishing School is new with respect to Software Companies access to information was limited.
- The results and findings of this study are confined to one Information Technology Company in the city of Visakhapatnam.

- Time Factor is another limitation as this concept is a continuous and long term process but my study was only for a limited period.

Profile of Visakhapatnam Information Technology Sector:

The software sector of Visakhapatnam started to gain importance and market attractiveness by the beginning of the 1990’s but actual operations of corporations took place by 1994. The very first corporation to have officially started operations was Quant Systems Pvt. Ltd in the year 1994.

Visakhapatnam is the second largest city in the state of Andhra Pradesh. It is primarily an industrial city apart from being a port city. The city having a population of approximately 1.3 million has seen a lot of change in the past couple of decades. Most Information Technology companies who commenced their operations in India in Tier-1 cities have subsequently expanded tier-2 and Tier-3 cities since they offer substantial savings in administration, maintenance, real estate, infrastructural costs and human resource availability. These strategic changes have put

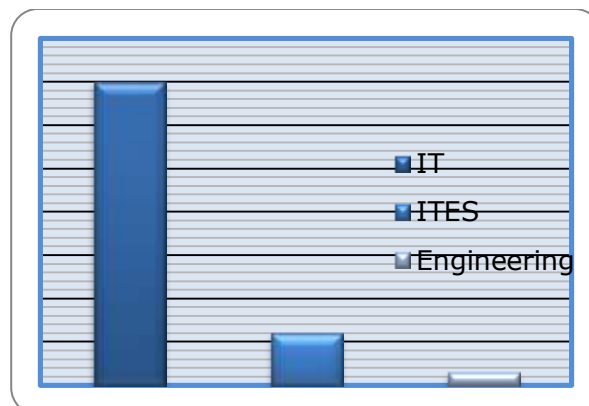


There are around 105 Software corporations who have generated a turnover of approximately Rs.786 Cr and created employment to around 10,644 people in the FY 2009-2010. It can be observed that Visakhapatnam Software Sector consists of total 85 registered corporations.

Out of these 85 corporations there are 70 Information Technology companies, 8 Business Process Outsourcing corporations, 4 Medical Transcription firms and 3 Engineering Services firms.

It can be observed that 82% of the corporations are primarily registered as Information technology corporations, the next highest in the sector are Business Process Outsourcing corporations who constitute 9% of the sector.

SOFTWARE UNITS IN VISAKHAPATNAM



Source: Compiled by author by interaction with the concerned authorities

Company Profile:

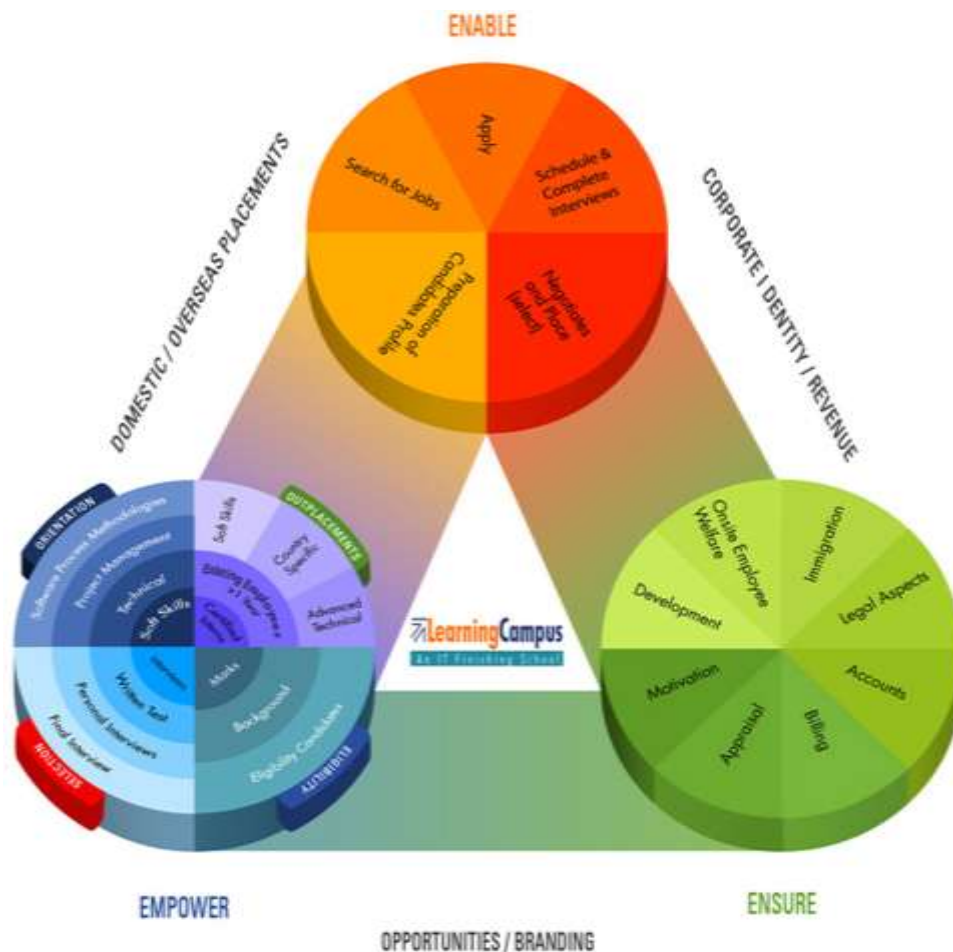
Symbiosys Technologies, a SEI CMMi Level 3 and ISO 9001:2000 certified organization. It is a Full Lifecycle Information Technology services development company encompassing SOA, ERP, EAI, Portals and Quality Assurance. 3D Animation Multimedia and Engineering Services form the corner stone of Symbiosys rapid development.

Conceptual framework of Information Technology Finishing School –A Strategic Model:

The Information Technology Finishing School was conceptualized keeping in mind the vision and mission of the organization. This Strategic Model will strategize any company’s revenue stream.

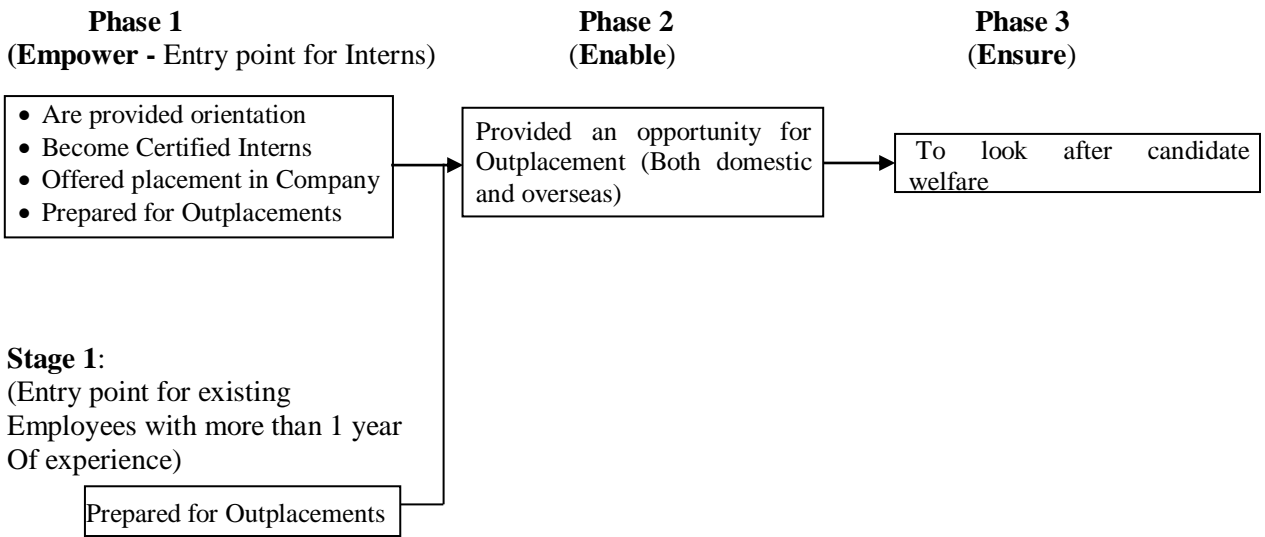
Definition of Information Technology Finishing School:

Information Technology Finishing School is a Technical/Soft-skills Orientation Campus that fine tunes a fresher/experienced professional by providing technical knowledge, skills and experience in live industry situations that include client interaction, exposure to complete software development life cycle and true professionalism.



The Golden Triangle:

There are three stages in the ‘Information Technology Finishing School’ Program, are as follows:

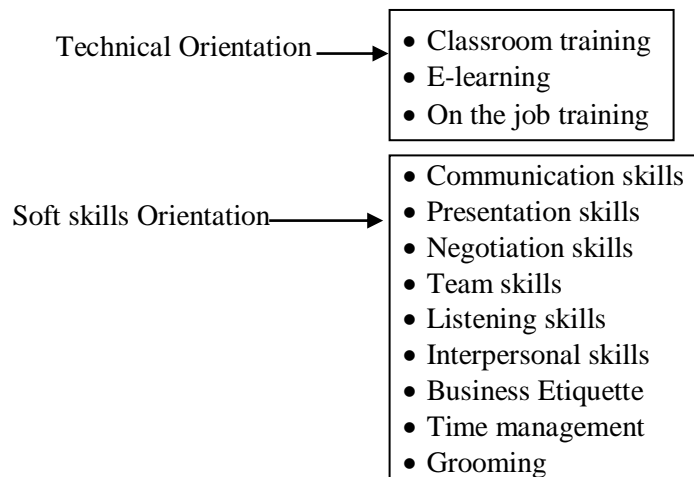


Phase 1-a: Empower - Entry point for Interns

This is the stage where the Interns are empowered enough to become job ready professionals.

Step 1: The selected candidates will have to undergo an Internship program. In order to qualify for the Internship program, certain criteria need to be met, which are as follows:

- Graduates hailing from engineering, science or non-science background would be eligible to apply for this program
- The eligible candidates would then undergo a selection process. The selection process would consist of the following:
 - ✓ Technical written test, to test the technical competence of a particular candidate.
 - ✓ Aptitude Test, to measure the intellectual capabilities for thinking and reasoning. The most commonly used tests assess verbal and numerical logical reasoning skills.
 - ✓ Two rounds of interview, to check if the candidate possesses the most important traits like Reasoning Ability, Assertiveness, Initiative, Listening skills, Presentation skills, Awareness, Flexibility, Communication skills and Confidence. The interviews may be a Selection Interview or a Panel Interview.
- The selected candidates would be exposed to various orientation programs under the categories of
 - ✓ Technical orientation
 - ✓ Soft skills orientation
 - ✓ Project Management
 - ✓ Software Process Methodologies



An Internship helps one gain valuable professional work experience and also develop skills and abilities. They are critical stepping stones to further learning and professional success. When one interns, he/she applies what they have learned, test their interests, develop new strengths and understanding. Once the candidates undergo the Internship program successfully, they become Certified Technology Professionals.

Step 2: Employment

After the successful completion of the 4 months of orientation, the interns will get absorbed into the Symbiosys fold as its employees. Working in a company exposes one to a different way of thinking and working. This breadth of experience is likely to stand one in good stead when he/she approaches problems, because one will be able to choose the most effective style rather than applying the same approach in every situation. The candidates are expected to be a part of Symbiosys for a minimum of 1 year before they qualify for Outplacements.

Step 3: Preparation for Outplacements

This is the stage where the candidates who have completed a minimum of 1 year in Symbiosys get an opportunity to undergo Orientation for Outplacements. The orientation programs would be under the categories of

- ✓ Soft skills orientation
- ✓ Advanced technical orientation
- ✓ Country specific orientation

Country specific orientation



- Cultural differences and similarities
- Values in the host country
- Habits and Manners in public places
- Business Manners

Phase 1-b: Entry point for existing Symbiosys employees (>1 year in Symbiosys). The existing employees are also eligible to be a part of this program, though in a slightly different way. The interested employees who have been with Symbiosys for over a year can be prepared for outplacements after they undergo an evaluation.

Phase 2: *Enable-Domestic and Overseas Placements*

This is where the empowered employees are provided with an opportunity to get out placed. At this stage, the candidates who have successfully undergone the Orientation for Outplacements are placed either domestically or overseas depending on their competence and the requirements from clients.

Phase 3: *Ensure*

This is the phase where the out placed candidates would be provided support by the parent company. The support will be in the following ways:

- By making sure that the employees have everything they need to do their jobs. We can build such an opportunity by asking the employees if they have everything they need to be as competent as they can be.
- By getting to know the employees, we can especially understand their goals, their stressors, what excites them and how they each define success.
- By making sure they are trained and retrained in problem solving and conflict resolution skills. These critical skills will help them interact better with their teammates, customers, suppliers, superiors and clients. Better communications reduce stress and increase positive outcomes.
- By rewarding & recognizing employees in ways that are meaningful to them and it is important to celebrate both accomplishments and efforts to give employees working on long-term goals a boost.
- Certain things like money, a nice office and job security can help people from becoming less motivated, but they usually don't help people to become more motivated. A key goal is to understand the motivations of each of the employees.

- Increased job satisfaction does not necessarily mean increased job performance. If the goals of the organization are not aligned with the goals of employees, then employees aren't effectively working toward the mission of the organization.
- Employee Development is closely linked to the growth of a company. This is especially true for small businesses, in which each employee plays a vital role in the success of the company.
- Employee growth has direct and indirect benefits. More knowledgeable, skilled, and capable employees directly impact the company's ability to satisfy customers, resolve problems and crises, and adapt to changing market conditions.

Practical working of the Information Technology Finishing School-A Strategic Model:

- The first step of the Certified Interns will be into Symbiosys as its employees. This association with Symbiosys will have to last for a minimum of 1 year.
- This association with Symbiosys for a minimum of 1 year will make them partly eligible to be a part of the next step which is Preparation for Outplacement. Working with Symbiosys by itself does not make a person eligible to sit for outplacements. Necessary observations would be made regarding their work, their behavior with their co-workers, superiors, the skills they possess and developed. Based on the above observations, decision would be taken by the management as to whether a particular person is ready to sit for outplacement at a point of time.
- The existing employees of Symbiosys, who are interested in sitting for outplacements, can do so, provided they go through an evaluation process.
- The next step is Preparation for Outplacement which will deal with programs like
 - ✓ Soft-skills orientation (2nd level)
 - ✓ Country specific orientation
 - ✓ Advanced technical orientation

Country specific orientation:

These orientation sessions help the people understand the roots of the cultural differences in their host country, so they can work more productively.

The 2nd level of Soft-skills orientation would deal with topics like

- Communication skills which include writing skills
- Business Etiquette
- Grooming
- E-mail writing
- Negotiation skills

The above exercise is expected to last for 1 to 2 months

- Once the candidates are out placed, the responsibility of the parent company is not over. The welfare of the candidates has to be looked after in the form of their Billing, Immigration, and Legal aspects, Appraisal, Motivation and Development which would be an ongoing process.

The above indicated execution plan was implemented and 40 Interns have joined Symbiosys in August 2010. The 40 Symbiosys interns have undergone a 3 months Orientation program – August 2010, September 2010 and October 2010. The complete schedule is in the form of a spreadsheet report and the same would be included in the very end as appendix during the project submission. November thru February 2011 the interns have done a project work – This project was on Hold by our client and instead of waiting for the client to get back to us we have utilized this time and made sure that these interns worked on different modules under the guidance of the Senior Developers and Project Manager completed the project.

Since 40 people have joined the development division the existing software engineers who have been working in the company for more than 1 year would go through quick Advanced Orientation and are eligible for outplacements (Domestic & Abroad).

Findings:

- With the inception of Information Technology Finishing School the company could address the set objectives and good results were achieved.
- Abroad Placements – 13 Onsite Placements Contracts were recorded and in turn 3 New Clients were added.
- Domestic Placements – 24 Onsite Placement contracts were recorded and in turn 14 New Clients were added.
- These consultants who are working as contractors at client locations always provide project based engagement requirements to the company and it was a good success. This is ongoing and the Management is very happy with the results achieved thus far.
- The timing of the IT Finishing School was so appropriate that not only it achieved the goals set but also brought in a sense of accountability within the employees. This is ongoing process and the company would benefit from the well laid framework
- The inception of Information Technology Finishing School into the company ignited brain storming sessions within the existing employees as well. The senior employees who were asked to shoulder the responsibility of Mentoring/Training/Orienting the Interns showed little resistance to the additional responsibility placed on them but the bigger picture slowly seeped in and the concept started rolling. The Management, Managers and Information Technology Finishing School Coordinator had regular meetings and this made sure the goal was always in the minds of the several stake holders
- Addressing of Attrition was very much possible
- Keep the Employees Motivated and at the same time provide economic benefit
- The well-travelled exposure of the employees contributed to the productivity in a global perspective. how constant revenue generating contracts would be achieved
- How to use the existing Talent within the company in the form of Trainers and giving them well rounded exposure
- Initially everyone thought “Information Technology FINISHING SCHOOL” was all about intake of Interns but later it was convincing to all that this is about using a concept and building a total echo system.

Suggestions:

- This concept can be offered as a Business to other SME Information Technology Companies in and around Visakhapatnam.
- The management should consider that Information Technology contracts are not always offshore development but onsite consulting is also a major portfolio which cannot be ignored.
- A different Profit Center in itself and extended the same into a Franchise Model to other Information Technology Companies.

Conclusions:

In today's globalized dynamic landscape the success of an organization is very much influenced and steered by its strategic decision making. In the current corporate landscape survival and growth have been immensely complicated. To define and redefine success companies are adopting new functional strategies. This study has relevance as it tries to explore the concept of Information Technology Finishing School.

Guidelines for future research:

The study for Information Technology Finishing School Inception has been conducted in Information Technology Sector. A future study can be extended to Engineering Services Firms, Civil & Constructions Firms who service their Manufacturing Sector Clients (Both Domestic and International) in which there is outplacements (Working at Client Location) requirements on a continual basis and quality job ready professionals are not available for the same.

Micro Level study of this concept can be undertaken in relation to its feasibility and profitability with reference to Information Technology Organizations of different scale.

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