Identifying Training Objectives

Companies that determine the success of a training activity by the number of its participants are bound to be disappointed. Does India Inc harbour a redundant approach towards training?

Picture this…you receive an email from HR to attend an "outbound training programme". Attached in the email is a fancy itinerary with details of the resort, the adventure sports you will be indulging in, the scrumptious cuisine you will be exploring and of course, a detailed profile of the facilitator – all signifying that a considerable amount of investment has been made towards this endeavour called "training". Let's not forget the other expenses that will get incurred by the company such as the wages of the trainer/assistants, whiteboards, pin boards, refreshments, stationery, workbooks, etc. Excited? Of course; after all, isn't this the only time your boss will not pull you up as technically, you are on an "official" trip, right? But once done with the three-day 5-star training programme and back to your "office life", ask yourself - did the training have a clear objective in sight?

Was it customised to your career goals? Did the curriculum take into consideration the business function? Did it have the desired impact and most importantly, did the training programme achieve its end-result - enhanced competencies and desired change in your behaviour? It's vital to ask the above questions to gauge the authenticity and impact of the workshop.

Organisations need to build a learning culture where every opportunity is used to re-emphasise the learnings, rather than wait for specific training interventions. Training, re-training and up-skilling is an ongoing process and needs to be seen in that context.

It is therefore evident at a time when companies are investing money into training and development, they cannot "afford" to go wrong. Yet, why do some training initiatives fail? Training, most of the time, is not looked upon as a developmental function. It is infact measured not on its effectiveness, bur rather on the number of man days conducted.

Most of the programmes fail because of poor diagnosis of the training need and a lack of empathy for the participants. Some employees believe in learning on-the-job and do not understand the importance of theoretical learning as well. If there is no visible change in performance, could we label the training activity a waste of time and if yes, why wasn't this foreseen? Any training intervention is deemed effective when there is a noticeable "transfer of learning".

Most of the times, employees are nominated to workshops that are ill-suited to their needs. The opportunity lies in the way the programmes are designed, combining a learning management system with an online social community that can create an incentive for employees from all departments to participate and helps foster perpetual learning by marrying formal with informal learning. HR should ensure the training strategy is aligned to the organisation's strategy and has the buy-in of the management, the training is appropriately positioned for the right audience and it's vital to make sure that post training; there is a conducive environment that is provided to the learners that encourages application of the learning.

But are HR managers ready to embrace change and adopt practices that are progressive and out-of-the-box in order to ensure that employees make the most of it? Changes need to be made in two areas, "The effectiveness of classroom lecture based training is in question as it provides participants with one-dimensional learning with very limited focus on application and mainly with a view to ensure that an individual attends a minimum number of training hours annually, and aid the HR department to meet their annual targets and objectives.

It all narrows down to one crucial question - what form of training methodology are employees comfortable with? After all, each employee has a unique way of functioning and if the training activity isn't customised, will it bear any results? No! Therefore, the answer to why training initiatives fail lies in the approach HR adopts.

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