

Learning & skilling trends during and post-COVID

The world of work is disrupted as we speak – from physical presence at work to working from home, meeting clients to closing sales virtually, building networks through conferences to remote networking, and the list goes on!

COVID has accelerated change at a pace never imagined! And the change happened almost overnight adjusting to a new way of working that was thought to be for the others, the outliers, the luxury of larg thought to be 'technologically savvy' organizations or for those who were on their own or the gig work. Most organizations aspired to adopt some of these practices in small steps at some time but, unbelievably it is the norm now, with it being tagged as the 'new normal'.

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Is this change temporary or here to stay? Will we go back to where we started and forget that COVID impacted our lives, our workspaces? Well, customer and employee behaviors have changed already! It is not only the technology that has taken a leapfrog... Agreed, technology has been an enabler and key one at that but the differentiators are the skills that have emerged through this crisis situation: Resilience, Compassion and Agility. The skills that are being learnt not through classrooms but experiences, amidst time crunch and time lag that the pandemic put us through.

It goes on to mean that learning is lifelong – a continuous process like change. Let us explore some of facets.

- **Learning as a continuum:** The forced shutdown caused business leaders to review and relook several of the Business Models - to reimagine their distribution, acquisition, product journeys to evolve. It only means that one has to be ready and amenable to change with the right mindset & new skills to keep looking and making sense of what exists. Organizations will have to continuously sense the changing market dynamics, evolving customer behavior, gain insights out of those and seek the best way to reach and service.
- **Focusing on building and driving performance through Resilience:** Real leaders don't give up but use the power of people and their own Resilience to face challenges and bounce back, stronger, better and more successful. It is therefore important to build this skill up as change becomes the new "norm".
- **Virtual Skills will be imperative:** Be it selling skills, networking/ influencing skills, all as were happening in a face to face medium will change to virtual which means a different way to approach customers, gain their trust and sell the products. There are several examples where face to face distribution models were the only way and yet COVID has indeed accelerated the move to digital and online mediums. And learning will need to evolve to cater to a larger digital world which has more players to compete with and more markets to explore.

- **Purpose-driven learning is here to stay:** Webinars and an overdose of them is what one sees these days. What created excitement early on, is now creating a fatigue and saturation where many are jumping in to keep their customers/ employees engaged. It is imperative to step back and ask ourselves whether these programs are relevant to the audience, are they solving a problem or addressing a need, what outcomes are expected, what changes do we want to see. Learning has to link to a purpose, an objective, a need.
- **Use of design thinking in L&D interventions:** Enough and more has been said about this, however, is more important than ever now, as in the highly volatile and changing dynamics, a linearly designed structure of learning programs and ecosystems will be redundant and less impactful.
- **Communication with Impact:** In a virtual world with limited facetime what will stay for days and leave an impact hence, will be the choice of words and media of communication. The differentiating aspect clearly will be the personalized approach at communication, with it being instant, constant and consistent with the message that needs to be delivered. Is less more or are wordy yet passionate sentence, to each its own, eventually - "impact is what counts".
- **More Real Heroes in Leadership Roles:** Organizations and employees look up to leaders as modelling the behaviors and competencies that have adorned their posters and office walls. Agility in decisions & actions, compassion and empathy that align business with people and resilience to bounce back & sustain – the present situation has uncovered these aspects of "real heroes" in leadership, more than ever. The workforce and businesses can gear up for the new way of working only when the leadership understands change, is quick to respond, understands people and the internal fabric and therefore able to drive the organization to design and implement solutions to challenges!
- **Virtual distribution of learning is here to stay:** Technology has enabled learning in a big way! And the present situation has only catalyzed the adoption of technology effectively and one can see more usage of the online delivery mechanisms, that will bring inclusion in whether be it of people in remote places where it took days to travel for a training program or more women inclusion in with more work from home options available.
- **Microlearning:** Attention span is limited and a sharper, shorter content will take it all! Instead of long training hours, with the same effectiveness, companies will have to look at content that is bite sized, effective to capture the employee's interest and keep people glued.

It's the time to Reimagine, Reinvent and stay Relevant from business models to people to technology in order to manage the now and stay future fit! This is the best time to invest in people, build capabilities, develop leadership with learning interventions being need based using user journeys, content that suits the audience and learning that makes an impact! Afterall, people are our competitive edge and the driving force behind every business!

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