

UCT to boost SA call centre industry with management training

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The UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) is launching a landmark programme to address a key skills shortage in middle to senior management in the South African Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and Contact Centre (CC) industry. The skills shortage has been identified in recent research studies on the local industry.



According to a recent Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) sector-development strategy report, the South African BPO & CC industry is fast gaining momentum and gradually becoming a preferred BPO and offshoring destination for the USA and the European market. This is largely due to the country's favourable time zone differences, healthy business climate, deregulation of the telecommunications industry, language, political stability and cultural ties.

The report, however, identified a skills shortage in middle to senior management as one of the key areas holding back South Africa's competitiveness in the global Call Centre industry.

According to Albert Rossouw, the main architect and director of the new Advanced Programme in Call Centre Leadership at the UCT GSB, the programme responds directly to this call for action.

"The programme addresses these key shortages head on and will go a long way to developing management and organisational capacity in the South African call centre industry. It is a nine-month modular based curriculum that is carefully designed to develop people both in terms of their personal mastery and in their business and management capability," said Rossouw, who runs Cape Town based BPO consultancy, Strategy Threesixty.

"This will help organisations to deliver exceptional and sustained value to their clients and other stakeholders," he added.

The new programme will be run by the UCT GSB's Executive Education unit, which recently received a global top ten rating from the Economist Intelligence Unit for its offerings.

The DTI report clearly articulates that "significant gaps are already apparent in the availability of managerial level talent today", and that a "shortage of skilled labour has stunted the growth of the BPO industry in South Africa - few global corporations have setup their back office processing centres in SA."

It goes on to explain that "although South African labour is educated, there is much training that needs to be done to impart special skills to these human resources", and "the establishment of effective public-private partnerships with government around key initiatives (e.g. talent development and skill building) will be critical."

Rossouw said this leaves very little doubt that there is a need to develop skills at management level in SA.

"We need to develop a profile for our management capacity as well - which will bring credibility in the international marketplace. Having a highly rated business school such as the UCT GSB take the lead in this regard will certainly add weight to the case for investing in SA and its organisations," he said.

The new programme has three core areas of focus and draws on the UCT GSB's substantial experience in developing people.

The first area of attention is exposing existing and emerging managers to global best practice in Call Centre management. To achieve the optimum, Rossouw says that managers need to be immersed in the needs of global clients and the broad management expertise they need to address these market demands.

This aspect would also include detailed training in managing call centre information and resources, building high performance call centre teams, and leading for ongoing performance improvement.

The second element is personal mastery - or understanding oneself. "The emphasis is on growing the whole person, and bringing into play the importance of emotional intelligence (EQ)," said Rossouw. This part of the programme also looks at developing a sense of personal purpose, team leadership, accessing creativity, communication skills, problem solving, and building teamwork abilities.

Thirdly, the programme will to give managerial talent the forum to work closely with industry colleagues and to network - allowing for collective learning, peer support, the dissemination of knowledge and the exploration of fresh business opportunities.

The first intake will be a group of between 20 to 30 individuals and study loans are also being made available. The programme is also a pathway for agents with the potential to develop themselves into management roles in the local industry.

Rossouw added that the modular basis of the programme means that people can both study and work at the same time and that they will be able to immediately apply skills to the workplace.

"If South Africa can get the formula right in addressing shortfalls such as those in management skills, the country could take a leading role in the BPO and Call Centre industry," said Rossouw.

"The DTI report argues that within four years the number of Contact Centres in SA could potentially be close to 1000, nearly double today's number of 535."

The first module gets underway in February 2007. For more information on the programme, contact (021) 406 1346 or go to www.gsb.uct.ac.za/callcentre.

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