Transforming talent for a new era

Abstract

We live in a world that is undergoing a complete structural transformation.
As technology continues to advance and job profiles become more fluid,
HR managers face a talent transformation that is equally fundamental to keep pace.

In this paper, we look at some of the key areas of focus at this inflection point for talent management practitioners. These include:

- Creating the agility needed to respond to future disruptions and maximize new market opportunities.

- Hiring people not only for their existing skills but also for their ability to grow, pivot and reskill with the organization.

- Transforming training so that employees can learn at the speed of a business's evolution in a way that is tailored to their needs, contextualized, and linked to their career opportunities.

- Moving to a more dynamic framework for career progression that allows not just vertical but also lateral growth opportunities.

By evolving their HR strategies, processes, and structures, talent managers can contribute to an organization's 'antifragility'- the ability to rise above crises and challenges to not just survive but also thrive as a result.

Introduction

Even before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, those in talent management faced a tough job. A shrinking talent pool, the aging workforce, transitioning to a digital economy and the associated transformation of work and business – all these trends were there well before 2020. However, the pandemic has reinforced and accelerated them.

Today, the challenge for businesses is to align new and retained talent with their ambitions while also ensuring continued resilience, responsiveness and agility.

As technology advances and job profiles change, talent managers have to both reskill existing staff and look at acquiring new talent, keeping both in balance.

According to the World Economic Forum[1], skills gaps will remain high as job requirements continue to change due to accelerated technology adoption (see Figure 1), and 50% of employees will need

---

[1] World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report 2020, October 2020, accessed June 2021
    https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020/digest

Aligning talent with business strategy requires agile talent transformation.

to reskill to take up new jobs internally. In this substantial talent transformation, what is working in talent managers' favor is the emergence of what we call the 'Human Cloud' – an abundance and accessibility of talent.

Apart from areas where workers' physical presence remains critical – for example, in manufacturing – recruiters and talent managers are less and less limited by location as technology has created a virtual global talent pool.

The challenge is to nurture and cultivate this ubiquity, harnessing it to maximize the opportunities ahead. This paper looks at key focus areas that can help organizations address this efficiently.

1. Putting agility first

One of the biggest weaknesses the pandemic exposed was that many organizations lacked resilience.

In a world characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA[2]), they must be able to pivot at an unprecedented rate to keep pace with change.

They have to become 'antifragile', or as the scientist and philosopher Nassim Nicholas Taleb puts it: "Antifragility is beyond resilience or robustness. The resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better"[3].

You could also say that rather than simply getting back to normal, organizations should come back better from any disruption they encounter.

One prominent example is the Disney+ streaming platform, which took The Walt Disney Company's traditional business and distribution channels – like cinemas and theme parks – into the digital sphere. More than 60 million users signed up to Disney+ in nine months of operation – something competitor Netflix took eight years to achieve[4].

---

[2]   Harvard Business Review, What VUCA Really Means for You, January-February 2014, accessed June 2021,
      https://hbr.org/2014/01/what-vuca-really-means-for-you

[3]   Nassim Nicholas Taleb, Antifragile (PDF version), 2012, accessed June 2021,
      https://www.fooledbyrandomness.com/prologue.pdf

[4]   The Wall Street Journal, The Business Report Card: How 12 Key Companies Have Fared in 2020, September 2020, accessed June 2021,
      https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-business-report-card-how-12-key-companies-have-fared-in-2020-11599278401

Having adapted processes, technology and people strategies to keep going, many companies have found that these adjustments are not just temporary crutches; they offered major efficiency advantages and new opportunities. Among these is the Human Cloud – the ubiquitous global talent pool we can now access thanks to the advancement in collaboration and communication technologies.

The goal of achieving antifragility affects two key areas in talent management – learning and recruitment.
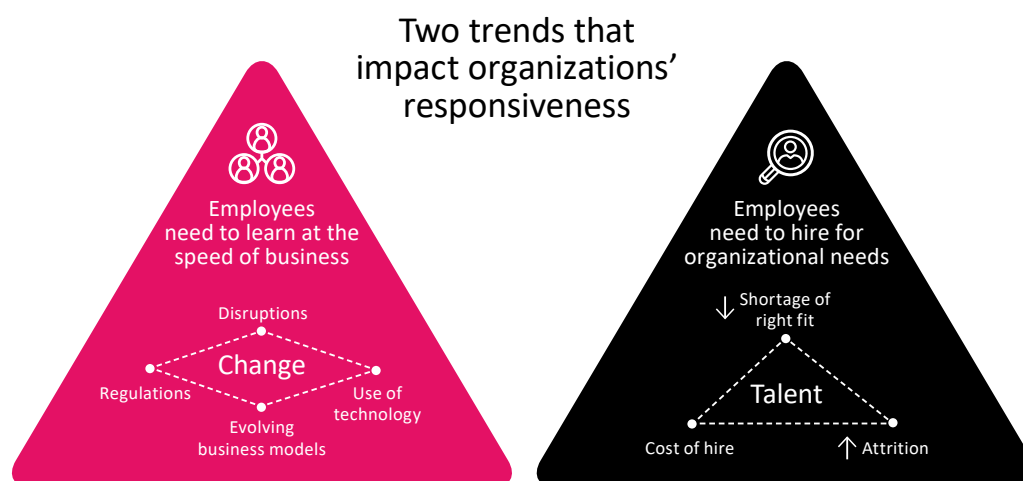

Figure 1: Trends affecting an organization's responsiveness

Source: TCS

2. Transforming learning

To achieve the agility required to deal with disruption, employees need to start learning at the speed of the business (see Figure 1). They need to be willing and able to change work patterns and skillsets to fit in with evolving business models.

In the 2021 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends report[5], nearly three-quarters (72%) of executives globally ranked the ability of employees "to adapt, reskill, and assume new roles" as one of the top two requirements for dealing with future disruptions. But just 17% thought that their employees were ready to do so.

---

[5]   Deloitte Insights, 2021 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends, The social enterprise in a world disrupted. Leading the shift from survive to thrive, 2020, accessed June 2021, *https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/6935_2021-HC-Trends/di_human-capital-trends.pdf*

The 'career jungle gym' will replace the traditional 'career ladder', allowing both vertical and horizontal career progression.

Talent managers need to help them develop a 'growth mindset', allowing them to view challenges as opportunities to further their own and the organization's progress.

A good example is a UK bank that moved most branch staff into call centers when the country went into lockdown in March 2020. The branch workers had to learn new technology and processes rapidly, creating a serious reskilling challenge.

Programs were put in place to help them pick up those new skills quickly and keep the business moving. What was more challenging was allaying fears around job security and giving employees a positive outlook when it became clear that not all of them would return to their previous jobs.

Among others, this meant looking at non-traditional frameworks for career progression. Unlike the stereotypical 'career ladder', where progress can only be upwards, these models are more like a 'career jungle gym', offering varied opportunities for staff to progress both vertically and horizontally.

More than half of learning and development professionals (51%) surveyed for LinkedIn Learning's 2021 Workplace Learning Report stated that such internal mobility is more of a priority now than before the pandemic.[6]

3. Shifting the recruitment mindset

According to our experience, as job requirements change, organizations typically aim to retrain about half of their existing staff along with recruiting outside experts.

This transformation of talent must adapt flexibly to both emerging organizational needs and people's training preferences and career aspirations.

It also affects the hiring process where the success formula is no longer to recruit for existing skills but for learning agility and the ability to find creative solutions to new challenges. To achieve this, they increasingly draw on technology such as data-driven recruitment for support.

For instance, our own talent developers used to focus on career fairs at India's top-tier engineering colleges. Now it runs a nationwide entry test online, which has resulted in many more qualified applications from engineering graduates across the whole of India than the company's recruiters were ever able to field manually.

---

[6]   LinkedIn Learning, 2021 Workplace Learning Report, accessed June 2021,
      https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report

> **In a volatile business climate, companies need to focus on recruiting for learning agility rather than for existing skills.**

Digital hiring has also enabled the company to bring recruits on board virtually and start their training before they have even graduated. This means they can hit the ground running when they officially join, leading to greater confidence for the new hires and productivity gains for the organization.

4. Targeted development

Under the new rules of talent development, a much greater emphasis must be put on aligning development initiatives with the higher-level organizational strategy and outcomes. This link has not always been there, but it is indispensable for organizational agility, not to mention antifragility.

At the same time, there is a much greater need for employee centricity.

Unhappy employees vote with their feet. Training, therefore, needs to impart the knowledge needed for them to realize their career ambitions as well as contributing to the business.

As LinkedIn's latest Workplace Learning Report shows, employees at companies that offer good development opportunities (internal mobility) stay almost twice as long as those at companies that do not.[7]

And this is only the start of the cultural shift we foresee in talent management.

Instead of imparting static skills that may not be relevant in a few years, talent development needs to focus on agile decision-making, experimentation ('fail and learn fast') and continuous learning. This transition needs to be supported by collaborative, networked learning structures and a pervasive culture of knowledge sharing.

One example is our Contextual Masters™[8] program, which celebrates staff who gain deep contextual knowledge about a customer's business and technology landscape. Over 17,000 associates have been identified as Contextual Masters to date, with their stories being shared across our social platforms to motivate others.

---

[7] LinkedIn Learning, 2021 Workplace Learning Report, accessed June 2021,
     https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report

[8] The TCS Way *https://www.tcs.com/tcs-way/contextual-knowledge-mastery-tcs-client-growth*

> "Offering good opportunities for internal mobility and targeted learning builds loyalty."

5. Matching employee ambition and organizational needs

Matching employee and organizational needs is not easy.

Spreadsheets and HR databases alone will no longer be sufficient for the amount of employee and company data that needs to be correlated, analyzed and acted on. Therefore, talent development will increasingly rely on technologies such as workforce analytics, AI and machine learning.

At Mastercard, for example, an AI platform was brought in to understand the company's skill-base and identify strengths and development areas. Instead of the usual top-down approach, the system analyzes large datasets from multiple sources, such as performance management, job descriptions and career conversations, to profile employee potential and training needs.[9]

Using AI technology will also ensure better visibility of job opportunities by offering a bird's-eye view of the workforce, cutting across functional silos.

The impact of all these initiatives will make for a more productive, agile and responsive organization. It will also deliver more engaged, focused employees with a clearer sense of purpose.

This should, in turn, have a positive impact on employee wellbeing and retention, as LinkedIn's analysis of employee tenure shows. Employees in companies with high levels of mobility stayed nearly five-and-a-half years while companies with low internal employee mobility can only retain staff for less than three years.[10]

---

[9]   Deloitte Insights, 2021 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends, The social enterprise in a world disrupted. Leading the shift from survive to thrive, 2020, accessed June 2021, *https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/6935_2021-HC-Trends/di_human-capital-trends.pdf*

[10] LinkedIn Learning, 2021 Workplace Learning Report, accessed June 2021, *https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report*

Talent development will increasingly rely on technology, ranging from workforce analytics to machine learning.

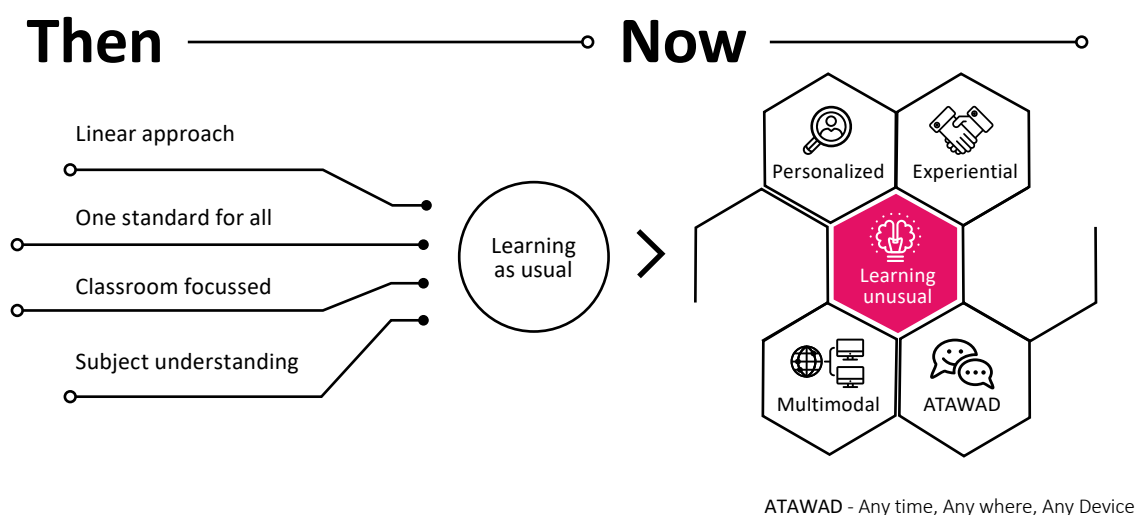**Learning transformation - 'Then & Now'**

ATAWAD - Any time, Any where, Any Device

Figure 2: How learning is changing

Source: TCS

6. Democratization of learning and career progression

Adding to purpose, visibility and transparency, there is a growing recognition that one size does not fit all.

Therefore, training is increasingly moving from traditional, standardized classroom teaching to more democratized approaches, tailored to a diverse population of learners and their specific needs. In catering to employees' individual preferences and learning journeys, there are three key areas to consider (see Figure 2).

First, learning must be personalized so that people can learn in ways that suit their dominant learning style.

Tata Consultancy Services

Personalized, contextualized and relevant content is critical for learners to engage with their training.

Increasingly, different types of training are blended to encourage employees to engage with rather than simply consume learning content. Examples of 'multimodal' training include gamification, hackathons, ideathons and crowdsourcing.

Second, learning must be contextualized.

Adult learning theory has long proven that, to motivate learners, what is taught must have immediate relevance and direct impact on their work and career progression.[11]

A good example is TCS' development strategy for senior leaders. When someone is certified as a Growth and Transformation Leader, we are obliged to assign them a suitable project quickly, rather than making them wait indefinitely for their next challenge.

Third, thought must be given to how learning content is presented.

At Zurich Insurance, the IT training team had collated a wide range of learning content, but it was not always used effectively. Zurich worked with us to introduce contextual learning programs pitched at different proficiency levels. They mapped out 16 learning journeys, using the existing training platform and content. Alongside, new social training methods were brought in to increase engagement.

Conclusion: Leading from the front

Technological changes, the pace of innovation and the impact of the pandemic have pushed talent management to an inflection point.

Companies must fundamentally evolve their HR strategies, processes and structures to adjust.

Democratized learning, advanced analytics, and alignment with business goals and employees' ambitions all need to be connected and made visible centrally. This can only be achieved with the help of sophisticated technology that reflects this growing complexity, such as the TCS talent transformation suite.[12]
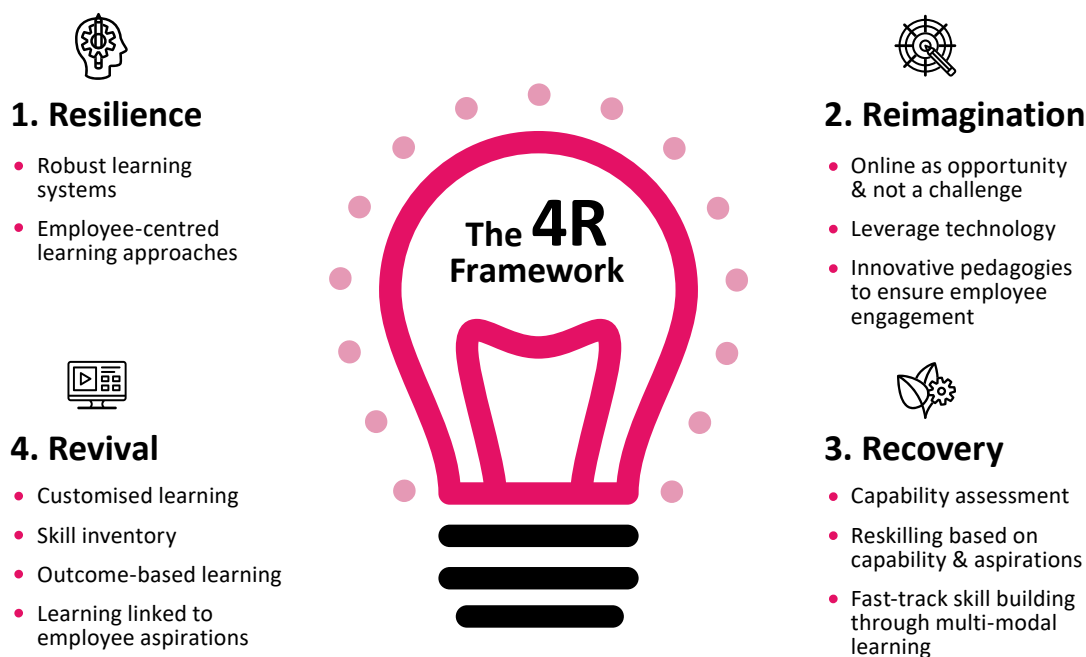
Talent developers must be particularly empathetic towards staff who may feel threatened by the transformation of job profiles and roles.

---

[11] E-learning Industry, The Adult Learning Theory – Andragogy – of Malcolm Knowles, May 2013, accessed June 2021, https://elearningindustry.com/the-adult-learning-theory-andragogy-of-malcolm-knowles

[12] https://www.tcs.com/education

Empowering employees through training and approaching every decision from a human angle will be key to agile talent development.

One way of allaying such fears is by making talent development plans highly transparent. Another is ensuring that employees can develop as they want through various learning programs. To create a roadmap for the talent transition, TCS proposes its '4R Framework' to create greater resilience through reimagining learning methods and modes. It aims to support an organization's recovery through rapid skill-building, by reviving corporate training through customization and outcome-based learning in a non-threatening fashion.

1. Resilience

- Robust learning systems
- Employee-centred learning approaches

4. Revival

- Customised learning
- Skill inventory
- Outcome-based learning
- Learning linked to employee aspirations

The **4R** Framework

2. Reimagination

- Online as opportunity & not a challenge
- Leverage technology
- Innovative pedagogies to ensure employee engagement

3. Recovery

- Capability assessment
- Reskilling based on capability & aspirations
- Fast-track skill building through multi-modal learning

Source: TCS

Alongside winning over employees, senior management buy-in is a major success factor, ensuring that talent transformation is driven from the top.

Finally, according to consulting firm Deloitte, the post-pandemic shift from "survive to thrive" that many companies are undertaking requires them to become "distinctly human" at the core and approach every decision from a human angle first.[13]

Only then can talent management move to the next level and contribute to the organization's agility, enabling it to better respond to new challenges and opportunities head-on.

---

[13] Deloitte Insights, 2021 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends, The social enterprise in a world disrupted. Leading the shift from survive to thrive, 2020, accessed June 2021, *https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/6935_2021-HC-Trends/ di_human-capital-trends.pdf*

About the authors

Poushali Chatterjee
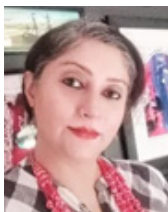
Poushali Chatterjee has a postgraduate degree in English Literature and possesses more than 25 years' experience in advertising and talent development. She currently heads TCS iON Talent Development Center & International Pre-Sales. She's also a Senior Assessor in the TBEM and a Design Thinking facilitator, certified by Royal College of Arts and Imperial College, London. She has won several awards in eLearning & Talent Development including Brandon Hall & Stevie. Her whitepaper on Engagement, Entertainment and Education in E-Learning won the best whitepaper award from Emerald Publishing Group UK in 2009.

Roshan Shetty

Roshan Shetty designs end-to-end talent development solutions for corporates as a Learning Consultant. His more than 12 years of experience ranges across delivery & operations, process transformation, talent development operations, training & facilitation and learning consultation. He is a Commerce graduate and has also acquired the Lean Six Sigma – Green belt certificate and diploma in Business Analysis from iiBA.

Awards and accolades

Contact

Email: enquiry.tcsion@tcs.com

About Tata Consultancy Services Ltd (TCS)

Tata Consultancy Services is a purpose-led transformation partner to many of the world's largest businesses. For more than 50 years, it has been collaborating with clients and communities to build a greater future through innovation and collective knowledge. TCS offers an integrated portfolio of cognitive powered business, technology, and engineering services and solutions. The company's 469,000 consultants in 46 countries help empower individuals, enterprises, and societies to build on belief.

Visit **www.tcs.com** and follow TCS news **@TCS**.