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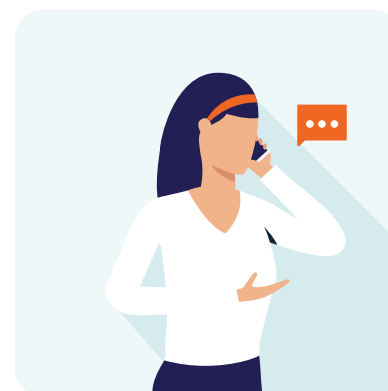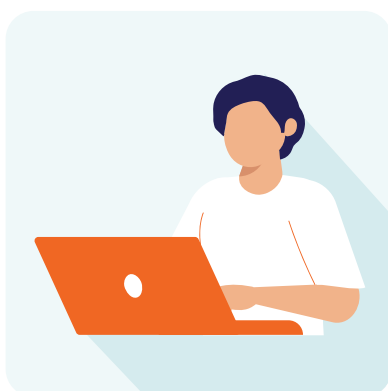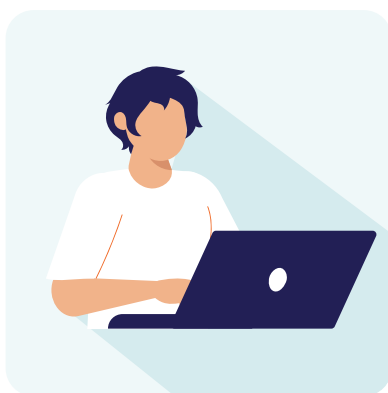
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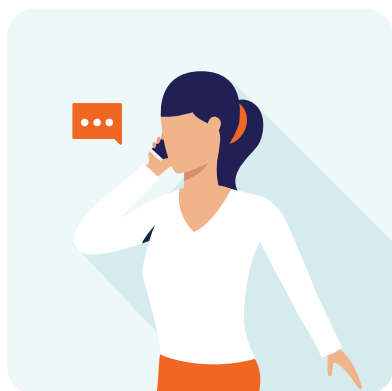
2ⁿᵈ Digital Round Table

Last Friday, we had the pleasure of organizing the 2nd edition of the FocusU Digital Roundtable where we had L&D leaders from 12 different organizations spanning a cross-section of industries (FMCG, Manufacturing, E-commerce, Electronics, Retail & Logistics) joining in to share their thoughts through a 1.5 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?

1) The Covid situation has created a 'pull' for learning and the agility of L&D to be quick off the mark to create/enable a system of learning during this period is paramount. On the other hand, it's a challenging task to keep the 'feet on street' employees engaged as they are not conversant with the current learning systems and it's an issue L&D faces to discover, rediscover a system that keeps them engaged.

2) L&D needs to be nuanced. Leaders are recognizing that L&D can provide solutions but a 'cut-copy-paste' or 'one size fits all' approach won't work. Currently, There is a demand and supply mismatch. There is a segment that has its hands full with household and work responsibilities for whom learning may not be top of mind. On the other hand there are others who have free hours in the day to manage upskilling and diverse projects. L&D has to flex, understand learning preferences, create differential approaches and leverage different platforms to provide relevant solutions.

3) Great opportunity for L&D to leverage relationships and partner with business teams. One from a strategy point of view of matching L&D strategy with the business strategy and another from finding out new avenues as we see virtual learning moving up from a 30% to a 95% contribution.

4) The Covid situation has broken a lot of myths like 'In FMCG companies people cannot work from home.' Work is happening seamlessly amidst disruptions. There is a mindset change that is being seen as the onus has shifted from L&D to people themselves for the learning.

5) A mix of learning solutions is being preferred and implemented - like Linkedin learning, Training for management committee members by digital experts half the age, Technical functional training through peer to peer, Simulations based learnings and fun, lighter interest related workshops.

6) Unlike the usual scenario of business leaders asking for 'some' training for teams, interestingly enough, now business leaders are getting into basics and finding out what training is most relevant for people at the ground level as capacity has got generated for people to learn. L&D should facilitate decentralization of ownership of learning as Business leaders are likely to come up with their own learning calendar for their teams.

7) While there are platforms available for learning, the challenge is to recognize that people are not equipped to learn in the manner available. Task is to understand this and make learning easier.

8) Learning journeys are being curated basis preferences and needs. For example, theme based learning journey kickstarted by leaders who have expertise on it. Topics like resilience and innovation for junior management, innovation for middle management and communication for top management are being looked at for training.

9) Virtual platforms and self-learning have gained centerstage. In the 70-20-10 model of learning and development, the '10' has gained centerstage. Due to the geographical span, management of timing for webinars has been a challenge.

10) Innovative learning Initiatives have been devised and brought in action like
    a) 3-3-3 (weeks-models-hours) where business leaders are engaging with their teams bringing great value in terms of content relevance and engagement format
    b) 11-11-11 (competencies-weeks-leaders) where level 2 leaders are brought to engage with teams. These initiatives hold great value and should continue even post Covid.

11) Communicating to business leaders about different modes of learning has come up as an interesting area recently. Differential learning models like peer to peer and reverse mentoring for top leaders are being leveraged as business leaders are experimenting with their own learning for the 1st time. Virtual platform seems to provide some amount of psychological safety to enable this.

12) Good development in terms of Business leaders & L&D working together to understand training needs. However critical to understand that it should not end up being a gap filler but become a permanent way of working.

13) Cost and cost optimization will be a challenge and don't see this challenge going away till 2021. Hence creativity will play a major role. Various cost-efficient learning ideas being implemented like bite sized learning, online free videos converted into gamified challenge through quizzes (14 days leadership challenge), Boardroom leadership program (on lines of reverse mentoring), COE programs – peer to peer, Quizzes and virtual training platform, Walkthroughs of LMS which normally did not get adequate attention, Leveraging internal leaders for training, bite sized learning through daily snippets pulled together as a journey.

14) Gig economy comes to the fore again and is likely to become a way of life.

15) Important to Identify learning styles for introverted versus extroverted personalities especially in the WFH scenario and creating engagement activities to suit them, for example, Gratitude journals, enabling differential work set ups etc.

16) This situation also creates an opportunity for L&D professionals to be agile in learning and upgrading their skills with the changing environment.

17) A caveat is that business will get back on track and become priority as covid settles down and it is important for L&D to ensure that the enthusiasm for learning does not die down.

18) A trend for the future is that focus and investments on the digital platforms will be an important area.

02.

How to sustain the momentum that learning is getting now due to the current Covid situation and what are the biggest priorities for the next 3 months?

1) Relevance and the quality of the training will be important. Hopefully L&D is able to grow a learning culture and sustain it.

2) Focusing on the roles and skills for future and also being cognizant that not every skill can be developed through virtual learning. Accordingly determining the capability development plan, for example, focused interventions will be required for technical skills and behavioral skills will require formal training and coaching.

3) Recognizing different learning preferences and creating a 'blended' learning mix of virtual and planned facilitated learning journeys will be a focus area.

4) To enable innovative interventions to continue like a "deal hour" – drop everything and learn.

5) Roles will change including that of L&D professionals. It is a good idea to enable 'carve your own learning journey' for the larger group as well as L&D.

6) Data from the e-learning system showed that courses on basics (finance for non-finance, excel etc.) were most sought after due to a fear of job security (culled from an employee sentiment survey). This is an important insight to prioritize and address so that the learning programs are made effective.

7) Continuing to experiment and use differential approaches will be a priority.

8) Important to be cognizant of the content consumption, relationship with businesses and measuring the effectiveness of learning programs.

9) Leaders are spending time with their frontline team members more now than earlier and it is an interesting development that may need to be looked into and sustained to understand development needs better.

03.

Key take-aways from the session:

1) Innovative campaigns for building excitement and importance for learning programs like 3-3-3 (weeks-models-hours) and 11-11-11 (competencies-weeks-leaders).

2) Thoughts and ideas on how to sustain the 'pull' for learning.

3) Accepting that virtual is the new normal.

4) Apply the best practices and ideas learnt from this discussion with the larger group.

5) Learning has to be nuanced and based on learning preferences so that it is empathetic to each segment. That may help to create pull.

6) Carry out a dipstick to identify if the learning preferences and needs would remain same after covid.

7) Reinvent learning in bite sizes – Focusing on the new way rather than going back to older ways.

8) Good rising trend of business leaders becoming active in learning initiatives of their own team members.

9) Focusing on front line managers who are essential in times of pressure and evaluating if enough time and thought is being given to their learning needs. Relook at their skills and map that to the learning programs.

10) Culling the learning needs in the changed scenario and identifying the new structures of learning.

11) L&D is a system more than a function and it is important to understand the factors that make the system effective. For example, if job security is important then it needs to be addressed.

12) Recognizing learning preferences, learning priorities and investing in platform apart from content.

13) It is a VUCA world and hence keeping a tab on the next wave, being updated on own and employees learning needs with changing times is important.

14) L&D is driven top down and the entire system needs to be structured in a way that leaders own this and is part of their work.