

2

people@work

FUTURE OF WORK

Making learning more palatable

Upskilling is becoming continuous, bite-sized, just-in-time, personalised and outcome-oriented

CHITRA NARAYANAN

What will the workplace in 2020 look like? By most reckonings it will be an automated, digital world where we have bots for colleagues, hold virtual meetings and our job roles and functions keep changing. How do we prepare for such a world?

Companies are radically altering their Learning and Development (L&D) models as they embark upon digital transformation and prepare their employees to cope with an unknown future. From content to delivery everything about training is changing. The buzz words in L&D today are to deliver continuous, bite-sized chunks of content that is just in time, just enough and personalised. Also, there is a huge emphasis on evaluating and measuring training.

Arun Rajamani, Country Head of Pluralsight India, an online training company that has delivered over one million hours of training to Indian customers, says learning is now deviating from old models of classroom training and going digital. He explains the imperative: "With shrinking attention spans and digitally induced distractions plus the pressure of meeting work deadlines, it is important for learning to be condensed into bite-sized modules so that the learner can switch to 2-5 minutes of learning and then switch back to their work."

As training becomes 24/7 and all year around, several companies are investing in dedicated L&D centres at their campuses.

Flying ahead

At Indigo, arguably one of India's most efficiently run airlines, you will find examples of this new L&D model. As Summi Sharma, Vice-President, ifly, the airline's dedicated training academy in Gurgaon, says, L&D at Indigo is crisp and short to make it impactful, integrated with operations to make it actionable and do-able, keeping it as close to reality as

possible. And it is evaluated and monitored. "After training, the participants undergo tests as part of practice - so that they implement the learning effectively," she says. Not surprisingly, Indigo has just been awarded for its L&D at the CLO Awards (Chief Learning Officers Awards) show held by Tata Institute of Social Science.

Although many companies swear by the 70:20:10 framework of L&D - which holds that 70 per cent of learning is done on the job (experiential), 20 per cent through interactions with others (social) and 10 per cent through academic courses (formal), Rajamani bluntly says there can be no ratios any more. How you learn no longer matters.

Over to the employee

He says the learning accountability is now increasingly shifting to the employee. Jaspreet Bindra, Senior Vice-President - Digital Transformation at Mahindra Group, agrees that in the new world the employee has to bear the onus. "When computers first came in people who didn't learn MS word or Excel had no job. Organisations did not teach them," he says. Eighty per cent of the onus of learning lies with the employees and 20 per cent with the organisation, he believes. "There are so many options available for individuals to skill up and so many ways to get trained, many of them free," he says, pointing to MOOCs, Stanford courses, and such. Other ways could be to

read, and attend conferences to gain awareness.

Bindra puts these skills into two buckets - hard and soft. Soft skills are culture-related and usually delivered by the company. Hard skills are technical and related to job functions - some of which may be taught by organisations. For instance, Mahindra employees were exposed to Design Thinking. Rajamani says skills the most in demand today are "cloud computing, user experience, mobility, data sciences & analytics, cyber security, machine learning, design thinking, automated testing, AI and RPA (robotic process automation)".

Outcome-oriented

L&D is also increasingly becoming personalised and addressing the needs and aspirations of individual learners. Companies are investing thought into which courses are better suited for which employee, what the skills needed for a particular role or function are, and so on.

All these changes are coming about as there is now heavy pressure on L&D functions at organisations to deliver and make an impact on business outcomes. As a result training has moved from being a nice thing to do, to a very outcome-oriented approach. "Earlier learning was measured on the basis of time spent by a learner while today it is the ability of the learner to demonstrate the new skills learnt on the job," says Rajamani.

Although changes are happening, the investments in training per employee are still inadequate, says Rajamani. MNCs tend to

spend more. Indian companies spend just one-third of what global organisations do. "Even if you factor in cheaper costs here, we believe that the spends are inadequate considering the enormous task ahead to transform organisation capability at scale. One of the main reasons for lower spends in Indian companies is due to their emphasis on relying upon traditional forms of learning as well as limited focus on continuous learning," he feels.

According to estimates the overall corporate L&D spends in the Indian IT industry alone exceed \$500 million. Online video-based learning accounts for one-fifth of this spend and over 75 per cent of this spend comes from large and mid-sized organisations.

Challenges and innovations

There are challenges, of course, in the new models. It is not easy to deliver bite-sized learning. Curating content is a complex process that starts from the design of a course, needs careful sequencing and incorporates significant research of learning behaviour, points out Rajamani.

There are also mindset issues. In the digital transformation context, Bindra says top management usually buys in, and junior employees usually have these skills inborn. The challenge is for middle management to adopt.

But several innovations are emerging too. Take Indigo, which has something called ICoaches, an army of leaders. "Each station in our network has specific individuals who have been hand-picked and trained to represent the L & D team at our airports. They not only act as our eyes and ears but also conduct briefings and ensure their teams stay updated by keeping in constant touch with ifly," says Summi Sharma.

Indigo also allows its employees to take control of their own learning by running open workshops every month for which they can nominate themselves and attend.

"At the same time, we also create DIY (do it yourself) learning videos on functional skills which they can view at their own convenience," says Sharma.

Bindra says Mahindra has done innovative stuff like getting employees to interact with startups or visiting new-age organisations to see how they work in order to promote agile thinking.

L&D is constantly evolving. Rajamani picks three trends that will further change models. These are gamified learning, artificial intelligence, and cloud technology in learning. "Gamified learning not only makes the learning process more of a fun activity, it also increases learner engagement and effectiveness," he says. Artificial intelligence is used for personalisation. "Machine learning, which we use in our platform as well, will be used extensively to understand user behaviour to recommend courses, paths and assessments based on their browsing patterns and interest levels."

He believes cloud-based learning platforms will pick up in the enterprise space as firms look to promote any-device, any-location, any-topic learning solutions to meet their re-skilling needs at scale.



Goes down easy
Lessons are better absorbed in small bites
GUZEL STUDIO/
SHUTTERSTOCK.COM