

A STUDY OF NEW GEN WORKFORCE FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING TRANSFER FOR BUSINESS IMPACT IN INDIAN SERVICE INDUSTRY, WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Service Sectors in India are undergoing a major transformation phase in today's time. In order to achieve sustainable, profitable growth, this sector is facing key competitive challenges such as operational efficiency, delivery productivity, global customer satisfaction and talent development & retention across their delivery centers. Training, Learning & Development (L&D) plays a significant role in these organizations by providing cutting edge leadership in technology & business management. It's therefore very important to accomplish and measure the effectiveness and efficiency of L&D for real life business application and building learning assets for such organizations. Interestingly, India has one of the largest young workforces in the world, with over 65 % of its population under the age of 35. Today, the Indian service sector employs about 3-4 generations at a time with generation Y alias Millennials constituting about 70% of the total workforce. They have varied social, demographic, have changing interests in diverse fields, and are innovative, creative & restless in nature. There are, however, lots of myths about them and their behavioral styles and patterns which need proper elaboration and reconciliation. It's therefore necessary to examine the impact of this important variable in determining the learning maturity of the organization and corresponding impact on its business performance. This would help in better co-innovation and co-excellence and hence a better win-win for individuals and organizations. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to study this significant variable of L&D ecosystem constituting to its effectiveness for business results and various ways of formal and informal learning strategies & business interfaces that resonate most with these new generation employees, being an emerging part of a multi-generational workforce of India Inc.

KEYWORDS: Training effectiveness, Learn Ability, Business Results, Service Sector, IT Organizations, India

INTRODUCTION

India today is gaining favorite status as cost-effective, quality service provider among the various other developing countries across globe. According to an IMF study (2016) on anchoring growth in emerging markets and developing economies, technology plays a significant role in resource capitalization, productivity gains and sustainable economic growth. Despite the slowdown that had engulfed technology spending worldwide, this sector continued to grow at a robust rate with CAGR of around 13-15 % during the last decade. Indian Information Technology-Business Process

Management (IT-BPM) sector revenue recorded an impressive growth of 13% from USD 130 billion in FY2014 to USD 160 billion in FY2016 with IT services revenue share alone at USD 75 billion. Interestingly, today while the export segment share account for about 68% of total revenue, the domestic segment is also growing steadily on account of central government programs on “Digital India”, “Make in India” and “Start-up India”. However, currency volatility, macroeconomic headwinds and obstacles for quick adaptation to changing technologies are likely to pull down growth of Indian IT & BPM services exports to around 10-11 % for FY17 & FY18 (Source: Nasscom Strategic Review Report, February 2016). It’s therefore necessary to examine the ways and means that can rapidly elevate this sector from productivity and operational efficiency perspective and help achieve its revenue, profit and growth targets on sustainable basis. Researchers, practitioners and industry experts believe that Learning and Development (L&D) are one such field that can play a significant role in this sector in order to provide required impetus for sustainable growth. Therefore, continuous training & learning is an absolute essential dimension of this industry along with its effectiveness and impact on business results. It’s thus highly imperative to study the factors contributing the training & learning effectiveness, how and to what extent they can enhance performing abilities of employees to deliver results and eventually which segments of business results would have a potential impact due to such enhanced ability to perform. Zaciewski (2001) examined employee’ individual characteristics and stated that, along with the work environment, motivation, attitude, and learners basic ability affect a training program and its potential success. In today’s changing times, it’s essential to study and analyze the background and profiles of learners, who are primarily new generation employees, assess their cognitive behavior, diverse needs & wants, varied learning styles and how business can function successfully with multiple generations, coexisting simultaneously. This paper, therefore, focuses on these important factors and discusses a collaborative model that can help corporations, governments, trade & commerce equally well, to leverage the same for higher business efficacy.

STATEMENT OF OPPORTUNITY

The current major challenge in front of the Indian service sector today is low operational efficiency and gaps in desired competencies to achieve business success consistently. This sector is often entangled with challenges like how to respond to the changing situation quickly and effectively? How to develop flexible competencies on a continuous basis? How to carry out fulfillment efficiently & optimally and earn customer confidence and trust? How to grow the business by increasing revenue, controlling costs and managing operating profits? Etc. The new generation employees, being on the front end, are expected to respond to ever changing customer needs and business pressures alongside. While they have some perceived competency gaps in learn ability and delivery orientation (which are becoming roadblocks), these new generation employees expect right recognition and reward, growth opportunities, better user experience & convenience, sense of achievement, moderate responsibilities, collaboration & teamwork, and availability of open culture, commitment, low stress etc. Their skills are also varied in terms of creativity, innovation, tech-orientation and leadership skills. However, they lack in experience, maturity, solution building approach, patience for achievement, and value for money & time. Hence there is a need to develop a combination approach at workplaces where multi-generations coexist along with their strengths and challenges. This will lead to the real effectiveness of learning and training, including supplementary benefits such as helping employees build their own development plans & career progression, thus reducing attrition, enhancing motivation and improving productivity, etc. Importantly, there is also a growing need to look at training and development function, not as a cost driver but more so as a value provider. The purpose of this paper therefore

is to examine the characteristics of this new generation workforce, their inherent traits and competencies, challenges & opportunities, myths about this generation and what are the various ways to build a stronger learning ecosystem to make the desired learning impact on the ground.

Following Table 1 depicts the four quadrants of today’s Indian IT scenario indicating the changing times and changing preferences.

Table 1: Changing Preferences with Changing Times

Changing Preferences of Next Gen Employees	Changing Technological Advancement
1. More Social, Collaborative 2. Need Anytime, Anywhere Learning 3. Low attention & retention span, differential learning & performing styles	1. Cloud-based digital learning environment 2. Integrated learning solution 3. Technical competency framework, linking roles, competency & learning/training needs
Changing Business Performance Matrix	Changing Client & Customer Preferences
1. Career growth linked to learning, development 2. Employee engagement & attrition control 3. Operational excellence through faster deployment of skills resources	1. Cost-effective, scalable, value added solution 2. Learning on-the-go to deliver more with less 3. Better customer experience through thought partnership, agile & lean approach

Thus, it’s realized that with changing times, preferences of employees, management, customers are rapidly changing, with apt support of next gen science and technology. Employees at the workplaces today are Millennials with distinct preferences of likes and dislikes, learning styles, span of attention and retention, needs and wants, digital acumen, and social collaborations. They, along with current generation need to work in cohesion and hence a combination approach are needed to make learning effective and impactful. On the other hand, due to such tech-savvy workforce in Indian IT organisations, the learning ecosystem and network also need to be next gen learner friendly with features like flexibility, cloud-based digital learning environment, end-to-end learning management system with appropriate mapping of roles and required competencies and hence learning interventions needed thereof etc. Indian IT management also have changed preferences for profitability, growth, employee engagement and retention, operational efficiency etc. and global IT customers also need a seamless customer experience with learning on-the-fly approach from their vendor partners, dynamic solution alignment and thought partnership with value orientation. All these changing aspects have varying impact on training and learning effectiveness, thus needing a detailed study thereof.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A successful learning program is one which has higher effectiveness & efficiency and is designed based on the expected business outcome. Donald L. Kirkpatrick postulated a pioneering model for measuring training effectiveness and classifies the learning evaluation in four levels. The first level (called Reaction) addresses learner’s perceived reaction or feedback while second level (called Learning) addresses the additional knowledge or skill acquisition post learning. Third level (called Behavior) addresses the Observed/ demonstrated change in work behavior of the learner through enhanced knowledge, skill or attitude while the last level (called Results) addresses the tangible improvements in individual and/or organization outcomes. This model, however, does not state the factor responsible for each of these levels and ways to improve the same accordingly. Fischer and Ronald (2011) explained that open-mindedness is a significant variable of training effectiveness and stated that training become more successful if the participants and trainer work with open-mindedness. Zaciewski (2001) examined employee' individual characteristics such as motivation, attitude, and basic

ability, which affect a training program and its potential success. Saks and Haccoun (2007) consider learning transfer as the generalization of knowledge and skills learned in training on the job and the maintenance of acquired knowledge and skills over time. Larivie`re et al. (2013) highlights how value fusion emerges from consumers and firms participating in mobile networks. Van Riel et al. (2013) consider how a service constellation i.e. multiple interdependent services contributes to value creation, enabling innovative ways of creating value. While learning transfer on the job is important, it's equally important to consider the primary and secondary pressure points within delivery organizations of the industry. The performance evaluation of business functions is typically done using balanced KRAs/KPIs such as financial and customer related indicators e.g. profitability and customer satisfaction index and also the operational indicators such as process compliance index, risk & quality index, schedule & effort variance etc. For most of these factors, training & development play an important role in terms of improving the skills and competencies required to perform various roles in the diverse functions. Sa´nchez, et al. (2003) concluded that training positively affects productivity, quality, labor turnover and financial results.

For the industry, training & learning being an integral part of talent supply chain, it's all the more important to evaluate and measure learning effectiveness for higher resource utilization of Gen Y & their delivery efficiency. Learn ability and improved learning value of multi-generation employees towards talent development, grooming and nurturing will eventually help in shaping an organization as a learning & performing organization with lots of learning assets for business efficacy. Some of the prominent learning effectiveness models are Kirkpatrick's four level model, Philips ROI model, Balanced Score Card model, Hamblin's five level model, Warr's framework of evaluation, Virmani and Premila's model of evaluation, Peter Bramely's model of evaluation and David Reay's approach to evaluation.

Learning Effectiveness for Growth of IT Organization – A Theoretical Construct

As indicated earlier, effectiveness of any training & learning program should be rightly measured based on how it impacts business results, at strategic as well as operational level. These business results can be analyzed in terms of hard and soft data, both from employee perspective as well as business, management perspective. For a full-blown conceptual framework, the construct is defined in terms of multiple variables that are simultaneously acting on each other as well as on ultimate outcome. Such variables are typically independent, dependent, moderating or intervening in nature with a degree of correlation among them. The conceptual model analyses the impact of the independent variables such as profile of learners, relevancy of learning ecosystem and support from organization and managers, on intervening variable, learn ability and eventually on dependent variables, like productivity, revenue growth & profitability, employee attrition and engagement etc.

A Cognitive Analysis of New Generation Workforce - A Reality Check

As stated above, profile of learner plays a very important role in this model such as the background of learner, level of his/her motivation and ability to deliver successfully. Generation gaps have taken on a whole new meaning today. Gen Y (those born between 1980 and 1995), Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980), Baby boomer (born between 1945 and 1965), Traditional (born before 1945) and the latest one, Gen Z (born after 1995) are the new categories of generation today. The figures show that by the year 2020, India will have the highest percentage of employable workforce in the world with over 500 million trained work forces by 2020. The generation-mix in the organizations would also vary as time moves, with higher percentage coming from these newer groups. This necessitates the need for analyzing Generation

Ys now and their expectations & aspirations. Gen Ys population in India today is about 25% of world population (Indian Population Bureau, 2009) that makes Generation Ys skills and potentials crucial for value added economic growth. With more than 60 percent of the GDP being fueled by the services sector today and an under-35 age group, Gen X and the baby boomers want to analyze the way Gen Ys plan, think, act and behave. Today's youth brings with them a set of distinct values, assumptions, and behavior to the workplace. This generation has developed a widespread professional anxiety, ambitions and newer ways of work-life balance. The arrival of Gen Y, has forced the organizations (who were mainly of Gen X and baby boomers) to re-strategies the talent value chain including talent planning & acquisition, talent development & deployment and talent performance management.

Gen Y, the Millennials, is the digital and internet generation which is tech-savvy, virtually networked, and socially active generation. They love freedom, enjoy flexibility and are confidently ambitious. GenX, on the contrary, mostly came from the culture wherein asking questions to elders, teachers, and seniors was considered as taboo and there were defined set expectations from everyone while choices were limited. Gen Y, on the other hand is bold to challenge the authority and environment friendly. They look for societal change; they want meaningful work in business & profession. It's opined that "these millennial don't live to work, but work to live" and while Gen X is thinking about how to prepare them for leadership role, they're already thinking about buying the companies.

These young generation workforce are thus making their presence felt, compelling organizations and corporates to re-think their business practices and rebuild their working environment aligning to these breed of employees and managers. Generation Y is also perceived as overrunning the workplaces, arriving as newcomers but wanting to overpower the environment, challenging the presence of Gen X and baby boomers. They bring along with them, the distinct digital technologies & their applications, their social contacts & networks, their tech-savvy culture and new ways of business & people practices.

Though these millennials have different exposure & education, have creative mind and are overwhelmed by technologies, they lack deep experience & envisioning for business focus to showcase their abilities and wisdom. They are little lethargic, lack required discipline, get bored fast, and are considered as "jumping jacks" for their lower degree of fortitude and ability to adjust with given environment. Some of these observations are myths too.

According to a research carried out by Academy of HRD, Ahmedabad, corporate entities are interested to know the career aspirations of Gen Y and the factors that motivate them. A detailed psychometric analysis of some of these factors is as below:

What are the Career Aspirations of Indian Gen Y Professionals?

The Indian Gen Y professionals have higher thirst to climb the corporate ladder quickly and have burning desire to get associated with strong brands which visibly enhance their self-definition. These big brand names thus attract Gen Ys, as their dream career choices. Interestingly, highly focused Gen Ys are driven by distinctive aspiration to build, invent and propagate something of their own. The study shows that Gen Ys are loyal to their jobs & careers but may not be so to their organizations. This generation looks for competitive learning & nurturing environment with a fast track career progression and a pre-determined retirement age at around 45 years. With ever dynamic pressure from their ecosystem, particularly from peers, they believe in proving and establishing everything right then & there. This is a completely different story

vis-a-vis that of Gen X and baby boomers.

What do they look for @ Business Workplaces?

This generation is very questioning, appreciate transparency & unambiguity at the workplaces and hence look for sound company policies, considerate superior, flexible working hours, responsibility and independence, fair compensation and direct appreciation for their achievements at their workplaces. For them, the extrinsic factors of motivation are equally important along with intrinsic motivation. Gen Ys love to express and socially collaborate at the work and like to have a fun-filled, cheerful and open work culture. Their orientation to accomplishment is much higher than their orientation to compensation & benefits. They want to participate in most of the learning & development programs along with hands-on experience in the field of their interest.

Some Myths about Gen Y

While there are positive vibes about Gen Ys, there are also negative, non-encouraging perceptions about these millennials. But the reality is Gen Y is here to stay and making their space for them, on their own terms. According to a monster TRAK® survey, the perceived enigma is:

- *Gen Y is lazy, spoiled* - As per the survey, one of the top goals of Generation Y was to “work faster and better than their coworkers.” This shows Generation Y’s desire to excel and make a contribution at work; they ask lots of questions to ascertain that they are aware about the problems and challenges and try finding different and better ways of doing the same; they are neither lazy nor spoiled. They grew up knowing they were valued and have high self-esteem.
- *Gen Y needs instant gratification, their attention span is low* - As Technology has made Gen Y accustomed to getting what it needs quickly and easily, they value time and periodic feedback, acknowledgement of what and how they are doing. As they like to voice their opinion and views boldly and do not compromise, it’s perceived that their attention and retention span is short.
- *Gen Y is disloyal, selfish* - Generation Y makes workforce leaders face the fact that loyalty is not given; it has to be earned. Managers should give them interesting work, lots of feedback, chances to advance and rewards for good performance etc. In doing so, they can become company’s best and most loyal employees.
- *Gen Y lacks depth, has limited knowledge, does not believe in hard work* - They do not use their brains as “large memory storage” but more as “faster processor” for primary information and has ability to search for secondary, tertiary information based on need, they know how to find and where to find this information quickly and accurately.

Some other myths about Gen Y are - they are indifferent about their future, they believe in short term relationship, they do not want to connect with older generations, do not have work ethics, ethos, prefers only digital conversations & communications, they believe careers as purpose of their lives, are loners, believe in linear careers only and so on. These are not the true observations.

Generation Y has been unfairly stereotyped. It is crucial that these myths, stereotypes do not exist in the

organizations or in the hearts and minds of employees. Leaders must fully understand the implications of this new paradigm and provide support for both new and current employees. Leaders must mentor and guide new employees using wisdom gained throughout the years and make certain that new Gen Y talent is not dismissed or overlooked. Furthermore, they must find ways to spread Generation Y's skills to older employees using reverse mentoring process. For an emerging India Inc. therefore, Gen X and baby boomers need to have a greater synergy & collaboration with Gen Y.

What are the Challenges & Opportunities for the Organizations?

As per the recent study, the key challenges in front of senior management today is to leverage diverse generational talents, integrate multiple outlooks and deploy diversity & inclusion at global workplaces in seamless manner. Identifying each generation's generic and specific traits & personalities and weaving them into a cohesive culture for building & sustaining an exciting & conducive environment is very challenging. The Generation Y is an extraordinary force which is ambitious, cheerful, likes to embrace change and has a good intellect and abilities. The organizations of today and tomorrow should therefore reconcile these facts while building their development strategies, plans and policies.

Gen XY – Need for a Synchronized Approach

It's observed that each of these generations possesses different characteristics & traits as required in the business and social world. Their strengths & challenges are different in diverse competency areas, such as creativity & innovation, energy & enthusiasm, experience & maturity, visioning & thinking-beyond ability, solution building & problem solving approach, tech-savviness, and value for time & money etc. While typical baby boomers today are at senior to top level of management in an organization, Gen X are at middle level and Gen Y at foundation level, forming the bottom of the organization pyramid. Gen X as well as Gen Y therefore is experiencing challenges to deal with each other and eventually align well with organization goals and objectives. Hence, it's proposed that a combination workforce of Gen X and Gen Y, termed as Gen XY, can follow a best of both world's approach through an end-to-end Talent Supply Chain (TSC) process as well as Project Lifecycle Management (PDLC) process. This means making a transformative change about the way contemporary corporates managers think, strategies, and execute the policies & guidelines towards a stronger employee value proposition. Some of the points that should be on top priority for Gen XY model include resilient brand positioning, clear & concise communication strategies leveraging social networking media, higher collaboration & participation of team members in decision making and implementation of ideas, selection of their careers & roles, talent development programs, a 360 degree appraisal & employee dialogues model using stronger mentor-mentee networks etc.

Designing and Implementing a New Learning Landscape for Gen Y

As these millennials choose to learn in newer and different ways, traditional training models does not work. They need much more informal and just-in-time learning models to acquire and assimilate varied knowledge and skills, as context is more important for them rather than content. A blended learning model, thus embedded with formal as well as informal learning, classroom as well as virtual, self-learning, micro as well as macro learning and autonomous as well as mentor-based learning has become more successful in achieving its implicit as well as explicit goals. Some of such new gen learning models include Collaborative Learning (such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram etc.) to share, express, discuss and connect real time, Micro Learning (such as bite-sized, easily digestible, video-based learning to suit their attention & retention abilities), Gamified Learning (such as hackathon, high engagement oriented simulated learning

to create a real-life scenarios etc.), Experiential learning (such as learning through experimentation, readiness for failure, embracing change, innovation and creation for a disruptive business model etc.) and Mentoring, Coaching (such as hand-holding by gurus in respective areas, providing help in decision making, self-exploration and self-discovery, building intrapreneurship for self-ownership, alignment with business, risk taking abilities with result orientation etc.). It needs to be remembered that different employees of same or different generations have different learning needs and styles, they have different profiles, personas and expectations from self and organizations and hence the learning professionals cannot have “one size fit for all” model, but a more customized learning solution to suite different learners or a group of homogeneous learners.

BENEFITS OF THE SYNCHRONIZED MODEL

The benefits of collaboration for corporates are manifold, including better employee engagement and retention, higher productivity and operational efficiency though detailed breakdown of job-role structures, enhanced employee participation for a sustainable delivery excellence, higher customer satisfaction and profitable organizational growth. Indian service sector organization needs higher focus on Learn ability, leading to higher business outcome such as better service efficiency (Time to respond, analyze, resolve, escalate fulfillment index, total throughput time, customer satisfaction index, quality index, cost of service etc.). On the other hand, from employee perspective the benefits are also exciting such as flexi hours and working from home options, better work-life integration, motivation & incentive for higher education, skill enhancement, sabbatical leave, multi-career options & aspirations, experiential and fun-filled learning & development leading to self-progress, structured career paths through value synchronization, better relationships with boss and senior management, life beyond work such as sports and cultural activities within the organization and more such beyond the traditions benefits.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A robust research methodology was deployed as part of the research. This is in light of the fact that the study revolved mainly around next gen employees, their specific needs & wants and learning support that is required to enhance the learning effectiveness, to make positive impact on business results of Indian Information Technology organisations. Research was conducted across major metropolis in India, with specific focus on cities with IT concentration. Respondents were selected across varied age and experience groups, background, roles & responsibilities in order to avoid any bias thereof. Sample size was selected at 714, a customised questionnaire was developed post detailed piloting with SMEs across sector. Reliability and Validity tests were conducted for appropriateness of the instrument, with required content, construct and criterion validity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

A detailed descriptive and statistical analysis suggested that there is a significant correlation between the learners profile (in terms of his/her background, level of motivation, new gen characteristics etc.), learnability and business impact. Following fig indicates the impact of background of learners, as above on Business Impact. The scale used for analysis was Likert's 5 point scale.

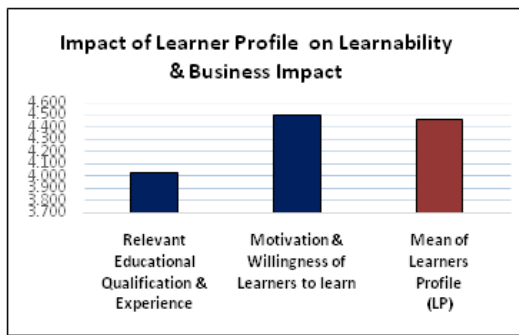


Figure 1: Impact of Learners Profile on Learn ability and Business Impact

It's observed that 80.3% of the respondents opined that background of the learners in terms of his/her new generation traits is an important determinant in deciding the business impact whereas 95.4% respondents expressed that motivation and willingness to learn play an important role determining learnability and eventually business impact thereof. About 94.5% respondents on overall basis perceived that this independent variable is critical as part of business impact learning model. As part of research, null & alternative hypothesis were developed, either to accept or reject the same, post statistical tests. Non-parametric statistical tests (such as Kruskal Wallis, Spearman's coefficient of correlation etc.) were carried out at 5% level of significance (95% confidence interval) which suggested a significant correlation among the variables, indicating that the addressing new gen learners characteristics for building subsequent learning ecosystem and other learning models play a significant role during learning effectiveness for business impact in service sector organisations, with specific reference to IT sector.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As majority of the workforce in Indian service sector is of generation Y i.e. between age group of about 21 to 35, it's pertinent to understand and appreciate their characteristics along with the root-cause thereof and then design, develop and implement the learning interventions, build relevant learning environment & ecosystem, build a supportive mentoring model of seniors alongside the needed support from senior managers and organization. This workforce have attitude to learn on-the-go whether formal or informal, keep interest in multiple happenings and events, learn by doing and anticipate quick returns there from. They are here to stay and make their space at every corner of the organizations. The proposed Gen XY model could therefore address the key challenges such as how to leverage these diverse generational talents integrate multiple outlooks and deploy diversity & inclusion at global workplaces in seamless manner. Identifying each generation's generic and specific traits & personalities and weaving them into a cohesive culture for building & sustaining an exciting & conducive environment is really a big ticket item. The Generation Y in India is an extraordinary force which is ambitious, cheerful, likes to embrace change and has good intellectual abilities. The organizations can therefore leverage Gen Y's socio-techno skills and smart decision making abilities while building organizations of next generations. A rightly blended learning model addressing this collaborative ecosystem can thus lead to a stronger learning value proposition.

Managing change effectively is one of the most important objectives of today's business corporates and nations at large. With new gen employees joining the organizations, it's important to study their changing patterns really well, and get them into mainstream of decision making, learning & delivery initiatives and overall operational excellence. A good

understanding of psychometric analysis of such multi-generation workforce for enhancing learning transfer efficacy for business impact will help researchers, practitioners, business leaders and industry experts to achieve a comprehensive win-win, individually and collectively.

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