



To enrich life: Bikram Dasgupta with the model of the attrition-free work habitat, GlobSyn Crystal

Intelligent buildings

Can they help **reduce attrition** in Kolkata's Information Technology hub?

By **Tathagata Bhattacharya**

IT is the backbone of Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's resurgent Bengal. The rate of growth in Kolkata's Software Technology Park (the fastest growing park in India for three consecutive years) is 72 per cent compared with the national average of 32 per cent.

This growth was often attributed to Kolkata's low attrition rate, low cost of operations and skilled workforce. In 2002, the attrition rate was less than 5 per cent in the IT sector and between 10 and 15 per cent in the IT-enabled services (ITES). But things are now changing.

In the last three years, the number of companies in Kolkata has increased

from 60 to 235. "Attrition rates too have gone up considerably. It is now around 25 per cent in the IT sector and more than 50 per cent in ITES," said Bikram Dasgupta, chairman and CEO, GlobSyn Technologies. A Wipro source put attrition figures at 27 per cent. He said the rate in little known BPOs was higher.

G.D. Gautama, principal secretary, West Bengal IT department, refused to buy Dasgupta's figures, but he conceded that attrition rate was up. "This is bound to happen with companies coming in hordes. We had five major players coming in the last few months alone," he said.

IT in the state accounts for 5.1 per cent of the national IT revenue and

employs 34,000 professionals. The government aspires to have a 15 per cent share in IT exports and 20 per cent share in ITES by 2010. "Around 4 lakh people will be employed in the sector," said Gautama.

D.K. Chaudhuri is the CEO of Skytech Solutions, a United Airlines and TCG Group company headquartered in Kolkata and having offices in Mumbai, Chennai, London, Chicago and New York. "In Skytech, the attrition rate is somewhere between 18 and 20 per cent. People are changing jobs for raises like Rs 10,000," he said, adding that job-hopping won't take them anywhere in the long run.

According to Chaudhuri, Skytech is the only Indian company working to streamline operations in Beijing air-

port for the 2008 Olympics. "We will soon land another prized contract. There is ample scope of going abroad. Despite this, retention becomes difficult in the face of astronomical offers from bigger companies," he said. "In Skytech, if we want someone, we stick to the pay scale for that position category." Chaudhuri proposes a mutual no-poaching pact between IT companies.

Summit Chaudhuri, a software engineer based in California, says Indian companies have still not learnt their lessons. "Fat pay packs weigh heavily on companies," he said. "When the last downturn hit the Indian IT sector in 2001, scores of employees were laid off from various firms as costs were so high."

Rathin Dutta, chairman and CEO of PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), which employs 3,000 people, says that some attrition is good for the sector. "Firms hiring at the lower end are facing more of the attrition problem," he said. "Since at PwC we do mostly consultancy work, we need specialised people."

PwC partner Rajarshi Sengupta added, "We stick to IITs, IIMs and a few other institutes when it comes to hiring people. You can call us snobbish but during lateral hiring, we raise the standard of the interview if the candidate has studied in a less known institute. We do it because we don't like firing our recruits. That's why our attrition levels are low." Santanu Banduri, HR manager at PwC headquarters in Kolkata, puts the company's attrition at 7.5 per cent.

None the less, Dutta says attrition has increased in the IT industry and the BPO sector in particular. "When IT started out in Kolkata, it was mostly locals in the industry. But now you have people from Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune, Mumbai and Delhi coming to Kolkata. They take up a job, work for two to three years and then move to other cities on better offers," he said.

Is money the only concern for changing jobs in these sectors?

"Money is important but not everything. It is the duty of an employer to ensure work-life balance for long-term sustainability," said Dutta. "Many firms, especially BPOs, don't ensure that. People burn out fast there. Having parties at office is no solution. Continuous nocturnal work turns one's biological clock turtle and takes away social life. That's why you have greater attrition there."

Bikram Dasgupta of Globsyn is building an ideal work habitat which he believes can reduce attrition. This is his second IT infrastructure project after Infinity Building, Kolkata's first intelligent building that he constructed in 1995.

"Globsyn Crystal is based on two fundamental principles. One, everybody has to work, spend time with his family, be entertained and be satisfied every 24 hours to perform well. Second, in a knowledge economy, one has to continuously learn to do a good job," said Dasgupta. "My idea is that workplace should be serious and sacrosanct. There should not be people sitting with their legs up, or having beer parties or film screenings at the place of work. It should be a zero-frill place. And the immediate neighbourhood should give a worker access to life-enriching services."

Globsyn Crystal, consisting of one 11-storey building and another 6-storey one, is going to have no-frill plug-and-play intelligent workspace for more than 2,000 BPO employees with abundant parking space. Youngsters will be able to recharge themselves at open-air cafeterias, gymnasiums and discos. They can discuss work over a drink in the lounge or catch a movie with their bosses at the digital theatre complex. They can collect branded wear from showrooms and groceries and essentials from grocerybazar.com, a supermarket that will offer them the opportunity of buying stuff online. There will be a library for book lovers. Spouses and children can enjoy an evening at the scores of shops, restaurants and kid stores while a person works till nine in the night. Parents can come for



Firms hiring at the lower end face more of the attrition problem. We do consultancy work; we need specialised people.

RATHIN DUTTA, CHAIRMAN AND CEO, PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS

a nice stroll on the rooftop jogging track or relax by benches beside a water body while a pianist perched in the middle of the pond plays Mozart. An extended stay facility nearby will ensure that a visiting boss can spend as much time with his employees before retiring to his resting place, a minute's drive from Crystal.

With a BPO training academy, a B-school and a software finishing school, offices operating out of Crystal need not look for recruits outside. Work is already on in full swing and the 11-storey building will be operational by 2007 end.

Rudraneel Basu (name changed) joined Wipro from Vishnu Solutions, a BPO. "Money was definitely a factor but the ambience here is also so much better. But I am glad such a workspace is being created where you can rejuvenate yourself at the end of a hard day's work. I will certainly love to work at the Crystal."

The theoretical basis seems to be in the right place. Whether it can reduce attrition in practice is yet to be seen. ■