The Shifting Corporate Strategy of Learning and Development in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract

The corporate world has rebooted and reconfigured several paradigms to deal with the changing scenarios. COVID-19 has proven to be a shock to home life and work. Amidst the problems of the pandemic era, a positive advancement in the transformation of businesses especially in the workplace has taken place recently. One of the largest changes that occurred is in human resource learning and development. Utilizing this opportunity will reskill and upskill the employees at a faster pace. Organizations have started to embrace online learning to empower employees in enhancing their skills. Finally, the pandemic helped in breaking the traditional learning strategies with the rise of peer-to-peer learning and self-directed learning which were possible for the employees to engage from home. The time is up for the organizations to embrace the new changes in the workplace and fasten the efforts for future advancements. In this article, we come across the various shifts in the corporate strategies of learning and development in the post-pandemic period.

Keywords: COVID-19, Corporate Strategy, paradigms.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations are revamping their approaches to various aspects of the workplace as the outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning and Development are no exception. The learning and development strategies across the world are revisiting the questions of what to learn, how to learn, and how much and when to learn. These questions arose not because the organizations could not cope with the changing workplace scenarios due to the pandemic. But to prepare the entire organization for the impending changes in the technologies and the regulations. So, companies have utilized the pandemic crisis as an opportunity to look back and analyze the needs for the future to reskill the employees and prepare an appropriate learning and development module. The workforce has to be prepared for the future with a clear career path describing their roles and the qualities needed. The workforce has to constantly acquire new skills and advancements to stay productive. Most companies now evaluate the workforce not only on their emotional quotient and intelligence but also particularly on their ability to learn, i.e. their 'learning quotient'. Organizations expect employees to handle multiple jobs, and for that, the companies should look forward to learning as a culture. An environment of lifelong learning is the need of the hour.

Review of Literature

During the time of COVID-19, the organizations adopted many new practices and

policies for managing employees regarding their work, especially their work at home or remote working. The learning and development policies had to be modified to adapt to the new changing work from home requirements. (Opathta, 2020). The pandemic created a world of uncertainty, especially for the employees and the organizations. Employers had to ponder upon new ways and means scientifically for employee engagement. The depressing and gloomy environment needed a drastic change for effective growth and advancement (Puneet, 2021). The pandemic supported virtual teams, increased WFH (work from home), and demanded variant skills in employees. The workplace was digitally transformed. Organizations adopted new projects with better coordination balancing work and life (Saragith et.al, 2020). Even though COVID-19 closed many businesses, it also opened a lot of new opportunities. The employees were given more awareness and openness to technological and virtual learning and working. Various benefits like Health care benefits, WFH facilities, career, and professional development benefits, additional financial support, wellness, and health benefits, virtual lunch, etc. were made available to the employees (Robert et.al, 2021). During the epidemic, organizations faced difficulties in finishing the work in the stipulated time because of the restricted resources. One of the reasons was the WFH scenario where necessary work equipment was unable to be supplied (Willy et.al, 2021). Ensuring the achievement of organizational objectives during the pandemic needed strategic agility. Organizations allocated and prepared the workforce, coordinated the mechanisms needed, and utilized the resources and the knowledge in the appropriate way (Liu et.al, 2020). Providing workplace guidelines all through a hard time of the pandemic helped in reducing stress among employees and enhanced their confidence and motivation (Wong et.al, 2020). The reskilling and upskilling of employees to deal with the new context of remote working was one of the challenges faced by L&D. The HRM practitioners had to go beyond the traditional learning methodologies. The L&D programs were

changed in a way that brought a long-term transition to the new organizational setup (Devyaniet. al, 2020). The employees were supervised by the employers through a virtual medium. The management provided supporting and training programs for both the employees and the employers on the virtual learning and working platforms (Hamouche, 2020). Organizations use varied methods of L&D to come to the forefront in the market. The digital technologies and internet and self-learning, e-learning, etc. are a few of them provided in the organizational virtual environments (Kramer, 2020). The impact of using digital technologies in the current organizational setup is highly significant. It helps in the evaluation of L&D and its results in a mathematical fashion to ensure the learning effectiveness

L&D in the Post Pandemic

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the L&D practitioners were not able to rely on the skillset of learning they were depending on in the past years. Instead, they had to adjust to a new world of work and had to adapt quickly to new patterns and procedures of new-age learning and development of the employees for better performance and productivity. In this move forwards with the transforming workplace advancements, there is no doubt regarding the L&D and the expanding digital learning in the pandemic era. The guidance and expertise of the L&D professionals are very crucial now than before for utilizing the different forms and methods of transformational learning which has the biggest demand now than ever before. Making a shift to the digital and virtual world has proved to be cost-effective for most organizations. The following is the figure showing the various future L&D aspects that have already begun in many of the organizations.

Figure: *L&D and its attributes in the post-pandemic*
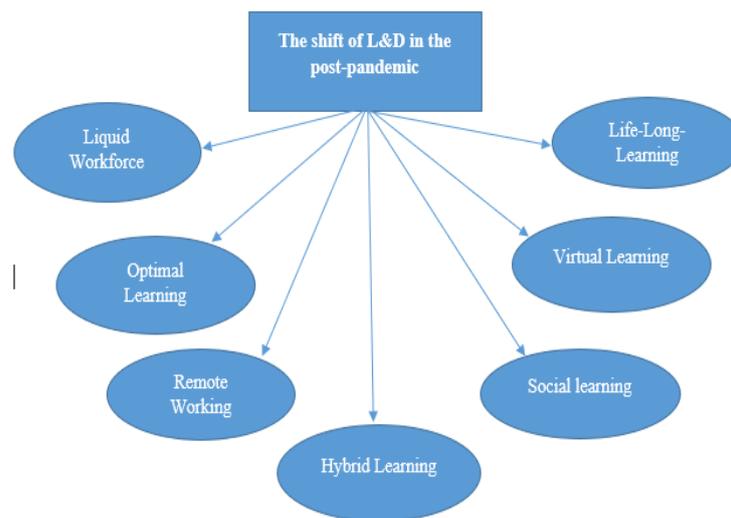
1.   Liquid Workforce

The epidemic has put its mark on almost all aspects of work life. Employees around the world took part in the largest experiment of remote working in history. Shortly, the human resources and the L&D practitioners will deal with a liquid workforce- comprising of non-traditional workers like consultants, freelancers, part-time workers, and contingent workers. The liquid professionals seem to grow, as the pandemic changed the workforce structure. A new strategy for L&D is needed for the training and motivation of the liquid workforce. Preparing digitally ready employees adaptable to the changing work environment will be the priority of L&D and HR. organizations adopt rigorous onboarding and contracting processes for the liquid employees. Consistent onboarding procedures help the liquid workers to get the instant feeling that they are a part of the team and move ahead running on their projects.

2.   Optimal Learning Culture

A work climate with embedded learning right across is the dream of every L&D professional. In the light of COVID-19 in recent years, the learning culture has become a trending topic in the corporate sector. A learning culture is the need of the present era to provide impactful workplace learning. To create a learning culture first, the organizational values have to be examined. A learning culture is where the

ideas, information, and challenges are cooperatively shared and worked collectively. The rapid sharing of challenges and insights allows the organizations to act fast according to the changes and that helps in building resilience. The barriers to a successful learning culture will be the leaders with a traditional mindset regarding L&D, less priority given to learning initiatives, degrading social learning, and considering learning as a cost centric rather than an investment. Mistakes are essentially important for learning and the failures must be considered as positive initiatives for success ahead. Continuous learning is an indispensable element of organizational success. Having an LMS (learning management system) associated with performance management strategies helps to keep the learning systematized and available.

3.   Remote working- The new normal

At the surge of the pandemic, many employers and employees had to shift to the 'new normal' of WFH or remote working. Firms that had already adopted remote working benefitted from the pandemic circumstances. They were able to withstand the challenges without major disruptions in the business activities. In the post-pandemic, many firms are embracing the new normal of remote working. It requires that the employees adopt and accept the remote working tools for creative and proper working with radiant outcomes. The tools like Zoom, shared creativity suites, Slack and employee

rewards, and employee recognition platforms will enhance performance and productivity, communication, and collaboration, and employee well-being. Reduced travel, fewer distractions, and more time with the family will result in focused and improved quality of work. The employees can themselves decide and discard their time productively resulting in a healthy lifestyle.

## 4.		Hybrid Learning

Technology and different knowledge-based applications play a crucial role in bringing a hybrid mode of learning. A non-linear shift that emphasizes choice-based learning, enhances the specialized skills, with cross-cultural learning making the talent pool in demand in a global way. A hybrid learning in the post-pandemic helps in creating a generation with a developed scientific temper and qualities of diversity and inclusion. This in turn will assist in instilling the values of lifelong learning and develop the agility to welcome the changes with a competitive advantage. The pandemic paved the way for humanity to adjust to the new normal which gave rise to more technological innovations, radical shifts in employment procedures, and an innate shift in valuing life more than before. This brought a clear way for numerous opportunities which have to be used for the transformation of individuals and the society at large. The new-age training methodologies and the access to learning anytime-anywhere must lead to a workforce that is highly enhanced in all aspects of the work.

## 5.		Social Learning

One of the major L&D trends that emerged as a result of the pandemic is the larger emphasis on social learning and its varied methods. Organizations have become more conscious of the dwindling employee engagement levels and as a result, the traditional ways of L&D are viewed as ineffective. Instead, social learning has taken up a greater part of the agenda and is found to be a well effective approach. Social learning enhances workplace collaboration and fosters corporate culture. The employees need to spend only a limited time for their learning what they need and that with less interruption to their daily routine workflow. Social learning is the collection and the sharing of the knowledge and information acquired from social media and peers. And this method of learning is found to be the fastest-growing sector of the workforce. The adoption of social learning ensures employee satisfaction, continuous engagement, information retention, and impressive work culture. It also creates stronger bonds with the team and peers with better collaboration and communication and retains critical information that helps the organizations function more effectively.

## 6.		Virtual/E- Learning

One of the by-products of the changing business world is the reliance on digital technology and virtual platforms. Most organizations had already planned of investing in learning technologies before the onset of the pandemic. E-learning permits the organizations to update learning consistently to the reach of the employees. It reduces travel costs to learning provided outside the organization and delivers learning on demand anywhere, anytime. It also increases the time available for learning and increases the effectiveness of learning. Virtual learning uses the internet, computer software, or both to deliver instructions to the employees minimizing the need for an instructor. It is highly adaptable and flexible as it provides the employees with the ability to learn on their schedule accelerating or slowing down upon self-pace.

## 7.		Life-Long Learning

Lifelong learning (LLL) is a learning philosophy that is intensely changing with the digitalization of organizations and embedded in the employee's belief that it is not too late nor too early to learn, to be open to the new decisions and ideas, and to change the attitudes. Optimization of the potential of LLL, organizations, employees, and the society as a whole benefit. Those employees who actively participate in upskilling and reskilling enhance their employment prospects. LLL plays a crucial role in addressing the skill gaps between what the employees have already learned in the

traditional way of learning. The new focus on the greater skill levels with ICT competencies and the mindset that is the need of the modern working world.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has formed a burning platform for L&D, it has forced the organizations to think about what new has to be done for learning. Now it is the end of the new beginning regarding the changes that have occurred in L&D. The learning strategies, the learning designs and the way they were delivered have already changed in a significant manner. The new ways of learning and working have also posed certain challenges. The most important factor to be considered by L&D practitioners is to be responsible for fast-moving and adapting to the world of work changes. The epidemic has made the VLE (virtual learning environment) an integral part of life. Its availability, accessibility, and affordability in the post-pandemic have envisioned a hybrid model of learning. Humanity is getting adjusted to the new normal which gave rise to technological integration and innovation, with radical shifts in L&D and an innate shift to valuing life more than before.

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