

Offshore Knowledge Engagements: Best Practices for Success – Part 2

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In the [previous blog post](#), we had discussed two key best practices – Mandate and Solutioning. In this blog, we discuss transition, monitoring, communication, control, and “human element” as strategic growth enablers for an offshore engagement.

Transition:

Training/transition needs to be an ongoing process, and one should never underinvest this area.

In some situations, the program may involve transitioning services hitherto performed by an existing provider to a new provider. Based on the nature of knowledge services to be transitioned, the role of the incumbent provider can be equally important to ensure the success of such an initiative. The incumbent provider may need to be specifically incentivized to cooperate with the new vendor during the transition stage. This could specifically relate to access to its employees to facilitate training and knowledge transfer to the new provider, facilitating hiring of key employees who have specialized knowledge of the process to the new provider, etc. Any incentives to the incumbent provider to facilitate the transition should also be appropriately factored into the business plan as well.

Monitoring:

Clearly defined statement of work (SOW) and service-level agreements (SLAs) are a must at the outset of an engagement. Monitoring on a periodic basis against the defined SLAs helps track hard factors and soft factors and ensure the engagement is on the right track.

Designing SLAs for knowledge services is tricky in many cases, especially where the work involves substantial judgment and cannot be codified to a predetermined list of key performance indicators. On the other hand, SLAs do provide a framework to effectively monitor and govern a third-party engagement. It is important to design SLAs that are customized to the nature of services provided by the offshore services partner. It is also important to have a narrow and focused set of SLAs so that the vendor and program manager can focus on the right things to improve the service quality of the program. In this context, business users should play an important role in designing the SLAs so that they are aligned to their expectations and priorities.

Communication:

Arrangements should be made for daily interactions between the onshore and offshore teams. Besides regular email/phone communication, in-person visits by the onshore and offshore teams help build a sense of ownership and team spirit.

This is a key yet underappreciated area that deserves significant attention to keep the offshore program relevant over the longer term. As the initial enthusiasm/attention in a new initiative diminishes, many offshore platforms begin drifting. In some cases, individuals associated with the initial program (on both sides) move on to take up new roles, and new personnel get involved in the program. It is important to have an ongoing, two-way dialogue to ensure the offshore program remains relevant through market cycles and as business strategies and needs evolve. It is also important that the onshore and offshore teams get opportunities to meet in person or through video conferences and build a rapport over time so that the teams can be more deeply integrated.

Control:

A clearly defined governance framework helps deal with regulatory questions and concerns.

Having a robust governance structure where senior executives from both sides participate in a spirit of partnership goes a long way in addressing teething issues in an effective manner and smoothing out implementation. It is important for both the parties to communicate transparently and proactively so that issues are identified early and addressed effectively. The role of program managers becomes vital in this context, as they serve as the link between the offshore partner and the offshoring entity.

Human element:

Building relationships and valuing people are key to the success of an offshore engagement

Offshore individuals should be viewed and engaged as an extension of the onshore team. For example, the onshore and offshore teams' celebrating employees' birthday would build team spirit.

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