

Learning & Development - An Investment towards building strong organizations

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Abstract-Over the past decade, the global workforce has been continually evolving because of a number of factors. An increasingly competitive business landscape, rising complexity, and the digital revolution are reshaping the mix of employees. Meanwhile, persistent uncertainty, a multigenerational workforce, and a shorter shelf life for knowledge have placed a premium on reskilling and upskilling. All of these trends have elevated the importance of the learning-and-development (L&D) function. L&D function is adapting to meet the changing needs of organizations, as well as the growing levels of investment in professional development. (Brassey, Christensen, & Dam, 2019). Unfortunately, many organizations struggle to demonstrate a return on their L&D investments. One of the major reasons for this, is the gap between the learning needs of the employees and the design and conduct of L & D programs. The people responsible for bridging this gap are the L & D professionals working in HR departments. The L & D professionals already in the work force and the L & D professionals in making (management students) need to be very thorough on the linkage between the need of the employee and the program he/she is undergoing. If the same clicks right, then the impact of L & D program will definitely be positive and the investments in these programs will yield the desired returns. **Management education need to be integrated, targeted and customized with an aim to remove the gap that exist between industry requirements and academic curriculum focusing on corporate awareness, grooming, attitude and developing managerial skills.** Thus the paper aims to document the workshop conducted at School of Management Studies, LJ University with an objective to provide experiential learning and practical exposure to students there by enabling them to apply theory to practice and gain knowledge about designing, conducting and evaluating L & D programs and developing skills towards gaining maximum returns on L & D investment leading to strengthening their employability in L & D function in the corporate world. In all 35 management students of Semester 4 – HR specialization had participated for the workshop. An external expert with 21 years of corporate experience in

learning and development was invited as the instructor for this 5 day workshop. The workshop was scheduled for 18 hours which was divided across 5 days with 3 hours sessions on the first 4 days and 6 hours session on the 5th day. The students were evaluated on the basis of attendance, classroom interaction, conceptual clarity and activity output (in the form of project presentations). The objective of conducting the workshop was thoroughly met as the students learned various ways and means to get maximum returns on L & D investments by understanding the details involved in designing, conducting and evaluating the L & D programs.

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of technology and rapidly changing global environment, the only resource that can distinguish one organization from another is Human Resource. Human resource is the foundation to build a strong organization. Organizations are investing a lot on acquiring the right kind of resource and further developing that resource in the interest of both the employee as well as the organization. Organizations as well as HR departments very firmly believe that the skills, abilities and competencies of employees need to be developed on a regular basis. Learning and development is considered to be one of the most important functions in the organization. One of its primary responsibilities is to manage the development of people—and to do so in a way that supports other key business priorities. These programs ensure both that the employees have skills and abilities to do their jobs well and demonstrate to those employees that their employers believe are worth investing in, thereby ultimately boosting company culture and fostering greater commitment in the organization (Rudy, 2022). Many organizations have set up exclusive L&D departments where in the department's only focus is to impart right kind of learning to the employee either in the form of upskilling or reskilling. HR departments

across the world are focusing on sharpening the current skills of the employees and helping them develop new skills that can be beneficial to both the employee as well as the organization in the long run. Unfortunately, many organizations struggle to demonstrate a return on their L&D investments. Many a times it happens that L&D is considered to be an expense and that Head of Departments and in some cases the top management do not appreciate as well as approve the budget on learning and development of employees as these programs yield no returns making them believe that Learning and development is wastage of multiple resources. One of the reasons that can lead to considering L&D programs as an expense and not an investment is that HR departments in some organizations fail to establish a linkage between the learning needs of the employees vis a vis design, conduct and evaluation of L&D programs. It is very important that the HR professionals who are already in the workforce and professionals who are looking forward to build a career in Learning and development area of Human Resource Management are thorough about the importance of developing the employees. These professionals should have a clear knowledge and understanding about need identification of the employees and the right kind of L&D programs that requires to be offered to them to fill the gap either by upskilling the current skill or learning and developing new skills. Management students who are looking forward to build their career in learning and development must be absolutely clear about the importance of these programs and ways and means to get the desired return on L&D investments. Management schools should design a curriculum that provides student's exposure towards the practicalities involved in designing, conducting and evaluating L&D programs. The curriculum should be a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge thereby bridging the gap between academics and the corporate world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning and Development

It is an educational process that involves the sharpening of skills, concepts, changing of attitude and gaining of more knowledge to enhance the performance of employees". (Oluwaseun, 2018) Learning and development is the process of investing

in people so that they are equipped to perform well and are part of an overall human resource management approach that hopefully will result in people being motivated to perform (McDowall & Saunders 2010). This activity is both focused upon, and evaluated against, the job that an individual currently holds; training refers to bridging the gap between the current performance and the standard desired performance (Garavan, 1997). Human resource management regards Learning and Development as a function concerned with organizational activity aimed at bettering the job performance of individuals and groups in organizational settings. It is an attempt to improve current or future employee performance by increasing an employee's ability to perform through learning, usually by changing the employee's attitude or increasing his or her skills and knowledge. (Oluwaseun, 2018) Learning and development focuses on improving the skills necessary for accomplishing organizational goals (Elnaga & Imran, 2013) Efforts on employee learning and development demonstrate that organizations are capitalizing not only on high potential employees, but also on individuals who can commit to achieving higher level of responsibilities (Joel Rodriguez, 2017). Today's dynamic, disruptive and competitive environment demands companies to continuously respond to the growing need for highly skilled and competent workforce (Chabbra & Sharma, 2014). The booming economies are one of the prime reasons for intensified competition for a highly qualified taskforce. (Chambers, Foulon, handfield – Jones, Hanking, & Michales, 1998) It has been advocated that employees are delighted when their organization spends on training and developing them as they get an opportunity to interact with experts from various fields (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). The goal of training and development is to increase both individual and organizational effectiveness. While development is associated with the advancement of longer-term organizational and personnel goals, training may be seen as tied to immediate changes in organizational performance through structured teaching (Fonceca, 2023). Training and development of the employees have made an appearance as one of the essential elements of strategies in business origination. (O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2019; Santoro et al., 2020). Furthermore, it also helps to ensure that organizations build a highly skilled workforce. The learning and developmental programs outline the

associated approaches that are used by the organization to train their employees to enhance productivity and creativity. Additionally, the approaches come up with high goals for organizational success. Training as an element is termed as the effective and continued efforts made by the organizations to enhance the performance levels of the employees (Verčič, 2021). There are several strategies and programs that help to create the learning and developmental procedures easy and more convenient. The developmental programs can be applied to different situations that require expanded skills, and it includes various skills such as quick decision-making, advanced communication skills, and leadership skills. Although the learning and developmental processes of the employees have a few drawbacks, the benefits of the programs significantly impact the growth of the organizations (Cao et al. 2019). It helps to enhance the performance levels of the employees and provides an opportunity to instill the required skills that are lacking in the employees. Furthermore, the learning and development of the employees help to expand the basic concept and ideas about the organizations. It assists the organizational managers to fill the gaps and the weak points within the organization, and among the employees, hence it reduces the risk factors and increases efficiency (Bhakuni & Saxena, 2023). Organized L&D activities allow organizations to adapt to changing markets, compete, excel, innovate, improve services, and reach goals (Klepić, 2021). Training is a set of activities planned on behalf of an organization that increases job knowledge and skills or modification of attitudes and social behavior of organizational members to align with organizational goals and job requirements (Kraiger, 2017). The development portion of training refers to employees' personal growth seen in newly learned abilities and skills that can translate into their jobs. Most organizations invest in L&D so employees can remain competitive and viable within their roles. Not only will ongoing L&D aid the employees to be competitive in the workplace, but also ongoing L&D will allow companies to compete with others in their industry. With many learning opportunities available, people who search for opportunities are more likely to advance in their careers. (Whitehead, 2022) When the focus of T&D is placed on professional development, the people involved will expand individual, group, and organizational effectiveness through what is learned

(Meyer, 2021). Learning and training are similar, but not the same. Training means a wide range of learning actions attained from individuals' training to complete a task. Learning is the transfer of knowledge that improves organizational processes (Kraiger, 2017). Investments in training and other development procedures create an organizational climate for constant learning that facilitates the transfer of knowledge and ideas. The successful development of highly motivated employees is necessary for organizational development, which builds an organization's competitive edge regarding employable skills (Sung & Choi, 2018). Organizations can invest in employees via two avenues of support: Corporate training or financial support for education. Corporate training involves company-specific, internal training that aims to achieve specific skill-building and performance gain. This avenue directly addresses the current training needs of the organization. Organizations that allocate resources to initiate in-house training programs are more likely to reinforce company-specific human capital in a shorter period (Hewett et al., 2018). Financial support for employee education is designed to directly improve task skills and competencies customized for a given professional role (Botke et al., 2018). Organizations that use ongoing L&D as a continued investment sustain a competitive advantage by continuously creating, expanding, upgrading, and keeping training relevant to the industry's unique market offerings. Whether developed by human resources within the organization or by consultation from outside of the organization, strategic training is more likely to influence employee interpretations about the organization's commitment to employee development (Botke et al., 2018). Human resource practices introducing strategic training have influenced employee behaviors, such as commitment, satisfaction, and productivity. Additionally, training influences employee attributes like attitude or behavioral responses (Hewett et al., 2018). Organizations that continuously invest in L&D, especially when there are industry uncertainties, should be conscious of employee needs that may potentially have adverse effects associated with employee behaviors and attitudes. Employee interpretations about human resource practices of investing in L&D are a critical component in employee commitment and satisfaction. This form of investment has an overall positive effect on the

mentioned characteristics of employees. Inversely, organizations that do not invest in L&D report a negative implication for employees' behavior and attitudes due to the implication that employees are expendable commodities (Botke et al., 2018). The nine dimensions that contribute to the L&D function are Alignment with business strategy, Co-ownership between business units and HR, Assessment of capability gaps and estimated value, Design of learning journeys, Execution and scale-up, Measurement of impact on business performance, Integration of L&D interventions into HR processes, Enabling of the 70:20:10 learning framework, Systems and learning technology applications. (Brassey, Christensen, & Dam, 2019). L&D's strategic role spans five areas Attract and retain talent, Develop people capabilities. , Create a values-based culture, Build an employer brand, Motivate and engage employees. (Brassey, Christensen, & Dam, 2019). Some of the reasons for L&D programs not being successful are programs typically taking place outside of the organization, making it difficult to translate what is learned in the classroom into real workplace applications, Trainings tend to require the learner to invest a substantial amount of their own time, while still being expected to fulfill all their regular work duties, The onus for applying the learning is typically placed on the learner, with minimal follow-up from the instructor once the training has concluded. (Rudy, 2022).while it is acknowledged that education and training are crucial, questions remains regarding the specific education and skill sets that lead to success on the job market. Such training must, more crucially, be measurable. Individual performance should be supported by training to have a good long-term and short-term influence on organizational productivity. (Fonceca, 2023)

Management education in India

As business leaders try to navigate and rebuild economies savaged by the global meltdown, business schools around the world are rethinking leadership and how to train the next generation of managers in the midst of unprecedented challenges. (Jadhav, 2019) It is not time to tweak what has been done before. It is a time for reinvention of management education. Today we need good and active managers for the development of country. Managers should know all the facts, logic and strategies. For this they should get

education from good institutions. An efficient management education framework is becoming a need for every country today as the skilled managers are needed to manage the complexities of the corporate world. The country that arranges for such flexible and wide management education for its young students will gain an edge over other countries and will progress much in future on the behalf of its more talented and practically trained managers. (Jadhav, 2019)

Management education in India is perceived as a valuable career. Participation in management education has grown dramatically as more than 200,000 students enrolled in over 3000 management schools spread across India. The curriculum is highly challenging and contributes towards work related skill development in an individual. Management education is facing difficulties due to gap between employer requirements and existing management curriculum making it challenging for management education to survive (Rao, 2015).Presently, the MBA program in India is facing problems related to employment which is alarming. Due to low quality of management education, there were fewer or no employers offering jobs at several management institutes which forced many institutes to close. Most students who enroll in the management education in India do not have prior experience which is a bottleneck in Indian education system. Since, Indian management graduates do not have any work experience before joining the program, many experts believe that experiential learning and practical exposure provided in the classroom by various means are the best method of applying theories to practice.

It is not time to tweak what has been done before. It is a time for reinvention of management education. Today we need good and active managers for the development of country. Managers should know all the facts, logic and strategies. For this they should get education from good institutions. An efficient management education framework is becoming a need for every country today as the skilled managers are needed to manage the complexities of the corporate world. The country that arranges for such flexible and wide management education for its young students will gain an edge over other countries and will progress much in future on the behalf of its more talented and practically trained managers.

STUDY OBJECTIVE & METHODOLOGY

The objective of the study was to provide experiential learning and practical exposure to students there by enabling them to apply theory to practice. The study further aimed to help the management students gain knowledge about designing, conducting and evaluating Learning and Developing programs thereby developing skills towards gaining maximum returns on L&D investments. The study also aims to enhance the employability of students in the area of Human Resource Management with special focus on Learning and Development. The study involved conducting a 5 day workshop on Learning and Development. 35 management students of Semester 4 – HR specialization had participated for the workshop. An external expert with 21 years of corporate experience in Learning and Development was invited as the instructor for this 5 day workshop. The workshop was scheduled for 18 hours which was divided across 5 days with 3 hours sessions on the first 4 days and 6 hours session on the 5th day. (Table 1). The students were imparted knowledge about designing, conducting and evaluating Learning and Development programs for the employees on the first 4 days and on the 5th day students were asked to make projects about their understanding about various concepts of Learning and Development that they learned during the first 4 days and present the same in the class to the expert. They were evaluated on the basis of attendance, classroom interaction, conceptual clarity and activity output (in the form of project presentations)

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the activity conducted in the form of the workshop by an external expert was to enable the students understand the importance of learning and development activities in organizations with special emphasis on designing, conducting and evaluating learning and development programs. With the gap that exist in theory and practice, it was very important that the students relate the text book concepts with that of the corporate world and learn the best of both. The prime motive of the workshop was to make the students understand the importance of learning and development as an investment and not an expense. The workshop thus began with making the students understand the importance of developing employees

and ways, means and strategies to design and conduct effective L & D programs that can give the maximum return on investments. The students were very categorically exposed to the skills required to be a successful L & D professional. The expert talked about the importance of evaluating each and every L & D program. Various formats used while designing, conducting and evaluating L & D programs were shared with the students. The sessions were totally interactive and all the minute details about learning and development function was shared with the students. These included Policy framework, Dos and Don'ts, Principles, Ethics, Accountability, Budget and closure. Further, knowledge was imparted on L & D calendars and L & D Cycles. A detailed discussion was conducted about LMS (learning management system) and its use in L & D programs. The students were exposed to various types of L & D programs with special emphasis on need based learning. Some other functions of Human Resource Management like performance appraisal and induction were also discussed about. A detailed discussion was conducted on points to be taken care of while conducting Learning and Development program for the employees.

Student learning from the workshop

Making policies for L & D function which includes basic details like policy name, policy date, client name. the purpose of making the policy, what is in it to do, the scope of the policy, who all will be included in the program, division of work and allocation of responsibility and accountability to the team , whether it will be an internal training or external training, if the trainees are freshers then induction details to be included, the importance of TNI- Training need identification, attendance criteria, linkage of some aspects of L & D programs with performance appraisal of the employees, preparing hour grid that involves allocation of mandatory training hours per employee, program feedback form, the mode and means of communication about the program, whom to communicate and who will communicate, linking rewards and recognition to L & D programs, primitive action against program defaulters, developing and providing tools to measure the impact of L & D program on the employee. Annual calendars as well as quarterly calendars were shared with the students that helped the students gain clarity on handling

multiple programs flawlessly. A 5 stage L & D cycle was shared with the students. These cycle demonstrated 5 stages which needs to be followed for a smooth conduct of L & D programs. 1. Subject knowledge, 2. Language – mirroring the language of the audience, and the language of the content (crispy, easy and comprehensible) 3. Assessment – Evaluation of the program by taking feedback from the audience 4. Measuring the retention level of the content amongst the audience, 5. Refresher program if required. In-depth discussion and knowledge sharing was done on Learning Management System software and its uses. The advantages and disadvantages of various type of training were discussed. These included On the job as well as Off the job training, Behavioural training, Compliance training, Concept training, Skill based training were discussed in detail. As there was a part of discussion which highlighted the linkage of performance appraisal system with Learning and development, certain portion of the workshop focused on discussing the same. The importance and methods of performance appraisal were a part of discussion along with errors that needs to be avoided at the time of conducting performance appraisal. With induction also being considered a type of training, students gained knowledge about the importance of induction. A sample of induction manual was shared with the students and a standardized process of conducting induction was further shared with them. Lastly there were certain important points that needs to be taken care of while conducting corporate training were shared by the expert. Some of those points are Understand your attendee's need, Re-energize your audience regularly, Pace your learning content, Segment your courage, Summarize at the end of every section, Use nonverbal cues to monitor the attention level of your audience, Your presentation slides should be an outline not detailed script, Use repetition to enhance learning, Mingle with participates, Check your breathing, take a break every 3 hours, Be punctual especially after breaks, Don't over run, Keep activity time punchy, Hang around at the end, Refer to trainee by sir/ma'am/Mr./Ms. Whatever your industry norm is, Use memory aids, Be comfortable saying ' I don't know', Avoid monologues, Inject humour, Optimize the learning environment, Be flexible, Vary your tone, Move around the room, Ask questions to maintain audience interest, Use hand gestures to convey

passion, Be enthusiastic, Establish ground rules, Demonstrate a new skill first, Make people feel at ease, Know your audience demographics.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

During the five day interaction with a corporate expert with more than 2 decades of experience, the management students gained a lot of clarity regarding L&D as a function of Human Resource Management and L & D as a career choice. The skills and competencies that have been developed within the students during these five days will strengthen their employability status. The application of the practical aspects of L & D that they have learned during the workshop when added to their future workplaces will be beneficial to both the employee as well as the organization. Optimum utilization of resources, high impact of L& D programs on the employees and maximum return on amount invested in the L& D programs will be the biggest advantage to the organizations where these professionals will join.

CONCLUSION

By designing and conducting the workshop on Learning and Development and its importance in the corporate world, an effort was made to enhance the knowledge of the management students about the L & D function and selecting L & D as a career choice. The workshop covered all the aspects of L & D including its importance, design, conduct and evaluation. The reasons of it being considered as an expense as well as the reasons for the failure of the L & D departments to achieve the return on their investments were also discussed. Post workshop the management students could very well differentiate between conducting a L & D program and facilitating a L & D program. There was a wholesome value addition for the students that included Introduction to L & D, Assessing L & D needs, Designing effective L & D programs, Conducting effective L & D programs and Evaluating this programs. The sub topics under the above mentioned 5 stages were also discussed with the students. The students were asked to prepare a project on the 5th day of the workshop and were asked to present the same to the expert as well as the subject faculty. The students were divided into groups and were allotted a topic related to L & D. The students

justified the topics allotted to them very well in the projects and presented their understanding about the topic allotted as well as L & D as a function through their projects. They were further evaluated on the basis of their attendance during the workshop, classroom interaction, conceptual clarity and activity output (Project presentation). The evaluation was done by both the expert as well as the subject faculty and the same was reflected in the continuous evaluation component of the semester exams. The students were asked to fill up the feedback form post the workshop. The students were very much satisfied with the content of the workshop, the expert and the learning they gained during these five days. The workshop succeeded in meeting its objectives and gained the desired results

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Annexure 1

Table 1 – L & D workshop Schedule

Date	Day	Time	Duration
13.02.2023	Monday	10.00 AM to 1.00 PM	3 hours
14.02.2023	Tuesday	10.00 AM to 1.00 PM	3 hours
16.02.2023	Thursday	10.00 AM to 1.00 PM	3 hours
20.02.2023	Monday	10.00 AM to 1.00 PM	3 hours
21.02.2023	Tuesday	10.00 AM to 3.00 PM	6 hours

Annexure 2

Student projects



