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Abstract
The global services industry shows steady growth and a very dynamic path characterized by unprecedented fast movements towards higher value services, constant changes in business as well as in service delivery models, and an increasing number of emerging outsourcing locations. In this context, the skills demand not only increases in amount and quality, but also constantly changes. This has led many countries to develop finishing school programs as an effective tool to face this challenge and take advantage of this growing industry that seems to have room for many players, aiming at bridging the gap between formal education and industry requirements. In this paper, we review this phenomenon and summarize its best practices.

1. Introduction

In the last decade, world services exports have increased their share in international trade, experiencing a larger growth than goods exports. In this context, global services (usually called "offshore outsourcing") have played a prevailing role in such expansion. The global services industry is the result of a business model characterized by transferring an activity and/or domestic process of a company abroad, either to a foreign outsourced supplier or to a subsidiary located abroad.

The activities included in the global services industry can be grouped into three segments according to the characteristics of the tasks and/or processes that are internationally commercialized, namely Information Technology Offshoring (ITO), Business Process Offshoring (BPO) and Knowledge Process Offshoring (KPO).

The first segment, Information Technology Offshoring, refers to the outsourcing of processes related to information technologies in two main areas: i) infrastructure and data processing, and ii) software and applications. This industry segment was the first to be developed, and it is currently the largest in relative terms.

The second segment, Business Process Offshoring, is linked to the outsourcing of administrative services and back office tasks, including Information Technology support activities. This involves transferring management functions and not only infrastructure and application businesses as in the case of ITO. This characteristic makes human interaction and quality decision-making very relevant, in contrast to the ITO activities, which are usually focused on technological support.

The last segment, Knowledge Process Offshoring, makes reference to knowledge-based and field analysis services that require high-skilled personnel and imply more value added services —for example, research and development services (innovation, design and testing), business consultancy, legal services, and biotechnology, to name a few. Unlike BPO services, KPO activities are industry-specific. For instance, KPO services in the finance industry are completely different from those in the pharmaceutical industry. Instead, BPO services tend to be more universal among sectors.

The aforementioned services show steady growth and a very dynamic path characterized by unprecedented fast movements towards higher value services, constant changes in business as well as in service delivery models, and an increasing number of emerging outsourcing locations

(each of them with its particular advantages and value added). In this context, enhanced employability is crucial for the future development of this industry, as the current and future workforce determines the entry and/or upgrading opportunities of an offshoring location in the industry (see Llisterri et al., 2014; Aedo and Walker, 2012; Gereffi, Fernandez-Stark and Psilos, 2011; Tholons, 2010; Fernandez-Stark, Bamber and Gereffi, 2010; Wadhwa, Kim De Vitton and Gereffi, 2008). Thus, many countries look to improve their human resource development strategy to take advantage of this growing industry that seems to have room for many players, aiming at bridging the gap between formal education and industry requirements.

2. Finishing Schools: Definition and Objectives

Finishing school programs are a strategic training and development tool to find a shortcut for the employability of human resources within the global services industry in developing countries. Countries that want to develop and increase their share in the global outsourcing market must be cognizant of the necessity of counting with a scalable and employable labor pool capable of performing the outsourced tasks (Gereffi et al., 2011; Tholons, 2012b). Finishing schools are a logical response to that necessity. They were first implemented in India, where since the 1990s the global services industry had started to experience a steep annual growth and development not yet accompanied by a similar increase in the labor pool. Consequently, the public sector, the private sector and academia designed specific training programs to reduce the skills gap in its current and future employees (specifically focused on fresh graduates) between what was actually taught by academia and the capabilities and skills demanded by the private sector.

By definition, finishing schools are non-formal educational institutions designed for short-term training and implemented by institutional academia, public and private sector partnerships. Their main objective is to train a particular labor pool segment according to specialized industries in order to improve its employability. As the ITO, BPO and KPO services and activities move towards higher value services, technology innovation increases its speed dramatically, and more locations are emerging into the global services landscape. In order to attract more foreign investments, countries have to focus on developing an attractive and skillful workforce, which together with factors like low costs, an adequate infrastructure and sectoral incentives, will make the difference and allow investors to provide the services desired in both quality and quantity in a reasonable time and at a competitive cost. Relying on a scalable as well

as skilled workforce is crucial for the development of this industry because Multinational Companies (MNCs) tend to require a great number of skilled professional workers, which justifies the offshore outsourcing movement. For instance, in India, the ITO and BPO sectors employ more than 2 million direct employees and create more than 9 million indirect jobs, while the top ten IT-BPO companies employ more than 20,000-25,000 employees a year (Mittal, 2008).

In fact, in the services landscape, with more emphasis than in the field of manufacturing, the amount of employable human capital is one of the most crucial factors that enterprises take into consideration when deciding to set up their businesses in another country. For instance, according to client surveys and business experiences, A.T. Kearney's Global Services Location Index tests the capabilities and attractiveness of locations as offshoring service providers based on their performance in three main categories: financial attractiveness, people skills and availability, and business environment, in which the weight of human capital accounts for 30 percent of the total Index score and includes several metrics that are grouped into four main subcategories: remote services sector experience and quality ratings, labor force availability, education and language, and attrition risk (see A.T. Kearney, 2011). Likewise, the Duke University Offshoring Research Network has also measured the main factors that drive enterprises to choose certain locations, interestingly finding that from the services providers' standpoint, employees' skills and training constitutes the most important factor, followed by industry knowledge, service quality, and processes knowledge (see Duke University Offshoring Research Network, 2011).[1]

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[1] The importance of low costs as a key factor to drive MNCs towards certain locations has been affected by the natural saturation of traditional locations; thus, there are other main factors that MNCs take into account, of which "talent pool availability" ranks among the first ones, according to the McKinsey Global Institute (Qahtani, Aramco and Daneshgar, 2010).

People Skills and Availability Index Metrics in the A.T. Kearney's Global Services Location Index 2011

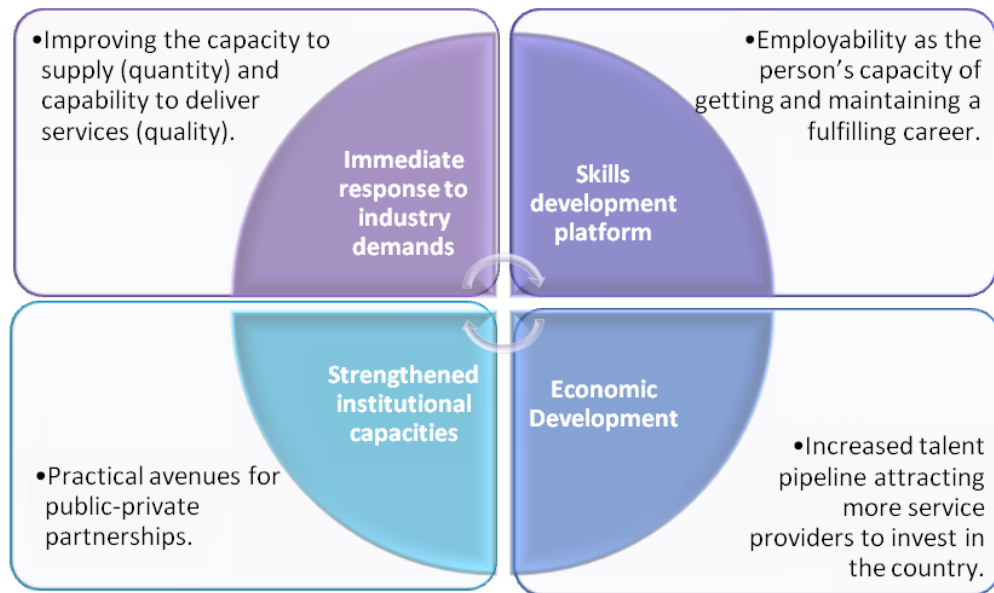|	
Remote services sector experience and quality ratings	Size of existing IT and BPO sectors
	Contact center and IT center quality certifications
	Quality ratings of management schools and IT training
Labor force availability	Total workforce
	University-educated workforce
	Workforce flexibility
Education and language	Scores on standardized education and language tests
Attrition risk	Relative IT and BPO sector growth and unemployment rates

Source: A.T. Kearney, 2011.

The main idea of a finishing school program is to enhance employability of the labor pool through a complementary education and training framework that aims at supplementing, rather than substituting, formal education. The concept of "finishing" implies the existence of a necessary previous step involving formal education; however, as it is naturally difficult to keep up with the dynamic and changing market forces that drive global services, finishing schools are designed to be a more flexible complementary tool that can tackle those dynamic forces and train employees according to the latest industry requirements, which, generally speaking, consist of practical knowledge regarding the specific field of work, a committed attitude towards continuous learning, soft skills, team work skills and analytical capabilities (UIT RGPV Bhopal, 2009). In fact, a better job placement for the actual workforce is a true indicator of success of the system.

Furthermore, the supply and demand mismatch found in this labor market is costly for both employers and employees, as employers have to invest greater amounts in recruitment and

training processes, while employees share the training costs receiving lower salaries because of their insufficient skills (Bassi et. al., 2012). Enhanced employability translates into an increase in national productivity and social welfare, as economic development is fostered by higher employment rates, better trained human capital, and the delivery of higher value services, which in fact provide the highest returns and greater knowledge transfer. Meanwhile, ITO, BPO and KPO enterprises as well as major corporations and banks benefit from a more skillful labor pool, which indeed reduces their induction and in-house training efforts, time and costs, as employees can perform the tasks expected from a certain job immediately after being hired (Tholons, 2010; Bassi et. al., 2012).

Objectives of the Finishing School Programs

- Improving the capacity to supply (quantity) and capability to deliver services (quality).

Immediate response to industry demands

Skills development platform

- Employability as the person's capacity of getting and maintaining a fulfilling career.

Strengthened institutional capacities

Economic Development

- Practical avenues for public-private partnerships.

- Increased talent pipeline attracting more service providers to invest in the country.

Source: Sethi, 2011.

2.1 Examples of Finishing Schools

Even though finishing school programs are an ongoing trend that is being expanded in many countries, it is still a new phenomenon. India and the Philippines, leaders in ITO and BPO, are the most experienced countries in implementing finishing schools for global services, followed by other countries with similar labor pool constraints, as this training platform has shown acceptable results in terms of the objectives attained. Some well-known finishing schools are

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3Edge Solutions, Dale Carnegie, Octopus, and Tholons Institute, in India; BPO Training Academy and some of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority training programs in the Philippines;[2] and EDUEgypt in Egypt (see the figure below). Nowadays, finishing schools are established not only in tier I cities, such as Bangalore in India and Manila in the Philippines, but also in tier II and even tier III cities, where there are opportunities for labor pool scalability and lower costs than in tier I cities, yet the skills gap is wider. In other places of the world, similar programs and technical schools, not yet identified as finishing schools themselves, have been established as well, such as Mexico First in Mexico, the Caribbean Institute of Technology in Jamaica, Formación Digital in Colombia, and CDC in Uruguay.[3]

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[2] Abbreviated as TESDA.
[3] For more examples of finishing schools and similar programs worldwide, see Annex 1.

BOX 1: Examples of Finishing Schools

3Edge Solutions – India. IT training programs are tailor-made based on market surveys and companies' requests. It is a private finishing school that assists talent acquisition teams of leading corporations and trains students in technical, behavioral, and industry process orientation skills. It has four specialized finishing school programs which are related to the ITO and BPO sectors. The institution's main objective is to "develop competencies of fresh graduates to meet the unprecedented demand for talent in top-tier IT Companies." Until 2012, it had trained more than 5,000 trainees and had achieved 95 percent of job placements (2006-2011).

EDUEgypt – Egypt. Training programs are designed according to outsourcing industry demands, adapted to the professional profile that the students will develop. Public and private participation: training programs are taught by private companies and some specialized public entities working together with the universities. It runs in two threads, the BPO and ITO sectors, enhancing the students' language, customer service, cultural sensitization, PC, data, computer science and information technology skills. The program aims at "securing a continuous pool of candidates ready for direct employment after graduation with minimal requirements for further training." Throughout its six phases of existence, it has trained more than 29,473 students (phase VI, 2012-2013).

Uruguay XXI Finishing School – Uruguay. Training programs include the teaching of both specific (technical and functional) skills and soft skills. They are totally tailor-made as they are actually proposed by the companies that need to train individuals or group of individuals, or by business chambers or associations from national priority services sectors. The Finishing School framework is a national program that started in 2012 within the Global Services program carried out by Uruguay XXI (the national export and investment promotion agency of Uruguay), together with the technical and co-financing support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). These stakeholders are responsible for assessing and approving the programs proposed by the companies and/or chambers after a detailed evaluation and approval process, and finance between 39 percent and 70 percent of the programs approved. By December 2013, one year after its implementation, the program had invested US$ 211,335, approved 32 Finishing School projects from various service sectors (ICT, Logistics, Call/Contact Centers, BPO/KPO, and Pharma) and served over 1,000 participants.

BPO Training Academy – Philippines. BPO and Call Center training programs form trainees according to the latest BPO theories and skills, being taught by people in the industry. A sister company of BPO Global Employment Inc., this finishing school is a TESDA-registered training center working together for the national Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system. TESDA is a government agency and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority. Thanks to its strong partnership with the Business Processing Association of the Philippines (BPAP), the center offers a wide range of BPO classroom training courses and onsite courses in industry companies. Its main objective is "to promote job excellence and hone world-class workforce who will be future leaders in the global Contact Centers and Business Process Outsourcing Industry." Until 2012, this institution had trained 6,308 trainees whose employment rate was 100 percent.

3. Finishing Schools: Main Characteristics and Best Practices

A key characteristic of all finishing schools is their flexibility, as they are based on theoretical knowledge and the formal education system, but they combine them with a unique practical, industry-specific and learning-by-doing framework that provides students with the skills and capabilities specifically required by companies. The finishing school framework can be

implemented for multiple disciplines, as its abstract concept practically fits into all kinds of industries that find a mismatch between current or potential employees' skills and industry demanded skills. However, as far as the global services industry is concerned, its dynamics are so fluctuating and speed is such a crucial factor that these schools have become particularly important as part of the human capital development strategy of any country.

Indeed, finishing schools in India were first implemented as a national strategy to address the fact that even though the country had a competitive number of 400,000 graduate engineers per year, the actual number of employable engineers for the ITO sector only represented 25 percent, while at the same time, only 10-15 percent of general college graduates were employable in the BPO sector (Nasscom, 2006; Majumdar, 2007). In other words, the private sector found that in spite of the fact that they had plenty of engineers, they could not hire 75 percent of the graduates due to their lack of or deficiencies in some skills required by the industry: technical skills, English fluency skills, team work ability and/or basic skills for oral presentations. Consequently, the academic, public and private sectors found that with the implementation of finishing schools, Indians could make a step forward to solve this mismatch problem. With this training framework, India has become the global service supplier par excellence (Kishore, 2009). Nonetheless, this is still a current issue for India's further development in the global offshore outsourcing industry. As a World Bank IT employer survey found in 2009, 64 percent of Indian employers in the IT industry are "only somewhat satisfied or worse" with the quality of the new graduate engineer hires (see Blom and Saeki, 2009).

In Latin America, the situation is similar if not worse. Even though the region has substantially increased access to education, according to a Demand for Skills Survey conducted in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile there are two trends that directly affect the employability of youth and show a mismatch between the skills taught by the education system and the ones required by the labor market (Bassi et. al., 2012).[4] The first trend is related to the taught versus the required skills. In this sense, Bassi et al. show that the skills required have changed (primarily due to technological advances), employers have raised their requirements, and enterprises attach more

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[4] Even though the study is based on the analysis of high school students and their employability immediately after graduation, we believe that the insights and correlations of the study also apply for our purpose, as the identified problem and hypothesis are the same: there is a gap between the skills that the education system develops and the ones that the labor market demands. Furthermore, the study design included both the manufacturing and services sectors.

importance to socio-emotional skills than to knowledge or sector-specific skills.[5] The second trend is that due to the fact that those changes on the demand side have not been accompanied by changes on the supply side (i.e. the skills exercised at formal education institutions), only 12 percent of the companies surveyed reported that they had no problem finding employees with the skills required. Furthermore, 80 percent of the companies reported that behavioral skills were the most difficult to find.

Given this situation, Bassi et al. state that there were two ways to solve this mismatch problem: either to change the content and structure of the education system or to modify some aspects of its pedagogical methods to adapt them better to the skills demanded by the labor market. Undoubtedly, moving forward in this trend could give a structural solution to the skills gap; however, such a solution could take time. In addition, although this solution might be successful, global services —due to their very nature of constantly demanding new skills as a result of information technology advances— need to develop a flexible and fast tool to satisfy the changing demand for skills and complement formal education.

Consequently, finishing schools may be a good short and mid-term alternative to bridge the gap between the supply of fresh graduates' skills and the demands of the labor market, thus benefiting both sides of the chain, complementing formal education with a more demand-driven methodology, and enhancing the economic development and productivity of the country in the global services sector.

3.1 Institutional Structure

In order to develop finishing school programs and achieve the objectives mentioned above, public and private partnerships (PPPs) as well as a coordinated communication net among academia and the public and private sectors are basic tools to attain such objectives. These three sectors are the stakeholders responsible for designing, monitoring and implementing the programs best suited for each country. Finishing school best practices have shown that the result of an effective finishing school program depends on how well coordinated stakeholders are and

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[5] Socio-emotional skills are defined as those related to "an individual's personality traits," including attitudinal skills, customer service, responsibility and commitment. Knowledge skills are cognitive competencies that can be applied in different occupations, and sector-specific skills are the ones required to perform a certain technical job (Bassi et. al., 2012).

how successfully they follow the steps required to create a suitable and sustainable finishing school framework, because the key point to consider while implementing a human resource strategy like this is that it should be country-specific. It will depend on the country's labor pool situation, the stakeholders available, and the business segment specialization.

Taking India as an example, finishing schools can be established by the government or by private institutions. In 2009, the local government of Tamil Nadu founded rural BPO finishing schools, and in 2010 the government of Kerala established model finishing schools to improve the IT and soft skills of students. There are also examples of Indian private finishing schools, such as 3Edge Solutions, Dale Carnegie, and Tholons Institute. Worldwide best practices suggest that even in government-run finishing schools, students should share the financial burden of enrolling in such training institutions (Tholons, 2012). The underlying objective is to generate a sense of ownership with and commitment to the program to ensure as many successful cases as possible (measured by improved job placements), even if tuition fees were only symbolic.

All in all, for the global services labor market it is crucial to develop programs fostering scalability, as the objective is two-fold —that the labor force should improve both in quality and quantity. In this sense, a strong PPP and analytical research into the needs of the private sector are a must to develop a proper finishing school framework. In structuring finishing school programs with an adequate public-private alliance, another important objective is favored: to give a sign to academia (and to students) of the kind of skills that are currently demanded by the industry.

With this in mind, the three angles of the finishing school triangle are the state (including academia or the public education system), the private sector related to the global services offshoring industry —one of the beneficiaries of the chain—, and the trainees —the ultimate beneficiaries of the program. Generally, the state participates by implementing the general education policies, defining the global objectives of the finishing school program, acting as a facilitator of the private sector's activities, and setting the strategic priorities of the program (for example, sectoral focus, incentives for gender equality, prioritization of specific locations). The active participation of the public sector is crucial because, if training programs were to be left solely in the hands of enterprises, these would naturally feel free to train their potential workforce only in those skills specifically required by the firms concerned (Bassi et. al., 2012). Nonetheless, in a competitive market, if trainees are trained at finishing schools in the general

skills that are deemed more useful to work in many companies, they will have more opportunities to become employable for many firms, with the advantage that they can increase productivity as they are able to perform the required tasks satisfactorily, without the need for in-house training. Furthermore, the state contributes by providing trainers and sharing the cost burden through incentives and co-financing initiatives. Some of the most well-known strategies for sharing cost burdens have been local government tax incentives and subsidies for foreign firms interested in undertaking human resource training initiatives (Gereffi et al., 2011).

As finishing school programs are demand-driven, private companies participate actively in program and content design, establish trainee selection criteria, provide some of the trainers responsible for teaching the required contents and skills, contribute with an internship system for trained students, and offer their physical infrastructure for practical training. Given all this, it is crucial for firms to carefully evaluate the training institution they choose to work with, as they have to make sure that the selected institution will follow the programs and contents designed by them to address the skills gap issue. As for program costs, private companies also contribute financially as they are one of the sectors that benefit the most from these plans. Finally, the trainees, who are the core of the education framework and the very reason for the human capital development program, also contribute financially by paying for their enrollment fees (depending on their economic situation) and by committing themselves to the program.

The Finishing School Triangle
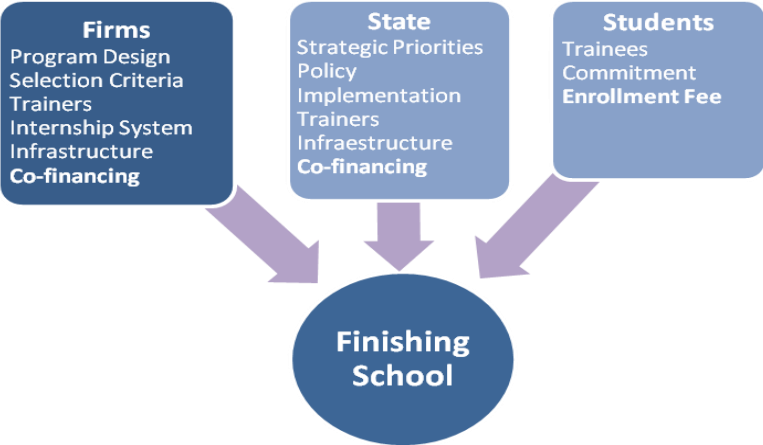
Source: Prepared by the authors.

3.2 Contents

The necessary employability skills that both trainees and companies seek through a finishing school program involve fundamental skills, technical skills, communication skills and interpersonal skills (IT Pathshala, 2012). The first ones include basic aptitudes required to perform a specific task, such as logical reasoning and quantitative abilities. Technical skills are those learned during school or professional education, depend on the course of studies chosen, and are the ones that allow you to work in a particular business field. For example, in the IT industry, technical skills would be computer programming, web design and expertise to work with different programming and web design tools and programs, such as Java, .Net and Flash. Communication skills involve expressing yourself effectively both orally and in writing; and interpersonal skills are required to act and work in a professional environment, and include skills such as time management, goal setting and team building (IT Pathshala, 2012).

Given the wide variety of academic disciplines, business segments, service lines and processes that exist in the global outsourcing industry, employability skills are grouped into different core or technical skills regularly taught in finishing schools, and into other general skills, commonly known as soft skills, which are provided to all students from all fields of academic and business disciplines (IDB, 2012). According to the finishing school objectives, both technical and soft skills are demand-driven, as the content of the program is settled and designed by the companies directly interested in hiring and increasing their personnel; moreover, professors and trainers are mainly provided by them as well.

Examples of Core Skills and Soft Skills Taught at Finishing Schools

Academic Discipline	Outsourcing Segment	Service Lines and Processes	Skills developed by finishing schools	
			Core Skills	Soft Skills
Business	BPO	• Contact Support Services	Orientation in business processes. Knowledge of a particular field of industry.	• Interpersonal relations • Public speaking skills • Presentation skills • Team work skills • Employability and Life Skills • Communication/ Fluency in English • Analytical and problem solving skills • Decision-making skills • Planning and time management skills • Confidence building
	KPO	• Business Analytics	Orientation in business models and terms. Knowledge of a particular field of industry.	
	KPO	• Insurance Services		
Health	BPO	• Medical Transcription	Technical Knowledge on Information Technology. Encoding. Billing.	
	KPO	• Health Care Information Management	Knowledge on Health Care. Patient Information. Physician Information. Laboratory Information.	
Information Technology	ITO	• Infrastructure Management Services	Database Management. Network Management. Storage Management. Application Hosting.	
		• Web and Mobile Applications Development & Maintenance	Orientation in Development and Design Tools. Knowledge on Web & Mobile Applications. Knowledge on Computer Operating Systems. Technical knowledge on Information Security and Threats.	
		• Computer Operating Systems		
		• Information Security		
	BPO	• Contact Center Services • Call Center Services	Technical Support	

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Peña Capobianco, 2012; Tholons, 2012a, and Sethi, 2011.

Finishing schools tend to differentiate their programs according to three main academic disciplines: business, health care and information technology, which is indeed how the service market and providers are widely organized. Within the business services, depending on the outsourcing segment the finishing school wants to address, programs tend to specialize in different service lines and processes. For example, to train students to perform BPO tasks while

rendering contact support services, the most common core skills taught include an orientation in business processes and knowledge building in the industry concerned. As for KPO tasks within business services, finishing schools usually train employees in business analytics and/or insurance services, providing orientation in business models and terms as well as industry-specific knowledge. Concerning health care services, finishing school best practices establish that, while focusing on BPO services within this academic discipline, employees should be trained in medical transcription services, providing them with technical knowledge on information technology, billing and encoding; instead, if focused on KPO services, finishing schools will train their students in health care information management processes, and health care, patient information, physician information and laboratory information services.

With regard to information technology in general, and ITO in particular, worldwide finishing schools offer ample training in different service lines and processes due to the fact that this business segment is critical for the development of all kinds of outsourced services and is highly demanded by companies and major players. Information technology is the basic platform for innovation and for increasing speed in service delivery to the market, and as finishing schools are a demand-driven strategy, they have to be aware of that. In this sense, some of the business lines most commonly followed in the field of ITO services include infrastructure management services, Web and mobile application development and maintenance, computer operating systems, and information security. The other business segment usually addressed by finishing schools as a response to demand is BPO, providing training for contact and call centers and working on the development of technical support skills.

As it was previously mentioned, finishing schools also address skills common to all disciplines and fields of work, which are identified as "soft skills." This set of skills, especially focused on improving the employee's performance in service provision, consists of personal and social abilities that will determine the professional, organizational and social performance of the employee at the workplace, on the one hand, and English proficiency skills, on the other. Indeed, according to a study made by O'Neil, Allred, and Baker (1997), in which they analyze the findings from five different studies concerning the skills required by employers in the United States and group them into four categories (basic academic, higher-order thinking, interpersonal and teamwork, and personal characteristics and attitudes), they conclude that American employers deem "social and teamwork skills" more important than "academic skills" at the time

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of recruiting their employees (see Bassi et. al., 2012).[6] In 2010, the Demand for Skills Survey driven by the IDB also revealed similar results for Latin America, showing how important soft skills are over time as well as in other regions. Evidence showed that companies not only attached greater importance to socio-emotional skills, but also found it more difficult to find people with such skills.[7] Eighty percent of the firms surveyed stated that the skills most difficult to find were those concerning behavior and personal attitudes (see Bassi et. al., 2012). Blom and Saeki (2009) also address this mismatch problem between educational institutions and industry requirements in India, where after an on-line employer satisfaction survey conducted in 2009, IT employers of fresh graduate engineers reported that, at the time of hiring their employees, they attached the greatest importance to what they call "core employability skills," which mainly consist of personal characteristics applied to the workplace and tasks, including integrity, reliability, teamwork, willingness to learn, and entrepreneurship, to name a few.[8] The second most important ones were "communication skills," within which communication in English ranked first.[9]

Therefore, finishing schools are helping bridge the mismatch in soft skills, as the traditional education system has proved to have failed in this area. For instance, some of the soft skills addressed include interpersonal relations, teamwork, public speaking, presentations, and communication skills, especially focused on English fluency. Likewise, Indian finishing schools, either public or private, regard English language proficiency a priority, as their offshore outsourcing activities aim at English-speaking customers, mainly from the United States and the United Kingdom (Blom and Saeki, 2009). The Tholons Institute, for example, currently encompasses five distance-learning finishing school programs, all of which begin with a foundation course in English (Tholons Institute). In addition, Indian finishing schools focus on

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[6] The five studies analyzed by O'Neil et. al. (1997) were (i) U.S. Department of Labor, *What Work Requires of Schools (SCANS,* (1991); (ii) American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), *Workplace Basics: The Essential Skills Employers Want*, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor; (iii) Michigan Employability Skills Task Force*, The Michigan Employability Skills Employer Survey*; (iv) New York Department of Education, *Basic and Expanded Basic Skills*; and (v) U.S. National Academy of Sciences, *High Schools and the Changing Workplace: The Employers' View*.

[7] See Annex 3 to check the survey results regarding demand for skills by scope of activity, size, wage level, country of origin and industry of the company concerned. In the categories mentioned, evidence suggests that the most demanded skills are the socio-emotional ones (Bassi et. al., 2012).
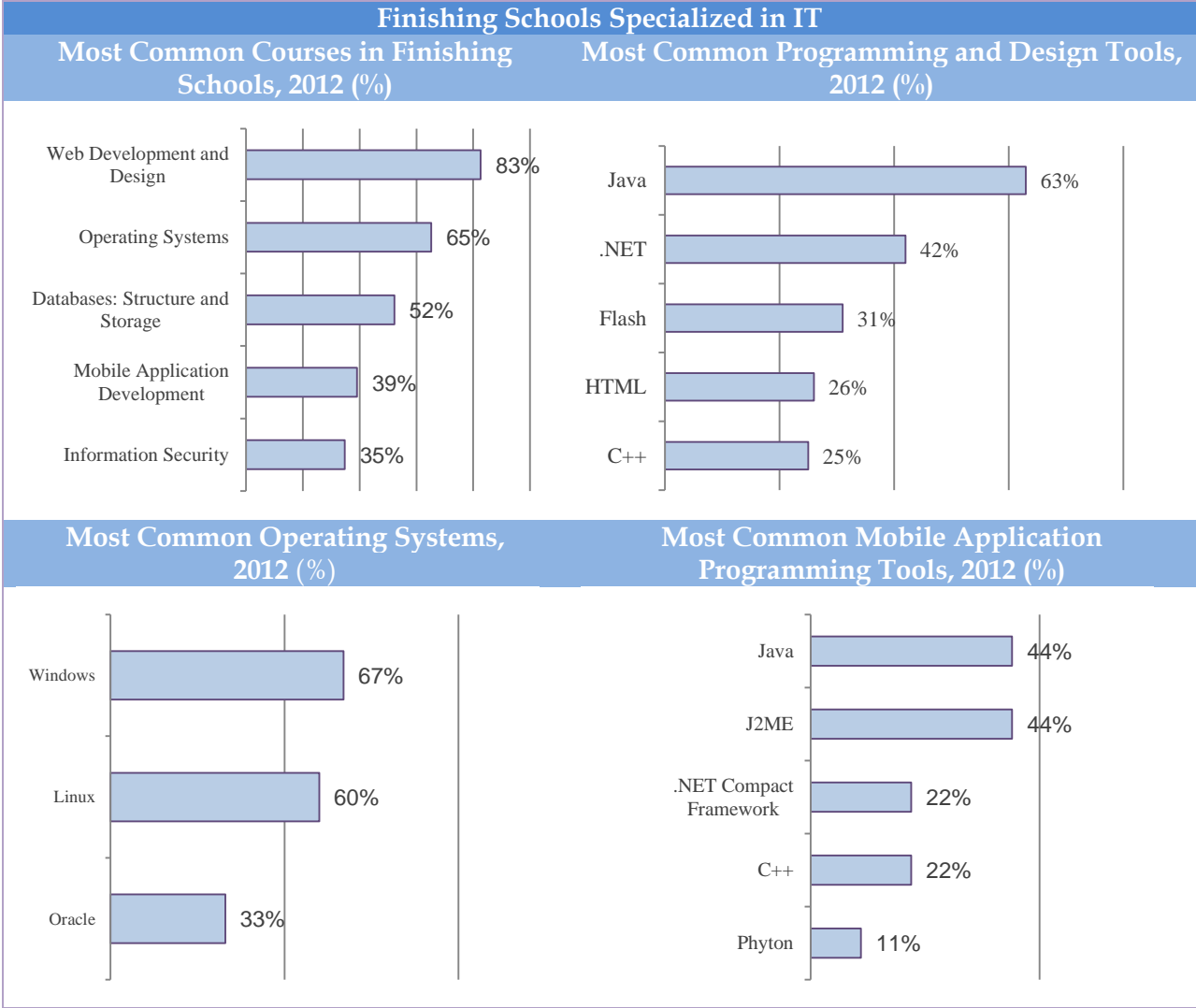
[8] The core employability skills include integrity, reliability, teamwork, willingness to learn, entrepreneurship, self-discipline, self-motivation, flexibility, understand/take directions, and empathy.

[9] Note that communication skills are also included under "soft skills."

improving relational skills, employees' confidence and presentation skills, as they are regarded as some of the most important skills needed by the ITO and BPO industries (Tholons, 2012).

3.2.1 Finishing School Programs in Information Technology

Concerning the content of IT finishing school programs, a study carried out by Peña Capobianco, 2012 about best practices in 23 educational institutions —some of which were finishing schools proper while others were institutions with similar objectives and structure, such as centers of excellence, college courses, training programs at service business chambers, and public and private enterprises— revealed that the IT courses most commonly used were programming and design tools, operating systems, mobile application programming tools, and soft skills. The universe of the study included institutions from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, the Philippines and Uruguay. The study found that courses on Web development design, operating systems and databases (structure and storage) were the most widely taught by finishing schools, accounting for 83, 65 and 52 percent, respectively. The most common programming and design tools were Java, .NET and Flash; and Windows and Linux were the most commonly taught operating systems, accounting for 67 and 60 percent, respectively. Among mobile application programming tools (for mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets), Java and J2ME, each one being present in 44 percent of the sample, ranked first.

Finishing Schools Specialized in IT

Most Common Courses in Finishing Schools, 2012 (%)

- Web Development and Design — 83%
- Operating Systems — 65%
- Databases: Structure and Storage — 52%
- Mobile Application Development — 39%
- Information Security — 35%

Most Common Programming and Design Tools, 2012 (%)

- Java — 63%
- .NET — 42%
- Flash — 31%
- HTML — 26%
- C++ — 25%

Most Common Operating Systems, 2012 (%)

- Windows — 67%
- Linux — 60%
- Oracle — 33%

Most Common Mobile Application Programming Tools, 2012 (%)

- Java — 44%
- J2ME — 44%
- .NET Compact Framework — 22%
- C++ — 22%
- Phyton — 11%

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Peña Capobianco, 2012.

Note: The data above is the result of an analysis of the IT courses, programming and design tools, operating systems, and mobile application programming tools taught in 23 finishing schools and similar institutions in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, the Philippines, and Uruguay.

The soft skills most commonly addressed in the universe of IT finishing school programs are communication and interpersonal, teamwork, English proficiency, and analytical and problem solving skills, in that order.

Soft Skills Most Commonly Taught at Finishing Schools, 2012 (%)

Communication and Interpersonal Skills	78%
Teamwork Skills	67%
English Proficiency	56%
Analytical and Problem Solving	44%
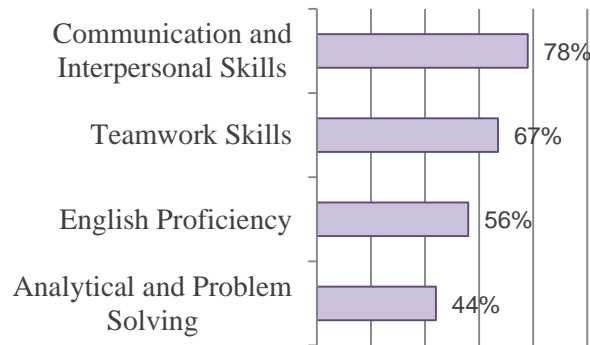
Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Peña Capobianco, 2012.

3.3 Finishing School Implementation

Along with the finishing school specialization in technical and soft skills, these institutions have to address their implementation mechanism in order to reach the objective of bridging the gap between the skills provided by academia and the skills required by the industry in a timely fashion.

3.3.1 Modules

In general, these training institutions organize their programs in courses or modules of training, each of them concerned with certain core technical skills related to a service line, as well as the soft skills required.

3.3.2 Duration

The duration of the program varies according to the course level (basic, intermediate and advanced) as well as to the course intensity, as there are some finishing schools offering intensive or part-time programs in addition to the regular ones (Peña Capobianco, 2012). Intensive courses reduce training days by half when compared to the regular courses and double instructional contact hours per day, whereas the duration of part-time programs increases as contact hours per day are reduced. Generally, finishing school programs run from five weeks to one year (Tholons, 2012). The underlying reason for such short-term programs is that the main

objective of finishing schools is to give an immediate response to industry demands and become a complementary tool to business specialization, taking into account that trainees have a formal education background.

In addition to the regular duration of courses, many finishing school programs also assist trainees preparing for final exams and offer review lessons to help them perform successfully. Review and exam preparation lessons usually take from two to five days.

3.3.3 Eligibility

Depending on the program level and students' objectives, finishing school programs require some background knowledge and thus they establish certain eligibility criteria, assessed by aptitude tests and/or interviews. As it was previously mentioned, most finishing school programs are aimed at fresh graduates or undergraduate students who are in the last years of their courses of studies. The selection process basically responds to the goal of these institutions of "finishing" the formal education level attained by developing some complementary skills as well as the right employee profile for the firms that design the finishing school program according to their needs. Consequently, private sector stakeholders actively participate in the selection criteria of trainees, as they will select among the most successful the ones to work in their enterprises.

3.3.4 Modality

In designing the most suitable and sustainable finishing school framework for a certain place and labor pool target, it is important to take into consideration the situation, available resources, and needs of the students who will enroll in such programs. For instance, the finishing school program design and tuition fees for the trainees have to be established after paying special attention to school schedules, trainees' commuting times and socioeconomic situation, and information technology availability, to name a few.

Having considered all these facts, the teaching mode can be face-to-face or distance training through e-learning or blended learning platforms. In the distance learning mode, depending on the course level, programs require between 10 and 20 hours of study per week. Both training modes usually require students to pass a final test to be awarded the program diploma or certification, and many of them also involve a final project related to the service line and/or an internship in companies within the industry during the last modules of the training

sessions. The advantage of such a practical approach is that trainees can perform the required tasks in real-life situations and scenarios, thus acquiring practical skills through a learning-by-doing methodology, which usually has little room in formal education contexts. Moreover, as trainees are in contact with industry experts working in the firms participating in these initiatives (during such practical opportunities or because they are their professors), they can develop their skills through constant exchange of ideas and approaches with these experts, who have a real corporate exposure (IT Pathshala, 2012).

In the case of the IT sector, 43 percent of finishing schools teach at least one of their courses online, and some of them offer courses split into two modules, one being face-to-face and the other, through distance learning, known as e-practice (electronic practice).

Nevertheless, if the finishing school teaching mode is analyzed by course (rather than by institution), the study reveals that the great majority of courses are face-to-face vis-à-vis distance or online courses, accounting for 85 and 15 percent respectively. However, even in entirely distance learning programs, most finishing schools require students to take a face-to-face final exam to be awarded the diploma or certificate concerned.

Finishing School Teaching Modes, by Institution and by Course, 2012 (%)
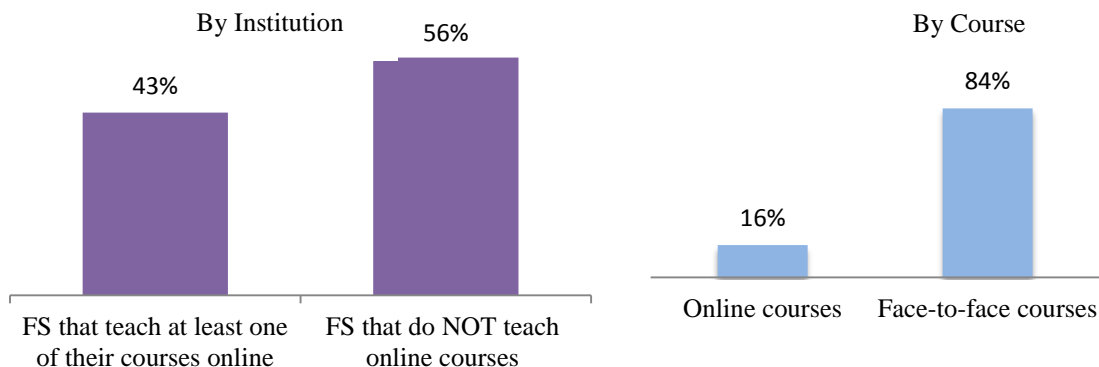

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Peña Capobianco, 2012.

Note: The data above is the result of an analysis of the IT courses, programming and design tools, operating systems, and mobile application programming tools taught in 23 finishing schools and similar institutions in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, the Philippines, and Uruguay.

3.3.5 Example of a Finishing School Framework

In order to establish an effective human resource development tool, Tholons has created a finishing school framework, which consists of a cyclical process of four different stages: needs analysis, program conceptualization, implementation of the finishing school, and evaluation (Sethi, 2011 and Tholons, 2012).[10] Each stage entails certain activities, and as this is a cyclical process, all stages are interconnected. Moreover, this is a mechanism to measure and train human capital, a non-stable variable; therefore, the framework needs to be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect the program objectives.
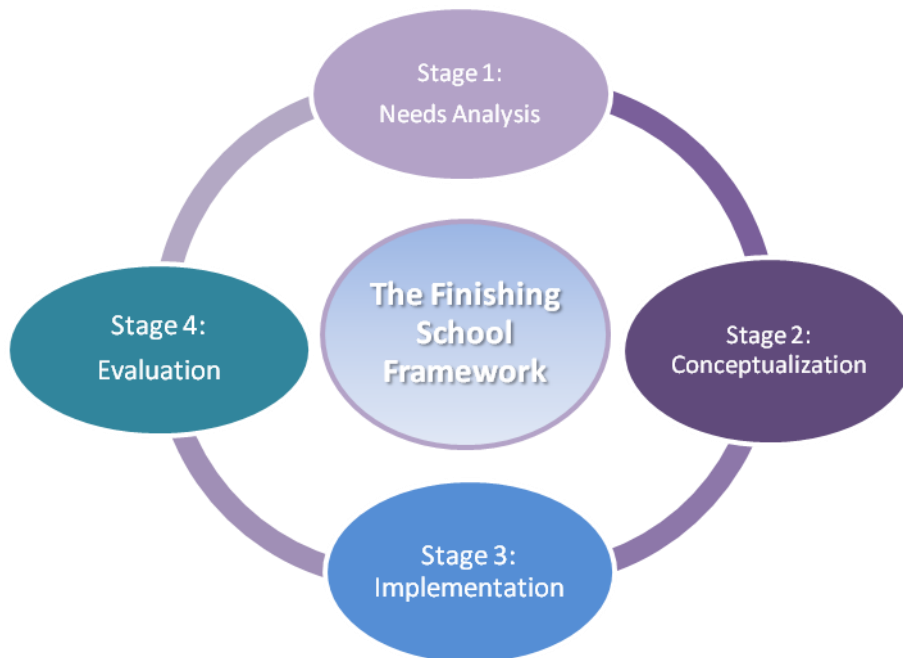
In the first stage, the analysis focuses on the assessment of the crucial components of finishing schools: stakeholders, labor pool, industry dynamics, and local infrastructure to set the basis for the best possible finishing school programs and locations, after deciding the objectives to be attained. Stakeholders are assessed in order to find opportunities for PPPs; the labor pool analysis consists in the study of the current situation and needs of the target trainees in order to adapt their training to the private sector profile of the country; the industry dynamics, market

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[10] There are other scholars who argue that this framework should be less centralized and systematized and more responsive to the needs and flexibility of the interested companies. In this sense, the finishing school framework should be designed by the stakeholders (the academic, public and private sectors) every time industry firms require certain workforce skills; then, the actual finishing schools would not be regular training institutions run by a specific organization.

demand and trends are also identified; finally in this stage, physical as well as IT infrastructures are also determined. In the second stage, i.e. the program conceptualization, there are two main activities to carry out: defining the role of each of the stakeholders involved and the kind of partnership they should establish, and designing the actual finishing school program, which has to meet the needs of both the labor pool and the industry.

The third step involves the actual implementation of the finishing school program designed according to the needs of skilling, re-skilling and up-skilling identified in the different locations of the country, as well as to the available physical and IT infrastructures identified. In this stage, stakeholders have to determine the actual locations for running the finishing schools and implementing the designed training programs. A pilot program is highly recommended prior to its actual implementation. Finally, the evaluation stage consists in assessing the skills acquired by the talent pool, the course curriculum, and the stakeholder's performance, in order to identify the aspects in which the finishing school has succeeded or failed. This evaluation analysis should be carried out on a continuous basis, due to the dynamics of the industry and the demand-driven characteristics of the programs.[11]

3.3.6 Evaluation

The importance of conducting a systematic analysis and evaluation of an established program is addressed by the literature (Tholons, 2012; Yarbrough et. al., 2011; Aichholzer and Westholm, 2009; Gadja and Jewiss, 2004; Fleischman and Williams, 1996), in which an evaluation and an analysis of the outcomes are thought to contribute to determining the extent to which the program has succeeded or failed vis-à-vis the objectives previously set in order to improve the program and make the necessary adjustments, if any. The evaluation tool allows stakeholders to answer the following questions: Are we doing with the trainees what we stated that we were going to do? Are the trainees learning what the trainers established that they were going to teach? How can we improve the teaching and training methods and techniques? (Fleischman and Williams, 1996). Evaluations help determine the program strengths and weaknesses, contribute new and unexpected opportunities for improvement and change, and show how the program has affected the target population (Aichholzer and Westholm, 2009). Furthermore, in measuring the

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[11] For a more detailed conceptualization of the Finishing School Framework by Tholons, see Annex 2.

impact of finishing school programs on the employability of a certain workforce, evaluations need to be made on an ongoing basis, because the main objective of these programs is to adapt trainees' skills to labor market demands and trends, which are constantly changing, as businesses follow information and communication technology trends very closely. The outcomes, activities, and indicators of program evaluations should be ideally revisited on a regular basis in order to guarantee the expected program direction and results (Gadja and Jewiss, 2004).

As it was previously stated, the true success of a finishing school implementation is achieved by an improvement in job placements for the actual workforce or by an increase in fresh graduate employment rates. In this sense, it is essential that all the trainees' data be collected and administered systematically and carefully, even after their graduation from the finishing school. The evaluation stage should consider and measure four main separate metrics in order to determine the effectiveness of the program: how many trainees started the finishing school program, how many finished the program in the expected time frame, how much trainees improved their skills after completing the program and, depending on their previous situation (whether they were already working or fresh graduates at the time of enrolling in the program), how much they improved their job placement or whether they were hired by the target industry.

In addition, to measure how trainees improved their skills and to compare trainees' skills before and after the program, a standardized skills assessment test before and after program completion is highly recommended. For instance, NASSCOM, the National Association of Software and Services Companies in India, has a pre-assessment and a post-program assessment test in its BPO and ITO foundation skills courses. The pre-assessment diagnostic test, which is called NAC-Tech Diagnostic, is aimed at identifying the skills gaps that have to be tackled within the course, whereas the post-program assessment test is called NAC-Tech Final and is the scorecard of the trainees' skills and competencies (NASSCOM and ICTACT). The NAC-Tech Final scores are shared with all NASSCOM member companies, which can then contact those trainees who performed well in the test and meet their selection criteria.

Thus, the questions that should be answered to measure the success of any program are the following:

1. How many trainees enrolled in the finishing school program and actually finished it?

2. Did the trainees improve their skills according to standardized tests taken before and after the finishing school program?

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3. How many finishing school graduates who were employed before the program improved their job placement?

4. How many finishing school graduates who were fresh university graduates found a job in the industry?

In order to implement this system of evaluation and assess the real impact of this training approach on the employability of the workforce, a system of trainees' tracking after completing their finishing school program has to be established so as to keep track of their job performance and employability after having acquired the technical and soft skills taught by the finishing school.

Similarly, as the finishing school framework entails the participation of the industry companies as stakeholders, the assessment can also be implemented and strengthened from the labor demand side, seeking the opinions and evaluation of the employers who hire the finishing school graduates. They can provide strong input and assessment according to their requirements, highlighting aspects from the actual job performance of the trained employees. They will be able to compare workers who have been trained through the finishing school program and workers who have not, and because of the existence of a necessary well-connected network of information among all the stakeholders involved in a finishing school, their input should be taken into consideration and included in the finishing school program updating process. Consequently, employers should be requested to answer the following questions:

5. Are finishing school graduates better trained and more industry ready than non-finishing school graduates? Do they possess the skills required by the industry? Can they perform the job tasks immediately after being hired? From your perspective, what skills do they still lack?

Yet, the evaluation entails a methodical and objective compilation, analysis and report of information, which then requires effective interpretation and judgment (Fleischman and Williams, 1996, and Yarbrough et al.,2011) put special emphasis on the nature and effectiveness of setting proper standards of feasibility and accuracy for evaluation tools, evaluators, and evaluation findings (see Yarbrough et. al., 2011).[12]

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[12] Fleischman and Williams (1996) suggest that the evaluation process of a teaching program should involve six steps in order to be successful: I. Define the purpose and scope of the evaluation; II. Specify the evaluation questions; III. Develop the evaluation design and data collection plan; IV. Collect the data; V. Analyze the data; and

4. Conclusions

Finishing schools are a relatively new demand-driven human resource development tool that is being increasingly implemented throughout many countries aiming at developing their offshore outsourcing services industries. The main objective for establishing these institutions is to improve the scope and employability of the talent pool in order to develop the local productivity of the global services industry and improve the rate of foreign investment in this field, as this business training approach allows the labor pool to better adapt to industry trends and market predictions. Predictions suggest that technology will move forward at a faster speed than in previous years, human capital will continue to be a great source of value, and outsourcing will increase; therefore, countries must be aware of these trends and develop their workforce to take advantage of such scenario (Gereffi et al., 2011, and Kelley, Moore and Holloway, 2007).

In order to increase employability, it is essential that finishing schools be structured as a flexible tool, taking into account the country's specific situation, needs and opportunities according to what is being demanded by this changing and fast growing industry; rest on specific training programs that involve the instruction of both technical and soft skills; and be designed and implemented through effective PPPs in order to successfully benefit all the members of the finishing school triangle and dictate the market course, signaling academia what the market is looking for. All in all, effective finishing school programs need to be implemented through an integral approach: from needs analyses to systematic evaluation instances from which to suitably adapt them to business trends.

VI. Use the evaluation report for program improvement (for further information about this evaluation approach see Fleischman and Williams, 1996). Gadja and Jewiss (2004) state that the best evaluation strategy is to first determine and document the desired outcomes, activities and indicators, and then assess the quantity and quality of the program achievements.

Annex 1: Examples of Finishing Schools

Examples of Finishing Schools	
Egypt	EDUEgypt
India	3Edge Solutions IT Finishing School
	Dale Carnegie
	GradFirst
	IPSR IT Finishing School
	Model Finishing School
	Raman International Institute of Information Technology (RiiiT), Mysore
	National Institutes of Technology – Calicut, Durgapur, Jaipur, Kurukshetra, Surathkal, Tiruchirappalli, Warangal & IIT-Roorkee
	NASSCOM & ICTACT Foundation Skills Programs
	Octopus
	Teknoturf
	Tholons Institute
Philippines	BPO Training Academy
	Karilagan Finishing School
	Multi-Source Global Network Inc.
	TESDA Training Centers
Similar Programs and Technical Schools in Latin America and the Caribbean	
Argentina	CESSI (Cámara de Empresas de Software y Servicios Informáticos) Training Programs
Brazil	SoftSul Training Programs
Colombia	Formación Digital
	SENA Training Programs
	Uniempresarial
Jamaica	Caribbean Institute of Technology
Mexico	Mexico First
Panama	Information Technologies Education Centre of Excellence India – Panamá
Trinidad and Tobago	TTEPP Training Programs (Youth Training and Employment Partnership Program)
Uruguay	CUTI Training Program *Hacé Click!*
	CDC (Centro de Desarrollo del Conocimiento) TCS-LATU
	Uruguay XXI Finishing Schools

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Peña Capobianco, 2012, and Tholons, 2012a.

Annex 2: Steps to Establish a Finishing School as an Effective Human Resource Development Tool, by Tholons

Stage 1: Needs Analysis

In this primary stage, the analysis focuses on the assessment of the crucial components of finishing schools: stakeholders, labor pool, industry dynamics, and local infrastructure. It is the most important stage because the rest of the framework is going to be designed depending on its outcomes (Sethi, 2011). According to best practices, the stakeholders involved in the implementation of finishing schools should represent the three main players —the private sector, the public sector, and academia— and depending on the findings, it is in this stage when possibilities of PPPs can be found. The labor pool analysis is especially crucial at this point, as the finishing school main objective is to improve the employability and scale of the local labor pool. Thus, this step will identify the talent pool's strengths, weaknesses, constraints and capabilities through both primary and secondary data gathering (Tholons, 2012a). Furthermore, it is important to highlight that this analysis should also involve teachers and trainers.

The industry analysis aims at identifying industry trends, the market demand, and short- as well as long-term human resources needs in order to adapt the talent pool training to the country's private sector profile. Best practices state that this analysis can be done through direct communication with the main industry players and surveys to get the most of that information (Sethi, Anuradha, 2011). Finally, the other important component that has to be assessed is the infrastructure availability to operate the finishing school. This includes physical infrastructure such as classrooms, and local IT infrastructure such as state-of-the-art telecommunications infrastructure (Sethi, 2011).

Needs Analysis Flowchart
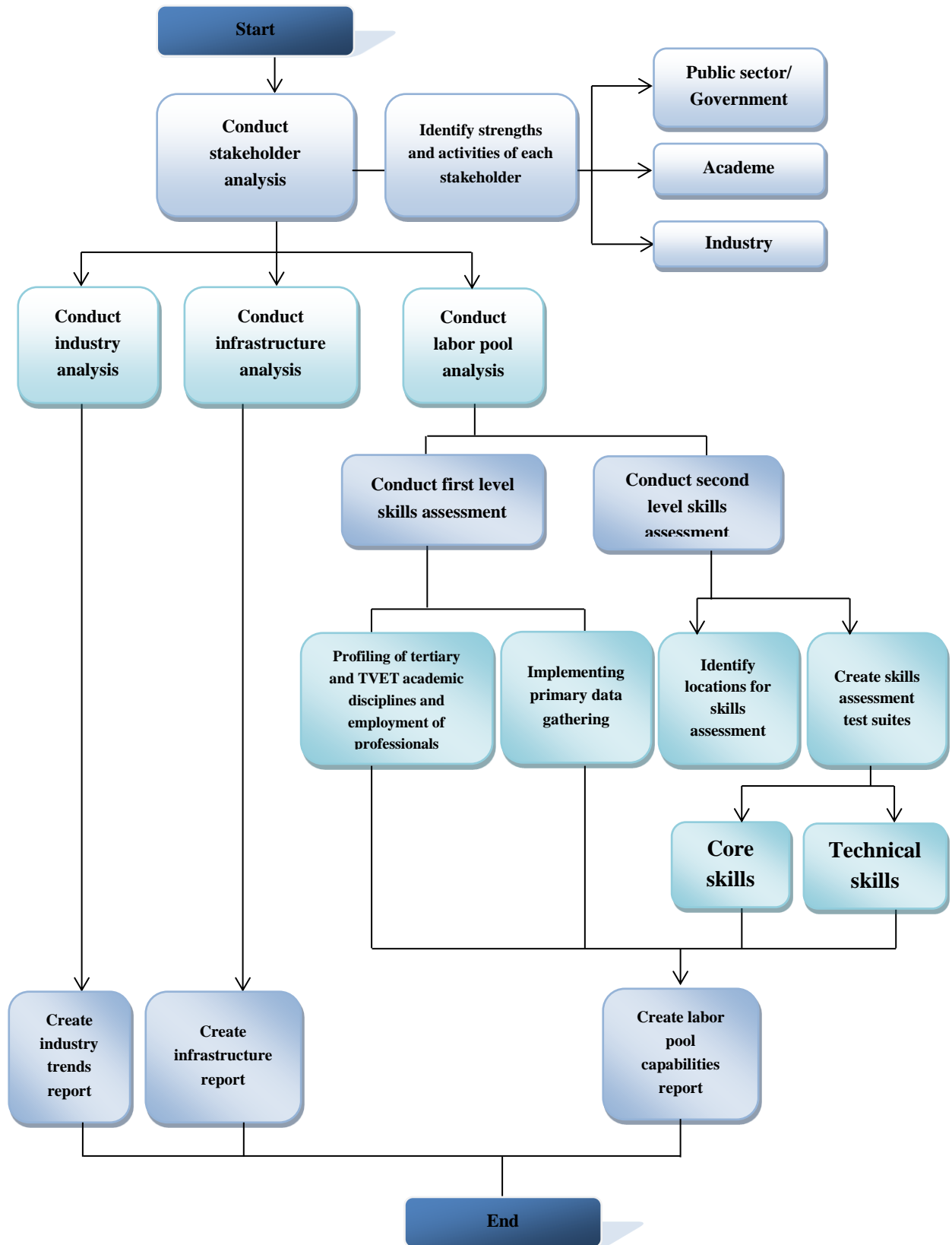
Source: Sethi, 2011.

Stage 2: Conceptualization

This stage is mostly aimed at defining the role of each of the stakeholders involved as well as the kind of partnership they should establish, and also the actual finishing school program design. The ideal situation for the best conceptualization of the finishing school program would be the creation of a new organization exclusively in charge of the government for the development of finishing schools, which has to include all stakeholders identified in the previous stage. However, it is highly difficult and unrealistic to have the resources needed to do that. Thus, what stakeholders need to do is to assign that role to an existing organization, receptive of other stakeholders opinions and points of view, and interconnected through PPPs (Sethi, 2011). This stage also includes the recalibration of the existing institutions in order to better synchronize their roles and activities.

Likewise, stakeholders need to design the finishing school program at this stage, which entails the program curriculum, the frequency and duration of classes, and the certification platforms. The program has to simultaneously address the needs of the labor pool and the industry identified in stage one (Sethi, 2011).

Program Conceptualization Flowchart

```
                    ┌─────────────┐
                    │    Start    │
                    └─────────────┘
                           │
                           ▼
                         ◇ Arrangement
                           of a new
┌──────────────┐          governing          ┌──────────────────┐
│ Identify roles│─────►   body for    ─────► │ Recalibrate existing│
│ and           │         Finishing          │ organization/agency │
│ responsibilities│        Schools            └──────────────────┘
│ for Finishing │                                     │
│ Schools Program│                                    │
└──────────────┘                                      │
                           │                          │
                           ▼                          ▼
                  ┌──────────────┐          ┌──────────────────┐
                  │ Create a new │─────────►│ Formulate Finishing│
                  │ organization/│          │ Schools Program    │
                  │ agency       │          └──────────────────┘
                  └──────────────┘                    │
```

Start

Arrangement of a new governing body for Finishing Schools

Identify roles and responsibilities for Finishing Schools Program

Recalibrate existing organization/agency

Create a new organization/agency

Formulate Finishing Schools Program

Formulate and Standardize Course Curriculum for Students and Professionals

Standardize Skill Certification Scheme

Identify Job Placements/Career Advancement Programs

Formulate Finishing School Program

End

Source: Sethi, 2011.

Stage 3: Implementation

The actual implementation of the finishing school program leverages on the combination of the labor pool analysis and the infrastructure analysis. According to the needs of skilling, re-skilling and up-skilling identified in the different locations of the country and their physical as well as IT infrastructures, stakeholders have to determine the actual locations for implementing the finishing schools (Tholons, 2012a). These initiatives involve marketing and promotion strategies within universities and services companies (Sethi, 2011). A pilot program before the actual implementation of the accomplished finishing school program is highly recommended as it allows stakeholders to identify the program strengths and weaknesses and its success in coordinating roles and spending allocations (Tholons, 2012a).

Actual Implementation Flowchart
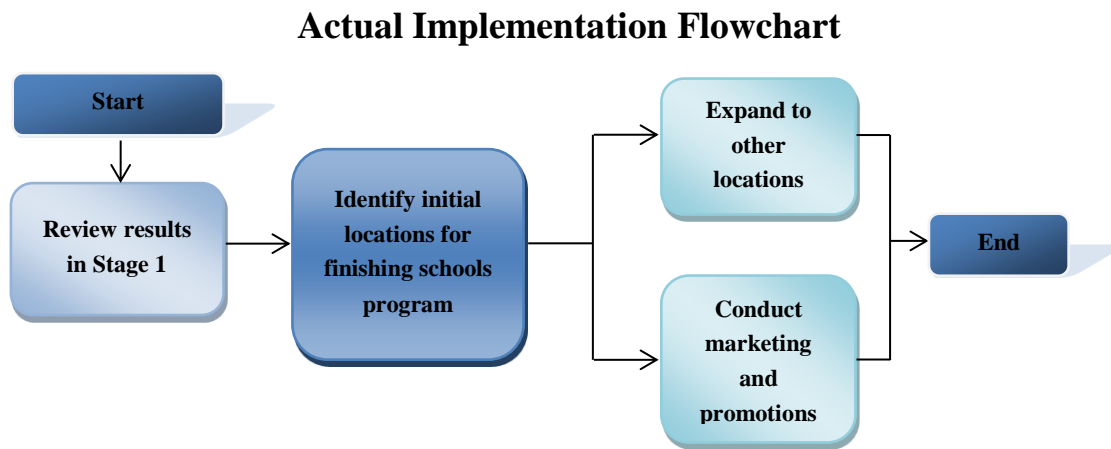
Source: Sethi, 2011.

Stage 4: Evaluation

This stage focuses on the program post-implementation evaluation, and it is crucial to know the aspects in which the program succeeded or failed (Tholons, 2012a). The evaluation stage will set the basis to make the required adjustments to improve the finishing school program and it will pave the way for the cyclical finishing school framework. The evaluation entails the talent pool's skills, the course curriculum and the stakeholder performance assessments. The after-program skill assessment will determine if the labor pool's skills have improved since the implementation of the finishing school program, and combined with the course curriculum assessment, will determine the aspects in which the program has to expand, reduce or change its focus. The stakeholder assessment will evaluate how well stakeholders performed their assigned roles and

the success of the partnerships established and the communication among them (Sethi, 2011). Even though the evaluation stage is the last one, according to best practices it should be an ongoing tool to be implemented throughout the framework if possible (Sethi, 2011).

Evaluation Flowchart
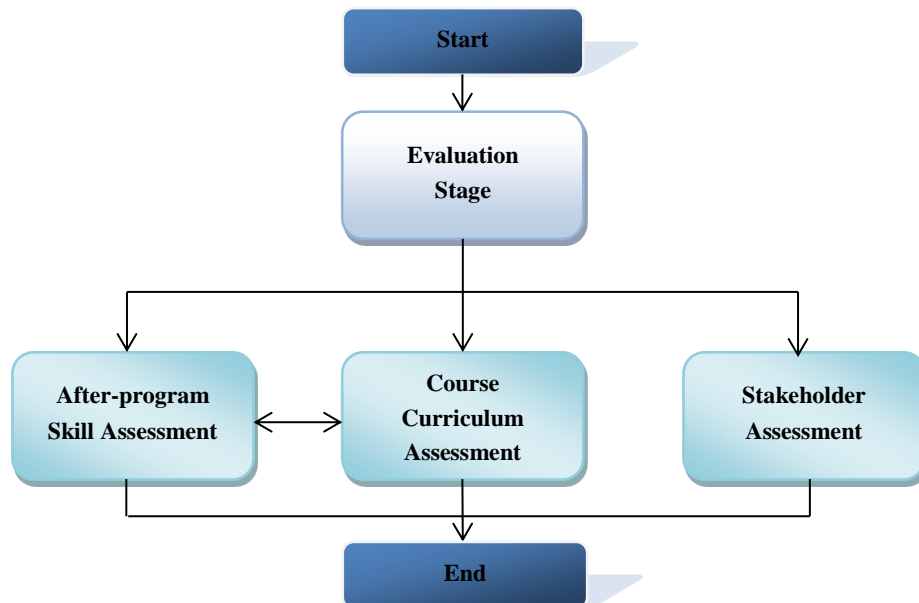
Source: Sethi, 2011.

Annex 3: Demand for Skills by Type of Firm

Demand for Skills by Type of Firm			
% of Evaluation			
	Socio-emotional Skills	Knowledge Skills	Specific Skills
Scope of the Firm's Activity			
Local	**52.5**	30.8	16.7
Regional	**56.0**	28.8	15.2
National	**53.0**	31.7	15.4
International	**57.4**	25.8	16.8
Size (number of employees)			
0 to 9	**55.0**	30.0	15.0
10 to 49	**53.0**	30.2	17.0
50 to 499	**50.0**	32.2	18.0
500 or more	**59.0**	26.6	14.2
Wage Level			
Low	**49.1**	34.6	16.3
Medium	**55.2**	30.1	14.7
High	**56.3**	28.8	14.9
Country			
Argentina	**55.5**	28.1	16.4
Brazil	**56.1**	29.7	14.2
Chile	**51.3**	30.7	18.1
Industry			
Automotive	**44.0**	29.2	26.8
Retail	**57.2**	29.3	13.6
Hotel	**54.4**	30.5	15.1
Finance	**53.8**	31.0	15.2
Food	**58.6**	27.3	14.1

Source: Demand for Skills Survey conducted by the IDB (Bassi et. al., 2012).

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