



Upskilling-An Imperative

HR and Learning & Development professionals of today must be skilled to facilitate an environment, both in policy and practice, where people with diverse experiences succeed as a unified and strong unit.

BY AVESH KUMAR JHA

Think of a crisis that warrants your organisation to change the way it operates overnight! While we ponder on the 'whys' and the 'hows', the bigger shock might be the longevity of this change and that it might simply emerge as the 'new normal'. We do not have to imagine this anymore, as leaders across the globe are dealing with it in reality in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of COVID-19 is an unprecedented crisis for individuals and businesses alike. The impact of the pandemic is highly visible on economies, and countries around the globe are trying everything possible to curtail the spread of the virus. In a matter of weeks, individuals and businesses have been compelled to grapple with the question of self-survival.

Organisations have been scrambling for ways to maintain business continuity in the face of this fastspreading pandemic. In such testing times, how quickly we adapt, how creative we are when it comes to planning, and how well we execute those plans, will determine how we emerge out of this adversity. The crisis has created an imbalance in the socio-economic wellbeing of people. People are forced to rethink about their career plans, financial goals and other commitments as the impact is proving to be huge. Remote working, dependency on digital and redefined job profiles

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With crisis comes opportunity

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has estimated job losses of over 25 million as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the lockdown is a massive setback for everyone, every crisis presents an opportunity. The need to relook over the manner in which we worked prior to the pandemic has emerged. Now, we need to look at newer ways that can assist us in the given context, and also in the post COVID-19 era. For instance, this may involve greater utilisation of cloud platforms to connect employees virtually. But



then this would mean that everyone in the organisation is equipped to use these technologies and there lies the need to shift to the 'continual reskilling and upskilling mindset'.

Many industry leaders are anticipating a recession and economic downturn in the post COVID19 era. While this alone risks jobs, let us not forget the onset of the automation boom and the fast-paced technological landscape. To remain employable and relevant in such competitive times, reskilling and upskilling is the only way to survive and thrive!

The generational advantage

Today, the workforce in many organisations constitutes of four or five generations, right from the Traditionalists (born before 1946) to the Generation Z (born after 1997). This mix offers huge benefits, due to the unique perspectives and ideas of those involved. Each of these generations has reacted differently in the pandemic, basis their skills and experiences. This also means that organisations are needed to be prepared to cater to the needs of the diverse set of people to enable them to deal with this situation. HR and Learning & Development professionals of today must be skilled to facilitate an environment, both in policy and practice, where people with diverse experiences succeed as a unified and strong unit. Most of us might not have faced a crisis of such a kind during our lifetime, and hence, might not be prepared for it. Reskilling and upskilling are the only ways in which the situation can be managed and prepare ourselves for the present and future.

Thought leaders, over several decades, have been making liberal use of the acronym VUCA – Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. Thanks to COVID-19, we are experiencing the real,

dynamic VUCA world, for the first time! Remote working, which was always termed as a 'benefit' for certain employees or roles, has suddenly emerged as the only way to work!

Analysts and commentators have said that remote working will come about as the new normal. We need to think about the skills that are required to work efficiently and manage the workforce during this change, enabling them to stay current, relevant and productive. And the next step is inculcating the habit of upskilling, so that our people are inspired to continue to stay relevant and worthwhile.

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Technology: The key enabler

Technology has been the key enabler for remote working and companies are making huge investments on this front to keep their operations running. Organisations are making extensive use of video and audio conferencing apps, chat/messaging tools, cloud storage and other virtual management tools. But the big challenge ahead of everyone is whether we are sufficiently skilled to work with such tech tools? So, this presents the trigger of learning, unlearning and relearning. This is the way the world will reorganise, redesign and rethink methods of staying connected, engaged, productive and contributing usefully.

It is natural to witness a rise in the demand in digital skills. It is therefore handy to accept this trend. That said, some things are likely to remain relevant - the emotional connect with people, empathy, the need for people to listen effectively, to understand to each other and to be able to influence each other. Honing these skills will be key in a remote working environment. With proximity out of the question for some time, the need for people to refresh their skills on these aspects will emerge. As has been stated by Alvin Toffler, American writer, futurist, and businessman, *“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”* This is of utmost importance today and deserves to be treated with great urgency. One believes that the time is now to reconstruct ourselves through consistent reskilling and upskilling. Wishing everyone a safe, strong, healthier and successful future! 

About the Author

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