

THE HUMAN SIDE OF OUTSOURCING

Companies don't do outsourcing, people do outsourcing. **Paul Corral** looks at the human side of outsourcing.

Professionalising the industry

As the outsourcing industry matures, it is important that it is recognised as a profession in its own right. Professionalising the industry is not only vital for the perpetual growth of the sector but also for the continual promotion of the UK as an outsourcing centre of excellence.

Outsourcing is never short of column inches, is discussed in cabinet meetings, it is seemingly permanently in the limelight, yet no-one grows up wanting to be an outsourcer. Outsourcing's ascension to the status of accountancy, law, medicine – a proper, 'professional' profession – is long overdue.

Martyn Hart, NOA Chairman, said: "When was the last time you heard someone – a child, a student, a young professional, someone wanting a career change – say that they wanted to become an outsourcer? Let me guess... never?"

"Although outsourcing as an industry is established, the concept and development of outsourcing as a profession is relatively new. There is a significant challenge in transferring the necessary skills, knowledge, technical infrastructure, tools and techniques. This challenge needs to be embraced through qualifications, development workshops, skills mapping and expert panel groups."

Despite outsourcing being roughly equal in pecuniary terms to the financial sector, currently generating 8% of the UK's output compared to the financial sector's 8.1% according to a 2011 Report prepared by Oxford Economics – outsourcing has a definite image problem. Just not enough people are aware of its potential as a viable, lucrative career. This is an issue of education – not only creating awareness, but creating standards to work towards and devising a clear path for career progression.

Standards such as an industry wide, universally accepted mark of quality. A recognised benchmark of knowledge and ability. Accreditation. Professionalisation. Chartered status.

As outsourcing continues to broaden its reach from traditional private sector partnerships to the public sector, it's worth asking whether there has ever been a more important time to develop talent, standardise practices and encourage professionalism in the outsourcing sector.

The 'Open Public Services' white paper, released in July 2011, details how the government will collaborate with charities, social enterprises, private companies, and employee owned mutuals to deliver better services for less money.

"This white paper says loud and clear that it shouldn't matter if providers are from the state, private or voluntary sector – as long as they offer a great service," the Prime Minister said. "The old narrow, closed, state monopoly is dead."

As a result of the increased interest and focus on outsourcing and public sector partnerships, the NOA has recognised the demand from its members for establishing a benchmark for best practice in outsourcing.

The NOA Pathway is a talent programme that reflects the fact that outsourcing is a part of everyday business now, and is awarded to individuals, rather than organisations. The programmes are flexible to allow the participants to shape the programme around their personal or corporate agenda (see table 1).

The NOA is now the only UK entity to offer professional outsourcing qualifications, which are fully accredited by Middlesex University, through its training arm NOA Pathway.

Outsourcing as a profession may not be a career for everyone, but it offers a unique opportunity to professionals to develop new systems of best practice and create their own successful career path in an emerging market. So while outsourcing can only go from strength to strength with the increasing flexibility of models, cost effective use of new technology and a surge in public sector contracts – the amount of growth and recognition will ultimately depend on the management, recognition and continuous professionalisation of the people.

Table 1: NOA Pathway programmes

Programme	Roles	Summary of Programme
Gateway Certificate	Anyone new to an outsourcing role or a role that is impacted by outsourcing Anyone who wants to undertake the Foundation Certificate	An overview of key terms and concepts used in outsourcing / shared services Key principles of outsource contracts Introduction to the NOA Lifecycle
Foundation Certificate	Individuals whose roles are in an outsourcing and shared services context Individuals who are affected by outsourcing and shared services activity	NOA Lifecycle: outsourcing relationship management involving strategic leadership, relationship engagement, transition and change and choosing sourcing strategies.
Outsourcing Specialist Certificate	Individuals whose roles are in an outsourcing and shared services context Individuals who are affected by outsourcing and shared services activity	Participants can choose the programme that best fits their functional specialism. Strategic leadership, relationship engagement, relationship management along with transition and change
Professional Certificate	Individuals whose roles are in an outsourcing and shared services context	Participants undertake a work based project that demonstrates their outsourcing ability
Diploma	Anyone in a leadership or management role operating in an outsourcing context including managers and executives	Using the NOA Life Cycle participants review their own current outsourcing practice and undertake to research into areas of their own choosing that are relevant to their own practice