

Driving long-term business success with leadership development and human skills

With the business environment becoming increasingly more volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, the need for leadership development has become more urgent than ever before. Companies all around the world have realized that although the future is virtually unpredictable, an innovative and resourceful leadership can help them pave their way through the challenges posed by uncertainties. Therefore, companies are investing in sophisticated leadership development programs in order to develop a rich pipeline of leadership talent. Such programs can also help organizations minimize disruptions and nourish individual leadership skills.

There has also been a world-wide recognition that leadership development programs must not be limited to just the C-suite executives. Instead, employees across the board must be encouraged to participate in such enriching activities. This will not only expand the talent pipeline of the organization but will provide an opportunity to the employees to advance further in their careers. “To prepare the workforce for a new normal, it is imperative to foster a learning culture and ensure strong employee engagement in training programs. Enterprise learning must also evolve to take a more skills-first learning approach. This can in turn have a positive impact on satisfaction levels and talent retention as well,” said Raghav Gupta, India and APAC, Coursera.

Leveraging technology for leadership development

Today, technology has taken over virtually every aspect of the business and corporate world. From information management to cross-departmental communication and collaboration, the use of technology is widespread and rampant in most business processes. Similarly, technology has successfully managed to set its foot in the learning ecosystem as well, especially post the pandemic. The number of players offering virtual courses online about skill and leadership development have dramatically soared. Companies all around the globe are leveraging this upheaval in the leadership development industry to their advantage. Additionally, such open online course providers can be maneuvered to create a positive learning environment within the company and keep the workforce engaged. It also simplifies the task of top-level management executives and business leaders to retain the organization's talents.

Apart from that, tying up with a successful online course provider can help firms in cutting costs related to employee training and development. Traditionally, firms spent billions of dollars annually to train their current and newly hired executives. However, with the emergence of technology in the talent development and skill transformation industry, firms can now save a substantial amount of money by providing their employees an opportunity to learn online. “To accelerate talent outcomes, learning leaders must set precise skill proficiency goals and leverage measurable, role-based learning programs. Coursera has developed several data-driven product innovations, such as SkillSets, Academies, Essential Skills Maps, and the Skills Development Dashboard, which help businesses better understand the effectiveness of their skills development strategy,” said Raghav.

Creating a virtual learning ecosystem within the organization also renders a platform for employees where they can log in anytime and avail the courses that are relevant to their learning journeys. Therefore, these ecosystems have to create ‘anytime, anywhere’ learning opportunities for people and act as an enabling backbone for driving skill shifts within the organization. “Online learning holds the promise to drive business growth and resilience, offering required flexibility and scalability, helping companies to address employees’ immediate and future skill needs swiftly,” added Raghav.

Human skills: The key to thrive in digital workplace

Apart from leadership development, human skills - otherwise known as “soft skills” - have also emerged as a key driver of long-term business success in recent years. Human skills are essentially those skills that allow one person to relate to another. Aspects such as empathy, compassion, emotional intelligence, and so on are some of the key constituents of human skills.

Now that more and more organizations are adopting the hybrid working model, the need to develop human skills has become much more crucial as they are necessary to create high-performing and motivated teams. Moreover, human skills play a critical role in improving communication at all levels and building a cohesive environment wherein employees focus more on the group goals rather than their individual targets. In a digital workplace, where employees are working remotely and there is no physical contact whatsoever, things like collaboration, inclusiveness, recognition and appreciation of good work and social interactions tend to take the backseat. However, leaders with strong human skills can overcome these hurdles as they can leverage their profound understanding of human emotions to form deeper connections with their peers and subordinates. A leader that possesses necessary human skill recognizes trust, transparency, inclusivity, and mutual respect as the essential pillars of building a vibrant company culture.

Human skills also advocate for a shift in the organizational mindset from being authoritative and linear to being democratic and flexible. For example, a manager who leads by a humanitarian approach often encourages employee participation in crucial decision making and welcomes inputs and feedback from the workforce, thereby building an organizational culture that respects the opinion of each and every team member. Moreover, unlike hard skills, human skills do not have a 'shelf life'. This means they remain relevant over the years irrespective of the disruptions in the ecosystem. Therefore, these skills are essential for a business to survive and thrive in the long run.

Need of the hour: A leader who can lead

The influence of a leader can resonate throughout the organization. The leader must have the potential to motivate the workforce and drive them towards the organizational goal while simultaneously promoting individual career growth and development. The leader should possess necessary human skills such as compassion, empathy, patience, benevolence, and problem-solving abilities to establish a connection with the workforce and build a positive working environment that fosters inclusivity, recognition, and a sense of camaraderie amongst the workforce. And finally, the leader should have the ability to pick up on the significant details in the ever-changing market and draw relevant conclusions on the basis of their observation. That is the leader who can guide an organization through turbulent times. Therefore, leadership development and human skills have more or less become the key drivers for long-term business success in this uncertain and complex world that we are living in. “Remote and hybrid work environments have made it more difficult for leaders to manage employee performance, development, and engagement. We’ve seen great success with Coursera’s Leadership Academy which aims to help businesses develop the next generation of leaders and high-performance teams as they navigate change,” highlighted Raghav.