

IT Cos Learn New Tricks to Cut Training Costs

Software firms are using time-and cost-saving tools such as external training and e-learning to boost staff performance

SHREYA ROY
BANGALORE

IT firms are weighing a major overhaul in training programmes, thanks to clients demanding shorter time for productivity, pressure to reduce training costs and a diverse workforce spread across geographies. From a drastic reduction in class-room learning and shifting to mobile apps to partnering vendors who can train freshers even before they are hired, these companies are finding ways to cut learning time by half and costs by up to a third.

A case in point is HCL, which is shifting away from its practice of 3-6 months of classroom training for freshers, and adopting a "just-in-time" approach — delivering modules for skills required for immediate roles. Prithvi Shergill, chief HR officer, HCL Technologies, says: "At a meeting, a very significant client of ours, a large telecommunications company in the UK, asked us what our time to competency is. The

question was not how long our training programme is. There is pressure on time, and on costs."

External training vendors are also being tried out. According to a former employee at HCL, the company had cut a 12-week training programme almost by half, when it encouraged freshers to get globally standardised technical certifications before they joined.

Mphasis has launched a pilot programme with vendors, who train freshers based on requirements before formal offers are put out. The company expects training time to be cut down from four months to four weeks. It's also getting more picky at the entry level. The number of successful candidates in its technical interview has decreased from 40 out of 100, to just 20.

Another big change in the past year has been the focus on e-learning. Nandita Gurjar, senior vice-president and group head of education and research, Infosys, says the company looked at e-learning

SMART LESSONS



- **Mphasis is opting** for external vendors and e-learning modules to train freshers
- **HCL encourages new recruits** to get globally standardised technical certificates before joining
- **Mindtree has shifted focus** to online training to coach not only top executives but also lower level employees

when it needed to find a way to "deliver consistency in training, to cater to a geographically distributed work force". While firms like IBM, HCL have mentoring programmes,

expertise locators and the like on mobile apps, Mphasis has a three-day e-learning module for a mandatory course on IT service management, which all freshers need to clear. Mindtree, which delivered 90% of its training through classrooms till a year ago, is looking at bringing it down to 40%, with 60% online training.

While Mindtree slashed costs by a third with online training, Mphasis sees a benefit of ₹4,000 per employee, per session. "When on-boarding a thousand people at a time, the savings is substantial," says Usha Subramanian, VP & head, technical and domain learning, Mphasis.

Interestingly, going online is also helping access training that was previously not affordable for lower level employees. Executive courses from Harvard Business School, for instance, were reserved only for senior managers. "A week's course would cost at least \$5,000, plus travel. With the same professors and curriculum available online at a

tenth of the cost, we have been able to offer senior level training to our mid-managers," says Ravi Shankar, chief people officer, Mindtree.

Sourabh Govil, senior vice-president, human resources, Wipro, thinks the shift is becoming increasingly imperative. "The traditional classroom has to move to your mobile, and your tablet, whenever you want it. That's a shift which we have to do, which is scalable, dependable, and is a model which can last."

A recent study of Indian companies by training solutions provider Skillsoft reflects the sentiment. "IT firms in India have increased their learning budgets at a higher rate compared to non-IT firms, with 67% reporting an increase over the last 2 years," says Vinay Pradhan, country head, Skillsoft. Additionally, 33% of IT firms in India invest more than 40% of their learning budget on e-learning while this figure is 9% for non-IT ones, states the report.

shreya.roy@timesgroup.com