

In safe hands

For new recruits, the entry into professional life can be quite tough. At MindTree Consulting, PALs help newcomers settle into their jobs.

Anjali Prayag

A parent supporting a 21-year-old at the workplace? Incredulous as this may seem, software services firm MindTree Consulting decided that campus recruits who are uprooted from familiar surroundings need emotional support and hand-holding by a 'parent figure' for a few months before they jump into the routine of projects and deadlines.

In 2007, the company's induction programme for campus recruits added a new dimension to the traditional training content: role play. "We're now using a very powerful tool called PAL: parent-anchor-leader. PALs are senior MindTree employees who nurture 'children' (campus recruits) who need emotional support while they adjust to the work environment," says N. S. Parthasarathy, Chief Operating Officer, MindTree Consulting.

Therefore, three senior line managers (with more than 10 years experience in the industry and more than five years in the company) have been chosen as PALs, with each parenting a group of 150 recruits.

The PAL's role is modelled on the lines of what a parent would do in a child's life: be there when the child needs him/her. Everyday there are two touch points between the PAL and the 'children'.

The 'children' report to the 'parent' for counselling sessions before training starts each day. The same is repeated every evening. "But we're also on call 24 hours," says Dr Sudha Selvarajan, Technical Director, R&D Services, MindTree Consulting and a PAL for the last two batches.

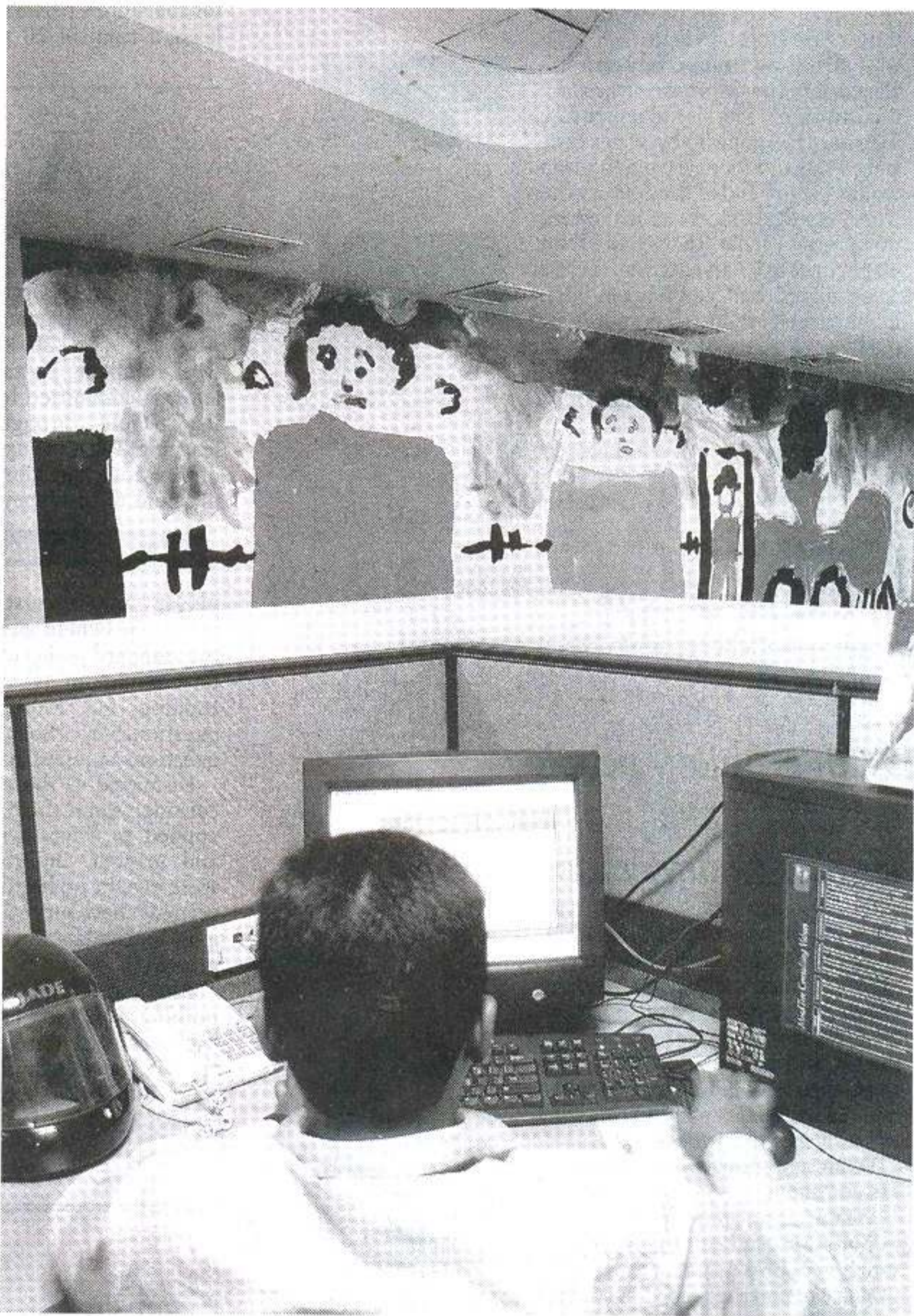
WHY PAL

Tracing the genesis of the idea, Dr Selvarajan says that in January last year the company realised that it needed to protect its saplings from competition and to achieve this it had to ensure better emotional bonding between the company and the employee. "To achieve this, we had to differentiate the company from other industry players, i.e., make the 'kids' feel special," says Dr Selvarajan.

Therefore, each batch of new recruits is now divided into three houses/families: Joy, Action and Imagination. The families are actually allotted space within the office campus to set up their 'homes' where they report every morning and evening to chat with their 'parent' for 10-15 minutes.

During the two-and-a-half month induction programme, the parent shares all the angst and the joys of the new recruits, advising, hand-holding and counselling them, thus giving the students emotional security as they transition into full-time jobs.

The 'children' of each house are also given a budget to decorate their 'homes' as they want to.



An interior view of the MindTree Consulting office in Bangalore.

AN EVOLVING CONCEPT

The PAL concept has also undergone transformation with the three batches that it has worked with, says Dr Selvarajan. Apart from team-building and leadership skills development, the programme has a culture and competence training programme. Parthasarathy says they have linked team-building to a social cause, like a slum clearance project in Koramangala, Bangalore.

He says though stemming attrition was

one of the objectives of the programme, it was too early to say whether this has been achieved. But the company has witnessed one positive fall-out: new recruits are already seeing the 'differentiation factor' in the company and are promoting MindTree as an employer of choice among their juniors in engineering campuses, says Dr Selvarajan.

That solves half the talent acquisition problem that most tech companies in the country are experiencing.