

Exam in Personnel Psychology, Bachelor, Autumn 2016

Course code: PSY2407

Formal issues:

- If you have **formal** questions during the exam period, you can post these questions in the blog in the Fronter room of this course. I will answer them once a day during the exam period.
- The maximum length of your exam assignment is 3000 words. Report the word count on the front page of the assignment.
- Note your candidate number that you find in StudentWeb (do not use your name) and course code on the front page of your assignment.
- Please submit the exam assignment through Inspira within the indicated deadline.

It is not required for this exam to refer to scientific work other than the textbook. However, if you use any kind of other sources, please use APA-style for citing:

<http://www.sv.uio.no/english/studies/resources/sources-and-references/APA-guide-summary>

TRAINING AT CONVERGYS CONTACT CENTRES, INDIA¹

Background

Convergys is the world's largest operator of call or contact centres. It was established in its current form in 1998 and grew out of the US Cincinnati Bell telecommunications company. Revenue in 2005 was \$2.58 billion and there are four operating divisions: customer management (the contact centre business), employee care (outsourced personnel activities, including payroll, benefits, learning and recruitment), information management (IT outsourcing, with specialisms in billing platforms) and finance and accounting (the outsourcing business recently acquired from Deloitte).



Currently Convergys operates over 65 contact, service and data centres worldwide. The largest number of service centres (54) is in North America where the company was founded. There are seven centres in India (the subject of this case study) and six in the Philippines. Total capacity in India is some 6000 'seats', which, given shift-working arrangements, means that some 9000 people are employed by Convergys in the country.

Programmes (the term used to describe a discrete activity centred around a product, service or market) are delivered for overseas clients. Convergys operates 'third party' centres for clients as opposed to 'captive centres' where a contact centre is established in India solely to meet the needs of the overseas parent company. The challenge therefore is to ensure that staff have both the technical and business knowledge to assist the client's customers and the communication skills and empathy so that this is put across in a way that leaves a positive and favourable impression.

Recruitment and retention

In its centres of operation (three in Gurgaon on the outskirts of Delhi and one each in Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune Thane and Hyderabad) Convergys is a prominent employer. The largest centre at Gurgaon, for example, has over 2000 agents (the term used for the staff who deal with client calls). As has been well observed, India has a current surfeit of capable and ambitious young people leaving its education system. Though the recruitment market is becoming more competitive, Convergys remains an 'employer of aspiration' for those who wish to work for the leader in the global contact centre business.

The majority of staff are young, mainly in their early 20s and half are female. Given that the majority of calls come from North America, much of the work takes place from

¹ This material has been taken from the 'Helping People Learn – case studies' (2008) section of the website: www.cipd.co.uk, with the permission of the publisher, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, London. The author is Martyn Sloman.

Source: www.cipd.co.uk/helpingpeoplelearn/_casestudies/_intenvrgys.htm.

evening until early morning and the company puts a lot of resources into providing meals, transport and security. For many staff it will be their first job since leaving full-time education. Much of the initial induction is therefore focused on the transition to work – what the company offers and what is expected from the employee. Retention rates can be a problem: some people leave after a transitory period to move on to a different career or into higher education. Others simply ‘don’t know why they joined’. However, given the need for staff to acquire the knowledge and skills demanded by clients, Convergys puts a considerable effort into training, as Gyan Nagpal, Organizational Development Director based in Gurgaon, puts it: ‘If an organization engages with its staff, offering them a career with prospects and progression, they will stay and develop.’

Initial training

After the initial induction, which typically lasts two days, the new agent will be supervised through two training modules. Both last three or four weeks and it can therefore be up to seven weeks before the new joiner takes their first customer-facing call.

The first module is designed to increase ‘cultural sensitivity’ to the country where the calls will originate, and to understand the context in which the client operates. All staff have English as a spoken language, and dealing with variations in accent is an issue in two respects. First, the agent needs to be comfortable understanding the caller’s accent: five different groups of accents have been identified from North American callers alone. The second issue is the agent’s accent – an element of ‘accent neutralization’ can be needed. Although, as Gyan Nagpur puts it: ‘A person can’t change their accent in three weeks even if it was necessary. We emphasize the need for clarity and encourage our agents to speak more slowly.’

Those modules are delivered in the classroom in groups of approximately 20 people, with feedback offered from the trainer and peers. Recording devices and audio support the programme. The second module, which is, again, classroom based, also introduces technology-based training screens. The module is focused on the client’s products and systems and the questions that are likely to arise. Much of the detail is determined by the client’s requirements and, whereas some clients are keen to avoid any situation where a customer sees a difference in approach between the client’s home staff and the agent in India, others are less concerned. The nature of the client’s product often determines the depth of understanding that the agents need to have.

Before they can deal with the client’s customers over the phone, all agents must acquire both the generic skills of client handling and the specific knowledge to answer the underlying request. Agents are brought up to speed in an efficient and timely way: driving minimum ‘time to competence’ measures is an important consideration.

Ongoing support: the role of the team leader

Convergys’s contact centres operate a relatively flat management structure and the normal progression for the agents is to the role of team leader: typically a team leader will have 15 to 20 direct reports. Team leaders are invariably chosen from high-performing agents, so

their technical understanding of contact centre work will be good. However, for many the management of staff will be a new challenge.

From start to finish, the training period for new team leaders can be as long as 90 days. The classroom component of this training is delivered in five day modules. Critical elements include the modules that focus on staff development – one of the five day modules is mainly centred on coaching – and modules on tools that the team leader will use to monitor and drive performance. Feedback to agents regarding their call-handling capability is critical to the team and to the business's success and the team leader must have the skills and confidence to perform this task.

As part of the preparation for the new role, during this 90-day period, team leaders are required to undertake 13 modules of online e-learning (from two to four hours each). The majority of the modules have been specifically developed by Convergys, as the organization increasingly deploys e-learning as a preferred means of training delivery within a blended approach. Convergys acquired Digitalthink, a US-based e-learning organization in 2004, and has used these skills to deploy a learning portal that is available for Convergys agents throughout the world.

Convergys recognizes that the quality and motivation of its agents is critical to the success of the organization. The delivery of focused training in a cost-effective, globally consistent fashion drives higher standards of service from Convergys's centres, whilst simultaneously reducing turnover and the associated bottom-line costs.

Answer all questions (10 points for each):

1. Develop a recruitment plan for Convergys.
2. What could Convergys do to retain staff?
3. How would you evaluate the way in which Convergys carries out its trainings?
4. How could Convergys improve the team leader training?