Power To Your People

By making work from-home an imperative in the knowledge worker space, the ongoing pandemic has put a different spin on the game. The world of work is in a state of turbulent flux, now more than ever.

BY **DR. MOORTHY K. UPPALURI**

Political instability, nationalistic initiatives, economic volatility, wage inequality, skill gap, immigration for work, changing business priorities, and technology disruption along with the pandemic's indelible mark on the society are some very critical forces impacting the business world and jobs in different strata of the society today.

Augmented Reality, Artificial Intelligence, and Machine Learning on top of Social, Analytical, Mobile and Cloud technologies have not only brought about a remarkable change in the world of work, but have also made online learning possible, prevalent, compelling, and invigorating. Development enabled by technology, making the content available for the learners on-demand, anytime, anywhere, and any device to consume at a pace suitable to their style and aptitude, and also to reiterate and review at their will and convenience has made way for such a paradigm shift in learning. This would constitute the mostsuited definition of 'Democratisation of Learning'. Technology presents the required information whenever and wherever required to perform a task without needing to memorise it. It also derives from human decisions to reiteratively learn and optimise such decision-making, thus taking the burden away from the human mind, releasing the human intellect and capacity to be applied to the challenges of a higher order.

Providing resources

Workforce distribution comprising of high and low-skilled jobs, unemployment and underemployment is evidently bi-polar and the spread between these poles is only widening by the day. While the onus of development continues to be on the employee, companies have a critical and instrumental role to play in providing the resources and environment for the upskilling, reskilling, and redeployment essential for their survival and also to fuel the growth of the business.

And to top it all, the ongoing pandemic has put a different spin on the game, by making work-from-home almost an imperative in the knowledge worker space. The world of work is in a state of turbulent flux, now more than ever. Cumulatively, all these factors will completely transform how the work gets done and where, redefining jobs and the skills required to accomplish them. Businesses must Reimagine, Reinvent and Rebuild themselves to thrive in this world of new order.

Increasing Shelf-life of skills

The increasing skill-gap and the ever-decreasing shelf-life of skills are making the highly regimented and long-drawn programmes (4-year undergraduate) seem unduly lengthy, demanding, expensive, and irrelevant. Students must be trained to learn while they are in school. One believes that the current undergraduate degree(s)

MANSIJ MAJUMDER
HR Head, Manipal Global Education Services

"Instead of a top-down approach, the efficacy of knowledge distillation is best through communities. These communities of knowledge already exist in the organisation where people reach out through informal networks, on chat or in hallway conversations. People seek mainly two types of information: working knowledge and tribal knowledge. Working knowledge is what is required to do the job; easily accessible via online courses, YouTube videos, articles, etc. Tribal knowledge comprises insights into how things work in the organisation, and is more contextual. Codifying, formalising and ensuring that these communities of knowledge are updated and active will be the biggest challenge."

RAJNI KHURANA
Chief Human Resources Officer,
U GRO Capital

"With Gen X and Gen Y gaining prominence in workforce, corporate lives are lived far more on cloud. People work anywhere, anytime and on assignments of their choice. This mirrors as such in their learning preferences too - they learn anywhere, any time and on dimensions of their choice. With trends shifted to continuous feedback, availability of learning content aplenty on web, employees today believe in continuous development rather than making this event based. AI and tech disruptions have led to shelf-life of skills diminishing alarmingly. The only way organisations can contribute to a learning environment today is by providing two critical inputs to people - a) relevant employee specific skills/ attributes gap, b) open playing field to choose how, when, where and with who to learn. Gone are the days of prescription and future is all about a democratic approach to learning."

are overrated, expensive and ineffective. These programmes can be shortened to restrict the theory and learning to core fundamentals and essential skills that serve as a strong foundation. Such trained talent can then pick-up the remaining and required skills on their own, leveraging the learning platforms either within the company or in the public domain along the course of their career and life.

The present-day classroom education is noticeably light on employable skills, leave alone any mention of emerging technologies. The shelf-life of the said skills is decaying very rapidly with the pace at which technology is evolving. For all the authoritarian old

schoolers, it is quite paradoxical to think of learning and development happening in an unstructured, and unorganised manner. Along with the exponentially increasing enthusiasm and acceptance for online learning, there is an equally dominant reluctance amongst the current knowledge-seekers towards the outdated, irrelevant, constricting, and disengaging teaching in a classroom setting. It is not just the format of classroom teaching, but also the content and the style that is losing its appeal with the millennials.

Understandably, this skill-gap contributes significantly to unemployment. All these developments cumulatively make learning in the current era a life-long process. Technology disruption and digital transformation of businesses will result in either elimination of jobs due to automation or evolution resulting in improved productivity, or the emergence of new jobs of higher cognitive order.
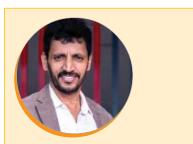
For over a decade, universities and faculty have been experimenting with the concept of flipped classrooms, wherein the learning of theory and content happens outside of the classroom at the student's will, then followed by the collaborative interaction of the cohorts wherein they engage to enhance their learning from their peers. Massively Open Online Courses were a huge step forward in accelerating the transformation of the education system and making online learning rampant. The techniques and methods applied to assess, validate, and ratify the learning are also dated. When the entire class applies themselves to repeat, memorise and reproduce what they have learnt to demonstrate their learning, their potential is only curbed if not buried. The days of rote learning and memorisation are long gone with the advent of technology and its permeation into business and all walks of human life.

HR being the talent architect and custodian of the organisation's

culture owns the roadmap to foster such L&D that is pivotal for the future success of the business. Baselining the inventory of all the skills available in the organisation and understanding the skills required to support the ambition of the business helps in determining the skill gap for the business.

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L&D programmes have delivered business impact when they are aligned with the business objectives

VINODH CHELAMBATHODI
Chief Human Resources Officer, FSS

"The Pandemic bestowed an unprecedented opportunity to redraft futuristic Learning philosophy. Simplicity should take over the new learning design because there is no other substitute. The recovery from this pandemic presents us with two distinct choices- The first choice was to recoil back to yesterday's normal, revert to old tested methods, predicted outcomes, and settling down with yesterday's results which might even fail. The second choice is committing to an exploratory path, where we experiment and chart a new course and enter into a new world of possibilities. This appalling pandemic brought a singular clarity and urgency to experiment and design an entirely new, people-centric organization learning practice."

and customised to engage and enhance the contextual and experiential experiences of the participants. On-the-job learning can be through online content that is bite-sized for easy consumption, comprehension, and application. Mere digitisation of existing course content is tantamount to pouring old wine into a new bottle and is clearly not the way forward. Doing so would be colossal depredation of resources along with the golden opportunity of rebuilding the L&D engine. L&D teams must be wary of this and not fall prey to this easy temptation. A simple four bucket categorisation that is seemingly obvious, but often forgotten could

RITU AGAST
Director-HR, Pearson India

"The worldwide technological disruption has led organisations to focus upon L&D programmes and take various initiatives to upskill/ reskill their employees. However, when talking about democratizing learning in the corporate space, it is important to look at it from two perspectives: the employees' and the organisation's. From an individual employee's perspective, it is possible that only a handful of people might get access to L&D trainings, owing to their individual potential and digital capabilities while another set of people may find it hard to learn through a tech/digital platform and need a personalised, face-to-face way of learning. From an organisation's perspective, this will mean determining whether their technological infrastructure is suitable to meet the needs of their employee base, see if employee in the organisation is mature to understand where they lack required skills and are ready to adapt/embrace digital learning improving their knowledge."

be the first step in driving the transformation of the current L&D programmes viz. Continue, Start, Stop, Evolve. L&D teams must identify such programmes or interventions that have completely lost relevance and are failing to have any impact in line with the changing environment and discontinue them. If they can be optimised to improve the relevance and enhance the impact, they must be placed in the evolve category.

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Similarly, L&D teams must identify whitespaces that have not been thus far addressed and apply resources to buy or build programmes to begin addressing those opportunities. This includes developing those leadership skills like agility, collaborative decision-making, compassion, empathy, innovative, inclusivity and unlearn/ relearn that are in increasing demand due to the unprecedented challenges and business conditions that are currently being encountered. Unusual times demand a shift in strategic business thinking. That leaves the ones that are working and are well-appreciated by the learners and the business which can be continued as-is. Well-planned and wellexecuted L&D programmes are like creating an oasis that not only draws the fauna to the pond but also makes it drink. When done right, they result in correcting the underemployment and underutilisation of talent that the business has already invested in. Democratisation of learning leads to enhanced productivity, diverse career paths, and thereby improved retention of talent, all of

ROHIT THAKUR
CHRO, Paytm

"Given the COVID-19 situation, democratising organisation learning has become an even more crucial aspect to ensure an employee's growth. As the entire corporate world adjusts to a 'new normal', it is important that we focus on re-defining the flagship learning and development programmes. The business leadership and human resource teams should adapt to new and innovative practices that help employees to upgrade their skills, promote knowledge sharing and keep their motivation level high as they continue to work from the safe confines of their homes."

which contribute to the growth and profitability of the business.

The need to offload the burden

L&D teams can become lighter and efficient by offloading some of their burden by beginning to work closely with the academic institutes, to architect the syllabus and course work and ensure their relevance to the industry trends so that by the time the talent graduates and is seeking employment, they have the skills that are relevant to help them hit the ground running. On the other hand, businesses can offer internships and apprenticeships along the course of the year to enhance their interaction with the prospective workforce, which gives them the exposure and opportunity to develop the skills and attitude to thrive in such culture and hit the ground running if and when they are hired for full-time roles.

It is common knowledge that development generally begins with

the realisation of a gap in skills or knowledge required to attain an aspirational goal and the motivation to address that need. This might come from the feedback of peers or supervisor, or a mistake committed, or watching other people's reactions or failure, or not being up to a task – in other words, from experiences or assessment of self and/or others around. It is proclaimed that such development will be about 70% from on-the-job experiences - working on regular tasks and problems, about 20% from the feedback of both peers and supervisor(s), and the balance 10% from planned interventions like either online or inclass sessions.

Much of the planned intervention today is to build the behavioural and social skills, enhance networking and collaboration amongst the participants. L&D must now think

DR. MITUL THAKKER
Chief People and Compliance Officer, IKS Health

"Organisations evolve perceptively during challenging times. There is a consequential mindset shift of the employees as well as the employer, creating synergies between to two is the key for a rewarding learning program. As we stride into the 'new normal', encouraging learning of new skills and sharpening existing ones for the workforce is crucial for these times. Organisations must create a learning ecosystem to build skills that can help them evolve and emerge as better versions of themselves. The democratisation of learning is about giving the opportunity, platform and support to develop themselves rather than mandating skill development and learning practices. This is a constitutive step in the right direction for cultivating talent."

about digitizing even this 10% to ensure such planned interventions are effective and sustainable. It is not that the in-person interactions are going to be eliminated but are going to be reduced for sure. That said, why not reduce the pain of travel, time away from family and health risks by leveraging technology if it does not compromise the effectiveness and impact.

Fostering a culture of learning

Each L&D organisation must foster a culture of learning and architect the strategy/roadmap that best fits the organisation's development needs in this quickly evolving world of online learning. It does not behove for any organisation to reinvent the content that is already available in the public domain just for the sake of proprietorship. One may curate the content that is most appropriate for their own organisation from the broad choices that are freely available in the public domain and host it on an appropriate platform that enables friction-free access and ensures interactive engagement amongst employees. Then prioritise their budget/spend on either buy or build. Content that is readily available in the market for a price may be purchased and only that which is proprietary in nature and not available can then be built by the company either by an inhouse team or an outsourced vendor. Global organisations may consider distributing this workload of in-house development or shared outsourced work to extend the efficiency of their budgets.

Digital platforms enable quick feedback from the participants to make the necessary improvements on priority. When the content and format are learner-centric, immersive, gamified, and right, it creates the much required 'pull' and employees would register to take such courses without any 'push' from the L&D team and/or the business to comply with some internal learning or development metrics. The picture

DR. ROSHAN JOSEPH
Head - Learning & Development, QuEST Global

"The world of learning has phenomenally changed. If L&D teams can create an environment where an employee feels empowered and involved in their development journey, they will have succeeded in establishing a strong learning ecosystem. The process can be enabled by providing employees access to infrastructure, curated content, and experiences. When it comes to learning, employees should have the flexibility, choice, and opportunity to learn from a wide array of courses. Learning should happen via byte-sized on-demand courses that can be accessed from anywhere, anytime. Employees must also get a chance to learn through sessions run by leaders, on the-job experiences, and collaboration with peers."

of success for a wellexecuted L&D roadmap is the creation of this learning pond/platform where all the learners are drawn to quench their thirst for development and the business can clearly see the return on the investment through enhanced employee morale, retention and business productivity. **HC**

About the Author

Dr. Moorthy K. Uppaluri is the former CEO and MD - Randstad India, a global business leader, an angel investor and advisor to early-stage startups. With vast domestic and international experience across diverse sectors like IT, manufacturing, and professional services, Moorthy is credited with evolving business strategy, building brands, growing market share, improving operational excellence, driving innovation and fostering a people-centric culture. He is also a featured author and an eminent speaker.