

## **Adding a hybrid twist to learning and upskilling**

In the last two years, the business ecosystem faced strenuous repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which quickly forced the enterprises to somersault into remote ways of working. Fast forward to 2022: people aren't returning to their same old workplace, and old ways of working are no more relevant. And as the businesses gradually emerge from what we can call the 'most transformational' years of the decade, organisations are now accelerating their journey toward a hybrid workforce.

With hybrid work becoming a norm, it has become even more critical for the leaders to identify the workforce that could double up to meet the evolving demands. In a Gartner survey of 113 learning and development leaders, 71% said that more than 40% of their workforce had needed new skills due to changes to work brought by COVID-19. It has become extremely imperative for the present-day workforce to create new skill sets and develop a deep understanding of rapidly evolving technologies to stay relevant in today's world of work. Coursera's 2021 Industry Skills Report found that employee skills are related to resilience and a company's ability to adapt in the face of challenges — benefits that correlate to stock performance.

Employees need to introduce an element of unlearning to reimagine the future of work, which is *now*. Why unlearn? The new era of work demands new skill sets which require constant updating. Unlearning old skills, making creative space for avant-garde skills and fostering a culture of continuous upskilling are important to build an efficient workforce for tomorrow.

### **Challenges of learning & upskilling in a hybrid model**

While the hybrid workplace offers a plethora of opportunities for the leaders to experiment with upskilling and reskilling practices, it also comes with a host of challenges that they have to navigate through.

1. **Establishing sync between the on-site and offsite workforce:** In hybrid working, the training professionals are required to incorporate the elements of online learning and development programmes that are self-paced. Now, with a group of employees working from home, another group operating from the office, and the third splitting its days between the two, it would become difficult to establish a sync between the groups and deliver L&D sessions that meet all organisation's compliance requirements and be meaningful to the employees.
2. **Maintaining 'learner engagement' level:** Another very crucial aspect of any training program is 'learner engagement'. The L&D programmes need to be highly collaborative and engaging to have well-informed employees and allow trainers to identify areas where

employees need additional help. With hybrid training, employees working from home may be able to concentrate more on the session in contrast to the ones working from the office because of new distractions. This will highly impact the engagement levels and the potency of the programmes.

3. **Addressing the 'digital fatigue':** With hybrid working and learning, employees' will be exposed to long screen hours involving a lot of online collaboration. This may induce issues like online fatigue and anxiety due to overwhelming back-to-back sessions. The L&D training expenses might as well increase since hybrid programmes may need to be executed over a couple of weeks, unlike traditional one or two-day workshops, due to the disparity between online and offline trainees.

### **Do hybrid the right way: Prioritise upskilling and learning**

The last two years have shown organisations that by fostering a culture of continuous learning and upskilling, they can create a more agile workforce that is critical in responding constructively to the dynamic business environment and opportunities as they appear.

While upskilling is not a new concept for businesses, it has gained significant importance due to the pandemic. Enterprises want to ensure that their workforce is prepared for what is likely to be a very different workplace of tomorrow.

Here're some of the ways to prioritise upskilling and learning at an organisation level.

1. **Analysis of competent skill sets:** Training professionals must analyse competencies and skills that the organisations need to stay relevant in the future of work. Consistent mapping out skillsets through detailed analysis will drive value.
2. **Adopting cutting-edge skilling tools and frameworks:** Launch training and learning platforms, and introduce rights tools(both onsite and offsite) and frameworks to upskill the workforce. For example, Coursera's LevelSets, an assessment tool designed to help learners determine their current proficiency in key business, technology and data skills, allows learners to enrol in recommended courses and enables them to develop job-relevant skills faster. These assessments determine where training should begin and create a clear development path for learners featuring high-quality content aligned with their skill goals.
3. **Reinforcing mentor-mentee relationship:** Organisations may also assign a dedicated mentor from the internal team. This practice will help them with the support they need to accommodate fast-moving changes and learn from their mentor's experience to advance in their careers. Hybrid workforces are here to stay, and a mentor-mentee

relationship that can thrive both on-site and offsite can address the issue of skill gap more effectively.

4. **Agility is the key:** Enterprises need to understand that with the advent of hybrid work, there's no one-size-fits-all approach. A definite learning curve must be established along with the flexibility to modify the training programmes according to the circumstances. Embracing the newness of the model, training professionals may as well need to do some trial and error to observe what's working and what's not and then adjust their strategies accordingly.

### **Realising the full potential of hybrid learning**

The widespread shift of the industry to hybrid or more flexible working models requires bridging the gap between physical and remote workplace with innovation by braiding physical spaces with technology. Leaders need to be trained and redefine skill sets to adapt to highly variable environments.

Moreover, organisations need to introduce flexible collaboration spaces with easily accessible technology to maximise efficiency, brainstorming and training sessions which in long term will help realising organisation's articulated vision.

Another very critical element that L&D teams must address is creating iterative feedback loops and establishing an engagement strategy between employees and training professionals. By following a structured approach to employee feedback and identification of their fears and doubts, the communication gap will shrink, which will reduce learning time, and result in better training outcomes and productivity.