Skilling, Re-skilling & Up-skilling: An Indian Perspective

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Change and development go hand in hand. Situation and environment compel the individual, organization and society at large to foster change, failing which existence will never be felt. The pace of change has moved faster because of the innovation, creativity and technology. On the top of it the Covid 19 pandemic has created huge disruptions and also compelled people in general and professionals in particular to skill, re-skill and upskill to be relevant in the context.

The concept of volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) is gaining significance now. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has been recognized as a major exogenous shock that has altered the competitive landscape for both small and large companies (Wenzel, Stanske, & Lieberman, 2020) and as follows from business practice, 34% of employers didn't have emergency plans prior the pandemic (SHRM, 2020a). The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed extraordinary vulnerabilities arising from widespread global uncertainty. Uncertainty is no longer the context experienced by just senior multinational corporations (MNE) leaders involved in managing complex global supply chains, volatile financial markets, and unpredictable geopolitical relationships. Rather, uncertainty has become the context for numerous international employees who are working from home for the first time, experiencing job instability and financial insecurity, and worrying about their and their loved ones' health and safety (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

Today, the corporate world is on the brink of an epochal transition. According to a recent McKinsey Global Institute report, more than 375 million workers may need to completely change their skill sets by the year 2030. This would happen because of newer technologies such as digitization, AI (artificial intelligence) and automation disrupting the world of work. As a result, a number of employees are focusing to pursue additional degrees and certifications in these technologies, either through self-finance or by taking loan for short term courses. So, how big is this challenge that can potentially change occupational skill sets? If we talk about numbers, this change would be akin to coping with the 20th-century shift from agriculture to manufacturing in Europe and North America. That said, things are about to change for the better, with several key corporate players increasingly investing in "reskilling" and "upskilling" their existing workforce. (Admin, 2018, Online)

In fact the 2018 Future of Jobs Report from the World Economic Forum predicts that 75 million jobs will be displaced by 2022 in 20 major economies. At the same time, 133 million new roles are expected to be created, driven by advances in technology and continuous digital transformation.

Going by the exact definition depicted in the Cambridge dictionary, "reskill", essentially means "to learn new skills so that you can do a different job". If we talk about "Upskilling", the exact definition says that "to learn new skills or to teach workers new skills".

As demand for new competencies gathers pace, re-skilling and up-skilling can facilitate an organization to build up the skills needed to remain viable. And both can be considered effective strategies for employers to combat what is expected to become a perennial skills shortage.

The processes of organization like recruitment, selection and training new employees involves huge investment as compared to trying to re-skill and up-skill the existing workforce. Human resource is the most important asset of the organization and the quality of people has a direct implication on the performance, growth and survival of the organization. When an organization invests in learning and development of its employees, it polishes their capabilities and makes sure that their present day skills are relevant. This in turn is going to lead the organization to be long lasting and sustainable in the long run.

New digital technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and automation tools are rapidly changing the way we work, develop products, and interact with customers. Intelligent automation tools augment what people do at work and will redefine what's possible. (Osborne, 2018, Online) The recent trends will result in the redesign of almost every job, as well as new perspectives on workforce planning and the nature of work.

Organizations these days are faced with cut throat competition and to survive in such difficult environment, both the organization and its employees need to be agile and innovative. Both agility and innovation will help organizations sustain in the digital, new age market.

Agility is fundamental in the race to replace structural hierarchies with networks of teams empowered to take action. In this context, companies will have to continually help employees to adapt to changing paradigms. The concept of a traditional career is being shaken to its core, driving companies to provide continuous learning experiences that allow employees to build skills quickly, easily and on their own terms. This transformation of the work environment will change job profiles and therefore require employees to be upskilled in a wide range of competencies. Also, the organization becomes agile through the process of providing learning and development opportunities to its people and will be better equipped to adapt and respond to the turbulent environment and changes. Agility is about flexibility. Ideally, organizational leaders keep in touch with customer needs, learning and then adapting to changes.

Innovation often results from the ability to utilize existing knowledge and information to generate different combinations and reconfigurations (Cantner, Kristin, & Schmidt, 2008). The training and development investments of an organization create a climate for constant learning that facilitates the exchange of knowledge and ideas among employees, thereby promoting the generation of new knowledge and innovation (Lau & Ngo, 2004).

Scholars have argued that training practices enhance innovation through promoting a learning climate (Gómez, Lorente, & Cabrera, 2004; Shipton, Fay, West, Patterson, & Birdi, 2005). The above studies provide support to the fact that by continually helping employees to develop themselves, the organization is helping them to become innovative. Innovation exponentially uplifts the chances of an organization to react to changes and discover new opportunities. It fosters competitive advantage allowing the organization to build better products and services for the customers.

As organizations strive to compete in the global economy, differentiation on the basis of the skills, knowledge, and motivation of their workforce takes on increasing importance.
The digital workplace of today is vastly different from the workplace a decade ago — due to both age-old challenges as well as some new realities. There are more tools, more flexibility in where we do our work and more communication with coworkers, whether they sit next to us or work half a world away. But the demand for a more engaged, effective remote workforce has increased exponentially. It is more important than ever to listen and act to help employees succeed (Igloosoftware, 2020).

To understand the dynamics of changing work environment and its impact on HR processes, an initiative was taken to brainstorm & bring forward the practitioners perspective to address the new challenges through a webinar organised by ASBM University on Skilling, Upskilling & Reskilling: The Need of the hour". The esteemed panel members were Colonel Ashwani Kumar Joshi, Director, E&Y, Mr. Arvind Bali, CEO, Telecom Sector Skill Council and Dr. G P Rao, Founder, Good People Relations. The author moderated the webinar.

Colonel Ashwani Kumar Joshi, Director, E&Y said that this pandemic has led to an economic fall & a lot of people have lost their jobs and a new trend has started to that effect and therefore people are looking at it from a different point of view as to whether they will be working remotely, will they go for hybrid workforce etc. He stated that because of the technological changes that a lot of machines is going to take on our roles, a lot of jobs are going to become surplus. Skilling he explains is being equipped with cognitive, technical and people skill. Also, when he was the CEO of Construction skill development council, which is second largest sector with 45 million workforces, they found that pan India there were only 10 % people who were skilled and out of that, only 3-4% had gone through a formal training which he explains is a major challenge. He further says since jobs are changing and globally people are requiring workforce to stay competitive and be" Atma Nirbhar Bharat", we need to constantly go for up-skilling & re-skilling i.e. to become more productive, reduce costs etc. Considering the job longevity, he stated that we need to either re-skill or up-skill.

The second panel member Mr. Arvind Bali, CEO, TSSC said skill in our nation is a priority considering the fact that we have such a large youth in the country and all of them need to be employed, however the importance of it has been realized quite late in the country. He then explained that our youth needs to be skilled & should not only support India's man power need but also support other workforce starving countries. He stated that every year there's a mobile world congress and the last congress's theme was 5G. He then said how important 5

G is for education & skilling and how it can help in taking education to real remote part of the country. Further, he said due to the pandemic, suddenly we realized the need for online education. Statistics says that 1.2 billion currently are using online learning & coaching. Skills council is also thinking of e-skilling. He further stated that TSSC is working on e-skilling & has found that with advanced technology like AR,VR, 360 degree videos etc. one can create a virtual environment and infrastructure.

Finally, Dr. G P Rao, Founder, Good People Relations, started by saying that the future of work has changed, the future of workplace has changed, the future of workforce composition has changed and that requires new skills, re-skilling & up-skilling. He said it's not the number of people getting skilled which is important but the right kind of people getting skilled. He explained that skilling is about creating the potential, people who will be useful for the jobs, re-skilling is for redeployment and up-skilling is basically being in the same job with advanced knowledge. He believed that quality, speed & efficiency are imperative being in the competitive world. Further, he thinks skilling is one area where industry can't work alone; it needs the govt., the skill development shelters, and the educational institutions. However, so far as re-skilling & up-skilling is concerned, it is primarily the industry responsibility, organizational responsibility or the service providers. He stated that need identification has to be shared by the industry with the skill producing industry. He views that skills are made for current job and by time we come to the market, it becomes obsolete. He then says we need to skill for future. And finally he elucidated that in actual world it is not only functional skills that needs attention but the behavioral skills like Cross cultural inclusion, adaptability, resilience, creativity, design thinking, critical thinking etc. are essential.

The terms up-skilling, re-skilling are latest buzzwords at workplaces including industries and companies and soon these terms may become hot buzzwords in academia too. Every day we hear the advent of some new technologies which either positively or negatively impact our professions. Some technologies make people with certain (outdated) skills obsolete or downskill them and some technologies create an opportunity for teacher to learn new skills or upskill them. All new technologies demand new skills. For example, those who are assigned to teach English or any foreign language in the language laboratory using technology are required to learn many new skills such as designing lessons using online resources, creating interactive exercises and online tests, and so on. (Rayan, 2018, Online)

L&D will drive the most significant transition in the workforce since the Industrial Revolution. This large-scale reskilling will be fueled by new technologies on the learning front. (Woods, 2019, Online) Re-skilling builds an atmosphere where people can pay attention to jobs of different kind that demands thinking and creativity which helps an individual grow. The procedure may sound intimidating, but this is the only way to survive in this technologically evolving space. (Gulati, 2018, Online). Creating upskilling opportunities at your company isn't just smart, it's critical to the health and growth of your organization. Forward-thinking companies that consider what the employees want their staff to learn and what training and development methods are best for their goals reap the benefits with

employees who are better at their jobs, more motivated and more likely to remain with the company. (Half, 2018, Online). Together companies and employees can prepare the manpower for tomorrow.

Employers must figure out how they can adapt to rapidly changing conditions, how to find new skills for "distance economy" and companies have to learn how to match those workers to new roles and activities. It is about how leaders can reskill and upskill the workforce to deliver new business models in the post-pandemic era. Reskilling programs most often focus on building employees' skills in critical thinking and decision making, leadership and management of others, and advanced data analysis. All these are the skills that the previous research has found (Przytuła, 2018) to be in greater demand in the coming years (McKinsey&Company, 2020). Agrawal et al. (2020) pointed that the skill building should be focused on four areas: digital, higher cognitive, social and emotional adaptability and resilience. In response to this, HR executives generally identify with the significant need to reskill the workforce and according to the 2019 Global CEO Outlook, 44% of CEOs across major markets plan to upskill more than half of their workforces in new digital capabilities (such as advanced data visualization, ability to code, etc.) big data, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity (KPMG, 2019). Reskilling was pointed by 75% employers as the most important HR trend in 2020 (Deloitte, 2020b) and in response employees are eager to reskill and that three-quarters of nearly 1,500 full-time employees around the world are more motivated to improve their technical or professional skills as a result of COVID-19 (Oxford Economics, 2020).

Studies show that training-related changes should result in improved job performance and other positive changes (e.g., acquisition of new skills; Hill & Lent 2006, Satterfield & Hughes 2007) that serve as antecedents of job performance (Kraiger 2002).In a qualitative study involving mechanics in Northern India, Barber (2004) found that on-the-job training led to greater innovation and tacit skills.

Several studies conducted in European countries have documented the impact of training on organizational performance. Aragón-Sánchez et al. (2003) investigated the relationship between training and organizational performance and results indicated that some types of training activities, including on-the-job training and training inside the organization using in-house trainers, were positively related to most dimensions of effectiveness and profitability.
In summary, many studies have gathered support for the benefits of training for organizations as a whole. These benefits include improved organizational performance (e.g., profitability, effectiveness, productivity, operating revenue per employee) as well as other outcomes that relate directly (e.g., reduced costs, improved quality and quantity) or indirectly (e.g., employee turnover, organization's reputation, social capital) to performance.

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