Indian Journal of Training and Development

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Vision

Leading Transformation through Training & Development

Mission

To facilitate Individuals and Organizations to excel in Training & Development activities. Serve as reservoir of universal knowledge of Human Interface through innovative practices and original exploratory research.

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Message from the National President

It is a privilege to welcome the new Editorial Board of the *Indian Journal of Training and Development* (IJTD) and to mark the beginning of a new chapter in the journey of this important publication of the Indian Society for Training and Development.

We are living through a profound transformation in the world of work. Artificial Intelligence, emerging technologies, changing business models, demographic shifts and evolving employee expectations are reshaping the skills, mindsets and capabilities that organizations require.

In this changing landscape, research must become a bridge between knowledge and action. IJTD has the opportunity to become a vibrant forum where rigorous research, industry experience and innovative thinking converge to address the challenges of developing future-ready workforce.

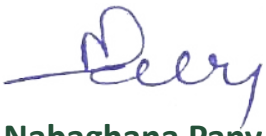
The future of learning and development cannot be limited to training alone. It must encompass capability building, leadership, employability, reskilling and upskilling, organizational agility, technology-enabled learning and workplaces where diverse talent can thrive.

I, therefore, see the renewed IJTD as more than a journal. I envision it as a credible knowledge platform for the future of work, encouraging original research, thought leadership, practitioner insights, case studies and cross-sector dialogue. An important strategic ambition of this new phase is to progressively build IJTD towards international academic recognition, including the aspiration of Scopus indexing. This is not an overnight destination. If we begin this journey now, it may take three to four years of sustained effort to build the quality, consistency, editorial rigour, citation impact and international visibility required for such recognition. Our efforts to strengthen the journal and explore meaningful linkages with SAGE are part of this larger vision.

I extend my warm appreciation to the new Editorial Board for accepting this responsibility. I invite academicians, researchers, HR and L&D professionals, business leaders, practitioners and emerging scholars to make IJTD a shared intellectual space and contribute to its growth.

As ISTD continues its journey towards enduring progress, may IJTD become a significant vehicle for shaping conversations, advancing knowledge and nurturing the next generation of thinkers and practitioners in Training and Development.

I wish the new Editorial Board every success in this exciting journey.



Nabaghana Pany
National President
Indian Society for Training and Development (ISTD)

From the Desk of Chief Editor

Ensuring Change Doesn't Stall Progress

Agility in the workplace depends on the speed with which employees can take action to solve problems. According to Gallup, speed is associated with employee empowerment, decentralized decision-making, and a focus on procedural simplicity. A study reports only one in four employees *strongly agree* that their company creates an environment where they can try, fail, and learn from mistakes. But creating a safe space where employees can fail is essential to building agility in the workplace. If people are afraid to fail, they will be reluctant to voice their opinions or try new things. Preventable failures occur when individuals fail because they didn't follow organizational procedures or rules. Complex failures occur due to intrinsic conditions or risk of an occupation or task and may involve mistakes by one or many people. Intelligent failures occur due to experimentation and innovation.

The complex and intelligent failures have potential to promote learning in the workplace. Conversely, when complex or intelligent failures are buried or left undiscussed, others risk repeating the same mistakes. The result? Increasingly inefficient organizations replicate mistakes. Agile organizations understand the importance of tapping into an employee's resourcefulness to solve problems and generate innovative ideas. By allowing employees the freedom and resources to experiment without facing criticism in an agile environment, employees feel safe while expressing their thoughts and ideas. Many organizations do a better job of encouraging employees to share and discuss new ideas than they do of creating an environment where they are empowered to try them out. Leaders must understand that for most large firms, experimentation can no longer be a prerogative of R&D teams only.

Agility in the workplace requires regular communication with employees. Instead of annual employee feedback, management culture can be developed to encourage small and frequent interactions with staff, focusing on what the organization needs today and get feedback immediately. If it takes weeks to get the results of a survey, it's just not timely enough to be useful. Listening is only half the battle. It is important that you act on what you hear. Agile working reshapes how organizations respond to change, grow, and thrive in competition. Its impact extends to employees, leadership, and long-term strategy. Agile organizations place decision-making near the work itself. When priorities change, teams don't stall. They adapt, act, and refine their approach in real time. That responsiveness minimizes downtime and helps momentum carry forward. Speed by itself isn't the real advantage.

What sets agile organizations apart is their ability to respond without disrupting progress. Agility at work provides employees with greater visibility into how they contribute value. When people can move between projects or apply skills in new ways, work feels less static and more purposeful. Retention improves when growth doesn't require a job change. Organizations that support agility in the workplace provide employees with the flexibility to evolve, making it a viable long-term option. Innovation tends to stall in tightly controlled environments. Agile workplaces loosen those constraints by encouraging collaboration across teams and roles. Ideas emerge more quickly when people aren't constrained by formal boundaries. Workforce agility supports experimentation. Teams test, learn, and adjust without waiting for perfect conditions, which keeps innovation practical instead of theoretical.

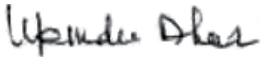
Agile organizations handle uncertainty more effectively because they aren't tied to fixed assumptions. Plans evolve as new information becomes available, which reduces the risk of being caught off guard. Risk tied to talent drops when leaders have a real-time view of workforce capabilities. When it's clear who has which skills, work can be shifted more easily, gaps can be addressed, and operations continue without disruption during change. Agile working helps organizations make better use of the resources they already have. Rather than defaulting to new hires, teams draw on existing skills across the workforce. Efficiency improves as unnecessary steps are removed. Over time, agility reduces waste while maintaining consistent performance, even as priorities change.

Workplace agility generally relies on five core components: *Adaptability* - the ability to adjust quickly when priorities, tools, or goals change; *Learning* - continuous skill development that keeps employees relevant as work evolves; *Decision-making* - empowering teams to act without unnecessary layers of approval; *Collaboration* - working across functions instead of operating in silos; *Visibility* - clear insight into skills, goals, and performance across the organization. Together, these components support workforce agility by ensuring change doesn't stall progress.

Moving from a traditional work environment to an agile one is not an easy task and presents unique challenges. Steps toward possible solutions: Create a clear agile vision that's tailored to the organization's identity and goals, and ensure it's understood and embraced throughout the organization**;** Encourage self-organization and customer-centric decision making; Break down hierarchies and encourage direct customer engagement to align activities with customer needs; Encourage learning from failure, iterative product development and open communication, and empower employees to innovate and contribute. Transition to a leadership style that mentors, inspires and guides teams towards autonomy and alignment with the organization's core values and vision. Empower teams with autonomy and accountability.

Further, focus on mentoring, feedback and personal development to enhance their contribution to the organization's goals; Favour iterative approaches for their adaptability, reduced risk and customer focus; Respond quickly to market changes to keep products relevant; Combine strategic direction from management with operational insight from employees, fostering a collaborative environment around common goals; Introduce agile coaching and continuous learning opportunities to foster a culture of continuous improvement; Encourage effective communication, feedback and collaboration; Involve team members in hiring and encourage cross-departmental interaction to improve team dynamics; Track customer and operational metrics to assess responsiveness and efficiency improvements; and Monitor employee engagement to measure workforce adaptation to agile practices.

The readers of IJTD are requested to go through the contents of the journal and facilitate us in improving the usefulness of this publication by offering suggestions based on their critical review and constructive observations. The prospective contributors to this journal are advised to follow APA pattern (latest edition) for presenting the references.



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Bridging the Gap between Potential and Readiness: Practitioner Insights from a Virtual Leadership Readiness Program

Reebu R. Kuruvilla*

ABSTRACT

The insights presented in this article are drawn from the author's experience facilitating, implementing, and evaluating a leadership readiness intervention as part of an internal mobility initiative within a large healthcare services organization. The organization has been anonymized to preserve confidentiality. All participant references are composite illustrations drawn from patterns observed across multiple batches.

KEYWORDS

Capability and Confidence, Facilitated Engagement, High-Performing Employees, Management Trainee, Poorest Self-Awareness

INTRODUCTION

There is a moment that stays with me from the second batch of this program. A senior operations professional with eight years with the organization, widely respected by her peers, sat across from me in a virtual mock interview. I asked her to describe a time. She had influenced a positive change in her team. She paused, looked slightly uncomfortable, and said: "I don't think I've really done anything like that." Ten minutes earlier, she had mentioned in passing that she had independently identified a breakdown in her department's escalation process, redesigned it, and then trained her entire team on the new workflow. The results had reduced complaint resolution time significantly. She had simply not thought of it as leadership. That moment captures the central challenge this article is about.

Organizations today invest considerable effort in identifying high-potential employees and creating internal pathways for advancement. Internal mobility - the movement of employees across roles, functions, and career opportunities within an organization has emerged as a strategic priority for talent sustainability, leadership succession, and employee retention (LinkedIn Learning, 2024; Deloitte, 2024). The logic is sound: organizations that develop leaders from within retain institutional knowledge, reduce hiring costs, and build cultures of growth (CIPD, 2023).

Yet, a gap persists. Many capable, high-performing employees struggle not because they lack potential, but because they have never been given structured support to recognize, articulate, and demonstrate that potential. The result is a pipeline problem that is less about identifying talent and more about preparing it. This article shares practitioner insights from the design, delivery, and evaluation of a leadership readiness intervention implemented within a large healthcare services organization. Delivered virtually across five batches involving 162 employees aspiring to Management Trainee positions, the program combined growth mindset development, behavioral interviewing techniques, communication skills enhancement, simulation-based learning, and structured feedback. The goal here is not to describe

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a training program. It is to share what we learned about employees, about learning, and about what it genuinely takes to prepare people for the next step in their careers in the hope that these insights are useful to fellow learning and development professionals navigating similar challenges.

LEADERSHIP READINESS CHALLENGE

Every organization has them: the reliable performer who has been passed over for promotion despite an impeccable track record. The subject matter expert whom everyone turns for guidance, but who is overlooked when leadership roles open up. The long-tenured employee who applies for an internal opportunity, performs poorly in the interview, and disengages quietly afterwards. These are not isolated incidents. They reflect a structural challenge in how organizations think about leadership readiness. Performance management systems are designed to measure what employees do in their current roles rather than their readiness for future responsibilities (Silzer & Dowell, 2010).

High-performing employees often possess strong domain expertise, consistent results, and a commitment to organizational goals. Yet, when presented with internal advancement opportunities, many struggle to navigate the selection process effectively. This creates what I have come to think of as the capability-visibility gap: employees who have the potential to succeed in leadership roles but cannot communicate that potential during critical moments. Throughout the intervention, this gap appeared repeatedly. Employees frequently possessed relevant leadership experiences but failed to recognize them as such. The challenge was rarely the absence of leadership behavior; rather, it was the inability to identify, articulate, and demonstrate those behaviors during assessment situations. This distinction became one of the central themes emerging from the implementation experience.

The gap manifests in several specific ways. First, many employees struggle to articulate their accomplishments. They perform complex tasks, mentor colleagues, solve critical business problems, and contribute meaningfully to team outcomes, but when asked to describe these experiences, they default to describing job responsibilities rather than demonstrating impact. The eight-year veteran mentioned earlier is a vivid example. Second, behavioral interviewing presents a genuine challenge. Contemporary selection processes increasingly rely on competency-based questions designed to assess behaviors such as leadership, initiative, collaboration, and decision-making. While employees may demonstrate these behaviors daily, many are unfamiliar with structured approaches for communicating them. Responses often lack specificity, omit measurable outcomes, or fail to distinguish individual contribution from team achievement.

Research on leadership transitions suggests that self-efficacy and confidence significantly influence leadership emergence and readiness perceptions (McCauley & Wakefield, 2006). Internal candidates frequently carry beliefs about their own limitations formed through years of operating within defined role boundaries that can undermine their self-presentation even when their substantive capabilities are strong. Employees who consistently perform well in operational environments may enter selection processes with genuine uncertainty about whether they belong in the conversation at all. Finally, the shift to virtual assessment environments has added complexity. Demonstrating leadership presence through a screen requires deliberate attention to camera engagement, vocal clarity, concise communication, and professional self-presentation, skills that many employees simply have not had reason to develop.

The implications extend beyond individual employees. When organizations fail to prepare internal candidates effectively, capable people get overlooked, pipelines weaken, and reliance on external hiring increases. High-potential employees

who experience repeated unsuccessful promotion attempts may disengage or leave. The organization loses not only the candidate but also the institutional knowledge and investment that came with them. From a learning and development perspective, these challenges point to a need that traditional training approaches have not fully addressed. Leadership readiness requires more than knowledge transfer. It requires self-awareness, mindset development, structured practice, and the confidence to present oneself as a leader before that identity fully feels earned.

PROGRAM CONTEXT AND INTERVENTION DESIGN

The intervention described in this article was designed in response to a pattern that organizational stakeholders had observed across multiple internal selection cycles. Many employees aspiring to Management Trainee positions demonstrated strong technical competence and solid performance histories, but a significant number struggled during interviews and assessments designed to evaluate leadership potential. The challenge, as stakeholders correctly identified, was not a lack of capability. It was the gap between what employees could do and what they could demonstrate.

The Management Trainee role represented an important developmental milestone within the organization. Employees selected for the role entered a structured journey that included additional learning interventions, performance evaluations, and readiness assessments before transitioning into Assistant Manager positions. For many employees, the Internal Job Posting (IJP) process was among the most visible career opportunities available to them. The stakes, both organizationally and personally, were meaningful.

The intervention was designed to address both the psychological and behavioral dimensions of readiness. Rather than building a conventional interview preparation workshop, we wanted to create a learning experience that helped employees think differently about themselves and their potential and then equip them with practical tools to communicate that potential effectively. The program was delivered virtually across five batches, drawn from diverse operational backgrounds. Each batch participated in an eight-hour learning journey structured across two days, with four hours of facilitated engagement per day. The virtual format was chosen deliberately to maximize accessibility across locations while maintaining consistency in experience. The intervention was also informed by principles of adult learning, particularly the importance of relevance, self-direction, and immediate application of learning to real-world goals (Knowles *et al*., 2015).

Program Architecture

The intervention was built around five interconnected components, each addressing a different dimension of leadership readiness. The first component focused on growth mindset development. Drawing on Carol Dweck's foundational research on mindset (Dweck, 2006), participants were invited to examine their beliefs about capability, learning, effort, and development. Through structured reflection and facilitated discussion, employees explored how mindset shapes responses to feedback, setbacks, and career opportunities. The aim was to help participants understand leadership readiness as something that can be developed, not a fixed characteristic that either exists or does not.

The second component addressed role expectations and the leadership transition. Many participants held implicit assumptions about what leadership looks like, often associating it with formal authority, designation, or tenure. Discussions explored the specific behaviours and competencies associated with Management Trainee and Assistant Manager roles, helping participants understand how expectations shift as one moves from technical contribution to leadership contribution. The third component introduced structured communication approaches, with the Situation, Task, Action, Result (STAR) methodology as the primary framework.

Participants learned how to organize their experiences into structured responses that clearly conveyed their contributions, decision-making processes, and outcomes. Particular emphasis was placed on translating everyday work experiences into meaningful demonstrations of leadership behavior.

The fourth component focused on broader communication effectiveness: verbal clarity, professional self-presentation, active listening, and confidence in virtual environments. Given that the actual selection process was conducted online, we devoted specific attention to virtual presence camera engagement, vocal energy, concise communication, and managing the particular anxieties that come with being assessed through a screen. The fifth component was simulation-based learning. Participants engaged in mock interview exercises designed to replicate actual assessment conditions. These activities provided opportunities to apply everything discussed in realistic scenarios while receiving immediate developmental feedback. Crucially, the mock interviews were positioned not as evaluations but as rehearsal environments where making mistakes was explicitly encouraged as a learning mechanism. The use of simulations aligns with experiential learning principles, which emphasize learning through experience, reflection, and application (Kolb, 2015).

Feedback was integrated throughout rather than reserved for the end. Facilitators provided specific, balanced observations designed to help participants recognize strengths while identifying clear areas for refinement. The intent was to create a learning rhythm of practice, feedback, and adjustment that continued even after the program concluded.

WHAT WE OBSERVED ON THE GROUND

Designing a program is one thing. Running it across five batches of real employees, each with different histories, confidence levels, and assumptions about themselves, is quite another. The implementation experience surfaced observations that no design document could have predicted, and that ultimately shaped the most important lessons we took away.

Motivation was Unusually High, and that Changed Everything

The first thing that struck us was the quality of engagement. Unlike many mandatory organizational programs where attention wanders and participation is transactional, participants in this intervention were visibly invested. They arrived prepared with questions. They volunteered for activities. They stayed engaged across both days. Several participants reached out before the program began to ask what they should do to prepare.

The reason, in retrospect, is obvious: the learning was directly connected to something they genuinely wanted. The Management Trainee opportunity was visible, meaningful, and real. This observation is consistent with research suggesting that employees demonstrate higher engagement when learning is directly linked to career growth and advancement opportunities (LinkedIn Learning, 2024). Participants were not attending because they had to. They were attending because they believed it mattered. This observation became one of the most important findings from the entire experience: when employees can see a direct line between learning and a career outcome they care about, engagement transforms from compliance into ownership.

Strong Performers Often Had the Poorest Self-Awareness about Their Own Achievements

Paradoxically, some of the most capable participants were among those who initially struggled most not with the concepts, but with applying them to themselves. When asked to describe their accomplishments, many defaulted to describing their job responsibilities. When asked to identify examples of leadership behavior, several insisted they had none despite having just described situations that demonstrated exactly that. This was one of the most consistent and striking patterns across all batches. Employees who had been consistently recognized as

high performers genuinely did not see their everyday actions through the lens of leadership. They saw themselves as doing their jobs, not as demonstrating initiative, driving accountability, influencing outcomes, or developing others.

Facilitated reflection activities became critical here. By helping participants revisit their own experiences through a different frame, asking not what did you do, but what did you change, what did you solve, what did you build, we watched self-awareness shift in real-time. Responses became more specific, more confident, and more compelling.

Participants Often Described Teams, not Themselves

A related pattern emerged in how participants initially constructed their responses. When asked to describe achievements, many began with phrases like "our team delivered" or "we managed to solve," which are accurate but unhelpful in selection contexts. The collective framing reflected genuine humility and team orientation, both of which are admirable qualities. But it obscured individual contribution. The STAR methodology helped here more than any other single tool. Once participants understood that assessors were specifically looking for what they personally did, and not what their team did, responses shifted noticeably. The I/we distinction became a running thread through coaching conversations across all the batches.

People-Related Questions Were the Hardest

Participants generally handled technical problem-solving questions with confidence. Questions involving stakeholder management, conflict, influence, coaching, or navigating disagreement produced much thinner responses. This is consistent with what the literature on leadership transitions suggests: the shift from technical expert to people leader is often the most cognitively and emotionally demanding aspect of advancement. What was interesting was that many participants had relevant experience. They had managed conflict, coached peers, influenced decisions, and navigated difficult stakeholder dynamics. The challenge was not the experience. It was the willingness to claim it as meaningful leadership behavior. This reinforced the importance of mindset work as a foundation for communication skill development.

Mock Interviews Were Transformative

Of all the program components, the mock interview sessions consistently generated the most feedback and the most visible growth. Participants who entered the exercise visibly anxious frequently emerged from it noticeably more settled. Several described it as the first time they had ever practised for an interview in a supportive environment rather than simply hoping for the best on the day. The value of simulation extended beyond skill practice. It reduced the fear of the unknown. Participants who had experienced a realistic version of the assessment process before the actual process felt meaningfully more prepared, not just in terms of what to say, but in terms of how to manage the emotional experience of being assessed.

Virtual Presence Was an Underestimated Capability

One observation that surprised us was how many participants comfortable and competent in their everyday virtual working environments struggled when the context shifted to a formal assessment. Eye contact through the camera, pacing of speech, managing silence after a question, and presenting confidently without the energy of an in-person room: these require deliberate practice that most participants had simply never done. This suggests that virtual communication competence in assessment contexts may represent a distinct skill set that organizations should proactively develop, not assume employees will figure out on their own.

Feedback Was Welcomed When Positioned as Preparation

The finding aligns with contemporary research highlighting psychological safety as a critical enabler of

learning and behavioral development (Edmondson, 2019). Participants consistently demonstrated openness to developmental feedback more than we typically see in organizational training contexts. We believe this had everything to do with framing. Feedback in this program was explicitly positioned as preparation, not evaluation. Facilitators emphasized that observations were offered in service of the participant's performance in the actual selection process, not as a judgment of their worth. When feedback is offered within a psychologically safe environment and clearly linked to a goal the participant genuinely cares about, it becomes a resource rather than a threat. That distinction mattered enormously in how participants received and acted on what they were told.

Observable Outcomes

While the primary objective of the intervention was developmental rather than evaluative, several outcomes provided encouraging indications of participant readiness. A total of 162 employees participated across five batches. Following the intervention and subsequent internal selection processes, 61 participants progressed to the next stage of the organization's internal mobility pathway, representing approximately 38 percent of the participant group. Participant feedback indicated very high levels of satisfaction, with the program receiving an average satisfaction score of 9.7 out of 10. Participants particularly valued the mock interviews, developmental feedback, and practical application exercises that enabled them to practice in a psychologically safe environment.

KEY PRACTITIONER INSIGHTS

The implementation experience generated five insights that extend beyond the specifics of this program and offer broader relevance for learning and development professionals working on internal mobility and leadership pipeline initiatives. This distinction between performance and promotion readiness has been highlighted in talent management literature, which argues that leadership potential requires separate assessment and development mechanisms beyond performance evaluation (Silzer & Dowell, 2010).

Insight 1: High Performance Does not Automatically Signal Promotion Readiness

This is perhaps the most important and underappreciated insight from the entire experience. The competencies that make someone an excellent individual contributor- technical depth, operational reliability, and domain expertise are not the same competencies assessed during leadership selection processes. And the skills required to communicate readiness for leadership are different again from either.

Organizations that treat high performance as a sufficient proxy for promotion readiness will consistently find capable candidates struggling in selection processes, not because they are unready, but because they have not been prepared to demonstrate readiness. This is a developmental gap, not a talent gap. And, it is one that L&D functions are uniquely positioned to address. The practical implication: leadership readiness programs should be considered a standard component of internal mobility initiatives, not an optional enhancement. The investment in structured preparation pays dividends not only in selection outcomes but in the confidence and engagement of the employees who go through it.

Insight 2: Mindset is the Foundation, not the Decoration

We initially debated how much time to spend on mindset development versus practical interview preparation. Experience across five batches convinced us that the mindset component was not merely a warm-up; it was foundational to everything else. Participants who entered the program believing that leadership was something you either had or you didn't were significantly less able to engage with feedback, practice exercises, and developmental

suggestions. Those who began to internalize a developmental view, that readiness is built through experience, reflection, and practice, engaged more productively with every subsequent component.

The shift from "Am I ready?" to "How can I become ready?" is a small linguistic change with significant practical consequences. It moves participants from a fixed evaluation frame to a growth orientation that makes learning possible. For this reason, we recommend that mindset development be positioned at the start of any leadership readiness initiative, not as a theoretical detour, but as the psychological foundation on which everything else is built. These observations are consistent with Dweck's (2006) assertion that individuals who view abilities as developable are more likely to embrace challenge, persist through setbacks, and seek growth opportunities.

Insight 3: Simulation Accelerates Both Capability and Confidence

Practice matters more than instruction in leadership readiness development. The observation reflects experiential learning theory, which suggests that meaningful learning occurs when individuals actively engage in concrete experiences followed by reflection and application (Kolb, 2015). This is not a novel insight in adult learning theory, but it bears restating because many organizational programs still rely heavily on information transfer- presentations, discussions, frameworks, with limited time for application.

Across all five batches, the mock interview sessions generated the most participant-reported value and the most visible developmental growth. Theoretical understanding without practice leaves employees with knowledge they cannot access under pressure. Simulation creates the muscle memory and the emotional familiarity that turns understanding into performance. The broader implication for program design: experiential components should be treated as the core of leadership readiness initiatives, with conceptual elements serving as preparation for practice rather than the primary deliverable. Role plays, mock interviews, structured storytelling exercises, and peer feedback activities should be weighted accordingly.

Insight 4: Feedback Generates Momentum When Positioned as Preparation

The quality of feedback in a developmental program is less about the content of the observations and more about the environment in which they are delivered. Participants in this program received the same kinds of feedback that selection panels give candidates- observations about response structure, evidence specificity, communication clarity, and confidence. The difference was in the framing: here, feedback was offered as a tool for improvement before the stakes arrived, not as a verdict after the fact.

Research on learning transfer suggests that timely developmental feedback increases the likelihood that learning will be applied and sustained in workplace contexts (Burke & Hutchins, 2007). This created a markedly different response. Participants actively sought feedback, asked follow-up questions, and returned to earlier exercises to apply what they had learned. Learning became self-directed rather than facilitator-driven. For organizations seeking to build a genuine feedback culture, this offers a practical insight: the conditions under which feedback is given shape how it is received. Safety, purpose, and timing matter as much as content. Leadership readiness programs that establish these conditions create momentum that extends well beyond the program itself.

Insight 5: Career-Linked Learning Generates a Qualitatively Different Engagement

The engagement observed in this program was unlike what we typically see in organizational training contexts. It was not the polite participation of employees fulfilling a training requirement. It was the active investment of people who believed the learning mattered to their futures. Recent

workplace learning research has consistently shown that employees are most engaged when learning activities are connected to visible career pathways and future opportunities (LinkedIn Learning, 2024). That difference has significant implications. Employees are not disengaged from learning in general; they are often disengaged from learning that feels disconnected from their real aspirations. When the connection is made visible and credible, something different happens. People show up differently, engage more deeply, take feedback more seriously, and carry the learning further.

This suggests that one of the most powerful levers available to L&D functions is not curriculum design or delivery methodology; it is the degree to which learning is meaningfully connected to career pathways that employees can see and believe in. Organizations that integrate learning with internal mobility strategies, succession planning, and visible development opportunities are not simply improving training effectiveness. They are changing the relationship employees have with learning itself.

IMPLICATIONS FOR L&D LEADERS

The insights from this intervention point toward a set of practical directions for learning and development professionals seeking to strengthen internal talent pipelines and improve leadership succession outcomes. Move upstream in the employee journey. Leadership readiness development should not begin when an employee submits an application for an internal opportunity. By that point, the window for meaningful preparation is already narrow. Organizations benefit from embedding readiness-building into earlier career stages through stretch assignments, structured reflection, mentoring, and peer coaching, so that employees approach advancement opportunities having already begun the developmental journey.

Integrate L&D with talent management, not alongside it. The level of engagement observed in this program was inseparable from the fact that learning was directly connected to a real career opportunity. When learning and talent management operate as separate functions, this connection is often lost. Closer integration, where L&D professionals participate in succession planning conversations, design programs in response to identified pipeline gaps, and help shape the narrative around internal mobility, creates conditions where learning is valued as a strategic enabler rather than a compliance mechanism. This aligns with contemporary talent management approaches that position learning as a strategic driver of workforce capability and internal mobility (Deloitte, 2024).

Prioritize experience over information. The evidence from this intervention is consistent with the broader adult learning literature: people develop capability through doing, not just knowing. Programs that tilt heavily toward instruction and away from application will consistently underperform relative to their potential. The practical recommendation is to redesign the balance: spend less time presenting frameworks, more time facilitating practice. Experiential learning approaches continue to demonstrate stronger developmental outcomes than information-based interventions alone (Kolb, 2015).

Build feedback into structures, not just culture. “Building a feedback culture” is a worthy aspiration, but culture is difficult to mandate. Structured feedback mechanisms embedded into programs, review processes, and development conversations create the conditions where feedback happens regardless of culture. Leadership readiness programs are a natural vehicle for this: they provide a safe context, a clear development purpose, and a specific performance goal that gives feedback immediate relevance.

“Measure readiness, not just satisfaction” is the most commonly used learning evaluation metrics-attendance rates, satisfaction scores, and knowledge assessments tell us relatively little about whether participants are actually more ready for advancement.

Programmes aimed at leadership readiness should incorporate behavioral indicators: quality of practice responses, confidence levels before and after simulation, observed communication improvement, and, where possible, downstream data on selection outcomes and performance in new roles. This recommendation is consistent with higher-level training evaluation models that emphasize behavioral application and business impact rather than participant reaction alone (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

Address confidence as deliberately as competence. Many employees who struggle in selection processes are not deficient in capability; they are deficient in confidence. These are different problems requiring different interventions. Skill-building activities address the former; reflective practices, strengths-based conversations, and sustained encouragement address the latter. Effective leadership readiness programs attend to both.

LIMITATIONS

The observations presented in this article are derived from the implementation of a single leadership readiness intervention conducted within a healthcare services organization. While many of the insights may be relevant across industries and organizational contexts, outcomes may vary depending on organizational culture, talent management practices, leadership expectations, and participant characteristics. Additionally, the article reflects a practitioner's perspective informed by facilitation, participant observation, and program evaluation rather than a controlled research design. The intention is therefore not to establish causal relationships but to share practical insights that may inform future leadership development and internal mobility initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The woman who said she had never done anything like leadership eventually completed her mock interview. By the end of the session, she had described, in clear and specific terms, how she had identified a systemic problem, designed a solution, built her team's capability to implement it, and measured the results. Her example was compelling not because it was extraordinary but because it was entirely real. She went on to progress with her application for the Management Trainee role. That, in essence, is what leadership readiness programs can do at their best. They do not create capability that was not there. They create the conditions in which the capability that was always there can finally become visible to assessors, to the organization, and most importantly, to the employees themselves.

The experience described in this article suggests that many organizations are sitting on a significant underdeveloped asset: employees who have the potential, the commitment, and the track record to take on greater leadership responsibility, but who have not been given the structured support required to bridge the gap between performing and demonstrating. Building a leadership pipeline is not only about identifying high-potential employees. It is about preparing them. It is about helping them see what they are already doing as leadership, equipping them to communicate that in the moments that count, and providing the practice, feedback, and encouragement that builds the confidence to pursue opportunities they might otherwise have talked themselves out of.

Learning and development professionals are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between potential and readiness. The opportunity extends beyond preparing employees for interviews or assessments. It involves helping individuals recognize their own capabilities, build confidence in their potential, and develop the skills required to navigate increasingly complex career transitions. As organizations continue to invest in internal mobility and succession planning, the ability to make talent visible may become just as important as the ability to identify it. The opportunity and the responsibility are ours.

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Enhancing HR Efficiency Through Technology Integration: A Comparative Study Across Startups

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ABSTRACT

Technology integration has become a pivotal force in reshaping human resource (HR) functions, particularly within the agile and resource-constrained environment of startups. This research paper examines the impact of technology integration on HR efficiency within startup environments. Using a descriptive research design and convenience sampling, data were collected from respondents across multiple startups through a structured questionnaire. Statistical analyses included frequency distributions, chi-square tests, and factor analysis. Findings revealed that the vast majority of respondents believe technology integration has improved HR efficiency, demonstrating strong positive sentiment toward its adoption. Factor analysis extracted three underlying factors: Operational Efficiency and Satisfaction, Customization and Integration, and User Interface and Experience—highlighting the multidimensional nature of HR technology perception. A significant relationship was found between job role and perception of technology's impact, suggesting that hierarchical position influences technology attitudes, while education level showed no significant relationship with perceived effectiveness, indicating that hands-on experience may outweigh formal credentials. The study concludes that HR technology positively influences efficiency; but, continues to face persistent challenges related to customization, data security, and user experience, which startups must address to fully realize its potential.

KEYWORDS

Customisation and Integration, HR Solutions, Operational Efficiency and Satisfaction, User Interface and Experience, Workforce Management Compliance

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of technology has profoundly impacted various business functions, and Human Resources (HR) is no exception. In today's competitive and dynamic business environment, enhancing HR efficiency through technology integration is not merely a trend but a necessity (Parry & Tyson, 2011). This research paper explores the transformative potential of technology in streamlining HR processes, improving decision-making, and fostering a more agile HR function within startup organizations.

The global business landscape is experiencing unprecedented changes driven by technological advancements, the rise of remote work, and evolving employee expectations. These changes demand that HR departments adopt innovative technological solutions to remain relevant and efficient (Bondarouk & Ruel, 2009). Furthermore, startups, which often operate with limited resources and face intense competition, must leverage technology to optimize HR operations and gain a competitive edge (Gill & Kaur, 2015; Bura *et al*., 2025). Startups represent a

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unique organizational context characterized by flat hierarchies, rapid scaling, resource constraints, and high adaptability requirements. Unlike established corporations, startups seldom have dedicated, fully-staffed HR departments in their early stages. Consequently, HR technology becomes not merely an efficiency tool but a foundational enabler of workforce management, compliance, and culture building (Zhang, 2026).

Focusing on technology integration in HR has the potential to automate repetitive tasks, thereby freeing HR professionals to focus on strategic initiatives. Automating recruitment processes can significantly reduce time-to-hire, improve the quality of hires, and enhance the candidate experience (Ball, 2001). Similarly, technology can streamline employee onboarding, performance management, and training processes, leading to increased employee engagement and retention (Marler & Fisher, 2013; Mohlala *et al*., 2024).

Problem Statement

In the rapidly evolving business landscape, startups face unique challenges in optimizing HR functions due to limited resources, lack of dedicated HR personnel, and intense competition for talent. Traditional HR processes often prove inefficient and unable to meet dynamic organizational needs. This research addresses how technology integration can enhance HR efficiency in startups by examining employee perceptions across multiple startup organizations, identifying key factors, best practices, and potential obstacles.

Objectives of the Study

The following two major objectives guide this research paper:

1. To assess the perceived impact of HR technology integration on HR efficiency among employees across startups.
2. To identify underlying factors influencing HR efficiency and technology integration through factor analysis.

Significance of the Study

This study provides crucial insights into how technology integration impacts HR efficiency within startup environments. By evaluating employee perceptions and demographic influences, the research offers practical recommendations for optimizing HR technology, helping startups streamline HR processes, enhance decision-making, and make informed technology investments. Given the projected growth of artificial Intelligent (AI)-driven HR solutions in the startup sector (Kanagale & Junnaykar, 2025), understanding current perceptions and barriers is timely and valuable.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Numerous studies have explored the integration of technology in HR and its impact on organizational efficiency. Parry and Tyson (2011) emphasized that Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) have evolved from support tools to strategic partners in business operations, encompassing recruitment, performance management, and data analytics. In startup contexts, this evolution is accelerated by the need for rapid scaling and lean operations (Gill & Kaur, 2015). Recent scholarship has increasingly focused on AI-driven HR solutions in entrepreneurial ventures. Bura, Naayini, and Kamatala (2025) conducted a systematic review examining AI-powered HR tools tailored for startups, finding enhancements in recruitment efficiency, employee experience, and workforce analytics. However, persistent challenges including data privacy concerns, integration complexities, and the necessity for human-centric decision-making were identified.

Zhang (2026) synthesized evidence from 21 studies on AI applications in SME HRM, revealing that AI enhances operational efficiency primarily in recruitment and performance analytics. Persistent challenges including algorithmic bias, data privacy concerns, high costs, and skill gaps were highlighted. Similarly, Alexandro (2025) found that Innovation in Recruitment and Retention and Utilization of HR Analytics and AI have significant positive impacts on workforce productivity ($p = 0.000$) in

MSMEs and startups. Mohlala, Mehlwana, and Nekhavhambe (2024) conducted a systematic review of 100 research articles on HRIS and AI adoption in SMEs, quantifying that HRIS adoption can improve employee productivity by 29%, decision-making by 20%, and operational efficiency by 26%. Major challenges identified include high implementation costs, limited IT resources, and integration difficulties with AI technologies.

Despite documented benefits, challenges remain. Kovach and Cathcart (1999) pointed out that resistance to change among employees and HR professionals is a significant barrier to successful technology adoption, requiring cultural shifts, training, and support. Strohmeier (2007) discussed financial implications for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), noting that acquisition and maintenance costs can be prohibitive, and robust data security measures are essential. Khan, Khan, and Iqbal (2025) observed that startups face additional challenges including organizational culture adaptation and the digital divide.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive-analytical research design using a structured questionnaire to investigate the impact of technology integration on HR efficiency across startups, aiming to comprehensively explore employee perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding HR technology effectiveness. The target population consisted of professionals employed across various startups engaged with or impacted by HR processes and technological integrations, with data gathered from individuals working in startups located in Trivandrum District, Kerala. Using convenience sampling, 149 respondents participated in the research. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire disseminated via Google Forms, while secondary data were extracted from company websites, articles, magazines, reports, and scholarly journals over a study duration spanning May 28 to August 20, 2024. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, employing frequency distribution tables, chi-square tests, and factor analysis (including KMO and Bartlett's test, total variance explained, and rotated component matrix).

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (*N* = 149)*			
Characteristic	**Category**	**Frequency (*n*)**	**Percentage (%)**
Age	Under 25	74	49.7
	25–34	62	41.6
	35–44	7	4.7
	45–54	5	3.4
	55+	1	0.7
Gender	Male	116	77.9
	Female	33	22.1
Education	High school or below	31	20.8
	Bachelor's degree	77	51.7
	Master's degree	41	27.5
Geographic Location	Urban	65	43.6
	Rural	50	33.6
	Sub-urban	34	22.8
Current Job Role	Intern	83	55.7
	C-level	33	22.1
	Executive	17	11.4
	Employee	16	10.7
Tenure	Less than 3 months	100	67.1
	More than 6 months	33	22.1
	Less than 1 month	16	10.7

Demographics: Among 149 respondents, 49.7% were under 25 years old, and 41.6% were aged 25-34, indicating a younger demographic typical of startup workforces. Males comprised 77.9% of participants. Bachelor's degree holders were most common (51.7%), followed by master's degree holders (27.5%). Geographically, 43.6% resided in urban areas, 33.6% in rural, and 22.8% in sub-urban areas. Interns formed the largest job role group (55.7%), with C-level executives at 22.1%. The

majority (67.1%) had been with their company for less than three months, reflecting the fluid nature of startup employment (Table 1).

Perception of HR Technology: An overwhelming majority (89.3%) believed technology integration improved HR efficiency. Regarding overall HR technology effectiveness, 45.0% rated it as "Neutral," 33.6% as "Effective," 10.7% as "Very Effective," and 10.7% as "Very Ineffective (Table 2)."

Table 2: Rating of Overall HR Technology Effectiveness

Rating of Overall HR Technology Effectiveness		
Rating	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Very ineffective	16	10.7
Ineffective	0	0
Neutral	67	45
Effective	50	33.6
Very effective	16	10.7
Total	149	100

Chi-Square Results

a. Crosstabulation: Current Job Role × Perception of Technology's Impact on HR Efficiency

Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between an employee's current job role and their perception of whether technology integration has improved HR efficiency in their company.

A chi-square test examined the relationship between current job role and perception of technology's impact on HR efficiency. All C-level executives (*n*=33), employees (*n*=16), and executives (*n*=17) believed technology improved HR efficiency. Among interns (*n*=83), 67 believed so, while 16 did not (Table 3).

Table 3: Crosstabulation Summary- Current Job Role × Perception of Technology's Impact on HR Efficiency

Current Job Role	No	Yes	Total
C-level	0	33	33
Employee	0	16	16
Executive	0	17	17
Intern	16	67	83
Total	16	133	149

b. Crosstabulation: Education Level × Rating of HR Technology Effectiveness

Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between an employee's highest level of education and their rating of the overall effectiveness of HR technology in their company (Table 4).

Table 4: Crosstabulation Summary-Education Level × Rating of HR Technology Effectiveness

Education Level	Effective	Neutral	Very Effective	Very Ineffective	Total
Bachelor's degree	27	35	8	7	77
High school or below	9	15	4	3	31
Master's degree	14	17	4	6	41
Total	50	67	16	16	149

Education level and effectiveness rating: A second chi-square test examined the relationship between highest education level and rating of overall HR technology effectiveness. For bachelor's degree holders (n=77), 27 rated "Effective," 35 "Neutral," 8 "Very Effective," and 7 "Very Ineffective." For high school or below (n=31), 9 "Effective," 15 "Neutral," 4 "Very Effective," 3 "Very Ineffective." For master's degree holders (n=41), 14 "Effective," 17 "Neutral," 4 "Very Effective," 6 "Very Ineffective (Table 5)."

Table 5: Chi-Square Test Summary

Test	Variables	Value	Df	p
Pearson Chi-Square	Current Job Role × Perception of Technology's Impact	14.253	3	0.003
	Education Level × Rating of HR Technology Effectiveness	1.43	6	0.964

The Pearson chi-square value was 14.253 (df = 3, p =.003). Since p <.05, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a significant relationship between job role and perception of technology's impact on HR efficiency. This finding aligns with Alexandro (2025), who noted that leadership roles often demonstrate stronger technology adoption orientation.

The Pearson chi-square value was 1.430 (df = 6, p =.964). Since p >.05, the null hypothesis was retained: no significant relationship exists between education level and perceived effectiveness of HR technology. This suggests that hands-on experience and training may outweigh formal education in shaping technology attitudes.

Exploratory Factor Analysis: Factors Influencing HR Efficiency and Technology Integration

A principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation was conducted to identify underlying factors influencing HR efficiency and technology integration. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.922, indicating excellent factorability, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(45) = 746.313$, $p < .001$, confirming that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis (Table 6).

Three factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1.0 were extracted, collectively accounting for 73.38% of the total variance. The first factor (eigenvalue = 4.518) explained 45.18% of the variance and was labelled Operational Efficiency and Satisfaction. This factor demonstrated strong loadings from items measuring impact on employee engagement (0.742), overall satisfaction with HR technology (0.715), cost-effectiveness (0.711), improvement in recruitment processes (0.707), satisfaction with training and support (0.658), and ease of use in daily tasks (0.574).

The second factor (eigenvalue = 1.80) explained 18.00% of the variance and was labelled Customisation and Integration, with high loadings from items measuring flexibility and customisation (0.801) and system integration (0.681 and 0.46). The third factor (eigenvalue = 1.02) explained 10.20% of the variance and was labelled User Interface and Experience, with a single high loading from the item measuring user-friendliness of the user interface (0.868). Factor loadings below 0.46 were omitted from the interpretation to enhance clarity. These three factors collectively represent the key dimensions through which employees perceive the effectiveness of HR technology in startup environments.

DISCUSSION

The first objective assessed the perceived impact of HR technology integration on HR efficiency. The finding that 89.3% of respondents believe technology

Table 6: Pattern Component Matrix, Eigen Values and Total Variance Percentage for Components obtained by Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation Method

Variables	Component		
	1	2	3
How has HR technology impacted employee engagement?	0.742		
Overall, how satisfied are you with the HR technology used?	0.715		
How cost-effective is the HR technology for your company?	0.711		
To what extent has HR technology improved recruitment processes?	0.707		
How satisfied are you with training and support for HR technology?	0.658		
How easy is the HR technology to use in daily tasks?	0.574		
How flexible and customizable is the HR technology?		0.801	
How well does HR technology integrate with other systems?	0.538	0.681	
How well does HR technology integrate with other systems? (duplicate)		0.46	
How user-friendly is the user interface (UI) of the HR technology?			0.868
Eigen values	4.518	1.8	1.02
Percentage of total variance	45.18	18	10.2
Note: Factor loadings <0.46 have been omitted from the table.			

has improved HR efficiency aligns with Parry and Tyson (2011), Bondarouk and Ruel (2009), and recent evidence from Mohlala *et al*. (2024) quantifying a 26% operational efficiency gain. However, the mixed effectiveness ratings—45% neutral and 10.7% very ineffective—suggest that perception of improvement does not always translate into high satisfaction, consistent with Strohmeier's (2007) observation that implementation challenges often moderate outcomes and Bura *et al*.'s (2025) identification of persistent data privacy and integration concerns.

The significant relationship between job role and perception (p =.003) indicates that higher-level roles (C-level, executives) uniformly perceive positive impacts, while interns show more variability. This may reflect differential exposure to HR technology, varying expectations based on organizational position, or differences in technology literacy across hierarchical levels. This finding extends Zhang's (2026) observation that adoption pathways vary by organizational role. The absence of a significant relationship between education level and perceived effectiveness (p =.964) suggests that practical training and hands-on experience may outweigh formal credentials in shaping technology attitudes. This supports Kovach and Cathcart's (1999) emphasis on organizational support and training over educational background.

The second objective identified three underlying factors influencing HR efficiency. The emergence of Operational Efficiency and Satisfaction as the primary factor (55.18% initial variance) supports Ball's (2001) argument that automation of administrative tasks drives efficiency gains. The Customization and Integration factor aligns with Gill and Kaur's (2015) observation that startups require flexible, scalable HR solutions and with Zhang's (2026) emphasis on integration challenges. The User Interface and Experience factor confirms Marler and Fisher's (2013) emphasis on user- centred design for technology adoption and aligns with Marliyas *et al*. (2026) advocacy for human- centred AI systems.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR STARTUPS

Startups should prioritize HR technologies that demonstrate clear operational benefits (Factor 1), offer customization and seamless integration with existing systems (Factor 2), and provide intuitive user interfaces (Factor 3). The 10.7% "Very Ineffective" ratings suggest that some organizations face significant implementation barriers, possibly related to training, data security, or cost-effectiveness. Based on the recent literature (Alexandro, 2025; Bura *et al*., 2025), startups are advised to adopt a hybrid human-AI recruitment model, invest in scalable HRIS solutions, and ensure robust data security measures.

Limitations

This study has several limitations: sample bias (majority interns, short tenure), self-reporting bias, cross-sectional design, geographic restriction to Trivandrum District, and time constraints. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, larger balanced samples across multiple geographic regions, and objective measures of HR efficiency alongside perceptual data.

CONCLUSION

This research paper addressed two major objectives: assessing the perceived impact of HR technology integration on HR efficiency and identifying underlying factors influencing HR efficiency across startups. Findings show HR technology is overwhelmingly perceived as beneficial, but effectiveness ratings remain mixed. A significant relationship exists between job role and perception of technology's impact, while education level shows no significant influence. Factor analysis extracted three factors—Operational Efficiency and Satisfaction, Customization and Integration, and User Interface and Experience. These factors highlight that successful HR technology integration depends on operational benefits, adaptability, and user- centered design. For startups, addressing challenges in customization, data security, training, and cost-effectiveness is critical. Future

research should examine long-term impacts of AI-driven HR adoption and interventions addressing neutral and negative perceptions.

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Experiential Learning Strategies for Student Self-Growth

Rakesh N.*

ABSTRACT

The transition from academic instruction to professional readiness remains a persistent gap in higher education, particularly within college soft-skills development programs. This paper examines how experiential learning initiatives can be deliberately designed to motivate college students to invest in personal growth and cultivate an authentic openness to guidance from learned professionals. Drawing on Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, reflective practice models, peer-learning structures, and project-based learning frameworks, the study presents the SELF-GROW Model, a conceptual framework structured around four actionable pillars: Self-Awareness Activation, Experiential Engagement, Learning Integration, and Feedback-Guided Ownership of Growth. The paper synthesises existing literature, proposes practical implementation strategies for collegiate soft-skills departments, and includes conceptual diagrams and implementation roadmaps designed for adaptation in MS Word SmartArt and PowerPoint formats. Findings from the reviewed literature indicate that structured experiential interventions, when anchored in mentorship by domain professionals and scaffolded by reflective activities, yield measurable gains in student self-efficacy, metacognitive awareness, and receptivity to developmental feedback. The paper concludes with implications for curriculum designers, faculty, and institutional leadership committed to cultivating future-ready graduates.

KEYWORDS

Kolb's Cycle, Reflective Practice, Peer Learning, Professional Mentorship, Self-Grow Model

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions in India and around the world face a recurring challenge: graduates who are academically proficient but professionally underprepared. Employers consistently report that new hires lack critical soft competencies: communication, self-awareness, adaptability, and the ability to receive and act on feedback (National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2022). This gap is not merely a reflection of curricular lacunae; it points to a deeper motivational and dispositional issue. Many students do not perceive self-development as urgent or personally relevant, and a significant proportion view guidance from faculty or industry professionals with scepticism or passive disinterest (Bandura, 1997).

Experiential learning offers a promising redress. Unlike didactic instruction, which positions students as passive recipients of knowledge, experiential approaches engage learners as active agents who construct understanding through doing, reflecting, and connecting experience to theory (Kolb, 1984). When implemented thoughtfully within soft skills programs, such approaches can activate intrinsic motivation, deepen self-awareness, and help students recognise the value of mentorship and professional counsel. This paper addresses how collegiate soft-skills departments can design and deliver experiential learning initiatives that simultaneously cultivate motivation for personal development and a receptive orientation toward professional guidance. The paper proposes the SELF-GROW Model—a

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practical, theoretically grounded framework —along with implementation roadmaps and diagrammatic tools that are editable for institutional use.

Rationale

The case for experiential soft-skills education rests on converging evidence from educational psychology, organisational behaviour, and workforce-readiness research. Soft skills encompassing interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, collaboration, and self-management are now considered as important as technical skills by over 90% of employers surveyed globally (World Economic Forum, 2023). However, college curricula often relegate these competencies to add-on workshops or electives rather than integrating them into the learning architecture.

The motivational dimension is equally critical. Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that human motivation is strongest when individuals feel autonomous, competent, and related to others. Traditional lecture-based soft skills sessions rarely satisfy these three psychological needs. In contrast, experiential formats role-plays, live projects, mentorship conversations, and reflective journals directly address autonomy (through personal choice and agency), competence (through skill application in real contexts), and relatedness (through peer and professional interaction). The rationale for this paper, therefore, lies in the urgent need to bridge motivational design with experiential pedagogy in Indian collegiate settings.

OBJECTIVES

This paper pursues the following objectives:

- To review existing literature on experiential learning models and their application to soft skills development at the college level.
- To identify pedagogical strategies that foster intrinsic motivation for personal growth among college students.
- To examine the role of professional mentorship and guided feedback in shaping student receptivity to self-improvement.
- To propose the SELF-GROW Model, a structured framework for experiential soft skills programing in collegiate settings.
- To develop conceptual diagrams and an implementation roadmap that practitioners can adapt for institutional deployment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Experiential Learning: Theoretical Foundations

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), formulated in 1984, remains the foundational architecture for experiential education. Kolb proposed a four-stage learning cycle: Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualisation (AC), and Active Experimentation (AE). Learning occurs optimally when a learner cycles through all four stages, moving from doing to reflecting, conceptualizing, and re-experimenting (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). When applied to soft skills development, this cycle moves students from lived interpersonal experiences through structured reflection, to the construction of personal communication frameworks, and then to deliberate practice in new social contexts.

Several studies affirm ELT's efficacy in professional development contexts. Healey and Jenkins (2000) demonstrated that diverse learner styles mapped onto Kolb's cycle respond differently to pedagogical formats; soft skills instructors can therefore design multimodal activities that accommodate convergers, divergers, assimilators, and accommodators within the same cohort. Moon (2004) extended the reflective dimension, arguing that deep reflection, not surface description, is the catalyst for genuine personal growth.

Reflective Practice and Metacognitive Awareness

Donald Schon's (1983) influential work on the reflective practitioner introduced the concept of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action processes by which professionals revise their mental models during and after experience. For students, scaffolded reflective practice (through journals, structured debriefs, or peer dialogue) cultivates

metacognitive awareness: the ability to observe and regulate one's own thinking and behaviour (Boud *et al*., 1985). Metacognition, in turn, is strongly associated with self-directed learning behavior and openness to external feedback (Zimmerman, 2002). Programs that integrate structured reflection activities have been shown to significantly improve students' self-efficacy for professional communication (Eich, 2008).

Peer Learning as a Motivational Lever

Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) implies that learning is most generative when it occurs in the company of more capable peers or mentors. Within soft skills programs, structured peer learning co-coaching dyads, peer feedback panels, and group debriefs leverage social comparison and collaborative sense-making to deepen personal insight. Johnson and Johnson (2009) established that cooperative learning structures consistently outperform competitive and individualistic approaches in developing interpersonal competencies. Importantly, peer feedback is often received as less threatening than faculty evaluation, enabling more candid self-disclosure and genuine developmental dialogue (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Project-Based Learning and Authentic Challenge

Project-based learning (PBL) situates students in authentic, ill-structured problems that require sustained collaboration, communication, and self-regulation over time (Larmer *et al*., 2015). Unlike hypothetical scenarios, real-world projects generate the motivational conditions described by SDT: students experience agency over process, visible impact of their efforts, and meaningful relationships with peers and stakeholders. Studies in Indian higher education contexts indicate that PBL significantly increases student engagement, communication confidence, and willingness to seek expert guidance (Kumar & Hsiao, 2007).

Professional Mentorship and the Valuation of Expert Guidance

A recurring challenge in collegiate soft skills programs is student resistance to professional advice. Research in adult learning suggests that this resistance is not wilful defiance but often stems from a mismatch between the student's self-concept and the implicit critique embedded in unsolicited feedback (Dweck, 2006). Mentorship structures that position professionals as collaborative guides rather than evaluators reduce threat responses and open motivational channels for growth (Zachary, 2012). Structured mentorship programs, in which students self-select goals and receive guidance aligned with those goals, have demonstrated stronger outcomes in the development of professional communication than standard lecture-based instruction (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). The literature collectively establishes that motivation for self-development is not a stable trait but a dynamic, situationally constructed disposition. Experiential learning environments that integrate reflection, peer dialogue, authentic challenge, and mentorship create the conditions under which this motivation can be reliably activated and sustained.

METHOD

This paper adopts a conceptual-analytical approach, drawing on a systematic review of peer-reviewed journal articles, foundational texts, and practitioner literature published between 1980 and 2024. Database searches were conducted across Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, and ResearchGate using key terms including 'experiential learning soft skills college,' 'Kolb's cycle professional development,' 'peer learning student motivation,' 'project-based learning higher education India,' and 'mentorship receptivity undergraduate students.' Inclusion criteria required that sources address either (a) experiential learning in post-secondary contexts, (b) motivational constructs relevant to personal development, or (c) the design of soft skills programs at the collegiate level. Thematic synthesis was used to identify convergent findings and translate them into the SELF-GROW framework.

RESULTS

The Self-Grow Model: A Proposed Framework

Synthesising the reviewed literature, this paper proposes the SELF-GROW Model, a four-pillar framework for experiential soft-skills programing in collegiate contexts. The acronym SELF-GROW represents two interlinked stages of the student journey (Fig. 1):

SELF-GROW MODEL – Overview
S - Self-Awareness Activation: Students identify personal strengths, blind spots, and communication patterns through psychometric tools, peer feedback, and reflective inventories.
E - **Experiential Engagement:** Students participate in structured activities (role-plays, live projects, industry visits, simulation exercises) designed to surface authentic behavioral tendencies.
L - **Learning Integration**: Students connect experiential data to conceptual frameworks through facilitated debrief sessions, guided journaling, and conceptual mapping.
F - Feedback-Guided Ownership of Growth: Students receive structured feedback from peers and professionals, set personal development goals, and commit to action plans.
G - Goal-Aligned Mentoring: Professional mentors engage students in conversations aligned to individually chosen growth objectives.
R - Reflective Review: Students maintain reflective logs throughout the program period, tracking progress against self-set benchmarks.
O - Observable Behavioral Outcomes: Faculty and mentors observe and document soft skill demonstrations in controlled real-world contexts.
W - Widened Professional Receptivity: Students develop an authentic appreciation for expert guidance, evidenced by self-reported openness and behavioral adaptations.

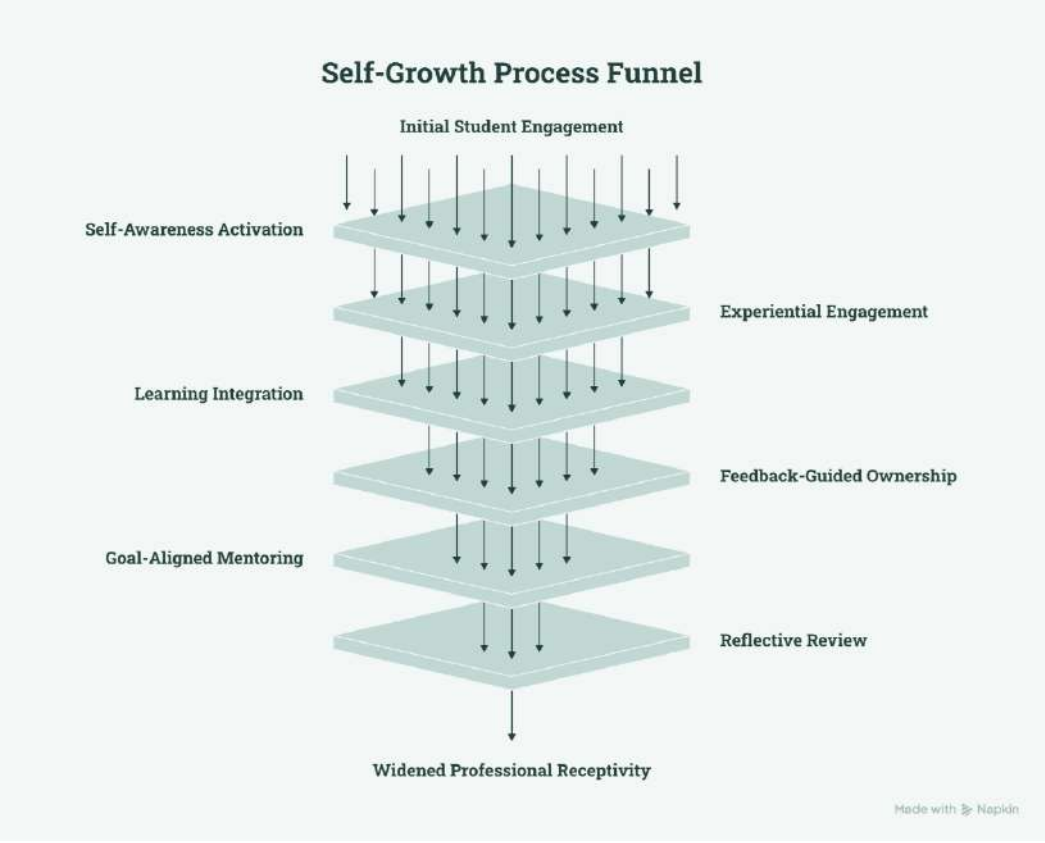

Fig. 1: Self-Growth Process Funnel

Adapted Kolb's Cycle for Soft Skills Development

Figure 2 presents an adaptation of Kolb's four-stage cycle, contextualized for collegiate soft skills instruction. Each stage maps to a specific classroom or cocurricular activity:

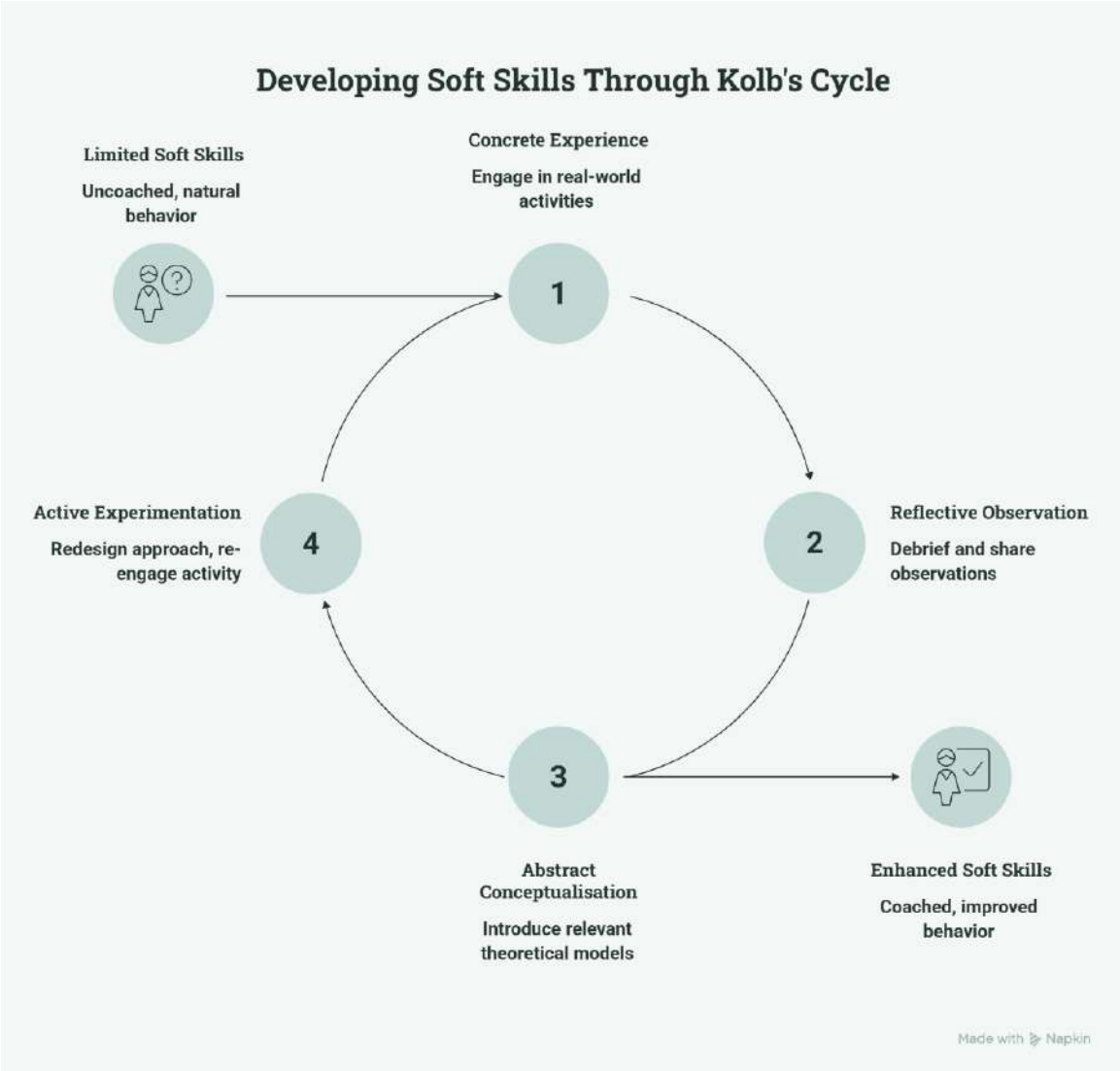

Fig. 2: Developing Soft Skills through Kolb"s Cycle

Framework for Student Self-Motivation: The Ownership Ladder

A recurring finding in the reviewed literature is that motivation for personal development is not binary; it exists on a continuum. Based on the SDT constructs of Deci and Ryan (1985) and Dweck's (2006) growth mindset theory, this paper proposes the Ownership Ladder, a five-level model of student self-motivation (Fig. 3):

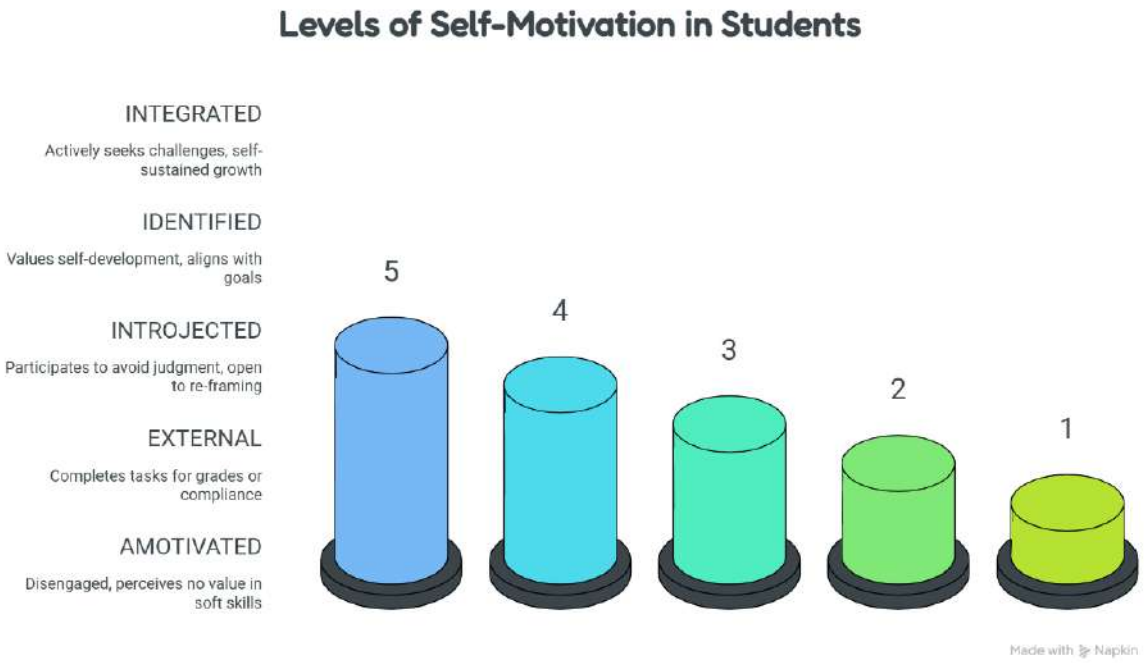

Fig. 3: Levels of Self-motivation in Students

Implementation Roadmap for Collegiate Soft Skills Departments

Table 1 presents a semester-long implementation roadmap, organized into four phases. It is designed for adaptation to Indian university semester structures and can be customised for 15–18-weeks programs.

Table 1: Semester-Long Implementation Roadmap for Experiential Soft Skills Programing

Phase	Timeline	Key Activities	Outcomes & Indicators
Phase 1: Orientation & Self-Discovery	Weeks 1–3	Psychometric profiling (MBTI/DISC/Big Five); Johari Window workshop; Strengths journaling; Peer introduction circles	Students identify 3 personal development areas; initial self-awareness score benchmarked
Phase 2: Experiential Engagement	Weeks 4–9	Role-play scenarios; Group negotiation tasks; Collaborative live project (community/ industry partner); Industry professional guest sessions	Documented behavioral observations; Peer feedback reports; Reflective journal entries Week 4–9
Phase 3: Mentored Reflection	Weeks 10–13	One-on-one mentoring conversations with assigned industry professionals; Structured goal-setting templates; Mid-point portfolio review	Personal Development Plans (PDPs) submitted; Mentor feedback incorporated; Evidence of goal adjustment
Phase 4: Integration & Showcase	Weeks 14–18	Capstone presentation of personal growth portfolio; Peer panel evaluation; Final reflective essay; Faculty-mentor triangulated assessment	Observable behaviour change documented; Student self-report of professional openness; Program evaluation data collected.

The Mentor-Student Receptivity Bridge

A critical enabler of the SELF-GROW framework is the structured orientation of students toward professional mentorship. The literature identifies a consistent barrier: students intellectually acknowledge the value of expert guidance but behaviorally resist it when it touches identity-relevant domains (Dweck, 2006; Zachary, 2012). This paper proposes a five-element Receptivity Bridge protocol to address this (Fig. 4):

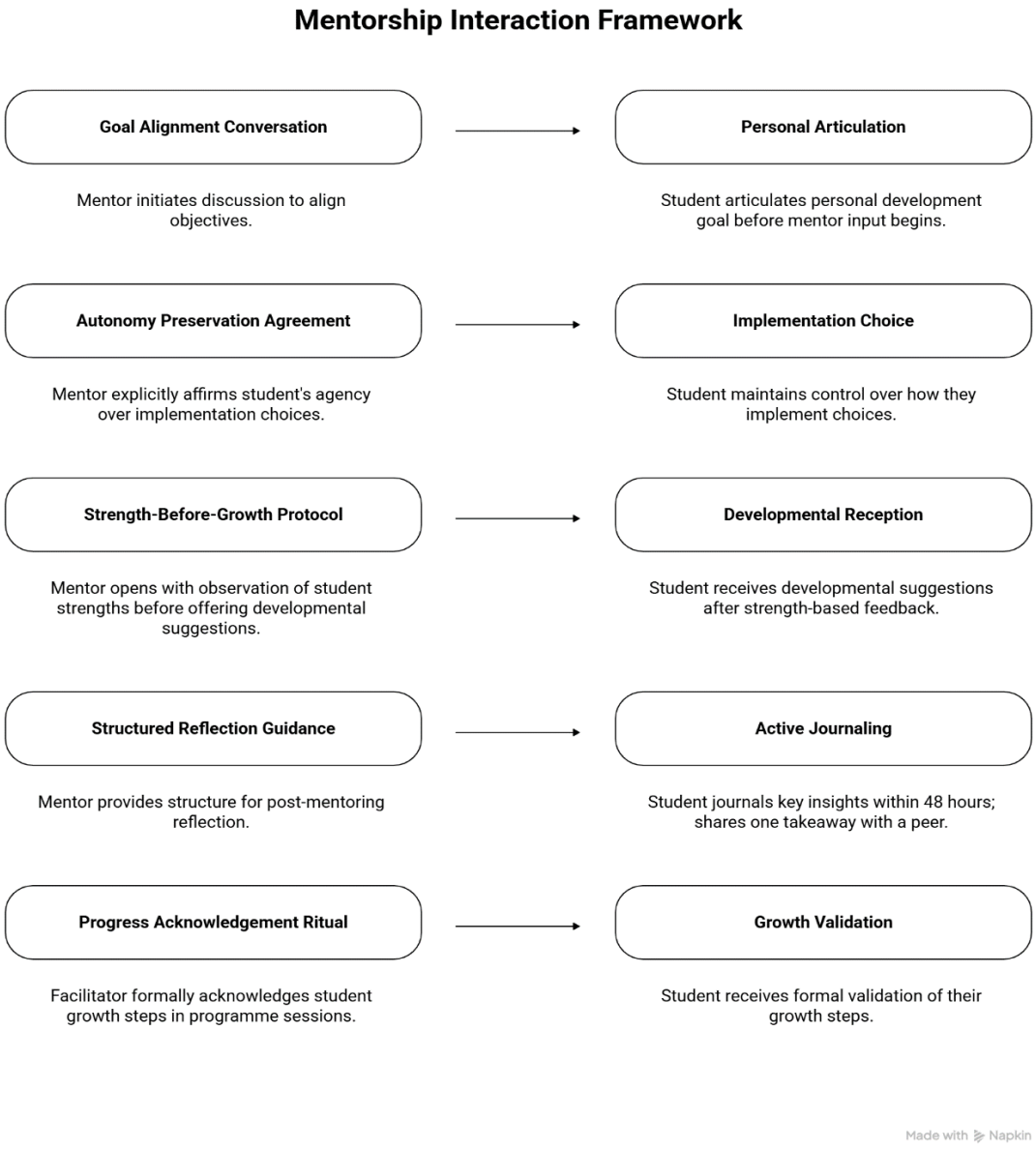

Fig. 4: Mentorship Interaction Framework

DISCUSSION

The SELF-GROW Model and its associated tools represent a departure from the prevalent 'workshop and forget' model of soft skills training in Indian colleges—several observations from the synthesized literature merit discussion. First, the model's sequence is deliberate. Self-awareness activation must precede experiential engagement; without a calibrated sense of one's starting point, students lack the reference frame to interpret feedback meaningfully. Psychometric tools and structured peer introductions provide this baseline without the reductionism of fixed labels. Students are encouraged to view their profiles as dynamic starting points, consistent with Dweck's (2006) growth mindset construct.

Second, the role of professional mentors as collaborators rather than evaluators represents a significant design choice. Research by Zachary (2012) and Crisp and Cruz (2009) consistently shows that the structural positioning of the mentor, whether as an authority figure or a developmental ally, determines the degree of student receptivity. Program that invest time in preparing mentors for

collaborative dialogue yield substantially better student outcomes than those that deploy mentors primarily as evaluators. Third, the Ownership Ladder highlights the heterogeneity within any student cohort regarding motivational readiness. A program designed for Level 4 students (Identified motivation) will fail Level 2 students (External motivation) unless differentiated scaffolding is provided. Facilitators are therefore encouraged to conduct brief motivational orientation surveys at program commencement and use the Ladder to design tiered engagement strategies.

Fourth, the implementation roadmap acknowledges the institutional realities of Indian colleges: fixed academic calendars, large cohort sizes, and limited faculty-to-student ratios. The roadmap is intentionally modular; departments may implement individual phases as standalone interventions before committing to the full semester model. A pilot with Phase 1 and Phase 2 activities, for instance, can generate sufficient evidence of impact to build institutional support for program expansion. Finally, the adapted Kolb cycle for soft skills underscores that reflection is not a passive, spontaneous activity; it must be triggered, structured, and scaffolded. Busy students will not reflect deeply unless the program architecture makes reflection a required, visible, and valued activity. The inclusion of reflective journals as assessable artefacts (not merely formative tools) shifts the institutional signal about what counts as learning in soft skills development.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the motivational gap in collegiate soft skills development is not primarily a content problem but a pedagogical and relational one. Students who see themselves as active architects of their own growth rather than passive recipients of prescriptive advice are significantly more likely to engage authentically in the developmental process and value the contributions of learned professionals. The SELF-GROW Model offers a structured, theoretically grounded response to this challenge. By sequencing self-awareness, experiential engagement, reflective integration, and mentored feedback within a coherent program arc, collegiate soft-skills departments can create the conditions in which intrinsic motivation for self-development becomes accessible and sustainable across diverse student cohorts. The conceptual diagrams and implementation roadmap included in this paper are designed to be immediately usable by practitioners and adaptable to a range of institutional contexts.

Future research should examine the longitudinal effects of SELF-GROW-aligned programs on graduate employment outcomes, supervisor-rated soft skill proficiency, and student well-being indicators. Empirical studies using quasi-experimental designs across Indian collegiate contexts would strengthen the evidence base for these recommendations.

IMPLICATIONS

For Curriculum Designers

Experiential learning elements should be embedded as core curricular components rather than supplementary add-ons. The SELF-GROW Model provides a semester-length architecture that can be formally credit-linked, ensuring institutional legitimacy and sustained student engagement.

For Faculty and Soft Skills Facilitators

Facilitators must be trained in reflective debriefing techniques, not merely content delivery. The shift from teacher-as-expert to teacher-as-learning-designer requires a professional development investment, particularly in motivational interviewing, group facilitation, and constructive feedback design.

For Industry Professionals and Mentors

Corporate mentors engaged in collegiate programs benefit from structured preparation on the Receptivity Bridge protocol. Briefing sessions that orient mentors to adopt collaborative rather than evaluative stances and to begin mentoring conversations with student-defined goals will maximise the developmental impact of their involvement.

For Institutional Leadership

Colleges committed to holistic student development must signal this commitment through resource allocation, assessment policy reform, and the formal recognition of soft-skill attainment in students' academic records. The implementation roadmap presented in this paper provides a phased entry point for institutions at various stages of readiness, from minimal-infrastructure pilots to full semester-long program embeddings.

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From Catalogue to Architecture: A Practitioner's Notes on Building Evidence-Led, AI-Enabled Learning at Industrial Scale

Shreeram Chintamani Ranade*

ABSTRACT

Three years ago, if you had asked me how we decided what training to run, I would have given you an answer dressed up in the language of strategy but built, underneath, on three things: what we ran last year, what a senior leader had asked for in a corridor conversation, and what a vendor happened to be selling well at the time. I do not say this to be cynical. It is simply how a great deal of corporate learning and development has worked, in India and elsewhere, for a long time. We were custodians of a catalogue. People came to us with requests, we matched the request to a program, and we measured our success largely by how many people we put through how many days of training.

What has changed for me, and for the team I work with at a large, diversified manufacturing group, is not that we discovered some new theory of adult learning. The theories were always there, and they were mostly right. What changed is that two things became cheap and accessible at roughly the same time: usable organizational data, and artificial intelligence (AI) that could help us make sense of it. Together they have quietly moved the centre of gravity of the work. We spend less time being custodians of a catalogue and more time being architects of a system. This essay is an attempt to describe that shift honestly, including the parts we have got wrong, for colleagues who are somewhere on the same road.

KEYWORDS

AI Inside the Work, Buying intimacy back, Evidence Test, List of Competencies, Real Risk

THE INDUCTION THAT WOULD NOT FIT IN YOUR HEAD

Let me start with the problem that forced the change, because for us it arrived as a logistics problem long before it became a philosophical one. Last year we inducted a cohort of just over eleven hundred graduate engineer trainees across fourteen business units, in a single intake. Anyone who has run a graduate program knows that the numbers do not behave in a linear way. A batch of forty you can hold in your head. You know who is struggling, who is quietly brilliant, who has gone silent and needs a call before the silence hardens into a resignation letter. At eleven hundred, spread across plants and offices in a dozen geographies, that intimate knowledge collapses. You simply cannot hold the cohort in your head. And the temptation, when a cohort gets too large to feel, is to stop trying to make it feel personal at all, to process people rather than develop them.

We were not willing to make that trade, but we also could not pretend the scale away. So the real question became a narrow and practical one: how do you preserve something of the intimacy of a batch of forty when you are responsible for a batch of eleven hundred? That question, more than any technology trend or conference keynote, is what pushed us towards data and the newer tools. Not because they were fashionable because they turned out to be the

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only way to buy back the attention that scale had taken from us.

THE QUIET END OF THE SURVEY

The first place this played out was in how we decide what people actually need to learn. The traditional instrument here is the training needs survey. You send a form, people tick boxes, you tabulate the results, and you build a calendar around the boxes that got the most ticks. The trouble with this method, which most of us know and few of us say out loud, is that people are poor reporters of their own development needs. They tell you what is socially acceptable to want. They ask for the workshop that sounds impressive, or the one their manager attended last quarter, or the topic that happens to be in the business press that month. They rarely tell you about the gap they are quietly embarrassed by. And a manager filling in a form on behalf of forty reports will reach for whatever is easiest to write, not for what is truest.

For one of our businesses, an energy operation with a workforce of roughly two thousand two hundred, we tried something different. Instead of asking people what they needed, we read what the organization had already written down about them. We took a full cycle of performance reviews, the real ones, with their qualitative comments and their ratings, and we treated that body of writing as evidence about capability gaps. This is precisely the kind of task that was impractical by hand and is now within reach with the right tooling. Two thousand reviews is far too much to read and code manually with any consistency, but it is a comfortable amount for a structured, AI-assisted reading that clusters the comments into themes and surfaces the language people actually use about each other's strengths and shortfalls.

What came back was more honest than any survey we had run. The dominant needs were not the glamorous ones. They were technical and plant-operations depth, basic and intermediate data handling in spreadsheets, first-line leadership, fluency in the core enterprise systems that run the business, and, yes, a growing and slightly anxious appetite for understanding the new digital and AI tools. None of these were a surprise in isolation. What was new was that we could see their relative weight, expressed in the words of supervisors writing about real people, rather than in the abstract preferences of a tick-box. We had moved from asking "what do you want?" to reading "what does the evidence already say?" and the two answers were not the same.

I want to be careful here, because this is exactly the point where a practitioner essay tips into overstatement. We did not build a flawless predictive model of organizational capability. We built a more honest mirror. The analysis still needed human judgment to interpret, and several of the themes meant nothing until we had sat with the line managers and asked them what they were really seeing. But the starting point was evidence rather than opinion, and that one change improved the quality of every conversation that followed it.

AI INSIDE THE WORK, NOT JUST ON THE CALENDAR

It is worth separating two very different ways that AI has entered our work, because they are constantly conflated and they ask very different things of us. The first is AI as a subject we teach. The second is AI as a tool we use to do our own jobs. The second has changed my daily work far more than the first, and it receives a fraction of the attention. Consider an unglamorous example. Like most large organizations that have grown through acquisition and time, we carry a sprawling employee master, in our case tens of thousands of records, well north of sixty thousand, accumulated across systems that never quite agreed with one another. Names spelled three ways: dates in four formats, business unit codes that meant one thing some years ago and a different thing now. For years this kind of data hygiene was simply not done, because the labor it demanded was prohibitive and the payoff was invisible. Nobody gets thanked for a clean lookup table.

AI did not magically clean that file. But it collapsed the cost of the tedious parts, proposing canonical spellings, flagging the rows that did not fit a pattern, drafting the exception logic, to the point where a job that would once have occupied a junior analyst for weeks became something we could actually finish, with a person reviewing the edge cases rather than grinding through every one of them. Once we noticed the pattern, we saw it everywhere. Building the first draft of a program deck, restructuring a tangled spreadsheet of batch allocations, turning a mess of location-wise numbers into a dashboard a leader could read at a glance. Drafting the unglamorous communication that no one wants to write and everyone needs to receive.

Here is the honest version of what AI does in this mode: it removes the drudgery that used to stand between an idea and its execution. It does not have the idea. It does not know that the cost of a particular program should sit with the business and not with the central team, or that a particular leader will react badly to a particular framing, or that a number is technically correct but politically radioactive. Those judgments are still ours, and if anything they have become more of the job, not less. What has changed is that we now spend our scarce hours on judgment rather than on assembly. The craft did not disappear. It moved up the stack.

I will add the uncomfortable part, because an essay that only celebrates is not worth much. Machine-generated first drafts are bland by default. Left unedited, they produce the beige, over-structured, faintly corporate prose that everyone has now learned to recognize and quietly distrust. A deck built entirely by a tool has a particular deadness to it that experienced people can feel even when they cannot name it. The skill that matters now is not generating the draft, since anyone can do that, but knowing what to throw away, what to sharpen, and where a human sentence has to replace a machine one because the moment calls for a person to have actually meant what they wrote. We have all started to develop a kind of taste for this, an instinct for when something has been produced rather than written. Protecting that taste, in ourselves and in the younger colleagues who are growing up entirely on these tools, has become part of the job.

WHAT AI LITERACY ACTUALLY MEANS ON A PLANT FLOOR?

The other mode, AI as a subject we teach, taught me something I did not expect. We ran sessions on AI and emerging tools for data analysis and business insight, aimed at people whose work is grounded in operations and finance rather than in technology. I went in assuming the curriculum would be about the tools themselves: which model to reach for, how to write a clever prompt, how to automate this or that. Some of that was useful. But the longer we ran these sessions, the clearer it became that what most of our people needed was not prompt engineering. It was data literacy and a healthy scepticism, and the AI tools were almost a side door through which to teach those older, plainer skills.

A plant manager who has never trusted a spreadsheet beyond a simple sum is not going to be transformed by access to a large language model. What changes their working life is learning to structure data so that it can be questioned, learning a reliable way to look up a value across two tables, learning to build a query that refreshes itself rather than a sheet they re-paste every Monday morning. We found ourselves teaching lookup logic and self-updating queries with as much care as anything else, and treating those as the real foundation. The AI sat on top, useful mainly to people who already understood the data underneath it. Sell someone a co-pilot before they can read a map and you have not helped them. You have only given them a faster way to get lost.

There was also a version-and-access reality that gets ignored in a great deal of breathless writing about AI at work. A meaningful share of our people use older, perpetual-licence versions of everyday office software, the kind without the newest functions,

never mind the latest AI features. The shiniest tool in the world is irrelevant if half your audience cannot open it. So a good deal of practical L&D in a large Indian organization is quietly about meeting people where their actual installed software is, not where the vendor's marketing assumes it is. We learned to teach the method that survives on the version people genuinely have, and to introduce the newer capability as an upgrade rather than a prerequisite. It is unfashionable advice. It is also the difference between training that lands and training that merely flatters the trainer.

THE EVIDENCE TEST APPLIED TO PARTNERS

A version of the same evidence discipline has reshaped how we choose and manage external partners, and it is worth dwelling on, because most L&D money in a large organization flows through vendors.

We recently ran a careful comparison of two providers for a single, apparently simple offering: spreadsheet training for a finance team. The old way to make that decision was reputational. Who came recommended, who presented well, who had worked with us before. We did it differently. We put both proposed syllabi side by side, line by line, against what the team actually did in its daily work and against the software versions they actually ran. We ended up choosing neither wholesale. We constructed a merged curriculum that took the stronger spine from one proposal, added the techniques the other had missed, and was deliberately built to work on the older software our people use rather than the latest release the proposals assumed. We made a specific teaching choice too: to teach the more robust, version-safe lookup method as the default rather than the trendier one that breaks on older installations, because we had looked at the evidence of what would survive contact with our real environment.

That episode taught me something about the relationship between L&D and its vendors that I wish I had understood far earlier. The good external partner is not the one with the most polished deck. It is the one willing to be customized, to have its syllabus pulled apart and reassembled against your reality, to be told that its default method is wrong for your audience and to adapt rather than defend. Treating vendors as evidence to be evaluated, rather than authorities to be deferred to, has improved our outcomes more than any single program.

The same logic now governs the learning platforms we license. It is easy, and expensive, to buy a stack of impressive content libraries and assume that access equals learning. We have tried instead to match specific platforms to specific bands and specific needs, a curated and deliberate mapping rather than a blanket subscription, on the principle that a smaller, better-aimed set of resources that people actually use will beat a vast library they ignore. Whether we have the mapping exactly right is something we are still watching the data to tell us. But the instinct to treat a platform purchase as a hypothesis to be tested, rather than a box to be ticked, feels like the right one.

WHY WE KEPT THE TWO-DAY ROOM?

Given everything I have said about data and tooling, you might expect me to argue that the classroom is dying. I would argue close to the opposite, and the reason matters. Some of the most important things we ask people to learn are not informational at all. They are dispositional. When we run change-readiness work for managers, anchored, as a lot of such work is, on the ADKAR model and on Kotter's account of how change actually moves through an organization, the goal is not for anyone to be able to recite the stages back to us. The goal is for a room full of mid-level managers to feel, in their bodies, what it is like to be on the receiving end of a change they did not choose, and then to sit with the discomfort of being the very person who has to lead it. You cannot deliver that through a screen. You cannot generate it. It requires twenty-odd people in a room, a facilitator willing to let a silence sit until it does its work, and an

exercise designed so that the insight is earned rather than told.

This is where I have landed on the relationship between the new tools and the old craft, and it is the through-line of everything I have learned in the last couple of years. Use data and AI for the parts of L&D that are about the system: who needs what, where the gaps are, how to reach scale without dropping people, how to stop wasting human hours on assembly. Reserve the human, experiential, deliberately slow work for the parts that are about the person: judgment, courage, the ability to hold a difficult conversation, the willingness to change one's mind in public. The mistake is to use the tools for the human work, or to insist on the human method for work the tools now do better. Most of the bad L&D I see, and a fair amount of the bad L&D that I have personally produced, come from getting that one division wrong in one direction or the other.

BUYING INTIMACY BACK AT SCALE

Let me return to the eleven hundred graduate engineers, because this is where the two halves of the argument meet. We could not give each of them the attention a batch of forty receives. But we could build a structure that protected the moments where attention matters most. We set up a simple rhythm of check-ins at thirty, sixty, and ninety days, deliberately early, because the people who drift away from a graduate program usually begin to drift in the first quarter, before anyone has thought to notice. We built tracking systems, one for each location, so that a single point of contact at each site owned the follow-up and nothing fell into the gap between the central team and the plant. And we built dashboards so that the few of us at the centre could see, at a glance, where a batch was thriving and where one was quietly going wrong.

None of this is glamorous. A check-in framework and a set of tracking workbooks will never feature in a conference keynote. But this is the actual texture of L&D at scale, and here the technology earns its place precisely by being invisible. The dashboard exists so that a human being can have the right conversation, at the right time, with the right trainee. The automation is not the point. The conversation is the point. The automation simply makes the conversation possible at a scale where it would otherwise be impossible.

I have come to think of this as the real promise of these tools, once you strip away the hype. They do not replace the human contact at the heart of learning. Used well, they buy it back. Every hour we no longer spend reconciling spreadsheets or manually reading two thousand reviews is an hour that can return to the part of the job only a person can do. Whether that hour actually returns there, or whether it quietly evaporates into more reporting, is a choice, and it is a choice the technology cannot make for us. I have watched teams use the time they saved to do more genuinely human work, and I have watched teams use exactly the same saved time to generate more dashboards that nobody reads. The tool is identical in both cases. The discipline is everything.

THE SPINE NO ONE PHOTOGRAPHS

There is one more piece of architecture worth describing, because it is the least visible and, I increasingly believe, the most important of all. For most of its life, L&D in a large group speaks in dialects. Each business, each generation of leaders, each consulting engagement leaves behind its own vocabulary for what good looks like, its own list of competencies, its own labels, its own definitions that overlap with the others but never quite line up. The cost of this is enormous and almost entirely hidden. You cannot compare capability across businesses. You cannot move a person from one business to another and carry their development story with them. Every framework is an island, and the water between the islands is where careers and budgets quietly drown.

A good deal of our recent work has been about building a single spine: one competency language the whole group can share, mapped carefully so

that the group's own proprietary competencies, the broader behavioral library beneath them, and the granular skills beneath that all connect into one coherent structure rather than three competing ones. This is slow, unrewarding, deeply unglamorous work. It produces no event you can photograph and put in a newsletter. But it is the difference between a function that runs programs and a function that builds capability, and I have become a quiet evangelist for it. Events are easy, and they are forgotten by the following quarter. Architecture is hard, and it compounds. If I could give one piece of advice to someone starting out in this field today, it would be to spend less of your energy on the next program and more of it on the shared language that every future program will eventually have to hang from.

WHAT I AM STILL GETTING WRONG?

I promised honesty, so let me end with the things that keep me awake. The first is measurement. We have become rather good at building the apparatus of L&D, the dashboards, the trackers, the needs analyses, the clean data, and we are still not good at proving that any of it changed behavior or moved a business outcome in a way a genuine sceptic would accept. It is, plainly, easier now to build a beautiful dashboard than to demonstrate that a program worked. That asymmetry is dangerous, because it tempts us to mistake the measurability of activity for evidence of impact. A full classroom, a high completion rate, a warm feedback form: these are inputs and reactions, not results, and everyone in this field knows it even as we keep dutifully reporting them upward. The honest position is that the evaluation of learning remains hard, that AI has not solved it, and that anyone who tells you they have cracked the link from training to business outcome with one tidy number is usually selling you something.

The second is equity. Almost everything I have described, the digital tools, the data fluency, the AI capability, tilts towards people who are already comfortable in English, already comfortable on a screen, already in roles where a laptop is simply assumed. A large Indian manufacturing workforce is not uniformly any of those things. There is a real risk that the data-and-AI turn in our profession widens the very gaps it claims to close, lavishing sophisticated development on the already-advantaged while the shop floor receives the same tired modules it always did. I do not have this solved. I am only trying to keep the question visible, and to ask, of every shiny new initiative, who exactly it leaves out.

The third is the one I find hardest to say, because it implicates me directly. The tools that let us produce more, faster, also let us produce far more that was never worth producing. It has never been easier to generate a deck, a mailer, a framework, a roadmap. The constraint used to be the labor of making the thing. Now the labor is almost free, and the only remaining constraint is judgment about whether the thing should exist at all. I am not sure our profession has caught up to that yet. Many of us are still measuring ourselves by output in an age when output has become close to free. The scarce and valuable thing now is restraint: the discipline to make less, and to make it better, and to leave the rest unmade.

A RE-GROUNDING, NOT A REVOLUTION

None of this amounts to a revolution, and I am suspicious of anyone who insists on calling it one. The fundamentals of the work have not changed. People still learn the way people have always learned, by doing, by struggling a little, by being seen and challenged and supported by someone who is paying attention to them. What has changed is the scaffolding around that ancient process. We can read the organization more honestly than we could a few years ago. We can reach far more people without dropping them. We can spend less of our finite attention on the mechanical parts of the job. If we are disciplined, all of that buys us more room for the human work that was always the actual point. If we are not, it merely buys us more noise.

I do not think the L&D professional of the next decade is a data scientist, and I do not think she is a traditional trainer either. I think she is something older and harder to name: a person who can read a system and read a human being, who knows which problems are technical and which are emotional, and who has the judgment to use a powerful tool exactly as far as it ought to be used and not one single step further. That person has always been rare. The new tools have not made her obsolete. If anything, they have made her more necessary than ever.

A NOTE ON THE FRAMEWORKS REFERENCED

The change-management material described here draws on the ADKAR model developed by Jeff Hiatt and the Prosci organization, and on the eight-step process for leading change set out by John Kotter. The competency architecture work refers to the Korn Ferry Leadership Architect, a proprietary framework owned by Korn Ferry. These are credited here as the work of their respective authors and owners; the views expressed, the applications described, and any errors that remain are entirely my own.

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India's Digital Governance: Building Digital Sovereignty, Public Digital Infrastructure, and Inclusive Development in the Emerging World Order

Madhusudan Mishra*

ABSTRACT

The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented transformation in governance through digital technologies. Digital governance has emerged as a critical instrument for enhancing transparency, accountability, efficiency, and citizen participation. Simultaneously, the growing significance of data, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, digital public infrastructure, and digital diplomacy has elevated digital governance from a domestic administrative function to a strategic geopolitical asset. India, home to more than 1.4 billion people, has emerged as a global leader in digital governance through its innovative Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) ecosystem comprising Aadhaar, Unified Payments Interface (UPI), DigiLocker, CoWIN, FASTag, Government e-Marketplace (GeM), and numerous citizen-centric digital platforms. These initiatives have transformed service delivery, financial inclusion, welfare distribution, and governance efficiency while positioning India as a significant actor in global digital governance debates. This paper examines India's digital governance model within the framework of contemporary global geopolitics. It explores how digital transformation contributes to state capacity, economic growth, strategic autonomy, cybersecurity resilience, and international influence.

KEYWORDS

Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity, Digital Diplomacy, Digital Governance, India Stack

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the nature of governance across the world. Governments increasingly rely on digital platforms to deliver public services, enhance administrative efficiency, improve transparency, and engage citizens in decision- making processes. The convergence of information technology, artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, blockchain, big data analytics, and cybersecurity has created new opportunities and challenges for states seeking to navigate the complexities of the digital age.

Digital governance refers to the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve government functioning, service delivery, public accountability, and citizen participation. Unlike traditional e-governance initiatives that focused primarily on digitizing government processes, contemporary digital governance encompasses broader dimensions including digital identity systems, digital public infrastructure, cybersecurity governance, data governance, AI regulation, and international digital cooperation. In the geopolitical context, digital governance has become an arena of strategic competition among nations. Data has emerged as a critical strategic resource often described as the "new oil" of the digital economy. Nations compete not only for technological superiority but also for influence over global standards governing data flows, cybersecurity norms, AI ethics, and digital trade.

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The global digital economy is expected to contribute significantly to world gross domestic product (GDP) over the next decade. Countries that successfully harness digital technologies gain competitive advantages in economic growth, governance efficiency, national security, and international influence. Consequently, digital governance has become an essential component of national power. India presents a particularly significant case study in this regard. As the world's largest democracy and one of the fastest-growing digital economies, India has demonstrated how digital technologies can be leveraged to address developmental challenges at scale. The Digital India program launched in 2015 marked a transformative shift toward citizen-centric governance through technology-enabled public service delivery.

India's achievements are particularly noteworthy because they have been accomplished in a highly diverse socioeconomic environment characterized by linguistic, cultural, geographic, and economic diversity. Through innovative digital public infrastructure, India has successfully expanded financial inclusion, improved welfare delivery, reduced corruption, enhanced transparency, and increased citizen access to public services. At the same time, India's digital transformation has geopolitical implications. The country's digital governance model is increasingly being studied and adopted by developing nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. India's leadership in the G20, BRICS, and Global South platforms has further amplified its influence in shaping global discussions on digital governance.

This paper seeks to analyse the intersection between digital governance and geopolitics through the lens of India's experience. It investigates how digital governance contributes to national development, strategic autonomy, and international influence while examining opportunities and challenges associated with the digital age.

DIGITAL GOVERNANCE AND CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL GEOPOLITICS

The relationship between digital governance and geopolitics has become increasingly significant in recent years. Digital technologies are no longer merely tools for economic modernization; they have become instruments of national power (Table 1).

Table 1: Evolution of Governance in the Digital Age

Era	Governance Characteristic	Dominant Technology
Industrial Age	Bureaucratic Governance	Mechanical Systems
Information Age	E-Governance	Computers & Internet
Digital Age	Digital Governance	AI, Cloud, Big Data
Intelligent Age	Algorithmic Governance	AI, Quantum Computing

The contemporary geopolitical landscape is characterized by several major trends:

1. Data as Strategic Resource: Data has become a critical national asset. Governments increasingly rely on data analytics for policy formulation, public service delivery, national security, and economic planning. Countries such as the United States, China, and members of the European Union have developed comprehensive frameworks governing data ownership, privacy, and cross-border data flows. India's Digital Personal Data Protection framework reflects similar efforts to balance innovation and privacy.

2. Digital Sovereignty: Digital sovereignty refers to a nation's ability to govern its digital infrastructure, data resources, and technological ecosystem independently. Major components include Data localization, Cybersecurity infrastructure, Indigenous digital platforms, National cloud architecture, and AI capabilities. India's emphasis on Atmanirbhar Bharat aligns closely with the concept of digital sovereignty.

3. Cybersecurity and National Security: Cyber threats have become a significant challenge for governments worldwide (Fig. 1).

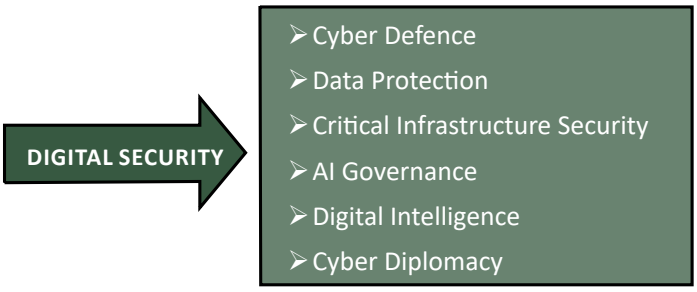

Fig. 1: Components of Digital National Security

Cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure, financial institutions, and government networks have increased globally. Consequently, cybersecurity is now a central component of national security strategies.

4. Digital Diplomacy: Digital diplomacy involves the use of digital technologies to achieve foreign policy objectives. Countries increasingly employ digital platforms for Public diplomacy, International cooperation, Crisis communication, Development partnerships, and Strategic influence. India's digital diplomacy has expanded significantly through initiatives such as Digital Public Infrastructure partnerships with countries in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Global South.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: DIGITAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE (DPI)

One of India's most significant contributions to global digital governance is the concept of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). Digital Public Infrastructure comprises interoperable digital systems that enable governments, businesses, and citizens to interact efficiently and securely (Fig. 2).

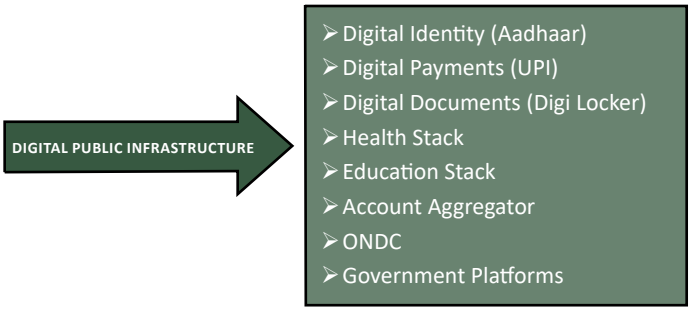

Fig. 2: India's Digital Public Infrastructure Ecosystem

The DPI model seeks to create foundational digital systems that can be used by both public and private sectors to deliver services efficiently.

Core Characteristics: Interoperability, Open Standards, Scalability, Security, Inclusiveness, and Affordability. Unlike proprietary digital ecosystems dominated by private corporations, India's DPI approach emphasizes public ownership and accessibility.

INDIA'S DIGITAL GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE

India's digital governance ecosystem is built upon multiple interconnected platforms (Table 2).

Table 2: Major Digital Governance Platforms in India

Platform	Purpose	Impact
Aadhaar	Digital Identity	Over 1.4 billion identities
UPI	Digital Payments	Billions of monthly transactions
DigiLocker	Digital Documents	Paperless governance
CoWIN	Vaccination Management	Large-scale vaccine delivery
GeM	Government Procurement	Transparent procurement
FASTag	Toll Collection	Efficient transport management
PM-Gati Shakti	Infrastructure Planning	Integrated development
UMANG	Citizen Services	Unified government services

Aadhaar: Foundation of Digital Identity: Aadhaar has become the world's largest biometric identification system. It has significantly reduced duplication and leakages in welfare programmes while facilitating access to banking, healthcare, education, and public services.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI): UPI has revolutionized digital payments and financial inclusion (Table 3).

Table 3: Transformation through UPI

Indicator	Before UPI	After UPI Expansion
Payment Cost	High	Minimal
Settlement Time	Hours/Days	Seconds
Financial Inclusion	Limited	Extensive
Digital Transactions	Low	Massive Growth

UPI has become a global model for real-time payment systems and is being adopted or studied by several countries.

FROM DIGITAL INDIA TO DIGITAL LEADERSHIP

The twenty-first century is witnessing a profound transformation in the way nations govern their people, deliver public services, conduct diplomacy, and compete in the global arena. If the Industrial Revolution was powered by coal and steel, and the Information Revolution by computers and the internet, the present era is increasingly being shaped

by data, digital platforms, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and digital public infrastructure. In this rapidly evolving landscape, digital governance has emerged not merely as an administrative tool but as a strategic instrument of national development and geopolitical influence. India stands today as one of the most remarkable examples of digital transformation at scale. Home to more than 1.4 billion people, immense diversity, and significant developmental challenges, India has leveraged technology to create one of the world's largest and most inclusive digital governance ecosystems.

What makes India's journey particularly noteworthy is that digitalization has not remained confined to urban elites or corporate sectors; it has increasingly reached villages, farmers, women, students, small entrepreneurs, and vulnerable populations. As a result, India is no longer merely a consumer of digital technologies but is increasingly becoming a global architect of digital governance models. Digital governance refers to the use of information and communication technologies to improve the efficiency, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness of government institutions. It encompasses digital identity systems, online public services, digital payments, data governance, cybersecurity frameworks, and citizen participation platforms. Effective digital governance enables governments to provide services faster, reduce corruption, eliminate intermediaries, and empower citizens with easier access to information and welfare benefits.

India's digital transformation journey gained significant momentum with the launch of the Digital India Program in 2015. The vision was simple yet transformative: to convert India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. Over the last decade, this vision has translated into a robust digital ecosystem that has attracted global attention. One of the foundational pillars of India's digital governance architecture is Aadhaar, the world's largest biometric digital identity programme. By providing a unique identity number to over a billion residents, Aadhaar has enabled governments to authenticate beneficiaries, streamline welfare distribution, and reduce duplication and fraud. Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) systems linked with Aadhaar have helped transfer subsidies and welfare benefits directly into beneficiaries' bank accounts, significantly reducing leakages and enhancing transparency.

Complementing Aadhaar is the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), which has revolutionized digital payments. UPI has transformed the manner in which Indians conduct financial transactions. From roadside vendors and small shopkeepers to large businesses and government agencies, digital payments have become a routine part of everyday life. India's digital payment ecosystem has emerged as one of the largest and most efficient in the world, offering a model that many countries are now seeking to emulate. Another important component is DigiLocker, which enables citizens to securely store and access official documents digitally. Educational certificates, driving licenses, vehicle registrations, and various government documents can now be accessed electronically, reducing paperwork and administrative delays. Similarly, the CoWIN platform demonstrated India's technological capabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic by managing one of the world's largest vaccination drives efficiently and transparently.

The success of these initiatives lies in the creation of what is now globally recognized as India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). Unlike proprietary systems controlled by private corporations, DPI consists of publicly accessible digital platforms that serve as foundational infrastructure for innovation and service delivery. The Aadhaar-UPI-DigiLocker ecosystem has become a globally admired model because it combines scale, affordability, interoperability, and inclusiveness. The significance of digital governance, however, extends beyond domestic administration. In contemporary geopolitics, technology has become a major determinant of national power. Countries increasingly compete not only through military strength and economic resources but also through technological capabilities, digital innovation,

cybersecurity resilience, and control over data ecosystems.

Data is often described as the "new oil" of the digital economy. Nations that effectively manage and utilize data gain advantages in policymaking, economic competitiveness, public service delivery, and national security. Consequently, issues such as data sovereignty, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence governance, and cross-border data flows have become central to global geopolitics. The global digital landscape today is characterized by three broad models. The first is the market-driven model led by the United States, where innovation is largely driven by private technology corporations. The second is the state-centric model exemplified by China, where digital infrastructure and data governance are closely integrated with state objectives. The third is the rights-based regulatory approach of the European Union, which emphasizes privacy, data protection, and citizen rights.

India is gradually developing a distinctive fourth model that seeks to combine innovation, inclusion, democratic governance, and public digital infrastructure. Rather than choosing between state control and corporate dominance, India has focused on creating open digital ecosystems that encourage both public service delivery and private-sector innovation. This balanced approach is increasingly attracting attention from developing nations seeking alternatives suited to their socioeconomic realities. India's growing influence in global digital governance has become evident through its engagements in international forums such as the G20, BRICS, and various South-South cooperation initiatives. During its G20 Presidency, India actively promoted Digital Public Infrastructure as a tool for inclusive development. Several countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have expressed interest in adopting elements of India's digital governance architecture to improve service delivery and financial inclusion.

Digital diplomacy has emerged as another important dimension of India's international engagement. Through technological cooperation, capacity building, digital payment linkages, and sharing of digital governance expertise, India is strengthening its partnerships with countries across the Global South. This form of cooperation enhances India's soft power while contributing to sustainable development goals globally. However, the rapid expansion of digital governance also raises important challenges. Cybersecurity has emerged as a critical concern. As governments become increasingly dependent on digital systems, cyberattacks targeting public infrastructure, financial networks, and sensitive databases pose significant risks. Protecting digital infrastructure from cyber threats requires continuous investment, technological innovation, and international cooperation.

Privacy and data protection constitute another major challenge. The collection and processing of large volumes of personal data necessitate robust legal and institutional safeguards. Citizens must have confidence that their personal information is protected from misuse while enabling governments and businesses to utilize data responsibly for public benefit. The digital divide remains a persistent concern. Despite remarkable progress, disparities in internet access, digital literacy, and technological infrastructure continue to exist between urban and rural areas and among different socioeconomic groups. Ensuring that digital transformation remains inclusive requires sustained investments in connectivity, education, and digital capacity building.

Artificial intelligence is poised to become the next frontier of digital governance. AI has the potential to transform public administration through predictive analytics, automated service delivery, intelligent policymaking, and enhanced citizen engagement. At the same time, it raises complex ethical questions concerning transparency, accountability, algorithmic bias, and employment. India must develop a comprehensive AI governance framework that balances innovation with ethical safeguards. The experience of Odisha offers valuable insights into state-level digital governance within India. Over the years, Odisha has emerged as a leading state in leveraging technology for governance reforms and

citizen-centric service delivery. Initiatives such as the Mo Sarkar programme, 5T governance framework, online land records management, digital grievance redressal systems, and technology-enabled disaster management have significantly improved administrative responsiveness.

Odisha's achievements in disaster management deserve special mention. The state has successfully integrated digital technologies, early warning systems, satellite-based monitoring, and community communication networks to minimize loss of life during cyclones and natural disasters. International organizations have often cited Odisha's disaster preparedness model as a best practice in climate resilience and emergency governance. Similarly, digital platforms have enhanced transparency in welfare delivery, education, healthcare, and public service provision across the state. The use of technology to bridge administrative gaps in remote and tribal areas demonstrates how digital governance can contribute to inclusive development when implemented with sensitivity to local contexts.

Looking ahead, the future of governance will increasingly be digital, data-driven, and interconnected. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, quantum computing, the Internet of Things, and advanced analytics will redefine the relationship between citizens and governments. Nations that successfully harness these technologies while protecting democratic values and citizen rights will be better positioned to achieve sustainable development and strategic influence. India possesses several advantages in this emerging landscape. Its large digital user base, vibrant technology sector, skilled workforce, expanding startup ecosystem, and successful Digital Public Infrastructure provide a strong foundation for future leadership. Moreover, India's democratic institutions and commitment to inclusive development enhance the credibility of its digital governance model in an era when concerns about surveillance, privacy, and digital monopolies are becoming increasingly prominent.

The story of India's digital governance is therefore much more than a technological success narrative. It is a story of nation-building through innovation, inclusion, and institutional transformation. It demonstrates how technology can be used not merely to modernize administration but to empower citizens, strengthen democracy, improve development outcomes, and enhance a nation's standing in the international system. As the world enters an increasingly complex digital age, India stands at a pivotal moment. Its challenge is not only to continue its domestic digital transformation but also to contribute meaningfully to shaping a fair, secure, inclusive, and democratic global digital order.

If the last decade belonged to Digital India, the coming decade may well witness the rise of India as a leading architect of global digital governance—bridging technology and humanity, innovation and inclusion, national development and international cooperation. Such a role would not only strengthen India's geopolitical influence but also offer hope and direction to developing nations navigating the opportunities and uncertainties of the digital century.

DIGITAL GOVERNANCE IN INDIAN STATES: TRANSFORMATIVE CASE STUDIES, INNOVATIONS, AND LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

The success of digital governance in India is not merely the result of national initiatives such as Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, CoWIN, and Digital India. Equally important has been the role of Indian States, which have emerged as laboratories of innovation in governance. Across the country, states have utilized digital technologies to address local challenges, improve service delivery, enhance transparency, strengthen accountability, and bring government services closer to citizens. What makes India's digital governance story unique is its diversity. Different states have adopted different models depending on their socioeconomic conditions, administrative priorities, and developmental challenges. Some have focused on citizen services, others on

land management, health, education, disaster management, agriculture, urban governance, and welfare delivery. Together, these initiatives provide valuable lessons for policymakers across India and the developing world.

Selected case studies are presented from leading states including Odisha, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu, highlighting their innovations, achievements, and lessons for future governance (Table 4).

Table 4: Leading Digital Governance Initiatives Across Indian States

State	Major Digital Initiative	Governance Impact
Odisha	Mo Sarkar, 5T, Digital Disaster Management	Citizen-centric governance
Karnataka	Bhoomi Project	Transparent land records
Andhra Pradesh	Real-Time Governance Center	Data-driven administration
Telangana	Dharani Portal	Integrated land management
Kerala	e-Health Kerala	Digital healthcare services
Maharashtra	MahaOnline	Integrated citizen services
Gujarat	SWAGAT	Digital grievance redressal
Tamil Nadu	e-Sevai Centers	Service delivery at scale

Odisha: A Model of Citizen-Centric Digital Governance

Among Indian states, Odisha has emerged as a remarkable example of how technology can strengthen governance even in regions facing geographical, climatic, and socio-economic challenges.

Case Study 1: Mo Sarkar Initiative

The "Mo Sarkar" (My Government) programme represents a unique experiment in citizen feedback-based governance.

Key Features: Citizens receive calls after availing government services; Feedback is directly monitored by senior officials; Performance of officers is assessed based on citizen satisfaction; Transparency and accountability are strengthened.

Outcomes

Indicator	Before Mo Sarkar	After Implementation
Citizen Feedback Mechanism	Limited	Real-time
Administrative Accountability	Moderate	High
Service Monitoring	Manual	Digital
Citizen Trust	Improving	Significantly Enhanced

The program transformed citizens from passive recipients into active evaluators of government performance.

Case Study 2: Odisha's Digital Disaster Management Model

Odisha is frequently exposed to cyclones, floods, and natural disasters. The state has become internationally recognized for its technology-driven disaster management systems (Fig. 3).

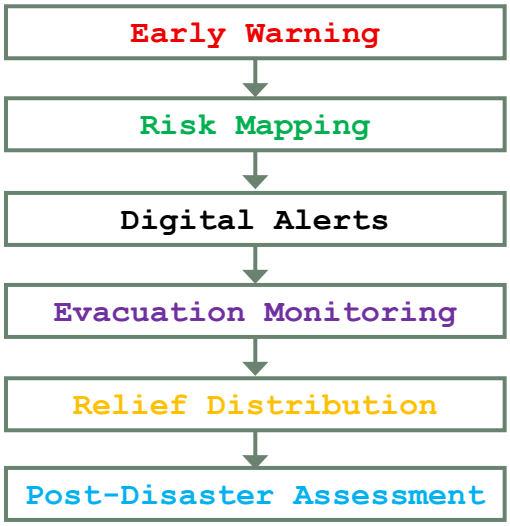

Fig. 3: Odisha Disaster Management Framework

Components: Satellite monitoring; GIS mapping; Mobile alerts; Community warning systems; Real-time evacuation monitoring

Impact: Cyclones that once caused thousands of deaths now result in significantly lower casualties due to advanced digital preparedness.

The Odisha model is now studied globally as an example of digital resilience and climate governance.

Case Study 3: 5T Governance Framework

The 5T framework - Technology, Teamwork, Transparency, Time, and Transformation - places technology at the center of administrative reform. The framework has accelerated: School transformation; Healthcare modernization; Online monitoring systems; Project tracking; and Citizen service delivery. The initiative demonstrates how digital tools can be integrated with administrative culture to achieve systemic transformation.

Karnataka: Revolutionizing Land Governance Through Bhoomi

Land disputes have historically been among the largest sources of litigation in India. Karnataka addressed this challenge through the Bhoomi Project.

Case Study 4: Bhoomi Land Records System

Before Bhoomi: Manual records; Delays; Corruption; and Limited accessibility.

After Bhoomi: Digitized records; Faster transactions; Greater transparency; and Reduced corruption (Table 5).

Table 5: Impact of Bhoomi

Parameter	Traditional System	Bhoomi System
Access Time	Days	Minutes
Transparency	Low	High
Manipulation Risk	High	Low
Citizen Convenience	Limited	Extensive

The Bhoomi project became one of India's earliest successful e-governance initiatives and influenced similar reforms nationwide.

Andhra Pradesh: Real-Time Governance Revolution

Andhra Pradesh pioneered data-driven governance through its Real-Time Governance Center (RTGC).

Case Study 5: Real-Time Governance CenterThe RTGC integrates: Satellite data; Weather information; CCTV feeds; Citizen feedback; and Administrative databases (Fig. 4).

Applications: Disaster response; Urban management; Welfare monitoring; Agricultural advisories

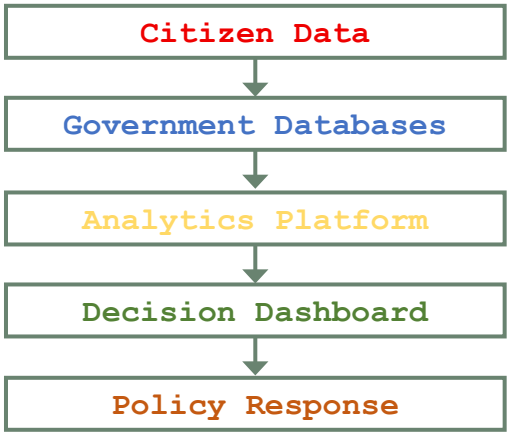

Fig. 4: RTGC Ecosystem

The initiative represents one of the most advanced examples of data-driven governance in India.

Telangana: Dharani Integrated Land Management System

Land administration remains a critical governance challenge. Telangana introduced the Dharani Portal to simplify land transactions.

Case Study 6: Dharani Portal

Features: Unified land records; Online registration; Mutation services; Ownership verification

Benefits

Benefit	Impact
Reduced Litigation	Significant
Faster Registration	Improved
Transparency	Enhanced
Revenue Collection	Increased

The portal has streamlined interactions between citizens and land administration departments.

Kerala: Digital Healthcare Leadership

Kerala has consistently performed well in human development indicators. Digital healthcare has further strengthened its public health system (Table 6).

Case Study 7: eHealth Kerala

The program aims to create: Electronic health records; Online appointments; Digital prescriptions; and Integrated healthcare databases.

Outcomes: Better patient tracking; Reduced paperwork; Improved healthcare access; Data-driven planning.

Table 6: Healthcare Transformation

Aspect	Traditional System	eHealth System
Patient Records	Paper-based	Digital
Accessibility	Limited	Statewide
Monitoring	Manual	Automated
Efficiency	Moderate	High

The initiative demonstrates how digital governance can improve healthcare outcomes.

Maharashtra: Maha Online Service Delivery Platform

Maharashtra has developed one of the country's largest digital citizen service platforms.

Case Study 8: Maha Online

Services include: Certificates; Licenses; Utility services; Educational applications; and Revenue services.

Impact: Millions of citizens access government services without visiting offices.

The platform has reduced: Administrative burden; Processing time; and Transaction costs.

while increasing convenience and transparency.

Gujarat: SWAGAT Grievance Redressal System

Responsive governance requires effective grievance redressal mechanisms.

Case Study 9: SWAGAT

Statewide Attention on Grievances by Application of Technology (SWAGAT) provides direct citizen-government interaction.

Features: Online complaint submission; Video conferencing; Direct monitoring by senior leadership; Time-bound resolution.

Results

Indicator	Improvement
Complaint Tracking	Significant
Resolution Speed	Faster
Transparency	Higher
Citizen Satisfaction	Improved

The programme received national and international recognition for governance innovation.

Tamil Nadu: E-Sevai Centers

Tamil Nadu has focused on ensuring digital services reach citizens at the grassroots.

Case Study 10: e-Sevai Centers

These centers provide: Birth certificates; Community certificates; Revenue services; Utility payments; and Welfare applications.

Importance: The initiative bridges the digital divide by assisting citizens who may not possess digital literacy or internet access.

Comparative Analysis of State Digital Governance Models (Table 7)

Table 7: Comparative Strengths

State	Primary Focus Area
Odisha	Citizen Feedback & Disaster Management
Karnataka	Land Governance
Andhra Pradesh	Data Analytics
Telangana	Integrated Land Records
Kerala	Healthcare
Maharashtra	Citizen Services
Gujarat	Grievance Redressal
Tamil Nadu	Service Accessibility

The diversity of these approaches highlights the flexibility of digital governance as a tool for addressing state-specific challenges.

Emerging Trends Across States

Several common trends are visible.

1. ***Data-Driven Decision Making:*** States increasingly rely on analytics for policy formulation and implementation.
2. ***Citizen-Centric Governance:*** Digital platforms are making governments more responsive and accountable.
3. ***Mobile Governance:*** Smartphones have become the primary interface between citizens and government.
4. ***Integrated Service Delivery:*** Departments increasingly share data and coordinate digitally.
5. ***Real-Time Monitoring:*** Projects, welfare schemes, and service delivery systems are monitored continuously.

Challenges Facing State-Level Digital Governance

Despite significant achievements, several challenges remain (Fig. 5).

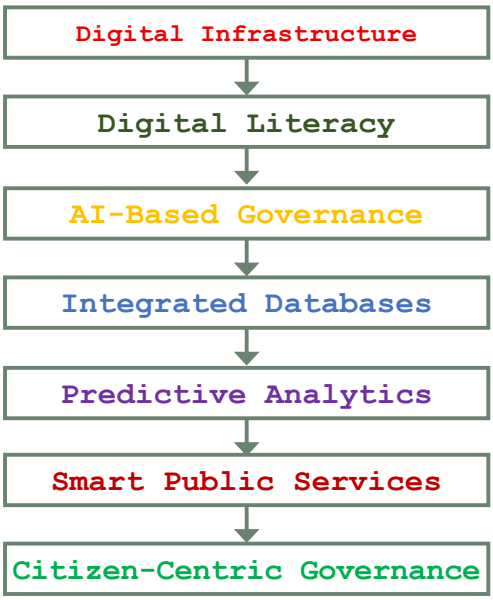

Fig. 5: Future Roadmap for State Digital Governance

Digital Divide: Rural and marginalized populations still face barriers in digital access.

Cybersecurity Risks: Increasing digitization creates vulnerabilities to cyberattacks.

Privacy Concerns: Large-scale data collection requires strong safeguards.

Capacity Building: Government employees require continuous digital training.

Infrastructure Gaps: Reliable internet connectivity remains uneven in some regions.

The Odisha Opportunity: Leading The Next Phase

Among the states discussed, Odisha possesses a unique opportunity to emerge as a national leader in next-generation digital governance.

Its strengths include: Proven disaster management systems; Citizen-centric governance innovations; Strong administrative reforms; Technology-enabled monitoring mechanisms; and Inclusive development focus.

Future opportunities include: Artificial Intelligence for governance; Smart agriculture; systems; Climate resilience platforms; Tribal digital inclusion programs; and Integrated health and education dashboards.

Odisha can become a model for how digital governance supports both economic growth and social justice.

CONCLUSION

The story of digital governance in Indian states is ultimately a story of innovation in public service. From Odisha's citizen-feedback systems and disaster resilience, Karnataka's land reforms, Andhra Pradesh's real-time governance architecture, Telangana's land management reforms, Kerala's digital healthcare initiatives, Maharashtra's service delivery platforms, Gujarat's grievance redressal mechanisms, and Tamil Nadu's grassroots accessibility programmes, each state has contributed uniquely to India's digital transformation journey. These experiences demonstrate that digital governance is not merely about computers, software, or online services. At its core, it is about improving the relationship between citizens and the state. It is about making governance more transparent, accountable, responsive, and inclusive. It is about ensuring that development reaches the last citizen in the last village.

As India advances toward becoming a developed nation in the coming decades, the innovations

pioneered by its states will continue to shape the future of governance. Their collective experience offers valuable lessons not only for India but also for countries across the world seeking to harness technology for inclusive and sustainable development. In this evolving digital century, the laboratories of governance are no longer confined to national capitals—they are increasingly found in the states, districts, villages, and communities that are redefining public administration through innovation and technology.

Suggestions and Policy Feedback for Strengthening Digital Governance

India's remarkable achievements in digital governance have demonstrated that technology can be a powerful instrument for inclusive development, transparent administration, and citizen empowerment. The experiences of various states, particularly Odisha, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu, provide valuable lessons for the future. However, the next phase of digital governance must focus not merely on digitization but on creating intelligent, secure, inclusive, and citizen-centric governance ecosystems. A key priority should be bridging the digital divide. While digital platforms have expanded significantly, disparities in internet connectivity, digital literacy, and access to devices continue to affect rural communities, tribal populations, women, senior citizens, and economically weaker sections. Governments must invest in last-mile digital infrastructure, affordable internet access, and community-based digital literacy programmes to ensure that no citizen is left behind.

Cybersecurity must become a central pillar of governance reform. As government services, financial transactions, healthcare systems, and citizen databases increasingly move online, robust cyber defence mechanisms, regular security audits, data encryption, and cyber awareness campaigns are essential. Public trust in digital governance depends on the security and integrity of digital systems. Another important area is the ethical and responsible use of AI. AI-driven governance can improve service delivery, policy planning, disaster forecasting, healthcare management, and agricultural advisories. However, AI systems must be transparent, accountable, and free from bias. India should develop comprehensive frameworks that balance innovation with privacy, fairness, and citizen rights.

Interoperability among government platforms should also be strengthened. Citizens often interact with multiple departments for a single service. Integrated digital platforms and unified service portals can significantly improve efficiency, reduce administrative burden, and enhance user experience. States such as Odisha have demonstrated how technology can strengthen disaster resilience, citizen feedback systems, and administrative accountability. Future governance reforms should build upon such successful models by integrating climate resilience, smart agriculture, digital healthcare, and data-driven decision-making into governance frameworks. Public-private partnerships can further accelerate innovation. Collaboration between governments, academic institutions, startups, and technology companies can help develop scalable solutions while ensuring accessibility and affordability. Universities should play a greater role in research, policy innovation, digital ethics, cybersecurity studies, and capacity building.

The future of governance will increasingly depend on the ability of governments to convert data into actionable insights while protecting citizen rights. The ultimate goal should be to create governance systems that are transparent, responsive, inclusive, secure, and sustainable.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, India's digital governance journey offers a globally relevant model that combines technology with democratic values, inclusiveness, and public welfare. By addressing existing challenges and embracing innovation responsibly, India can emerge not only as a digital economy but also as a

global leader in digital governance and public-sector transformation.

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Influence of Employee Training and Development on Employee Performance in Banking Sector

B. Hariprabhu Dhukal*, P. Chinnadurai, C. Velaudham*****

ABSTRACT

The importance of employees is becoming more widely acknowledged in today's fast-paced and competitive business environment (Testa, et al. 2023; Ismail, 2023). Organizational success depends significantly on the dedication and enthusiasm of its employees (Akgunduz, et al. 2023). The ability to identify and improve the elements that affect employee performance is now essential for businesses to sustain their competitive edge (Banmairuroy, et al. 2022). Employees are the pillars of any organization. They're more than just a means to an end; they're vital to the development of new ideas, increased output, and expanded business (Akther and Tariq, 2020). Their expertise, experience, and hard work are invaluable in accomplishing strategic goals and keeping an edge in the competitive landscape (Banmairuroy, et al. 2022).

KEYWORDS

Burnout Among Employees, Employee Engagement, Positive Emotions, SEM Analysis, Work-Life Balance

INTRODUCTION

Organizations that want their employees to perform at their highest levels invest in training and development programes (Mahmood, *et al*. 2023). In addition to boosting morale and competence, continuous training and development help employees adapt to new challenges (Diamantidis and Chatzogloum, 2019).

Training and development, along with employee engagement, and job performance, collectively contribute to establishing an efficacious work environment (Yadav, *et al*. 2022; Chanana and Sangeeta, 2021). For organizations to optimise their human resource management practices and align them with corporate objectives, data driven insights are imperative (Verma, *et al*. 2021).

It is essential to evaluate the effects of training and development, on employee engagement and job performance to make informed decisions based on empirical evidence. In the private banks, training plays vital roles for several reasons. Firstly, comprehensive training ensures employees possess the skills to adapt to industry changes and provide quality service (Yadav, *et al*. 2022). Secondly, maintaining work-life balance is crucial for employee well-being and job satisfaction, reducing burnout and turnover (Chanana and Sangeeta, 2021). Moreover, a positive work-life balance enhances morale, productivity, and organizational effectiveness (Oyewobi, *et al*. 2019; Chanana and Sangeeta, 2021).

Furthermore, our selection of training and work-life balance as central constructs influencing job performance is substantiated by their significant

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implications for employee competence, engagement, and motivation Ting, *et al*. (2024), Wood, *et al*. (2020). Training initiatives play a pivotal role in augmenting employees' skill sets and knowledge base, thereby directly enhancing job performance (Garavan, *et al*. 2021). Similarly, prioritizing work-life balance initiatives mitigate stress levels, fosters employee well-being, and cultivates job satisfaction and morale, consequently positively impacting job performance outcomes (Alzadjali and Ahmad, 2024). These strategic choices align closely with organizational imperatives of talent development and effectiveness, thereby substantiating their pertinence within the private banking sector's operational framework (Ting, *et al*. 2024; Wood, *et al*. 2020; Garavan, *et al*. 2021; Alzadjali and Ahmad, 2024).

Private banks encounter difficulties in implementing effective training and development initiatives. Limited resources pose a significant constraint, restricting the scope and quality of programs. Additionally, high turnover rates disrupt continuity, making it challenging to sustain long-term training efforts. These challenges hinder the ability of private banks to address the skills gap and retain talent effectively. Addressing significant challenges related to long working hours, rigid structures, and uneven workloads, is vital to maintaining employee health and well-being, which in turn directly impacts job performance. Private banks encounter hurdles in achieving this balance, often struggling to mitigate the impact of long working hours and rigid organizational structures on employee well-being. Uneven workloads further exacerbate these challenges, leading to increased stress and burnout among employees, ultimately affecting their productivity, efficiency, and overall job performance.

The central focus of this study is to identify and comprehend the factors of training and development that influence job performance within KVB in Coimbatore Divisional office. Additionally, through an examination of the mediating effect of employee engagement, our objective is to reveal the underlying mechanisms that have the potential to improve job performance. Within the specific domain of the KVB in Coimbatore Divisional office, there exists a dearth of scholarly investigations that thoroughly explore the mediating function of employee engagement in the association between training and development, and job performance. The primary objective of this study is to address the existing research gap and provide significant contributions by examining strategies that effectively enhance organizational performance.

The outcomes of this study will hold significant value for both local and international private banks operating worldwide. Organizations have the potential to enhance employee performance and cultivate a positive work environment by leveraging scientific research on the importance of training and development, employee engagement and job performance, as well as the mediating effects of employee engagement.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Training refers to a planned as well as systematic activity that builds and upgrades employees' capacity to carry out their task roles more effectively, making the employees more motivated, satisfied and confident (Malik, 2018). Training and development have become increasingly popular among research scholars due to their relationship with employee performance and productivity (Kiweewa and Asiimwe, 2014). Training and development act as a precursor to human capital development and enhance both employee and organizational performance (Alola and Alafeshat, 2021; Garavan, *et al*. 2021). Training builds the capacity of the employees so that they can be more effective and efficient in performing their roles.

Moreover, previous studies have shown that training positively impacts employee performance, contributing to enhanced productivity and effectiveness (Presbitero, 2017). However, findings from studies such as that conducted in North Cyprus by Babakus, *et al*. (2017) indicate a negative association between training and employee performance, leading to inconclusive results. Given the critical importance of excellent customer service in the banking sector, it becomes imperative for banks to understand how training and development initiatives

influence employee performance. Therefore, further exploration of the relationship between training and employee performance is necessary to inform effective strategies for enhancing organizational outcomes. Hence, based on the above discussions, the following hypotheses are postulated:

Job performance and job engagement have drawn the attention of many research scholars in the past decade (Wang and Chen, 2020). Job performance refers to the extent to which an individual effectively executes the tasks and responsibilities associated with their role within an organization (Motowidlo, 2003). It encompasses the quality and quantity of work produced, the ability to meet objectives and goals, the level of competency in performing job-related tasks, and the overall contribution to the success and productivity of the organization (Judge and Robbins, 2017). Conceptually, job performance is influenced by various factors including skills, knowledge, motivation, work environment, and organizational support. It is also the performance and behavior demonstrated by a firm's members in fulfilling the formal roles and expectations of the firm (Shin, *et al*. 2020). Moreover, job performance is a behavior that is aligned with the firm's objectives and demonstrated by self-controlled employees (Campbell, *et al*. 1993).

Essentially, it refers to all the behaviors that are crucial for attaining the firm's goals and objectives. Moreover, engaging in such behaviors and actions leads to an individual's contribution to the firm (Harter, *et al*. 2013). However, engaged workers are the backbone of organizational success as they enhance productivity, commitment and performance (Wang and Chen, 2020). The concept of job engagement was proposed by Kahn (1990), and employees need to be focused to enhance organizational productivity and performance (Lai, *et al*. 2020). According to Lorente, *et al*. (2014), engaged employees provide better performance. Job engagement allows employees to invest their energy to fulfil their work-related roles, which enhances their performance (Kahn, 1990). Hence, much emphasis should be given to job engagement, which is considered one of the critical determinants of job performance (Wang and Chen, 2020).

There is an ongoing debate regarding the association between job performance and job engagement. Many studies have focused on the relationship between job performance and engagement in various industries, including hotel, education, telecommunication, military, banking, and retail (Wang and Chen, 2020). However, studies on the association between job performance and engagement in the banking industry have been scant. Previous studies conducted in the hospitality and healthcare industries showed that job performance is positively associated with job engagement (Lai, *et al*. 2020).

According to Wang and Chen (2020), job performance is significantly improved by job engagement. On the contrary, a study conducted by Kim and Koo (2017) found no significant association between job performance and job engagement. Hence, the results remain inconclusive. Furthermore, a study conducted by Bizri *et al*. (2021) in the Lebanese banking sector showed that work engagement positively influenced job performance. Therefore, we hypothesize that banking professionals' job performance will be impacted by their degree of involvement with their job.

Selim Ahmed *et al*. (2024) investigated the influence of training and development and work-life balance on employee engagement and job performance at private banks in Bangladesh. In this study, 450 survey questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and received 346 useful responses (76.88% response rate). The findings of the study indicate that both training and development and work-life balance significantly influence employee engagement and job performance in the private banks. The findings also indicate that both training and development and work-life balance indirectly significantly influence the job performance of the private bank through the mediating role of employee engagement.

Work engagement, extensively studied since the late 1990s, has consistently revealed a strong link between employee performance and engagement

(Kahn, 1990; Rich, 2010). Defined as the positive attitude employee hold towards their organization and its values, employee engagement is regarded as a pivotal motivating factor within the business sector (Aguenza and Som, 2012). Engaged employees, as argued by Shantz *et al*. (2013), exhibit heightened focus, dedication, and psychological presence in fulfilling their work-related roles, which subsequently contributes to the minimization of mistakes and human errors (Shantz *et al*., 2013; Sendawula *et al*., 2018).

Moreover, studies such as those conducted by Lambert, *et al*. (2021) and Chen and Peng (2021) have consistently demonstrated a positive correlation between an individual's work performance and their level of engagement. Engaged employees are more likely to experience and express positive emotions, fostering a greater sense of absorption and attentiveness in their work (Shantz, *et al*. 2013). Thus, it is evident that employee engagement plays a crucial role in enhancing employee performance.

Research Gap

This research aims to fill the gaps in research that do not address training and development in employee engagement and employee performance that narrow the gaps of previous studies. However, it has been found that training and development can lead to positive impact experiences. Nevertheless, very little attention has been paid to understanding the relationship between training and development and employee engagement. The current research conducted in the KVB in Coimbatore Divisional office is significant. This is because training and development is an easy way to find out how to engage employees in the fast-growing technology and technology-adapted field of banking. From the results obtained from this research, banking sector can understand how training and development as an indispensable tool for the banking industry.

Need for the Study

Similar research was performed by Jaiswal and Tyagi (2019) in the Indian context of the hotel industry in Uttarakhand and the Himalayan regions of India. Therefore, training and development, work engagement and employee performance would have shown different results. The results will be helpful for this research. Therefore, there is a need to conduct research that clarifies the extent to which training and development influences employee engagement and employee performance. Therefore, this research first empirically tests the direct relationship between training and development, employee engagement and employee performance in the Karur Vysya Bank (KVB) in the Coimbatore Divisional office, Tamilnadu.

Framework of the Research (Fig. 1)

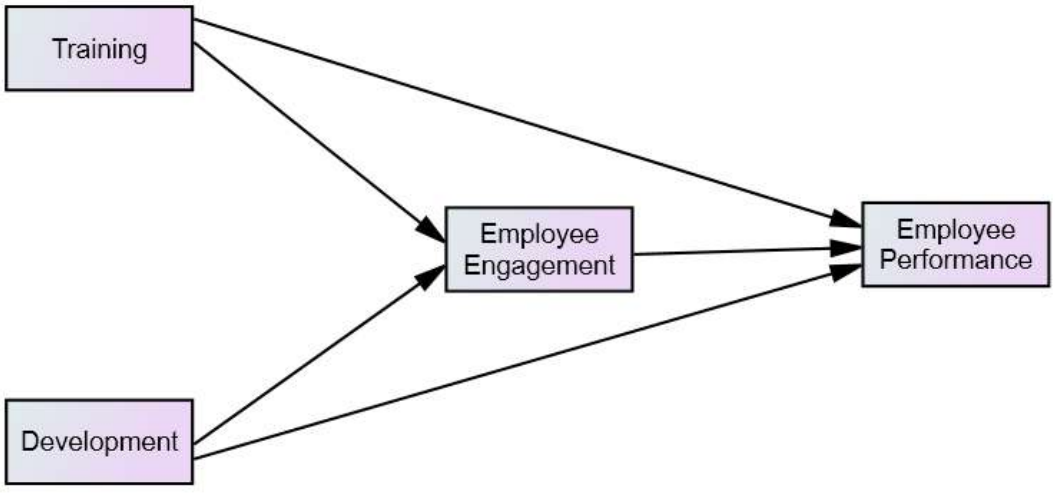

Fig. 1: Framework of the Research

Statement of the Problem

Though recruitment of talented employees for banking sector is high, Bank also finds it difficult to ensure employees engagement. At this juncture, employee engagement helps to improve their performance and reduce employee turnover intention. To improve employee engagement, better training and development practices are needed. There are several studies to ensure positive relationship between training and development and employee engagement. This positive relationship ultimately leads to employee performance. This opinion of the researchers leads to examine the employee training and development on employee performance in the KVB, Coimbatore Divisional office.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the various demographics factors of bank employees that influence of their opinion on training and development.
- To determine the influence of training and development on employee engagement.
- To investigate the influence of training and development on employee performance.
- To examine the influence of employee engagement on employee performance.
- To identify the mediating effect of employee engagement between training and development and employee performance.

Hypotheses of the Study

- There is a significant difference towards training and development with respect to demographic profile of the bank employees.
- There is influence of training and development on employee engagement.
- There is influence of training and development on employee performance.
- There is influence of employee engagement on employee performance.
- There is a mediating effect of employee engagement between training and development and employee performance.

METHOD

Research Design: The Coimbatore Divisional office's KVB training and development is examined by the researcher using descriptive research design. The primary data was collected using a methodical questionnaire (Table 1). Training and development, employee engagement, employee performance, and demographic profile are its four distinct surveys. Employees at KVB in the Coimbatore Divisional office participated in the survey using a well-designed questionnaire, and they were assured that the data collected would only be used for research. A descriptive study approach was used to examine the relationship between the research variables (training and development, employee retention, and employee performance).

Table 1: Questionnaire Construction

S.No.	Variable	Items	Author
I	Demographic Profile	9	---
II	Training and development	20	Danish Ahmed Siddiqui & Noor-us-Sahar (2019)
	1. Course content	4	
	2. Facilities	4	
	3. Trainer	5	
	4. Development	7	
III	Employee engagement	12	Sadikoglu & Olcay (2014)
IV	Employee Performance	6	Mohammed Hassen Yimam (2022)

Employees of the Coimbatore Divisional office's KVB were given a questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire for this study was also divided into four pieces by the researcher. Determining the demographics of bank personnel in the KVB was the goal of the survey's first component. The second half of the questionnaire inquired about training and development, the third section questioned about employee engagement in KVB, and the fourth section asked about their performance. Except for the first, all three sections had multiple-choice questions and were presented statistically.

Data Collection: In this study, the researcher used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected using a well-structured questionnaire and a Google document. Additionally, the researcher requested that the staff of the Coimbatore Divisional

office's KVB respond to the questions using the instructions in the questionnaire. The completed questionnaires were collected by the researcher. The workers of the KVB in the Coimbatore Divisional office submitted their opinions in compliance with the rules. After the data was analyzed, the results were totalled and presented in the next chapter. To perform the study more effectively, the researcher employed secondary data, which is a survey of the literature. The researcher collected data from a range of sources, such as annual reports, books, journals, doctoral theses from various academics, working papers, websites, and more (Table 2).

Table 2: Reliability of the Research Tool

S.No.	Variable	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
I	**Demographic Profile**	**9**	---
II	**Training and development**	**20**	0.90
	1. Course content	4	0.80
	2. Facilities	4	0.94
	3. Trainer	5	0.90
	4. Development	7	0.96
III	**Employee engagement**	**12**	0.88
IV	**Employee Performance**	**6**	0.83

Source: Primary data

The study's goal was to confirm the structured questionnaire's reliability. Questionnaires were distributed to 131 employees of the Coimbatore Divisional office's KVB. Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the variables' dependability. According to the table, the Cronbach's alpha values for each of the three variables in this questionnaire are higher than 0.70. This Cronbach's alpha value indicates the questionnaire's reliability. This suggests that the questionnaire has a very high reliability value. Based on this result, it is statistically advised that the questionnaire be utilized for the final collection of study data.

Population

Table 3: Karur Vysya bank Ltd Under Coimbatore Divisional office

S.No.	Divisional Office	Population
1	Middle level employees	72
	Total	72

Source: www.kvb.co.in

The employees working in KVB Under Coimbatore is considered as population of the study is. Hence, total population of this study is 188 employees working in KVBLtd Under Coimbatore.

Determination of Sample Size: The Yamane (1967) formula is used to calculate the sample size of a research. This formula would be of good use to determine the sample size for this research.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n represents the sample size, N represents the population size (72) and e is assumed to represent the precision level (e = 0.05). The following sample size is available when using this formula.

$$n = \frac{72}{1 + 72(0.05)^2}$$
$$n = \frac{72}{1 + 0.18}$$
$$n = \frac{72}{1.18}$$
$$n = 61$$

Therefore, the samples collected should not be less than the size of the samples determined by the formula 61. It is therefore to be distributed more than 10 percent of the sample size determined by the formula.

Sampling Technique: Simple random sampling technique (Lottery method) has been applied to collect the data from KVB in Coimbatore Divisional office. The population of the research is 72 employees of KVB in Coimbatore Divisional office. In this method, all the employees working in KVB in Coimbatore Divisional office are given a particular number (1 to 72) and it is being taken out for 61 numbers and whosoever is coming in the hand they can be considered as the respondent. Through this method, sample size is obtained by the descriptions below (Table 4).

Table 4: Sampling Frame of the Research

Population	Distributed = 61 + (10%) 6 = 67	Not Received	Received	Rejected	Final Sample Size
72	67	3	64	2	62

The questionnaires (research tool) were distributed to 73 employees working in KVB in Coimbatore Divisional office. From the sample size, 10 percent is increased and distributed, out of which received filled questionnaires were 64; nonresponse were 3 from the employees working in KVB in Coimbatore Divisional office and rejected 2 questionnaires due to incompleteness. Hence, 62 sample responses are fit for further analysis and considered as sample size of the research.

Statistical Tools: Path analysis is employed to determine the mediation effect of employee engagement between training and development and employee performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Table 5 shows the model fit statistics, such as RMSEA, RMR, NFI, CFI, AGFI, and GFI. The recommended cutoff point, less than 0.08 (Indra, *et al*. 2020; Velaudham and Baskar, 2016), is exceeded by RMR and RMSEA. The recommended limit of 0.90 is exceeded by the AGFI and GFI values (Velaudham and Baskar, 2015; Velaudham and Baskar, 2016). All model fit statistics point to a moderate model fit (Premapriya, *et al*. 2016; Victor and Velaudham, 2020), and the NFI and CFI values are more than 0.90 (Reena, *et al*. 2019; Hariprabhu Dhakal, *et al*. 2025) (Table 6).

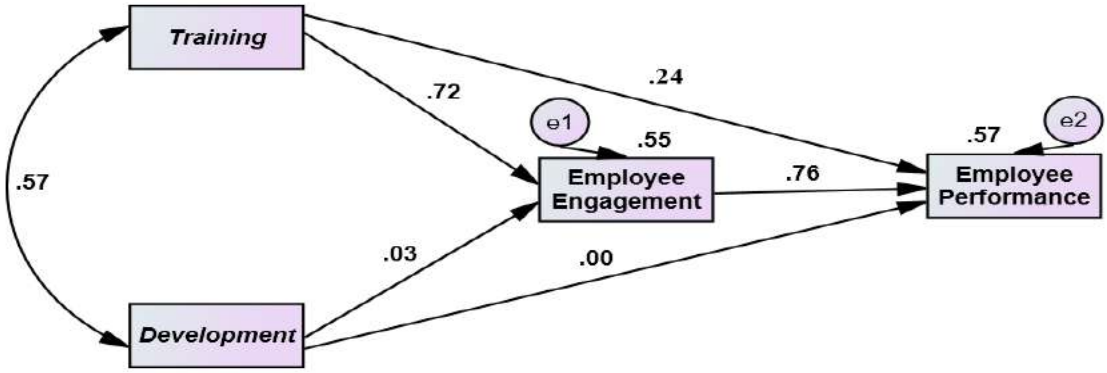

Fig. 2: Employee Engagement Mediates the Relationship between Training & Development and Employee Performance

Table 5: Model Summary

	S.No.	Model Fit Indicators	Calculated Values in the Analysis	Recommended Values (Premapriya, et al., 2016)
	1	Chi-Square	0.002	---
Goodness Fit	2	P	0.963	> 0.050
	3	GFI	1.000	> 0.90
	4	AGFI	0.998	
	5	CFI	1.000	
	6	NFI	1.000	
Badness Fit	7	RMR	0.001	< 0.080
	8	RMSEA	0.001	

Source: Primary Data

Table 6: Regression Weights

DV		IV	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	Beta	p-Value
Employee Engagement	<---	Training	0.569	0.077	7.434	0.723	0.001
Employee Engagement	<---	Development	0.021	0.071	0.298	0.029	0.766
Employee Performance	<---	Employee Engagement	0.708	0.108	6.564	0.764	0.001
Employee Performance	<---	Training	0.010	0.093	3.103	0.243	0.001
Employee Performance	<---	Development	0.003	0.065	0.046	0.004	0.963

Source: Primary data

H_{A1}: Training significantly and positively influences employee engagement.

SEM analysis has been employed in the study to verify the hypothesis. The value of β is 0.723, while the C.R. value is 7.434. This indicates that 72.3% of training has a substantial and favorable impact on the employee engagement. At p=0.001, the p-value is significant. Thus, hypothesis (H_{A1}) is approved. Therefore, training significantly and positively influences employee engagement.

H_{A2}: Development significantly and positively influences employee engagement.

SEM analysis has been employed in the study to verify the hypothesis. The value of β is 0.029, while the C.R. value is 0.298. This indicates that 0.29% of development has a substantial and favourable impact on the employee engagement. At p=0.766, the p-value is not significant. Thus, hypothesis (H_{A2}) is rejected. Therefore, development does not influence employee engagement.

H_{A3}: Training significantly and positively influences employee performance.

SEM analysis has been employed in the study to verify the hypothesis. The value of β is 0.243, while the C.R. value is 3.103. This indicates that 24.3% of training has a substantial and favourable impact on the employee performance. At p=0.001, the p-value is significant. Thus, hypothesis (H_{A3}) is approved. Therefore, training significantly and positively influences employee performance.

H_{A4}: Development significantly and positively influences employee performance.

SEM analysis has been employed in the study to verify the hypothesis. The value of β is 0.004, while the C.R. value is 0. 0.046. This indicates that 0.04% of development has a substantial and favorable impact on the employee performance. At p=0.963, the p-value is not significant. Thus, hypothesis (H_{A4}) is rejected. Therefore, development does not influence employee performance.

H_{A5}: There is mediation effect of employee engagement between training and employee performance.

SEM analysis has been employed in the study to verify the hypothesis. The value of β is 0.243, while the C.R. value is 3.103. Additionally, the data shows that the overall effect is 0.795, the indirect effect is 0.552, and the direct effect is 0.243. This indicates that there is a 79.5% mediation impact of employee engagement between training and employee performance. At p=0.001, the p-value is significant. Thus, hypothesis (H_{A5}) is proved. Therefore, there is mediation effect of employee engagement between training and employee performance (Table 7).

Table 7: Mediation Effects

DV		Development	Training	EE
EE	DE	0.029	0.723	0.000
	IDE	0.000	0.000	0.000
	TE	0.029	0.723	0.000
EP	DE	0.004	0.243	0.764
	IDE	0.022	0.552	0.000
	TE	0.026	0.795	0.764

Source: Primary data

H_{A6}: There is mediation effect of employee engagement between development and employee performance.

SEM analysis has been employed in the study to verify the hypothesis. The value of β is 0.004, while the C.R. value is 0.046. Additionally, the data shows that the overall effect is 0.026, the indirect effect is 0.022, and the direct effect is 0.004. This indicates that there is a 2.6% mediation impact of employee engagement between development and employee performance. At p=0.963, the p-value is not significant. Thus, hypothesis (H_{A6}) is rejected. Therefore, there is no mediation effect of employee engagement between development and employee performance.

FINDINGS

- Training significantly and positively influences employee engagement.
- Development does not influence employee engagement.

- Training significantly and positively influences employee performance.
- Development does not influence employee performance.
- There is mediation effect of employee engagement between training and employee performance.
- There is no mediation effect of employee engagement between development and employee performance.

SUGGESTIONS

- It is suggested that the higher the employee inspiration the greater is the possibility to learn and apply the new knowledge on the job. The reasons for such an interest are to be identified. It will help the dairy plants to make additional interest among the KVB employees in relation to training.
- KVB should take required action in such a way that employees should think training is essential to enhance employees' performance and to manage the present competitor challenges.
- Managers should provide opportunities for KVB employees to actively participate in employee training.
- KVB should design effective employee development programes and foster a supportive work environment to motivate their employees to contribute to organizational success.
- KVB management should evaluate the remuneration of employees with the analysis of raising employees' engagement and employees' performance levels.
- KVB management need to recognize the worth of the participatory components to compete efficiently at the global levels through effective achievement in the engagement policy.
- KVB management should be provided about morals through training the employees to increase their engagement toward their work performance. Providing the accurate type of training programs the employee engagement can be influenced in either way.

CONCLUSION

The research is an attempt to identify the effect of "Employee Training and Development on Employee Performance in the KVB." Descriptive research design is employed to explore the relationship between research variables (training and development, employee engagement, and employee performance). Simple random sampling technique (Lottery method) has been applied to collect the data from employees working in KVB Coimbatore divisional office. The questionnaires (research tool) were distributed to 62 employees working in KVB Coimbatore divisional office.

The factors course content, facilities, and trainer significantly influence employee engagement. But, the factor development did not influence the employee engagement. The factors course content, facilities, and trainer significantly influence employee performance. But, the factor development did not influence the employee performance. Employee engagement significantly influences employee performance. There is mediation effect of employee engagement between training and employee performance. There is no mediation effect of employee engagement between development and employee performance. Hence, it is concluded that, KVB management should be provided about morals through training the employees to increase their engagement towards their work performance. Providing the accurate type of training programs the employee engagement can be influenced in either way.

LIMITATIONS

Though the research has been properly planned and well-executed, there are certain limitations, which are inherent in nature, and which are out of the researcher's control. Such important limitations of the study are stated below.

- The main disadvantage is that the researcher could not observe the responses to the Google

document questionnaire from the employees of the private sector banks in the Coimbatore division.

- The survey only included employees from the Coimbatore division's private sector banks.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

Though the research has been accurately planned and well executed, there are certain gaps, which are intrinsic in nature and are out of the researcher's control.

- A comparative study could be conducted in various sectors in India based on cost benefits and return on investments from training programes can be carried out.
- Only two outcome variables (employee engagement and employee performance) have been identified in this study, but training and development are influenced by several variables which can be probed in future.

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Role of Women in Applique: A Human Resource Development Perspective

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ABSTRACT

A research pursuit examining women artisans in Pipili, Odisha to highlight the various adversities faced by them in the pursuit of the craft are described in this article paper. The article may also illuminate previously hidden issues that can be applied to practice, and/or provide a means for understanding an important research problem associated with Pipili craft with greater clarity. Case studies are known to research and usually examine a single 'subject of analysis', but article papers can also be designed as a comparative investigation to show relationships between two or more centers of power. The methods used to study this case can be categorized within qualitative, or investigative paradigm.

KEYWORDS

Chandua, Dialog and Deconstruction, Motif, Patriarchal System, Women Artisans

INTRODUCTION

An artisan cluster is defined as a geographically concentrated rural township or village that accommodates household units producing handicraft or handloom products. In a typical cluster, inhabitants often belong to a traditional community, producing the products for generations. Pipili village in Odisha, is a Nagar Panchayat or Notified Area Council (NAC) located 40 km from Puri and about 45 minutes from Bhubaneshwar is one such artisan cluster that is known for its applique work on cloth.

Pipli village about 20 km from Bhubaneshwar, the capital of Odisha, is a village where all houses and shops along the roads used to have a common denominator: beautiful appliqué products, in the making or on display, along the Pipili bazaar. All that is changing and much has already changed over the last decade. It is now being spoken in loud voices that the commercial aspect of Pipili craft has only a few years left. Many artisans are buying similar looking products from Gujarat and selling it under the pretext of Pipili products.

Applique also called a Chandua locally, was mainly a craft form that was nurtured by women due to the delicate handwork involved in the making of products. Repetition, embodied learning and patience are hallmarks of the craft. Chandua or applique was a part time occupation for the Daraji (Spelled as Doroji) community in Pipili with most Daraji's catering to the Dol yatra Chandua requirements as a secondary income or catering to temples and other religious events (RC Mahapatra, 2005) usually paid in kind with groceries or a few shillings (Jumna Khan Artisan, personal Communication, 2025). During other times Daraji community earned their income via repairing mattresses, and umbrellas. Now due to various factors like commercialization of craft, customer preferences, utilitarian focus of craft, etc, Chandua applique has become primary mode of income.

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This article has been produced as a result of a participatory dialog with a women's self help group during the Residency with Odisha Craft Odyssey in Pipili, Odisha during August-September 2025. *Copyright © 2025 Madhulika S. Naidu; Copyright © 2025 Madhulika Sagaram*

As commercialization set in, so did large scale spread and vast decentralized network of the craft form. Coupled with this shift arrived government incentives for self-employment for self-help groups (Skilled Artisan Tukkubabu, Personal Communication, 2025). It is now estimated that there are 15000 women artisans working through SHG model in Chandua clusters. There needs to be detailed assessment and analysis of the various factors that led to this spread of decentralized structure of the process and practice of the craft along with role of male and female artisans across various clusters. This article attempts to use voices of women artisans and build several short cases for the purpose of dialog and deconstruction of the problem. The article will also include a women self-help group to engage them in participatory dialogue. A preliminary dialog was conducted in Narsighpur in Pipili village and the following issues emerged during the introductory dialog based in a participatory approach.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

Income Parity

The real problem of income parity has been possibly created by two factors; sudden expansion of a part time occupation into a full-time occupation and decentralization of craft form. The former happened when Pipili craft shifted from a generational mode with learning passed on from one generation to the other to any person from any community learning it. However, when generational artisans learned it, they spent close to ten years to learn the artform. But, when non-generational learners were learning it, only for commercial purposes they learned only a part of the artform like motif making or stitching strips in just a few weeks after which, the government gave them a certificate and an ID card. It is clear from descriptions on state run store website that the authorities did not know that the artform takes at least a decade to master. With the best intentions, the most damage was caused!

While decentralization of craft has created an opportunity for women workers to be trained and recognized as artisans, it has provided them a part time option to earn meagre amount of money daily. Women are paid as low as 10-15 paisa for a jasmine flower made with cloth and it does not help them repay the loans they take as members of self-help groups also. Added to this, women artisans are trained to make only the motifs, they cannot cut cloth and neither can they put all the components together by hand or by machine. The cutting and assembly are both controlled by men.

Patriarchal System of Control

The skilled artisan is usually a man with control over resources, cutting technique, and assembly process. The women artisans trained by the men in power just create motifs that go on Pipili products. Pipili craft has three different aspects to it, first the thread work, then cloth strip work and finally the cutouts or motifs. Thread works which were done by hand earlier is now replaced by sewing machine stitching. Cloth strip work is done by both men and women, men cut the cloth and women stitch it on the base material; likewise with the motif as well.

This control is a well thought out practice since time immemorial; men always did the cutting and assembly and women did the handwork. The actual reason was requirement of delicacy and patience in a craft that demands repetition and boredom. The protocol that was established for practical reasons, is now the backbone of patriarchy. The skilled artisans pay the women artisans almost next to nothing while making huge profits. The men openly talk about the exploitation as valid and a justified means toward controlling women to work for meagre resources. Exploitation of women artisans is a grave concern; while they may not be sufficiently trained to create Pipili craft products on their own, paying them 10-30 paisa per motif in this day and age is absolutely mindboggling and ridiculous.

The women are also entrenched in patriarchy and do not seem to take stock that the men are hoarding money and power and making them slog. Most women are waiting for some fairy to come and save them or are hoping that some authority somewhere

will take notice of this situation. The problem is in their midst, in their backyard and the solution is in taking control of the situation. The men keep telling the women a crisis is looming and this craft is going to just collapse sooner than later and women artisans are manipulated into believing the men are their saviors. The women are lacking access to markets, and even when provided with design interventions lack the confidence and will to reach out to boutiques and textile vendors for collaborations. These observations were made in the preliminary participative dialog conducted in Narsinghpur in Pipili.

Continuity of Roles

It is well known fact among Pipili artisans, and the community at large that men and women had developed different roles in the craft of Pipili. Women did the handwork apart from household chores and providing care for elderly and children. Men on the other hand participated in mattress and umbrella construction or agriculture and also did all the cutting work of Pipili artefacts and final assembly. This structure was put in place so women did not have the knowhow of cutting and assembly and only did the laborious handwork. Two factors contributed to this setup; intense competition among and between Daraji families warranted this system that excluded the knowhow of the craft from girls and women so the ancestral knowledge did not spread to other villages if they were married into other Pipili craft clusters. The second factor was control, whoever knew how to cut the motifs and assemble the final product had power over the craft and knowledge. This is the most blatant aspect of patriarchy that is staring at us in the narrative of Pipili.

The women are conditioned to think and feel that the men are naturally entitled to the knowledge of cutting and assembly. They continue to work extremely hard for meagre pay and are paid in paisa for a motif. For example, generational artisans who are women create extremely beautiful jasmine flowers only to sell them for one rupee. Some of them consider this a high pay since other women get paid Rs.100 for 80 flowers. A whole day's work might get a woman only Rs. 10 to 12. Due to this issue women are barely able to repay the loans they procure through self-help groups. They work all the time and do not have any earnings in return for their work while the male skilled artisans make at least Rs. 1,500 per product. This too is an ugly face of patriarchy; one that the women are aware of but are unable to overcome or willingly refuse to acknowledge because the male artisans are in power and the women who speak may be ostracized from social setup and lose the opportunity that exists.

Case A

She is seventy now, Shashikala Devi (name changed) and a mother and grandmother who is also an entrepreneur. Anyone who meets her is in awe of her resolve to sell her art and craft herself. Very meticulously, Shashikala Devi keeps crafting jasmine flowers in many colours; she figured out women like the applique flowers and put them on clothing so she specialized in creating them her own way. She does not use thin dhoti cloth because the flowers have to sustain wear and tear if they have to go on dress materials and wearable clothing. Instead, she improvized on raw material to make it last wash after wash. Her in-laws taught her Chandua along with other family traditions and she has held on to the family tradition with great tenacity.

What is remarkable about her is she does not use the family name as her last name, instead she goes by her first name, Shashikala Devi. She laments the loss of Pipili as a craft and how artisans are doing whatever they want in the name of Pipili and the protocols of practice are now diluted and lost. She is one of the handful people who are continuing to do handwork just like Pipili craft was when it flourished in Pipili village 500 years ago. She takes pride in her expertize and says she used to make Pillows (mandi), her husband made Umbrella (Chotti), Victory banner (Tarasa), Announcement banners, Adheni, Hand fan (Alata). Everything has changed, the face of Pipili craft has changed due to commercialization but Shashikala Devi stands tall among the stalwarts of the trade, refusing to sell her craft and products

for pennies. Instead, she very bravely makes her products, displays them in front of her small store and makes a profit with a smile on her face.

Case B

Now in her sixties, Hira Bibi (name changed) diligently makes wheels of chakki with her fragile hands, day after day. For 35 years, she has created motifs for Pipili artefacts only to sell them to the skilled artisans for meagre payment. She was all but 16 years old when she got married and moved to Pipili from her parent's house near Nimapada. She learnt the art of applique called Chandua from her sister-in-law and co-sister (Badi jhethan). She started making peacocks (mayur), Parrots (sua), Jagannath and Krishna also. The Baniya would give her thread (suta) and cloth (kapada) and she would start working late afternoon after her chores were completed and sometimes sit with her lantern in the evenings and make her motifs. She says as a matter of fact that the tailor who was a man used to cut and give and women used to make motifs only. Her husband managed fields and made motifs along with her sometimes, he was good at chain stitch (chikaan) she says with a smile on her face.

Hira Bibi has no body of work, no display of her craft, no recognition for her effort; just worn-out hands that have made motif after motif for decades. In her mature years, Hira Bibi has to continue to make those motifs and sell them to the skilled artisan who calls himself the "Master' for next to nothing. Her whole life spent in tending and managing patriarchy in her community; the most sinister of toxic masculinity that exists in power structures in human settlements.

Case C

A cut throat entrepreneur and skilled artisan, Jamal khan (name changed) manages several women artisans to mass produce Pipili artefacts that are sold across the country. He has a small workshop that caters to demands of showrooms in far way cities as well. Jamal Khan is astute and shrewd; he understands that he holds power and uses it without remorse. His strong hold on women artisans is a testimony to the patriarchy that runs deep in the artisan networks and community in Pipili. Women artisans do not have access to money, or resources required to make the craft products. They rely on skilled artisans like Jamal Khan for material and in turn are paid in paisa per artefact created, while Jamal Khan sells the product for Rs. 1,500.

A woman artisan makes Rs. 50 for what she creates and Jamal Khan makes a profit of at least Rs. 1,300 on the product created by the woman with her sweat and blood. Pipili is teaming with male skilled artisans like Jamal Khan who control the women artisans and make money off them. "I do it because I can; they have no choice but to cater to my condition if they want work, says Jamal Khan with a smirk on his face that too in front of the women artisans. Yet, the women artisans look up to him as their saviour, the sewing machine wielding master, the starkest reminder of patriarchy thriving among them!!

PARTICIPATORY DIALOG

A participatory dialog was initiated by the researcher at a women's self-help group (SHG) in Pipili village. The SHG consisted of ten women who work together as a unit creating and crafting commercial Pipili products. They obtained a loan of Rs. 1 lac from the government and bought supplies to start applique work. They repay the loan together as well as the monthly interest. However, the women revealed it is extremely difficult to pay off the monthly interest because their pay is very meagre. The women earn in paisa per handmade motif. They only earn Rs. 50 for the complete product while the skilled artisan who hires them for handwork sells it for Rs. 1,500 to the showrooms where it is sold for double the amount. The women continue to work because this skill is what they know of and if they protest for higher pay, they might lose the opportunity. They try to make best of what is available and possible and keep going.

The women artisans are involved in parttime work through the Pipili handwork and motif creation. Women have traditionally from time immemorial made the motifs and hand stitches and strip designs on products while the men did the cutting and

assembly. Little has changed in this format even when Chandua, that art of applique in Odisha moved from a traditional format to a more commercial enterprise with different materials. However, what has changed is the remuneration for the handwork. Now, the pay is next to negligible. Imagine being paid 30 paisa for a flower motif, even if a woman artisan could make 100 pieces per day; she would still earn only Rs. 30 for it. The researcher involved the women in a discussion on diversifying their skills on sarees, dress materials at boutiques in Bhubaneshwar instead of just focusing on creating wall decorations.

The researcher then did a transaction to understand power structure and negotiation via experiential learning. She asked the leader of the group to make a strip design for her and enquired how much she needed to pay. The woman artisan said Rs. 30, the researcher offered Rs. 50 for it. Then the researcher also asked for an incomplete strip of design and asked for the price. The woman artisan replied Rs. 30 for it. Then the researcher asked what else the woman artisan could give her so she could be paid a round figure of Rs. 100. The woman artisan showed two more small pieces of motifs and asked for an extra Rs. 100.

The researcher then explained to the women that the customer should not feel ripped off or being taken advantage of!! It was quite evident that the women did not have the ability to negotiate; they were used to being controlled or want to overcompensate that control. This is the biggest impediment to their self-sustenance and financial independence. This scenario is quite common in the working class in India. Patriarchy ensures that people live their lives understanding power as a see saw instead of a negotiation meaning lopsided experience of power relays a false narrative toward power.

The women artisans like millions of others who have been entrapped in the hierarchical and unnegotiable weight of patriarchy, only know how to snatch power or be completely submissive. There is no in between of power sharing in social circumstances where poverty exists. This pattern can be observed in participatory dialogs with domestic help or those providing other forms of service also. In environments where financial stress does not exist, the need for social power also does not exist. But, in environments where financial power is limited, the scramble for social power exists. Often, patriarchy is involved in the midst of the interaction of agency for women and their own emancipation is thwarted by themselves because of lack of ability to negotiate power. In such circumstances, the male in power makes all decisions in order to keep control over women who do not know how to negotiate power. Also, when women workers or artisans do not know how to negotiate power, the male in power will keep them oppressed so he can have the say.

Just like the skilled artisan controlling the SHG in this case said “I pay them less because I know they will work even if I reduce it further”. The conundrum is this that it is difficult to erase their lived experience. When a person grows up in control, they understand being in control or getting controlled and no other paradigm. Unfortunately, for these women, they do not have the experience of negotiation of either power or money. Which is why, the skilled male artisan is controlling their financial prospects as well as their possibilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

“An article encompasses a problem contextualized around the application of thorough analysis, interpretation, and in-depth discussion, often resulting in specific recommendations for action or for improving existing conditions.” (writing@CSU, 2025)

The concept of participative consciousness is to be introduced to women artisans, so reflections on mystery of the craft, their own aura, and the ineffable qualities of patience, perseverance and dedication resist full intellectual capture driven by modern existential control. This narrative is suggesting that women artisans should be aware of multiple ways of communication, their personal power and the existential crisis simultaneously. While, fostering harmony with the larger cultural and physical

environment rather than striving for total control or singular authorship, it is also important that women artisans do not become unheard and unseen in the story of Pipili craft. The women artisans like any other artist that goes on an uphill trek must decide whether to resist or flow with larger forces that control the practice of the craft. This article advocates for a balance that embraces humility and openness to external power with "grace" without compromising on their personal power and agency.

Modern feminist theories and approaches emanating from the West are alien to cultural constructs that inform daily routine, emancipation of women, social agency and gender roles in villages in India. India is a very diverse country with rituals, social norms, way of life informed by traditions that are passed from one generation to the other. Value systems and role of women in rural India are situated in close knit family structures, and primary roles as homemakers. In such circumstances, women have to take a step back or remain subservient in order to negotiate power and control over money.

To take feminism from Western theories and bombard it on the narratives of rural women artisans would be totally inappropriate and unrequited as it would be a total misfit for the subjective narratives of women in rural India. Feminist narratives that are relevant to local contexts should be introduced via questioning, participatory dialog and storytelling. While, it is evident that the male skilled artisans are exploiting the women artisans, a fact that they themselves know but will not speak up about because they might lose whatever little they are able to earn now. All that they have practiced is Pipili craft and might be apprehensive about losing the opportunity to create motifs for the craft they heart so much; also, a work from home opportunity that could get lost if voices are raised against power and dominance.

CONCLUSION

Further, deeper exploration and engagement with several SHG units might be required to expand the scope of the project from a article to qualitative study if the patriarchy and its deep-seated roots are to be fully understood. This article is just an overview of the problem and the lack of negotiation of power in a craft cluster. Complicated conversations about income parity, entrepreneurship, identification of personal power will enable possibilities for further dialog and an elaborate process that might be useful for women at large. This article and the set of cases it showcases are just the tip of the iceberg of a huge problem that is submerged under water, invisible to the society and social consciousness at large. A lot of effort and embedded training will be required to enmesh the women artisans from the blind side that has engulfed them. However, that process and perspective will be the content and interest of another research study and proposition. This article was built to develop a narrative, a case for that possibility.

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DECLARATION

The author also states that there is no conflict of interest or third-party interest involved in the production or distribution of this article solely meant for research, development and the advancement of scholarship. The author can be reached at madhoosony2@gmail.com for further information.

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The AI Era: How do Human Trainers Exist in a Digitally Distracted World – Practitioner's Perspective

Nikita Vasant Raut*

ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed how people access information, learn new skills, and engage with knowledge. While technology has democratized learning, it has also created new challenges for trainers and learning professionals. This article explores how the role of trainers is evolving in an AI-enabled and digitally distracted world. Drawing from professional experience in leadership development, organizational learning, and people development, it examines the competencies that distinguish impactful trainers from content providers. The article proposes the A.C.T.I.V.E. framework as a practical model for trainers seeking to remain relevant, influential, and effective in modern learning environments.

KEYWORDS

Creating Presence, Digital Fluency, Emerging Competencies, Human-Centered Learning, Power of Storytelling

INTRODUCTION

The learning landscape has changed dramatically over the last decade. Employees today consume information through videos, podcasts, social media, AI platforms, and digital learning systems. Knowledge that once required classroom instruction is now available within seconds. As a result, the trainer's role can no longer be limited to delivering information. In the past, trainers were often viewed as subject matter experts whose primary responsibility was to transfer knowledge. Today, learners frequently arrive in training sessions having already read articles, watched videos, or interacted with AI tools.

The challenge is no longer access to information; it is making sense of information, applying it meaningfully, and transforming it into action. This shift has significant implications for learning and development professionals. The future belongs to trainers who combine technological awareness with human-centered facilitation. Their value lies not in what they know alone but in how they engage, inspire, challenge, and support learners.

The Age of Digital Distraction

Modern professionals operate in an environment characterized by constant notifications, multiple communication channels, and information overload. Attention has become one of the most valuable and limited resources in the workplace. Participants attending learning programs often carry competing priorities, digital interruptions, and cognitive fatigue. Long lectures and information-heavy presentations struggle to hold attention. Learners increasingly expect experiences that are relevant, engaging, practical, and immediately applicable. This reality requires trainers to rethink traditional instructional methods. Learning must be designed not merely to communicate content but to create meaningful engagement. The trainer's ability to capture

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attention, sustain interest, and stimulate reflection has become a critical differentiator.

Will AI Replace Trainers?

Artificial Intelligence can summarize books, generate presentations, create assessments, personalize learning pathways, and analyze learning data. These capabilities have led many professionals to question whether trainers will remain relevant in the future. The answer lies in understanding the distinction between information and transformation. AI excels at processing information. Human trainers excel at creating transformation. Transformation requires trust, empathy, emotional connection, reflection, psychological safety, and contextual judgment. These are deeply human capabilities. Learners often remember stories, conversations, insights, and emotional experiences more vividly than facts and slides.

When individuals face uncertainty, ethical dilemmas, leadership challenges, or personal growth opportunities, they seek human guidance. Trainers who help learners navigate complexity provide value that extends far beyond content delivery. Therefore, it's not AI or Human Trainer but it's AI and Human trainer and so the AI and Human trainer must co-exist.

The Emerging Competencies of the AI-ERA Trainer

Before discussing specific competencies, it is important to recognize that the AI era is transforming trainers from knowledge providers into facilitators of learning, engagement, and behavioral change. Several competencies are becoming increasingly important for trainers.

- Trainers must understand how to create energy, participation, and involvement throughout the learning journey. Engagement is no longer optional; it is central to learning effectiveness.
- Rather than speaking continuously, effective trainers create opportunities for dialog, reflection, collaboration, and peer learning.
- Trainers should be comfortable using learning technologies, collaboration tools, virtual platforms, AI applications, and multimedia resources.
- Workplace realities change rapidly. Trainers must continuously update their knowledge, methods, and approaches.
- The ability to understand participant needs, build trust, and create psychologically safe environments is increasingly important in modern learning ecosystems.

DESIGNING HUMAN-CENTERED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

The most successful learning experiences are designed around human needs rather than content volume. Participants rarely need more information; they need opportunities to interpret, apply, and internalize information. Human-centered learning begins with understanding the learner. What challenges are they facing? What motivates them? What barriers prevent performance improvement? What outcomes matter most to them? When learning design starts with these questions, programs become more relevant and impactful. Activities, discussions, simulations, and reflection exercises help learners connect content to real-world situations. This approach increases retention and application. In my own professional experience, participants consistently report greater value from experiential exercises and reflective discussions than from slide-based content. The reason is simple: people learn best when they actively participate in the learning process.

Creating Presence in a Distracted World

One of the most overlooked skills in training is the ability to help participants become fully present. In a distracted world, attention cannot be assumed; it must be intentionally cultivated. The concern for the trainer is not merely attendance in the classroom but attention of the physically present participants. Simple practices such as mindfulness moments, breathing exercises, guided reflection, and purposeful check-ins can significantly improve participant focus. These practices help learners transition from operational thinking to learning mode. Presence is particularly important in leadership development programs

where self-awareness and reflection are essential outcomes. By creating space for reflection, trainers encourage deeper learning and more meaningful conversations.

The Power of Storytelling

Storytelling remains one of the most effective tools available to trainers. Stories create emotional engagement, improve memory retention, and make abstract concepts tangible. AI can generate examples, but authentic human stories carry lived experience, vulnerability, and credibility. Participants connect deeply with stories of success, failure, resilience, and learning. Effective trainers use storytelling not as entertainment but as a strategic learning tool. Stories provide context, stimulate discussion, and help learners visualize practical application. They transform concepts into experiences that participants can relate to and remember.

Facilitation as the New Competitive Advantage

In the past, presentation skills were often considered the hallmark of a successful trainer. Today, facilitation skills have become even more important. Facilitation involves guiding conversations, encouraging participation, managing group dynamics, and helping learners derive their own insights. The facilitator does not simply provide answers; they create conditions for discovery. This shift reflects a broader change in learning philosophy. Adults learn most effectively when they are actively involved in constructing knowledge. Facilitation supports this process by encouraging critical thinking, collaboration, and reflection. The most impactful trainers are often those who ask powerful questions and enable learning through facilitation rather than those who provide the most information.

Digital Fluency without Losing Humanity

Technology should enhance learning rather than dominate it. Trainers must understand how to integrate digital tools strategically. Virtual collaboration platforms, polling applications, gamification tools, AI-assisted content creation, and learning management systems can improve engagement and accessibility. However, technology alone does not create meaningful learning. The challenge is balance. Trainers must know when to leverage technology for efficiency and when to emphasize human interaction for depth. The future belongs not to technology-first trainers or human-only trainers but to professionals who skillfully combine both approaches.

Ethics, Trust and Responsible AI

As AI becomes more prevalent, ethical considerations become increasingly important. Concerns related to misinformation, bias, plagiarism, privacy, and authenticity require careful attention. Learning professionals have a responsibility to model ethical AI practices. This includes verifying information, citing sources, acknowledging AI-generated contributions, and encouraging critical evaluation of content. Trust remains fundamental to learning. Participants must feel confident that the information they receive is credible and responsibly developed. Trainers play a crucial role in fostering this trust.

The A.C.T.I.V.E. Framework

To help trainers translate these principles into practice, I propose the A.C.T.I.V.E. framework—a practical and easy-to-apply model designed for classroom, virtual, and hybrid learning environments. The framework recognizes that in an era where information is abundant and attention is scarce, the trainer's role is to create meaningful learning experiences that engage both the mind and emotions of participants.

A – Arrive with Presence

Effective learning begins with presence. In today's fast-paced and digitally distracted environment, learners often enter training sessions carrying work pressures, personal concerns, and cognitive overload. Trainers must intentionally create opportunities for participants to become mentally and emotionally present before introducing new content. Simple techniques such as mindfulness exercises, reflective questions, breathing practices, or purposeful check-ins can help participants transition into a learning

mindset. When learners are fully present, they become more receptive, attentive, and engaged throughout the session.

Trainer Action: Use grounding exercises and purposeful opening activities.

Expected Learner Outcome: Improved focus, attention, and readiness to learn.

C – Create Energy Early

Research consistently suggests that the first few minutes of a learning session significantly influence participant engagement. Trainers should establish momentum from the outset by creating curiosity, interaction, and enthusiasm. Interactive polls, thought-provoking questions, energizers, icebreakers, quizzes, or short discussions can immediately involve participants and reduce passive listening. Creating energy early helps establish a positive learning climate and encourages active participation throughout the session.

Trainer Action: Use interactive openings and participation-focused activities.

Expected Learner Outcome: Higher engagement, motivation, and involvement.

T – Tell Human Stories

Stories remain one of the most powerful tools for learning. While AI can generate examples and summaries, authentic human stories provide context, credibility, emotional connection, and practical relevance. Stories help learners understand not only what happened but also why it mattered. Effective trainers use personal experiences, organizational examples, case studies, and real-world situations to make concepts meaningful and memorable. Stories bridge the gap between theory and practice and encourage learners to reflect on their own experiences.

Trainer Action: Share authentic experiences, lessons learned, and relatable examples.

Expected Learner Outcome: Stronger emotional connection, improved retention, and deeper understanding.

I – Invite Dialog

Learning is most effective when participants actively engage with ideas rather than passively receive information. Dialog encourages critical thinking, reflection, perspective-sharing, and collaborative learning. Instead of positioning themselves as the sole source of knowledge, trainers should create opportunities for discussion, questioning, peer learning, and collective problem-solving. Powerful questions often generate greater learning than detailed explanations.

Trainer Action: Facilitate discussions, reflections, and collaborative activities.

Expected Learner Outcome: Deeper learning, enhanced critical thinking, and greater ownership of learning.

V – Vary the Experience

People learn differently. Some learners prefer visual content, others learn through discussion, observation, practice, or reflection. A single instructional method rarely meets the needs of all participants. Effective trainers intentionally vary learning approaches by combining presentations, videos, discussions, simulations, case studies, role plays, group activities, storytelling, and reflective exercises. Variety sustains attention, accommodates different learning preferences, and improves retention.

Trainer Action: Blend visual, auditory, experiential, and interactive methods.

Expected Learner Outcome: Better understanding, increased participation, and improved retention of learning.

E – Engage Emotionally

Learning is not purely a cognitive process; it is also an emotional experience. Participants learn more effectively when they feel respected, valued, psychologically safe, and connected to the learning environment. Emotional engagement is created through empathy, active listening, encouragement, and genuine interest in participant perspectives.

Trainers who build trust and psychological safety enable learners to share experiences, ask questions, and explore new ideas without fear of judgment.

Trainer Action: Demonstrate empathy, active listening, and respect.

Expected Learner Outcome: Psychological safety, stronger trust, and increased willingness to participate.

Practical Applications for Organizations

Organizations seeking to strengthen learning effectiveness should invest in developing trainers as facilitators rather than content presenters. Trainer development programs should focus on coaching skills, facilitation techniques, emotional intelligence, and digital capabilities. Leaders should also recognize that learning outcomes depend not only on content quality but on participant engagement and application. Organizations that create cultures of curiosity, experimentation, and continuous learning are better positioned to thrive in uncertain environments. The trainer of the future acts as a catalyst for learning rather than a distributor of information. This distinction has significant implications for talent development strategies.

CONCLUSION

The learning profession stands at a pivotal moment. AI is reshaping how knowledge is created, shared, and consumed. Yet, the human dimensions of learning remain as important as ever. The trainers who thrive in the coming years will be those who combine technological competence with emotional intelligence, facilitation expertise, ethical awareness, and genuine human connection. They will create learning experiences that are engaging, relevant, reflective, and transformative. AI may generate content, but it cannot replace empathy. It may personalize information, but it cannot replicate authentic human understanding. It may improve efficiency, but it cannot inspire meaningful change. The future of learning belongs to trainers who remain deeply human while embracing the possibilities of technology. Their role is not diminishing; it is evolving. And in that evolution lies a tremendous opportunity to redefine the impact of learning and development in organizations and society.

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The Transformative Impact of Digital Technologies on Pharmaceutical Sales Team Training

Pradeep Kumar Jha*, Shailendra Kumar Jha*

ABSTRACT

The commercialization framework of the global pharmaceutical industry is undergoing an unprecedented paradigm shift driven by evolving regulatory compliance landscapes, increasingly complex clinical trial data, and rapid cross-industry digital disruption. Central to this structural reorganization is the large-scale digital transformation of pharmaceutical medical representative (MR) training programs. Traditional, centralized, and purely sales-centric classroom instructional frameworks are no longer ethically or operationally sustainable. Consequently, global pharmaceutical manufacturers are deploying advanced digital architectures—including cloud-based Sales Force Automation (SFA) platforms, integrated mobile electronic detailing (e-detailing) systems, remote video conferencing software, interactive microlearning tools, and adaptive blended e-learning systems This comprehensive research article evaluates the strategic impact of these digital technologies on the technical competency, scientific proficiency, organizational resource utilization, and field-readiness of modern pharmaceutical field forces. Examining these emerging educational architectures demonstrates that shifting from rigid, centralized pedagogical modalities toward agile, data-driven, and highly distributed digital training systems significantly enhances the quality of scientific engagement with healthcare professionals (HCPs), lowers corporate overhead expenses, reduces compliance and administrative errors, and fosters long-term strategic commercial agility.

KEYWORDS

Digital Transformation, Sales Force Automation, E-Detailing, Blended Learning, Continual Medical Education (CME)

INTRODUCTION

The historical operational model of the global pharmaceutical industry has traditionally relied upon high-touch, relationship-driven interactions between medical representatives and healthcare providers (Aher & Wavhale, 2026; Msosa & Khuboni, 2023). Under this conventional commercial architecture, the primary objective of field teams was to secure brand awareness and maintain market share through repetitive in-person brand reminders, extensive paper visual aids, and relational marketing tactics (Aher & Wavhale, 2026; Balkanski & Getov, 2020). However, the modern healthcare ecosystem has entered an era of profound structural realignment (Almeman, 2024; Hole *et al*., 2021). Stricter regulatory transparency laws across the globe have dismantled legacy medical gifting practices, while the exponential rise of evidence-based medicine has changed how physicians evaluate modern pharmaceutical options (Aher & Wavhale, 2026). Healthcare professionals (HCPs) now demand deep, data-driven, and objective clinical evidence, such as robust real-world data and head-to-head trial outcomes, before altering their

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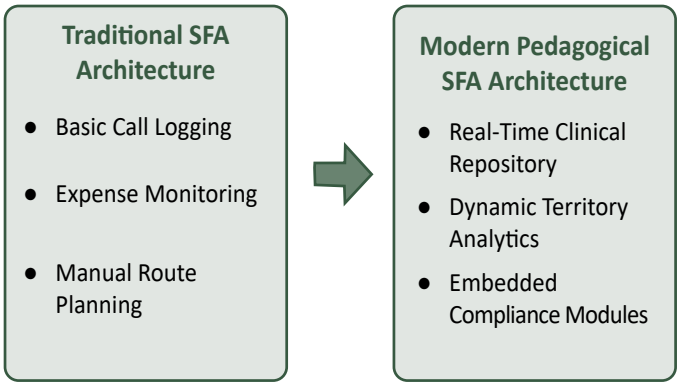
therapeutic prescribing habits (Aher & Wavhale, 2026).

Compounding these regulatory and clinical shifts, unexpected global disruptions and regional lockouts have permanently altered physical access to medical settings (Hole *et al*., 2021; Yılmaz Altuntaş & Yalçın, 2023). To ensure ongoing enterprise visibility, strict regulatory compliance, and baseline market survival during volatile periods, pharmaceutical firms have had to rapidly integrate digital technologies throughout their sales, marketing, and corporate operational workflows (Dundi *et al*., 2024; Hole *et al*., 2021).

As a direct result of this industry-wide shift, the internal pedagogical frameworks used to train these field teams have undergone an extensive transformation (Aher & Wavhale, 2026; Dundi *et al*., 2024). Static, centralized corporate training workshops are quickly being replaced by responsive, distributed digital learning ecosystems (Almeman, 2024; Dundi *et al*., 2024). This structural digitalization within the corporate infrastructure ensures more optimized organizational planning, lower compliance risk, and superior financial sustainability within highly competitive therapeutic fields (Dundi *et al*., 2024; Hole *et al*., 2021).

SALES FORCE AUTOMATION AS AN INTERNAL PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The large-scale integration of Sales Force Automation (SFA) systems has significantly optimized the administrative capabilities, daily field routing, and workflow visibility of pharmaceutical sales forces (Yılmaz Altuntaş & Yalçın, 2023). While early iterations of SFA applications functioned primarily as tracking software to monitor daily field call metrics and representative location logs, modern configurations serve as a central foundation for continuous corporate learning (Wahyuningsih, 2019; Yılmaz Altuntaş & Yalçın, 2023). These advanced enterprise software platforms provide representatives with immediate analytical data regarding physician diagnostic habits, segment variations, and targeted cross-channel promotional guidelines (Yılmaz Altuntaş & Yalçın, 2023).

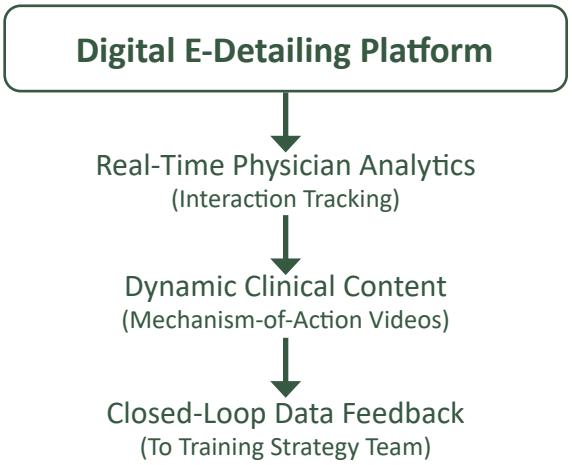


Empirical research shows that the simultaneous implementation of specialized sales training alongside comprehensive SFA technologies yields a strong, positive, and statistically significant impact on overall medical representative performance (Wahyuningsih, 2019). Modern SFA platforms provide field teams with an accessible gateway to updated scientific data, allowing sales personnel to continuously refine their personal knowledge base directly before and after individual physician appointments (Yılmaz Altuntaş & Yalçın, 2023). By embedding automated data analytics and tracking capabilities directly into daily routines, pharmaceutical organizations can convert static field feedback into continuous, data-driven learning opportunities (Hole *et al*., 2021; Yılmaz Altuntaş & Yalçın, 2023). This unified technological approach ensures that field forces can pivot quickly when encountering unexpected clinical queries from providers, thereby significantly increasing overall sales effectiveness (Wahyuningsih, 2019).

E-DETAILING COMPETENCY AND MODERN CLINICAL INTERACTIONS

The rapid development of modern mobile and web-based electronic detailing (e-detailing) applications has altered the core interactions between medical representatives and HCPs (Balkanski & Getov, 2020; Kwak & Chang, 2016). E-detailing is formally characterized as an evolving suite of electronic, highly interactive media applications designed to enhance, structure, and deliver product value presentations to clinicians (Kwak & Chang, 2016). Implementing these structured tools allows field teams to present complex scientific data, molecular mechanisms of action, and adverse event profiles through high-resolution

multimedia formats, animations, and interactive disease state calculators (Balkanski & Getov, 2020). This interactive approach can be adjusted on the fly to meet the specific clinical interests or specialization of each individual physician (Balkanski & Getov, 2020; Kwak & Chang, 2016).

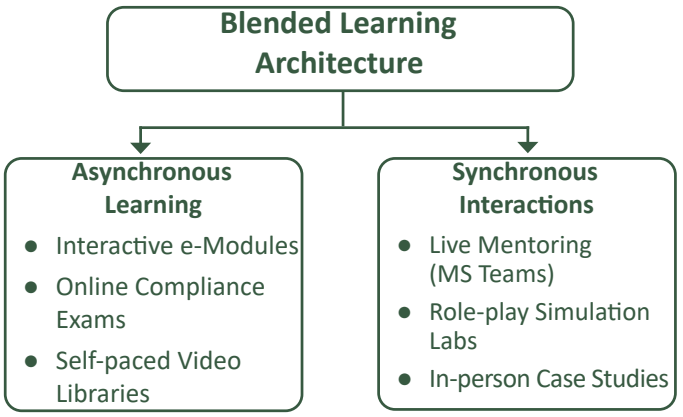


From a training and skill-acquisition standpoint, teaching field representatives to master interactive e-detailing systems offers substantial strategic advantages over traditional print media (Balkanski & Getov, 2020). These systems empower corporate training teams to actively collect, structure, and analyze detailed usage metrics during interactions (Balkanski & Getov, 2020). This provides immediate visibility into which clinical slides, safety charts, and trial data points resonate most with providers (Balkanski & Getov, 2020). This data loop provides a powerful feedback mechanism that reinforces field execution, allowing sales reps to adjust their communication style to match a doctor's therapeutic preferences and practice habits (Balkanski & Getov, 2020).

Furthermore, mastering e-detailing allows pharmaceutical manufacturers to logistically expand their reach to peripheral, low-prescribing, or rural medical practitioners who are otherwise difficult or too expensive to reach via traditional in-person travel (Balkanski & Getov, 2020). Field surveys indicate that a representative's intent to use these advanced digital tools is heavily driven by their perceived usefulness and ease of use (Kwak & Chang, 2016). This underscores why companies must invest in comprehensive, intuitive software training to ensure strong technology adoption across all experience levels (Kwak & Chang, 2016).

BLENDED LEARNING MODALITIES AND KNOWLEDGE RETENTION

To ensure long-term retention of complex medical concepts and compliance rules, pharmaceutical training managers are increasingly transitioning to structured blended learning models (Aher & Wavhale, 2026). Blended learning involves the thoughtful integration of traditional, in-person instructional sessions with modern asynchronous e-learning modules, online discussion forums, and synchronous virtual classes (Liu *et al*., 2016). Research across health profession environments indicates that blended learning frameworks regularly outperform pure classroom instruction or purely unguided online modules in terms of baseline knowledge acquisition and long-term retention (Liu *et al*., 2016).



A case study from the pharmaceutical manufacturer Abdi İbrahim highlights the measurable benefits of converting traditional sales training into a multi-phase blended format (Aher & Wavhale, 2026). By utilizing dedicated learning management systems (LMS) combined with corporate tablet computers, the organization redesigned its "Inexperienced Medical Representatives Pre-onboarding Training Program" into a balance of asynchronous web modules and synchronous remote mentoring sessions (Aher & Wavhale, 2026).

This digital transition produced clear operational and educational improvements:

Performance Criterion	Traditional In-Person Model	Modern Blended Learning Model
Total Program Duration	27 Days (On-site with Lodging)	23 Days Total (12 Days Remote, 11 Days On-site)
Learning Accessibility	Bound by geography & schedule	24/7 Multi-device Cloud Access
Final Success Assessment	Baseline Score Reference	**10 % Improvement** in Final Exam Metrics
Primary Talent Selection	Relied on post-classroom review	Identifies high learning-responsibility candidates early

The data confirms that this digitalized approach not only improved final examination scores by 10%, but also shortened the overall training timeline from 27 days down to 23 days (Aher & Wavhale, 2026). By shifting the theoretical components of pharmacology, drug-drug interactions, and tissue physiology to remote, self-paced digital modules, the company reduced its on-site lodging and travel expenses (Aher & Wavhale, 2026). This left valuable in-person classroom time to focus exclusively on advanced skill practice, such as complex sales roleplay, objection handling, and clinical case study reviews (Aher & Wavhale, 2026).

STRATEGIC BENEFITS, IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

The deployment of digitized training architectures provides pharmaceutical firms with significant advantages in speed, regulatory compliance, and overall field readiness (Hole *et al*., 2021). Centralized cloud-based training platforms allow companies to instantaneously push out updated product labels, new safety warnings, and revised marketing strategies across thousands of geographically separated sales representatives simultaneously (Hole *et al*., 2021). This rapid delivery capability minimizes the risk of field forces sharing outdated or non-compliant information with providers, shielding the parent corporation from potential legal or regulatory issues (Aher & Wavhale, 2026; Hole *et al*., 2021).

Furthermore, utilizing continuous online assessments allows managers to track skill levels across territories in real-time, enabling targeted coaching where it is needed most (Aher & Wavhale, 2026). Despite these clear operational benefits, the digital transformation of field training brings unique organizational challenges (Almeman, 2024; Hole *et al*., 2021). Comprehensive corporate reviews suggest that many digital transformation initiatives focus too heavily on implementing the technology itself, occasionally neglecting the critical human element (Almeman, 2024).

Overly automated platforms risk focusing too much on data-heavy concepts while underserving soft skills, empathy-driven clinical communication, and strategic leadership development (Almeman, 2024). To build a truly resilient commercial organization, pharmaceutical executives must maintain a healthy balance, intentionally pairing technical automation tools with human-centric communication strategies (Almeman, 2024). Looking forward, the next generation of sales force training will likely depend on embedding advanced closed-loop artificial intelligence (AI) tools and predictive data analytics directly within SFA and LMS ecosystems (Aher & Wavhale, 2026; Hole *et al*., 2021). These tools will automatically tailor training materials to match each representative's unique learning pace, ensuring the field force remains highly capable, fully compliant, and deeply competitive (Aher & Wavhale, 2026; Hole *et al*., 2021).

CONCLUSION

The analysis highlights a clear shift from traditional training models to modern blended learning systems in pharmaceutical sales development. Traditional methods are limited by time, location, and lack of real-time feedback, reducing overall efficiency. In contrast, blended learning offers flexible, 24/7 access and integrates digital tools for continuous skill enhancement. The use of analytics-driven platforms improves knowledge retention and enables data-based decision-making. Notably, training duration is reduced while performance outcomes improve, as seen in higher assessment scores. Additionally, modern systems allow early identification of high-potential candidates, strengthening talent management. This transformation supports the evolution of medical representatives into scientifically informed professionals. Overall, digital and blended approaches provide a sustainable, scalable, and competitive advantage for pharmaceutical organizations.

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Games People Play

Premier Group, a conglomerate of companies that was around 110 years old had an annual turnover of Rs. 30,000 crores in 2007-08. The Group had its head office in Mumbai with business covering a wide range of products including manufacturing of steel and heavy machinery for industry. The Group was planning to establish a university in Nashik with an objective to enhance its brand value by offering quality education. As Premier was a large group with a strong financial arm, profit making through education was not on the agenda. Sushil Agarwal, Chairman of the Group, had earmarked the fund of Rs. 2,200 crores for the advancement of education through Premier Education Foundation. The Group had long experience of running CBSE affiliated schools at the townships of its manufacturing plants for the benefit of the children of its employees.

Premier Education Foundation engaged Excel Human Resource Consultants to identify the first Vice Chancellor for the project. Excel Consultants approached various National Institutes and other institutes of repute including IIMs, NITs, IITs and some universities to identify a suitable person. Excel arranged interviews of several eminent academicians with the Chairman Sushil Agrawal. Finally, Dr. Kishore Kumar, Director of a leading institute of management was identified by Excel Consultants. Dr. Kishore Kumar was then interviewed by the Chairman on 15th February in 2009 and was appointed as the Vice Chancellor Designate for the upcoming university at Nashik. Ghanshyam Das, 73, a senior executive who had been with Premier for the last 55 years was given the responsibility of coordinating the university project.

Ghanshyam insisted that Dr. Kishore Kumar should join immediately while Dr. Kishore Kumar wanted to serve the notice period in his current organization. Ghanshyam Das gave an impression to Dr. Kishore Kumar in the presence of Chairman that all is set and Vice Chancellor Designate is required to be at Nashik at the earliest on the pretext that the academic session had to start and recruitment for teaching and non-teaching staff was an urgency. Believing these words, Dr. Kishore Kumar on going back to his current institution made a special request to the competent authority to relieve him at the earliest. He was relieved on 30th April and joined the new assignment on 1st May in 2009. Dr. Kishore Kumar was received by Shyam Lal at Nashik. Shyam Lal, an Associate of Ghanshyam Das, was coordinating the university project in the absence of Ghanshyam Das, who had left for Canada to visit his son. Accommodation for Kishore Kumar was arranged by Shyam Lal in the guest house of the Group for 15 days.

Shyam Lal shared the information with Dr. Kishore Kumar that a consultant was appointed about a year back to prepare the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for establishing the university. DPR was submitted to the Department of Higher Education of the state government. A team of subject experts appointed by the government was not satisfied with the presentation made by Ghanshyam Das, who had no idea about the minor details of a university. His presentation was more in terms of a business proposal. The land was purchased but formalities were not completed. The team of experts rejected the proposal, as it wanted someone with academic background on the board, so that their queries could be answered. On hearing this, Dr. Kishore Kumar was taken a back as this information was in contradiction to what was told by Ghanshyam Das to him. Shyam Lal felt sorry for the fact that Ghanshyam Das had

This case was developed by Upinder Dhar (PDFI, Indore), Timsy Kapoor (M.B. Khalsa College, Indore), and Prachi Maheshwari (Prestige Institute of Management and Research, Indore) during a Case Writing Workshop held from December 3-5, 2020.

not disclosed the reality to him. However, Dr. Kishore Kumar thought that there was no point in looking back.

Dr. Kishore Kumar chalked out a plan of action for the next few days. On the first day after joining, Shyam Lal introduced him to the concerned government officials and accompanied him to book a vehicle for him. Next two days, they spent in looking for an office accommodation and residence. A few candidates were interviewed by them to appoint personal assistant and driver for the Vice Chancellor Designate. After Shyam Lal returned to Mumbai on 5th May, Dr. Kishore Kumar started to work on completing the formalities related to land allotted by the Government of Maharashtra. He took the possession of 4 BHK accommodation identified earlier for his temporary office on 8th May when newly appointed personal assistant joined him. Driver joined on 10th May and newly booked car was collected from the showroom.

THE WORK BEGINS

Ghanshyam Das returned from leave on 1st June. In the next few months, Dr. Kishore Kumar attended a number of meetings chaired by Sushil Agarwal at Mumbai to finalize the architect, project management consultant and construction contractor. The possession of land was also taken after visiting the concerned department number of times along with Chamanlal, resident manager of Premier Group located in Nasik. After receiving the approved initial drawings from the architect, the construction was started on 5th November 2009. Dr. Kishore Kumar thoroughly reviewed the DPR and made certain necessary changes in it. The DPR was resubmitted to the concerned department for consideration. A committee of experts was constituted by the government to assess the proposal. A new committee this time and none of the members of this committee were part of the committee appointed earlier.

A meeting was fixed by Prof. Praful Kumar, the chairman of the expert committee, in his office on 10th September. The presentation was made by Dr. Kishore Kumar to explain the project proposal and all the queries were addressed by him to the satisfaction of members of the expert committee. Though Ghanshyam Das tried to intervene in between, but Prof. Praful Kumar did not like his observations and disallowed him from answering the questions raised by the experts. He wanted only Dr. Kishore Kumar to respond. The meeting was over in about 50 minutes with a positive note. Prof. Praful Kumar asked Dr. Kishore Kumar to meet him later. When Dr. Kishore Kumar met him, Prof. Praful Kumar congratulated him for a good presentation. He told him to keep Ghanshyam Das in the background because he did not have any idea about how a university functions as was evident from his responses to the queries. and if he had made the presentation, the proposal would have been rejected. However, in view of the credibility of Dr. Kishore Kumar as an academician and the way he had explained the motive behind setting up this university, the committee unanimously approved the proposal. Dr. Kishore Kumar appraised Sushil Agarwal about the whole episode in his next meeting at Mumbai.

ASSURANCE OF THE CHAIRMAN

Dr. Kishore Kumar received the Letter of Intent from the Department of Higher Education on 21st September. One year was given to the Foundation to set up the requisite infrastructure and appoint the teaching and non-teaching staff. The letter stated that Department should be informed as soon as the requirements are fulfilled. Dr. Kishore Kumar asked Sushil Agarwal while handing over the copy of the Letter of Intent that should he continue in the organisation or leave. On hearing this, Sushil Agarwal was surprised and asked him the reason for such a question. Dr. Kishore Kumar told him that in a university system, vice chancellor reports directly to the chancellor. There is no one in between, but Ghanshyam was trying to be the boss. He interfered and tried to dictate the terms. On learning this, Sushil assured Dr. Kishore Kumar that he has to continue and set up the university as its first vice chancellor and he would be reporting to him directly as he will be the chancellor of the university. He would

be having one to one meeting with him regularly to get apprised about the developments of proposed university. Ghanshyam Das would be responsible for overseeing the construction and providing other infrastructure only.

In one of the meetings, Sushil Agarwal wanted to know that how to proceed for making the university operational. Dr. Kishore Kumar proposed that in addition to academic blocks, hostels and residential accommodation for the staff should also be constructed simultaneously. He felt that university should begin with two constituent institutes, the Institute of Management and Institute of Engineering & Technology. His proposal was readily accepted by Sushil Agarwal. Ghanshyam Das intervened by proposing to start the first academic session of the Institute of Engineering from July 2010, but Dr. Kishore Kumar insisted that since construction of academic blocks would not be complete by that time, therefore, first session with both management and engineering should commence from July 2011. All other formalities based on the Private Universities Act would also be completed by that time. He believed that deviating from the legally prescribed procedure at any stage would not be in the interest of the project.

The chairman was convinced with the logic of Dr. Kishore Kumar and approved his proposal. Sushil Agarwal, Ghanshyam Das, Dr. Kishore Kumar and Shyam Lal met every month at the site to review the progress of construction along with representatives of the architect, project management consultant and contractor. In March 2011, the construction was completed along with furniture, fixtures and all other facilities related to the two academic blocks, and one hostel which was communicated to Department of Higher Education. The department formed the new committee to do the physical verification and assess the readiness of university for starting the academic session. The committee recommended the release of Ordinance in favor of the university.

RECRUITMENT OF STAFF

In May 2010, an advertisement was released for the recruitment of faculty. The response was overwhelming 3000 applications were received and 250 applications were shortlisted for face-to-face interview by a panel of subject experts. Finally, five faculty members were appointed for Management and twelve for Engineering. These faculty members were appointed one year ahead of the first academic year, so that they could be involved in preparing the curriculum and syllabus. Dr. Kishore Kumar was given free hand in appointing other staff. He wanted the best of the facilities for the university and hence insisted to have residential facilities for the students for which he had already convinced the chairman Sushil Agarwal. Dr. Kishore Kumar also appointed an administrative officer and a finance and accounting officer besides a team of four counsellors for admission and a Placement Officer. The faculty for the Institute of Engineering and Technology was appointed in June 2011.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE ACADEMIC SESSION

In the year 2011, the admission process was initiated whereby against 60 seats 42 students and against 240 seats 90 students were admitted in the first batch of MBA and B.Tech programs, respectively. Dr. Kishore Kumar wanted to attract the best faculty and he convinced Sushil Agrawal to approve the salary and fringe benefits for faculty not only at par with the institutions of national importance, but 10% higher emoluments to be paid by Premier University. It was decided that faculty will be given laptop with latest configuration at the time of joining and would be replaced with a new one after four years.

The admission for both MBA and B. Tech programs were started from June 2011 after receiving approved ordinance signed by the Governor of the State for commencing the academic session. Dr. Kishore Kumar remained in constant touch with the chairman for smooth implementation of the decisions. Ghanshyam Das felt neglected and started

to speak against Dr. Kishore Kumar and all the work in progress but as Sushil Agarwal knew Ghanshyam Das very well and would cross check the information with Shyamlal and was convinced regarding the good work being done by Dr. Kishore Kumar. In the second year, i.e., 2012, the total of 52 and 104 students were admitted in the second batch of MBA and B.Tech, respectively. Dr. Kishore Kumar was very strict in the academic matters and ensured full attendance in the class as per norms.

Dr. Kishore Kumar in consultation with chairman appointed directors for both the Institutes. Both of them had worked in reputed institutions in the country. Dr. Kishore Kumar was formally appointed as Vice Chancellor of the university in March 2011. The campus started bustling with activities of the students. An International conference was organized by the university in December 2011. Besides, MBA and B.Tech, Ph.D. program was also introduced in Management and Engineering from 2011. The university became a value-based and activity driven institution. Many eminent persons visited the university on various occasions. In one of the conferences, the director of a national institute, Dr. Satish Chandra who was a friend of Dr. Kishore Kumar was invited as the chief guest. Dr. Satish Chandra was highly impressed by the way university was shaping up. He himself was about to retire in September 2014. Dr. Kishore Kumar shared a good impression about the Premier Educational Foundation and also told him regarding the free hand that he was given. Dr. Satish Chandra got in touch with Sushil Agrawal and congratulated him for developing a great institution at Nashik.

In the year 2013, the admissions for the institutes of management and engineering increased steadily. Sushil Agrawal and Dr. Kishore Kumar (KK) were satisfied with the progress of the university. The total number of the faculty increased to 35, while laying strict emphasis on the quality of education. In the meantime, Ghanshyam Das out of jealousy, continued to share negative feedback about KK. He wanted to be the center of attention, so that full credit could be given to him for the establishment of the university. Instead of appreciating the loyalty, commitment and hard work done by KK for earning good name and reputation for the university, Ghanshyam Das always misled Sushil Agarwal about the efforts of KK. He failed to do so for a long time, as Shyam Lal was always present to give the right information to portray the correct picture of KK in front of the trustees and always appreciated the work and efforts of KK. Shyam Lal was never carried away by the submissions of Ghanshyam Das as he very well knew that Ghanshyam Das felt he was losing importance in front of Sushil Agarwal, and had started playing dysfunctional politics.

In 2014, the admissions continued to increase steadily raising the total number to 670. Sushil Agarwal preferred quality over quantity. The strength of faculty was increased to 47. He did not have anything against KK who was about to complete his first term. Thus, he issued a letter appointing him as vice chancellor for the second term. On seeing this development, Ghanshyam Das became restless and told Shyam Lal that just wait and watch. KK will not be able to continue for the second term.

RESTLESSNESS TO SET THE SCORE

Shyam Lal being friendly and a well-wisher used to keep KK informed about the suspicious activities of Ghanshyam Das in the headquarter at Mumbai. Ghanshyam Das had proposed the name of Dr. Satish Chandra to replace KK, as he always looked for the opportunity to meet Sushil Agarwal and poison him against KK. He knew that Ghanshyam Das felt highly insecure and jealous of KK. As insecurity of Ghanshyam Das increased, he planned to get Shyam Lal relieved from the university project. He approached Bansi Agarwal, the younger brother of Sushil Agarwal, who was heading a famous hospital owned and run by the Premier Group. Ghanshyam Das convinced him to take Shyam Lal for overseeing the expansion of the hospital because his work at the university was over. Since Bansi Agarwal was looking for a reliable person, Shyam Lal was immediately shifted from university project to hospital project in consultation with his elder brother..

Further, Ghanshyam Das told Bansi Agarwal that university was not doing well under the leadership of KK. Initially, Bansi Agarwal did not pay much heed to what Ghanshyam Das was saying, but an incidence in the year 2014, during second convocation of the university changed his view. On the occasion of convocation at the university, the photograph taken on the occasion had Sushil Kumar on one side of the chief guest as chancellor and on the other side it was KK as vice chancellor. Bansi Agarwal expected to be seated in place of KK on one side of the chief guest. Even though seating arrangement was made by KK in consultation with Sushil Agarwal, this incident pinched Bansi Agarwal. Ghanshyam Das quickly took advantage of this situation, and met Bansi Agarwal number of times to impress upon Sushil Agarwal to replace KK. Finally, under family pressure, Sushil Agarwal started thinking about changing the leadership at the university, even though he had already issued a letter appointing KK as vice chancellor for the second term of three years. On the other hand, Ghanshyam approached Satish Chandra to present his candidature.

In June 2014, Sushil Agarwal called KK to his office and informed him that some of his family members who are also trustees of the foundation are of the opinion that admissions of the university need to be boosted. A lot of improvement needs to be seen in the number of admissions. Sometimes, the change of guard makes the difference. He appreciated the contribution of KK in setting up the university and advised him that it would be appropriate for him to exit. He further asked him to give the date he would like to be relieved, as new incumbent is likely to join by October. KK accepted the advice graciously and proposed 31st July for getting relieved. Sushil Agarwal accepted the same. He even hugged him before saying goodbye and promised all possible help to facilitate his relieving on the chosen date. KK knew that Ghanshyam Das was behind this development. To confirm his hunch, he preferred not to speak to Ghanshyam Das and instead made a call to Dr. Satish Chandra, asking him as to when was he joining the Premier University. Dr. Satish Chandra told KK that Ghanshyam Das had informed him that your term was getting over and foundation was looking for a new person. After a few days, KK received an offer from Tukaram University as Vice Chancellor at Nagpur, which he joined on 5th August.

Dr. Satish Chandra joined the university on 15th of October, and his first reaction was of great surprise as he felt still a lot of work had to be done, as he had no experience of building an institution from scratch. He had long experience of working in established institutions where everything was available from the date of his joining. Thus, he found Premier University far different from his previous institution. The regulations and procedures were in the process of development. The work done by KK was to be taken forward. Dr. Satish Chandra was used to a 10:00 am to 5:30 pm routine while maintaining distance with the staff. He used to meet faculty only by appointment. He preferred to stay in the university guest house and did not shift with family to the official residence. This was in contrast with the work behavior of KK who used to be available as and when any staff member wanted to see him. He stayed with family in the official residence on the campus. He believed in 24x7 availability and was thus approachable. All faculty and non-teaching staff members felt free to approach him any time which had created an environment of friendly relations on the campus.

Dr. Satish Chandra was appointed with the aim to increase the number of admissions in the University. The trustees were given to understand by Ghanshyam Das that admissions in the university will jump to more than 1,000 every year and a total number of 10,000 students in a few years with the leadership of Dr. Satish Chandra. Dr. Satish Chandra started experiencing pressure very soon. He could not tolerate the interference of Ghanshyam Das. Dr. Satish Chandra found himself lacking in the necessary aptitude and zeal to match upto the irrational expectations of the foundation. Moreover, he could not overcome the strong image of KK who was still remembered by people on the campus. As an option to increase admissions next year by having eminent teachers, Dr. Satish Chandra appointed some of

his old colleagues in Premier University on very high emoluments without following the laid down procedure. It gave rise to dissatisfaction among old faculty members.

In 2015, Dr. Satish Chandra found himself cornered when admissions did not exceed the number of previous academic year, i.e., 2014. He felt dismayed and could not cope up with the situation. He started making excuses based on the health issues of his mother and finally after completing nine months resigned from the university on personal ground. He continued to stay in the guest house till he remained with university. He joined another university at Sonepat as Vice Chancellor (VC) on 1st August. Sushil Agarwal began his hunt for a new VC and interestingly offered the position to a candidate who was rejected by him twice in the past. Ghanshyam Das continued to be in the Premier Group.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that Sushil Agarwal played his cards cautiously while being nice to KK?
2. Had you been in the position of Sushil Agarwal, how would have you handled the situation?
3. Comment on the role of Ghanshyam Das.4.
4. Do you think that Satish Chandra grabbed the opportunity as a stop gap arrangement?

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Tyrix Technolabs

BACKGROUND

Alok Saxena, a postgraduate in computer applications and Sanjeev Sharma, a graduate in management met in Mumbai, way back in 2007 during their summer internship training with a big IT conglomerate. The duo shared the same room in the hostel and their bond of friendship strengthened with the sharing of their perspectives regarding their aspirations and expectations. While working with the IT conglomerate, they realized that they are merely treated as operators and did not have any say in decision-making. This was not at all acceptable to Alok, as he believed in being the architect of his own destiny and wanted to have more exposure to the core IT services.

Sanjeev, on the other hand, was a fresh graduate and wanted to learn the art of management, so he left his job, and went on to pursue his MBA from one of the reputed institutes in India. Inspite of having interest in different fields, the duo continued to be good friends and had the plans of barging into the world of Entrepreneurship in near future. Both believed that it was better to have their own small initiative and make it big, rather than working with a big company and not having an enriching intellectual profile. While Sanjeev was pursuing management, Alok came back to his hometown, Alwar to work for his plans. Alok had some family obligations and had to be close to his family. Due to this he could not think of settling in Mumbai or any other metropolitan city.

There were many things in his mind. He was in dilemma as he did not want to run away from his family responsibilities. But then, he did not wish to put his dreams at stake. After mulling over the possible options, he decided to opt Jaipur as his working place as it would take care of both family and business. Jaipur being in proximity with Alwar, it would be easy for him to commute. He could remain in touch with his family. Moreover, the city was the capital of Rajasthan making it a conducive place to start business. Though, Alok was positive about his aspirations of being an entrepreneur but somewhere at the back of his mind he always had apprehension because both of them belonged to service family background. However, these things did not discourage the duo and they decided to begin with a small start-up named as *Tech Computers.*

INITIAL YEARS

It was in 2012, Alok settled down in Jaipur and commenced the operations from his own 2BHK flat. It was a make-shift kind of business that started with the initial investment of around INR 1.5 lacs from savings. The business challenge was mind-set of people and not having process-oriented approach. Moreover, there was paucity of resources in comparison to other cities. However, as a team, they decided, to first explore into the processes themselves, get well acquainted and further disseminate to the future members of the team. The company started offering its services in the domain of block chain, IOT, social networking, e-commerce, medical and PHP training. Later after three years, Sonal, wife of Alok, M.Sc. in Computer Science also joined them as a supporting hand.

After few years, the company was renamed as *Tyrix Technolabs*. Initially, the team comprised of only two members- Alok and Sanjeev. Alok was taking care of technical operations. Sanjeev joined him while on his summer internship. He was looking after managerial functions such as recruitment, training, sales and marketing which he continued even after going back to Mumbai to finish his MBA. After becoming

This case was developed by Santosh Dhar (People Development Foundation India, Indore), Namrata Jain (Shri Vaishnav Vidyapeeth Vishwavidyalaya, Indore), Ritu Joshi (Sage University, Indore), and Chanpreet Kaur Bhatia (Gurunanak Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai) during a Case Writing Workshop held at Indore.

a management graduate, Sanjeev too became the full-fledged cofounder with Alok, and the duo now became the business partners. They were like-minded people and both believed that business can have ups and downs despite putting all time, energy and faith in business plans. Still, these things did not deter them to move ahead.

INITIAL CHALLENGES

The duo wished to form a strong team as it had its own advantages if one wants to run for long. But, they were unable in get the right mix of people. This made them to opt campus drives for recruitment. Despite of good number of Engineering institutes, they were unable to hire the kind of the candidates they were looking for. One of the reasons was the reluctance/disinclination on the part of parents toward start-ups. Conservative mind-set of parents was a deterrence to join start-up for their wards. The duo then had no choice left except to manage the operations of the company with the available pool of recruits. They decided to brush up the skills of every recruit with the training and development programs of the company. One size does not fit all and with this frame of mind the training module for recruits depended upon the needs of the trainees.

Gradually, the hard work they put in from 2012 began to show results. They started getting business from overseas. In 2014, the company got 70 percent of its business from United States, 20 percent from Europe and remaining 10 percent from Australia. This boosted their confidence. Everything was going well but then company had its turning point due to Brexit (British Exit). Brexit referred to the leaving of the United Kingdom from the European Union after a June 2016 public vote. This affected the trading behavior from 2016 onward despite the fact that the official departure took place on January 31, 2020. In 2016, the company witnessed sharp dip in its business from the European market. This disheartened the promoters' spirit to some extent.

And then to add to their worries, just after couple of months in the same year, there were Presidential elections in the United States. This added to the agony of the founders. Both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton were not supporting the outsourcing of IT services. US stopped expenditure on IT services. The company underwent a very tough time. This was the period when company lost its existing customer base. These changing scenarios affected 65 percent of revenue generation. Moreover, the company had less appetite for risk and was not prepared to handle such adversities. The circumstances were not such that they could revive speedily. Despite odd circumstances, they tried to maintain the spirit.

Very soon, Alok found a ray of hope from their Australian clients. These were the clients from where they could capitalize. At the same time, he also realized that Australia was pro-Australian centric. To encash on this opportunity, one of the major business strategies the company adopted was to launch a venture in Australia. With the result, Sanjeev the co-founder of Tyrix settled down in Australia and established a sister-concern over there. This gave the Australian clients, a sense of comfort that their projects were being handled by a local Australian organization. However, in reality these services were actually outsourced from original setup of Tyrix in India. With the days passing on, Tyrix was successful in coming across as a friendly Australian entity. Moreover, they were able to rope in two major Australian clients. These two clients gave them good business. However, the challenges persisted. IT industry being service industry, the market is often unpredictable. Ultimately, it is the clients who decided the fate of the company. The services might be withdrawn either on short note or even without notice making the team vulnerable.

BEST PRACTICES AND ROAD AHEAD

Tyrix Technolabs had certain specific policies and practices that had helped the company to sustain over a period of eight years. To name a few, the founders believed in customer centric environment. They believed in keeping their internal customers, their employees, happy first. This they practiced by empowering the employees by giving them autonomy

in decision-making. The employees would often take an autonomous strategic decision and ensured that service requested by client would be fulfilled before stipulated time. This would give a win-win situation to both the parties - the Tyrix and the client.

Tyrix won the trust of the client, thereby making the association to go for long. And, at the same time it would boost the confidence of the employees and would enhance the belongingness. The company did not have a formal HR department because Alok believed it would act as a barrier in between employees and management. Having direct communication with his small team, he could give a personal touch. Open door policy and flat structure as far as decision-making was concerned would yield better results. The company had the basic HR practices in place like performance appraisal, training and development, career growth plans, recruitment, team building initiatives, job rotation, and conflict management.

Alok would not mind if his team members committed mistakes as he believed that such mistakes could do wonders for the company. This was the reason Tyrix emphasized learning culture for employees wherein each team member felt more connected and engaged with the company. Tyrix accepted attrition as a challenge and part and parcel of businesses especially in IT sector wherein the service life of an employee with one company is merely eight months in most of the cases. However, with Tyrix it was 1.8 months. The company tried to retain talent by offering nonmonetary incentives. At Tyrix Technolabs, founders did not believe in negotiation of salary as a strategy to retain talent. Also, to counter the problem of attrition, they had perennial recruitment cycle throughout the year for meeting manpower requisitions. The most important and prominent practice of the company was to ensure cultural fit of employees with the company. The company recruited fresh candidates rather than going for experienced ones, as they had a belief and experience as well, that it was easier to mould younger minds and orient them to the company culture.

Experienced persons had a comparatively relaxed mind-set, had deadweight of bad memories of previous working experiences, fixed ways of working, not open to unlearn and mostly a cultural misfit. In comparison to younger ones, the experienced ones did not gel well with the organization. Moreover, it would be okay for Tyrix to have candidates with less technical skills as they had individual training and development plans to sharpen their technical skills. But, being a culturally mis-fit candidate was completely unacceptable. The company not only had transparent, open and trustworthy culture, but also had an open policy wherein they welcomed their ex-employees back into the company with full warmth if they wished to rejoin. Tyrix, had a combination of mechanistic and organic design structurally, wherein the policies were organically implemented and followed. But when it came to the internal processes, they were hierarchical in nature, which was imperative to maintain standardized and robust processes.

Despite of having a strongly cohesive culturally fit team, the company had a setback in the year 2019 when Sanjeev the cofounder split as he had accepted an offer in Australia. Alok did not have any immediate successor for Sanjeev who had the expertise and whom he could trust. It was difficult to keep the Australian unit operational. Therefore, it was closed. He had no choice but to run the show alone. In 2020, with the onset of COVID pandemic, the company faced infrastructural challenges with respect to internet connectivity. The team members did not have personal laptops and were forced to use mobile phones for carrying out the operations. However, without proper technical requisites like a laptop and high-speed internet connectivity, at times they felt frustrated because the problems that could have been resolved in just minutes would take hours.

Alok tried his best to address these concerns as early as possible so that business operations were not affected. Further, Tyrix was flexible and supported employees who wanted to work from home. BREXIT,

Presidential elections in US, cofounder split, and covid pandemic had affected operations at Tyrix. The company regressed from the advanced growth stage and had begun again to work for the growth stage. Tyrix was a mid-sized company and to counter the current challenges, the company prioritized sustainability over expansion. The team wanted to leverage on current competencies, analyze gaps in the existing environment, recoup with the recent catastrophes while adopting a stable strategy. The vision was to make the Tyrix Technolabs processes self-driven.

QUESTIONS

1. If you were appointed as a consultant, what changes would you propose in the human resource strategy of the company?
2. Comment on the strategies for survival of Tyrix Technolabs.

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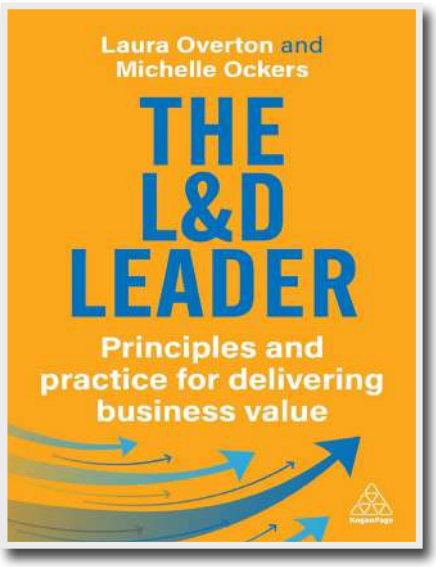
A Mirror, Not a Brochure

The L&D Leader: Principles and Practice for Delivering Business Value



Authors: **Laura Overton and Michelle Ockers**
Year of Publication: **2025**
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Reviewed by: **Shreeram Chintamani Ranade***

Every few years a book arrives that the learning and development profession needs rather than merely wants, and it is usually the one that refuses to flatter us. The L&D Leader by Laura Overton and Michelle Ockers is such a book. It is not a manual of techniques, not a tour of the latest tools, and not another breathless account of how some new technology will transform learning forever. It is something rarer and more uncomfortable: a sustained, evidence-led argument that most L&D functions are still measuring the wrong things, together with a practical account of what it takes to change that. I happened to read this book as someone responsible for learning across a large multibusiness industrial group, where the distance between the activity we report and the value we can actually prove is a daily preoccupation. I will say plainly that few books have spoken as directly to that particular discomfort.

The premise is set out in the subtitle, *Principles and Practice for Delivering Business Value*, and the authors mean both halves of it equally. Their argument, distilled from more than two decades of research involving over ten thousand L&D professionals and some two hundred and thirty learning leaders, is that the profession has spent too long defining itself by what it does, the courses delivered, the hours completed, the platforms launched, and not nearly enough by what changes as a result. The book sets out to move L&D from an activity-led function to an outcomes-led one, and to give leaders both the principles and the practical scaffolding to make that shift inside their own organizations.

The authority behind this is not borrowed. Laura Overton founded Toward Maturity, the outfit that ran the industry's annual benchmark study for the better part of two decades, and much of the book reads like the considered distillation of that long vantage point. Michelle Ockers brings the complementary discipline of someone who has spent years helping organizations build the strategies the research points to, and who interrogates practitioners regularly through her Learning Uncut work. The result is research-grounded without being academic, and practical without being thin. When the authors make a claim about what separates high-performing L&D functions from the rest, you sense the weight of data behind it rather than the authors' last good week.

What I valued the most is the book's insistence on evidence over fashion. Our field is unusually susceptible to enthusiasm; a new modality, a new

*Group Lead, Learning & Development, JSW

model, a new acronym arrives every eighteen months and we dutifully reorganize ourselves around it. Overton and Ockers quietly refuse this. They are far less interested in whether you have adopted the newest thing than in whether you can demonstrate that your work has moved a business outcome, and they are honest that doing so is hard. The strongest material, to my mind, is on aligning learning with business priorities and on the governance and culture required to sustain that alignment, because it treats L&D as a discipline of leadership and decision-making rather than a catalog of interventions. The illustrations are drawn from serious and varied organizations, among them McKinsey, AstraZeneca, the children's charity Barnardo's, and the construction group Multiplex, and the range looks deliberate: the point is that the principles travel across sectors.

The book is also clear about the present moment without being seduced by it. One of its endorsers, the AI-literacy specialist Stella Lee, captures its spirit in observing that it argues for a leadership comfortable with ambiguity rather than one chasing false certainty. In a year when every L&D gathering is consumed by AI, the authors treat AI as one more reason to get the fundamentals of value and evidence right, not as a replacement for them. I found that restraint persuasive, and consistent with my own experience that the organizations which handle new technology best are usually the ones who already knew how to ask whether something actually worked.

No book is the right book for every reader, and I read this one from a vantage point its authors do not center. My world is a large Indian manufacturing group, with a substantial frontline and plant-floor workforce, several working languages, uneven digital access, and infrastructure realities that differ sharply from those of a global professional-services firm or a British charity. The case organizations, strong as they are, sit largely in a Western, white-collar, well-resourced world. The principles the authors derive are genuinely portable, which is much of their worth, but practitioners in an emerging-market industrial context will have to do the translation work themselves. How do you run an evidence-led L&D function when a meaningful share of your learners are not on a laptop, when the data infrastructure is still being built, and when the business sponsors still regard training as a compliance cost rather than a capability investment? The book hands you a reliable compass. It does not, and perhaps cannot, hand you the local map.

I would also gently observe that the book's center of gravity is the senior L&D leader who already holds a seat at the table or sits within reach of it. For practitioners earlier in that journey, or in organizations where the function is still arguing for the right to be taken seriously, some of the advice may read as aspirational before it reads as immediately actionable. That is less a flaw than a matter of audience, since the authors are explicit that they are writing for leaders, but it is worth knowing going in. None of this diminishes what the book achieves. For anyone carrying real responsibility for learning in an organization of any size, The L&D Leader is among the more useful things published in recent memory, precisely because it is willing to hold up a mirror rather than a brochure. I expect to return to it less as a reference to be consulted than as a discipline to be readopted: a periodic reminder to ask, of every program and platform and proudly reported completion rate, the one question that finally matters. What changed because of this, and can I prove it?

It is a book I wish more of the executives who fund learning would read, and one I will be pressing on my own team. In a profession that too often mistakes motion for progress, Overton and Ockers have written a quietly radical case for proof. That they manage to make it practical, humane and genuinely readable is the mark of authors who have not only studied this field for twenty years but evidently still care about it.

* * *

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