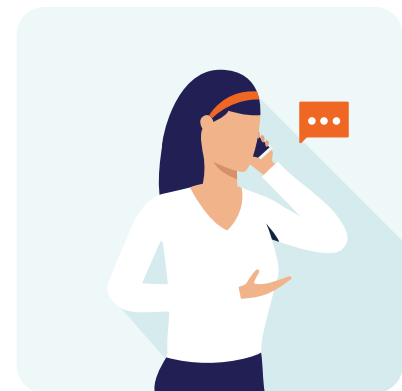
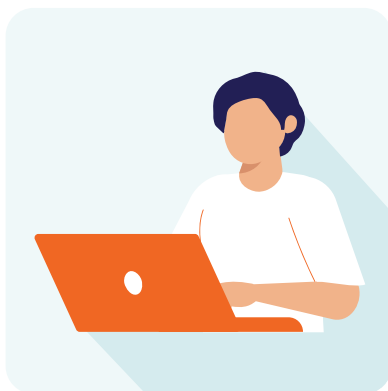
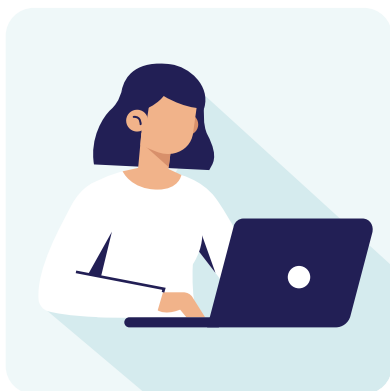


REPORT

DIGITAL ROUND TABLE



Digital Round Table Summary

Last Friday, we had the pleasure of organizing a Digital Roundtable where we had L&D leaders from 15 different organizations spanning a cross-section of industries (FMCG, Pharma, Software, Retail & Consulting) joining in to share their thoughts through a 2 hour free-wheeling chat facilitated by FocusU. Here is a synopsis of the same.

01.

How has Covid-19 affected learning and the L&D function?

Here are a few thoughts that the panellists shared:

- 1) L&D has become more important than ever before.
- 2) The pandemic has been like the demonetisation moment for the learning function. While digital initiatives had been launched a while back by L&D teams, the uptake so far was quite weak. Most companies in fact, have always had digital plans ready – platforms like Degreed, LinkedIn learning, etc. What has happened now is that digital learning has suddenly gained centre stage.
- 3) L&D has never been so busy as in the recent past. But it is a good time for learning since everyone has become learning conscious. Learning itself has moved from a “push” to a “pull” paradigm. Internal business leaders (anyone who has a people responsibility) have become more conscious of learning being critical. The tables have turned – they are reaching out proactively. Organizations are looking at internal leaders to also be facilitators of learning.
- 4) The outlook of companies has changed from being strategic to being “now” focussed. The focus is on survival. Learning is being seen as a way to help in this phase of tiding over this crisis. Any skill building hence has to be anchored around three themes that go by the acronym ACE:
 - a) How to be more Agile
 - b) How to build Connections
 - c) How to be more EmpatheticEvery HR initiative, whether it is skill building, succession planning or coaching has to be anchored around these three themes.
- 5) Every aspect of what we can do in L&D is going to be a luxury and a responsibility. Every dollar being spent is going to be counted. Digital is here to stay – but blended is what the future is.

- 6) There is a need for L&D to relook and reinvent how we do things. Development journeys were put on hold for a while – but now we are looking at how to do it virtually. How do we make it shorter? What people will remember are “the experiences we leave people with.”
- 7) It has made us more aware that certain groups – especially those who are spread out in the field offices have always been in this remote learning situation. So this has made us more sensitive towards crafting learning keeping all groups in mind.
- 8) Learning budgets have eroded significantly, while at the same time there is a need to learn new skills – so clearly there is a need to innovate. A lot of focus on what can we do internally? What best practices can be shared?
- 9) Especially now, more than any other time – L&D is being seen as a business partner.

02.

What are the key learning themes you will be focusing on in the near future?

- 1) From 5% of our workforce working remotely, we now have 100% working remotely. Hence the key themes that L&D is expected to help with are:
 - a) How to drive productivity
 - b) How to manage teams virtually
 - c) How to work from home
 - d) How to enable managers to cope with the new reality.
- 2) From what we started the year with, our people development agenda had to be relooked at completely again. There is a realisation that without “psychological safety” learning is not going to happen. Also being more sensitive about where different people are in the change curve is becoming critical while connecting virtually and to people across geographies. And hence:
 - a) Empathy is important as a human and a business skill
 - b) Learning to build connections in a virtual world is critical
- 3) The current scenario is something we may have talked about earlier as VUCA or Black Swan or White Swan – but nobody ever has experienced anything like this. Hence a few important themes:
 - a) Building Resilience (physical, mental and spiritual) in teams and team members
 - b) Learning Agility is vital – since we need to unlearn & learn at a whole new pace
 - c) How to deal with the unknown and work through ambiguity.
 - d) How to handle and manage crisis

- 4) Managing crisis requires self-awareness. Hence this will be a big focus area. We want to help our employees answer questions around mental health like:
 - a) Why am I feeling drained?
 - b) Where are my anxieties coming from?
 - c) How do I rest and recharge?
 - d) What resources do I have?
- 5) Engagement is more important than ever. Engagement not at a company level but at a team level. We have seen that employees who have more frequent one-one-ones and regular team meetings with managers are able to better deal with this situation. Hence a big theme is of Team Purpose.
 - a) Are people in the team aligned to a course of action?
 - b) Are Managers able to share a vision?
 - c) Are managers flexible enough to understand the challenges of WFH?
- 6) Productivity in a virtual working environment.
 - a) How does one be more productive in a WFH environment?
 - b) How does one delineate between workspace and personal space? Weekday and a weekend.
 - c) How does one set a target and move forward?
- 7) Concepts like Heart led leadership and Courageous Leadership – are getting more focus.
- 8) Volunteering as a way to build engagement in virtual teams is being explored.

03.

What are a few things that are already working for you?

- 1) Virtual sessions which are facilitator led is catching much more traction than fully virtual self-paced sessions (with no facilitator being there) due to the buzz of people connecting and getting to share with each other. The ideal model going ahead seems to be blended learning.
- 2) Covid-19 is humanizing the whole organization in a big way through this process of self-realisation with people connecting to each other with more conversations, more authenticity. People manager enablement sessions where senior leaders do virtual fireside chats with open sharing about life and challenges are really helping.
- 3) Learning through informal catch-ups, story-telling and sharing of experiences is working. Managers connecting without an agenda is also helping!
- 4) Global subscription to an app called Calm – that has features not just for employees but also their children.
- 5) Using this as a time for skill building – digital learning journeys mapped out for individuals so that there is a feeling of progression even during this period.
- 6) Having a weekly engagement calendar – family selfies, what does your workspace look like?, Sharing of childhood pics, playing games like Psych as a team ritual.
- 7) Skill building as a focus area. Skill builder sessions currently have participation of 100%
- 8) Using this time to reiterate and cascade company values.

04.

How do you see the post Covid-19 period panning out for L&D?

- 1) The virtual technologies have also made everyone realise the value of human connect. So whenever things open up, classroom learnings will make a comeback. However, this period of digital adoption and learning will make people more accepting of the digital medium of sustaining learning.
- 2) Organizations are going to see lay-offs. One question we will need to soon engage on is whether we can turn the people on lay-offs into gig workers? Can we offer learning opportunities to our gig workers? Our area of focus needs to go beyond our full- time employees.
- 3) The virus will definitely shift thinking in business leaders as to which are the roles that can be moved to WFH even after the crisis. That means new paradigms of learning and coaching – that we will need to be prepared for.
- 4) Need to be ready for people to go back to a mix of current and previous behaviors.
- 5) L&D is in focus now – but how do we sustain engagement around learning – even after the current crisis blows over, is something we need to start thinking about now.

05.

How is L&D modelling being Agile?

The question is: What we preach to the world – are we doing it ourselves?
Here are a few ideas that are already in action:

- 1) #3 week challenge
- 2) Posting certifications
- 3) Blocking a learning hour every week – where a leader outside the function shares what is happening in his function
- 4) Asking people to share a recent webinar, a book or a course they have completed recently.
- 5) Books reviews
- 6) Challenge to find articles around a certain theory or concept
- 7) Brain storming around “How can we make digital learning more creative?”
- 8) Twice a week – catching up for informal chit-chats & Know-how building.
- 9) Putting together cross-functional teams and learning from that. For example pairing a L&D person with a Marketing person to understand what we do for our customers – are we doing it for our own people?

06.

Do discussions like this help? In which way?

Here is what we heard:

- 1) Definitely yes. Great to hear different perspectives and have a cross-pollination of ideas.
- 2) Why to reinvent the wheel? We can learn from each other
- 3) Sharing of best practices and being boundaryless helps the whole community
- 4) HR is now being seen as steering the organization – hence this helps
- 5) Helps build community
- 6) SOAR – Support, Own, Achieve & Rise This forum helps in that for everyone!
- 7) Helps by committing to a higher purpose of helping a fellow human
- 8) It is a validation – that we are all going through the same thing – and we are up to speed in the initiatives and actions that we are taking
- 9) What is the size of the sky? It is as big as the window we see it through. This session has helped me increase the size of my sky!

We hope this synopsis has given you a dipstick into how L&D leaders across a cross-section of companies are thinking through and navigating the current situation.

Report compiled by:



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