

KPO calling: PhDs tech-ing charge

By Sujata Dutta Sachdeva/TNN

New Delhi: It's the success story of the decade and it's getting better all the time. As India's ITES juggernaut gets more and more knowledge-driven, it's opening up a world of opportunities for Gen Next — not just for the BTEchs and MBAs, but also for the BAs and PhDs.

As Sunil Mehta, VP, Nasscom explains: "The ITES sector is creating jobs of all kinds. From PhDs in operational research to degree-holders in literature, everybody has a chance."

The story so far: With 65% share of the global IT services and 46% share of outsourcing, India's leadership is well-established. Already, 28% of the global pool of IT-ITES professionals are employed in India, compared to 11% in China and 10% in Russia. By 2010, says an Evalueserve study, India will have the lion's share

— 70% — of the \$17-billion global Knowledge Process Outsourcing (KPO) pie. Which translates into three lakh new jobs in fields as diverse as back-office work, clinical research in pharma and biotech, legal services, publishing, and automotive and aerospace R&D.

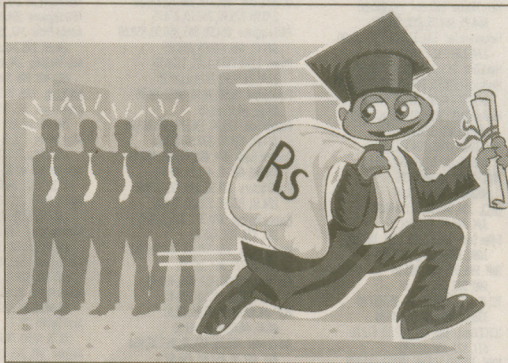
And as the industry looks around for cutting-edge expertise, even non-techies can end up with a six-figure salary in a KPO job. Take Priyal Bisht, for example. A PhD in catalytic chemistry, she joined as R&D manager in a Bangalore-based company. But gave it up for a job at Evalueserve, a Gurgaon-based KPO. "I wanted to work on IPR and this job gave me that opportunity," she says. Biotechnologist Dipika Dayal Mathur gave up an R&D job for a KPO. "My work involves patent drafting, IPR-related services, which is what I wanted to do," she says.

According to Ashish Gupta, CEO, Evalueserve, already more than 5,000 PhDs in various subjects are working in the KPO sector, and by 2010 the demand will rise to 25,000.

"And that's a conservative estimate," he says. Mumbai-based KPO Ugam Solutions, which has a mix of MBAs and market researchers, has just hired a few PhDs. Says CEO Sunil Mirani, "Since outsourcing in research and analysis is hot, degree-holders in mathematics, statistics and operation research are in great demand."

Nasscom estimates the Indian ITES sector will generate 50,000 jobs in clinical research by 2009 and the demand for accounting graduates will be around 100,000. Gartner predicts 85% of US companies will outsource at

least one component of their HR function by 2006, many of them to India. Similarly, a Forrester study says 79,000 legal jobs are to be offshored by 2015 — of these, nearly 60% are expected to come to India. There will be vacancies for nearly 160,000 foreign language professionals in India by



2010, says an Evalueserve study. Publishing, too, holds promise. Indian BPOs are already involved in content development, editing and page layouts. "Seeing the speed at which the segment is growing today, publishing outsourcing will soon become an industry by itself," says Ranjit Singh, CEO, TechBooks.

But as the sector throws up more and more jobs, will there be enough talent to fill them? The Nasscom-McKinsey 2005 report predicts that by 2010, India will have a shortfall of five lakh people in the IT sector. Currently, only about 25% of technical graduates and 10-15% of general college students are suitable for employment in the industry. In fact, the Call Centre Association of India, in collaboration with CII, is planning to launch a new programme, eKaliber, that aims to train Class XII students for a career in the sector. "Unless we invest sufficiently in higher education, good colleges and a better curriculum we might miss the opportunity," sums up Mehta.

(With inputs from Mini Joseph-Tejaswi and R Raghavendra in Bangalore)