

Languages and Communication Skills: The Two Most Desired Competencies in Polish Outsourcing Centers

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While human resources and intellectual potential is one of the main reasons Poland is the fastest growing outsourcing country in Europe, two crucial competencies are still scarce – languages and communication skills. As the market expands and more centers are created across Poland, most of them face the recruitment challenge of finding employees who have the required language level and appropriate communication skills.

There's a clear gap between the skills university graduates are equipped with in their college years and the skills crucial for a successful career at a business center. This article presents some solutions to this challenge that come from the experience of Accent Group, offering employee development solutions to outsourcing centers for the last 12 years.

Language Assessments

It all starts at the recruitment stage, where the language level of candidates is one of the key factors.

It's crucial to assess the practical usage of the language in a business context, so a standard multiple-choice language test just doesn't do the job.

Accent provides an online language assessment tool together with speaking assessments conducted over the phone, both tailored for each Client and their core business. It's grown extremely popular among-business centers and recruitment agencies as it's accurate, inexpensive and quick (results guaranteed within 24 hours). Last year the tool was nominated for the CEE Outsourcing and Shared Services Award.

Language Upskilling

Here's some comforting news for the business centers struggling with their recruitment targets of foreign language speakers – it no longer takes 5 years of university education to teach someone a foreign language! The latest methodology combined with tailored business language solutions make this possible in a period of 1-4 months, depending on the entry level and the level required for the job. This is shorter than many on-board-



ing programs, and often turns out to be more cost-effective than relocation or head-hunting. Additionally, it's a loyalty-building approach that creates a corporate culture of learning and development.

On-boarding

Communication defines corporate culture. Effective communication is also a key success factor for outsourcing centers. In our consulting work we frequently recommend that centers define and implement communication values, derived from core values and desired behaviors in the company.

Communication values are best implanted during one's first weeks on the job. Including a communication training in the process of onboarding has tremendous advantages, such as increased service-mindedness or on-the-job efficiency.

Another element that should not be underestimated is cultural sensitivity and awareness. Poland and most CEE countries are highly homogenous and the ability to collaborate with other cultures is rare. This is especially important in the outsourcing sector, where most interactions occur over phone or email, which only increases the risk of cultural clashes.

Our experience with service centers across Poland shows that investing resources in this area at the early transition stages is always less costly than having to react and firefight issues when they arise, or trying to change habits once they're well-grounded.

Communication Training

Communication is sometimes mistakenly catalogued under "soft skills training" and offered as a voluntary development opportunity, while in outsourcing reality, efficient and accurate communication is one of the key success factors.

This is true for basic-level employees, for whom the ability to write clear, precise emails, communicate effectively over the phone or build relationships with clients and colleagues in the so-called "virtual reality" is often a great challenge, just as it is for team leaders and managers.

More advanced skills such as presentations, persuasion, and chairing effective and results-based meetings are still sadly not taught at most universities; yet, they make up a large part of a working day at a typical outsourcing center. Some of our clients make these obligatory as part of on-boarding or first year training. Others turn to us for help, wanting to improve their KPIs, often highly dependent on communication skills.

While there's little hope for the immediate change of the public education system to answer the needs of the fastest growing business sector, there are other solutions that outsourcing centers can implement, to guarantee the highest level of business delivery.

Accent Group includes 2 sister organizations - Accent for Professionals (www.4professionals.pl) and Accent Business Training (www.accentbusiness.pl), both specializing in training and development for the Shared Services and Outsourcing sector. Accent Group is an active member of ASPIRE and ABSL, contributing to the development of this sector. Accent operates across Poland, but also recently in Romania, Germany and Switzerland.

n Client list includes IBM, Shell, State Street, BBH, UBS, Genpact, Heineken, Amway, CAPITA, Motorola, Luxoft, AON Hewitt and many others.

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