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*Overcoming the Training & Development
Challenges of the New Normal*



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About the Journal

Sri Lanka Journal of Training & Development (SLJT&D) is a peer-reviewed professional journal. This journal provides full open access to its content on the principle that making knowledge freely and independently available to the global training & development community and the public will support a greater global exchange of knowledge and further development of expertise and collaboration in the field of training and development. All members of the Editorial Board of SLJT&D work on an honorary basis.

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Scope of the Journal

SLJT&D covers training and development topics encompassing: management development; professional education and training; vocational training and education; human resources development; organization development; career and technical education; workforce education; continuing vocational education and training; and continuing professional development through both in-person and online methodologies.

Publisher

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Editorial

In the pursuit of taking Sri Lanka Institute of Training & Development to the next level in the new normal steered by the Executive Council (Exco) led by President Dr. Padmasiri Ranawakaarachchi and SLITAD Secretariat Staff led by Admin Secretary Mr. Upali de Silva, the SLITAD Professional Journal Committee took it upon themselves to contribute towards this drive by taking SLITAD periodic publication which was hitherto available only in the form of a magazine also to the next level.

As a result of deliberations at the SLITAD Professional Journal Committee, with the blessings of the Executive Council (Exco), we decided to publish a peer-reviewed professional journal benchmarking international professional journals. Sri Lanka Journal of Training & Development is a biannual free and open online publication in July and January. This journal will be available through the SLITAD website, several prominent international open publishing platforms for academic and professional publications as well as in online free and open libraries for journals and magazines.

To promote collaboration between SLITAD and national training & development professional organizations of other countries, we will also invite articles from authors on topics relevant to the theme of the future issues.

Apart from publishing SLJT&D, we intend to continue to publish the “SLITAD Trainer” Magazine also as a biannual publication in October and April focusing on facilitating the exchange of communication among the membership, best practice sharing, and membership engagement.

We would like to record our deep appreciation to the authors of the respective articles as well as all those who contributed with reviews, ideas, and encouraged us in this endeavour to ensure the success of this publication.

Editorial Board

Dr. Padmasiri Ranawakaarachchi, Dr. Samantha Rathnayake, Ravi Rajasinghe, Sisira Nanayakkara, and Saman Kulasuriya

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Message from the President of Sri Lanka Institute of Training & Development



Dr. Padmasiri
Ranawakaarachchi

“HR and Training & Development professionals are striving hard to find solutions to minimize the impact of the pandemic on their employees. Among many challenges, employee health and safety and building competencies and making employees ready for the new normal take precedence over the others.”

With great pleasure, I send this message to the inaugural issue of the Sri Lanka Journal of Training & Development - the professional journal of the Sri Lanka Institute of Training and Development (SLITAD).

SLITAD is the premier professional body for Training & Development professionals and has been in existence for more than two decades. With the support of our membership exceeding 300 practising T&D professionals, SLITAD continues to conduct our activities notwithstanding the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic.

As you know, the pandemic has affected all of us, and the challenges we face today are unprecedented and unpredictable. Lifestyle and work habits have changed dramatically, and we are now in ‘the New Normal.’ Organizations face a range of unique challenges, and HR and Training & Development professionals are striving hard to find solutions to minimize the impact of the pandemic on their employees. Among many challenges, employee health and safety and building competencies, and making employees ready for the new normal take precedence over the others.

In these circumstances, the theme of this issue, ‘Overcoming the training & development challenges of the new normal,’ is appropriate as it focuses on the roles and the responsibilities of the HR and Training & Development professionals in their organizations.

I take this opportunity to thank my colleagues of the Editorial Board and the Administrative staff of the SLITAD Secretariat for their untiring efforts in making this e-journal a reality amidst the challenges due to the present uncertain pandemic situation.

Dr. Padmasiri Ranawakaarachchi

Introduction to Sri Lanka Institute of Training & Development

Sri Lanka Institute of Training & Development (SLITAD) was established in 1998 to fulfil the professional needs of the community of Training & Development (T&D) professionals of the country scattered among diverse sectors, various types of organizations and with numerous functional belongings, including but not limited to human resources development function. These T&D professionals' needs have transcended their individual learning, and professional growth needs, to collectively contribute towards professionalism in the T&D endeavours of their organizations as well as that of other fellow Sri Lankan organizations. Thus, SLITAD has been able to establish more visibility and recognition for the T&D profession while contributing towards educating the young students to mould them as T&D professionals and ensuring the continuing professional development of practising T&D professionals over a couple of decades

To encourage and recognize Sri Lankan organizations investing in their people to achieve the growth and success of their organizations through developing people, SLITAD has been successfully organizing the "People Development Awards." SLITAD has also been organizing National Conferences on Training & Development during the pre-COVID-19 period.

SLITAD is a non-profit organization managed by a national executive council (Exco) led by a president. The Institute is affiliated with the International Federation of the Training and Development Organizations (IFTDO) and Asian Regional Organization of Training and Development Organizations (ARTDO).

There are numerous opportunities for individuals and organizations to partner with SLITAD as it organizes professional study programmes, courses, and training workshops.

SLITAD provides public training programmes as well as offers many customized training workshops and management consultancy projects. Your organization can also partner with SLITAD in developing your competitive advantage through developing people.

For more details on how SLITAD can help, please feel free to contact us. Email: slitad@sltnet.lk and slitadhrd@gmail.com WhatsApp: +9475 8084402, Telephone: +9411 280 7170 / +9411 401 9869. The official website of SLITAD is www.slitad.org.lk/

Promising Prospects of Learning in the Post-COVID-19 Era



Prof. Ajantha
Dharmasiri*

“Effectiveness is all about achieving the desired results. This can be approached in many ways. Let me attempt a structured way of doing so by using McKinsey’s Seven S framework, involving strategy, structure, systems, shared values, style, staff, and skills. Some fundamental questions that need to be raised and answered in each of the above Ss will clarify how effective online learning is all about.”

Keywords: Learning facilitation, post-COVID-19, technology solutions, effectiveness challenges

Introduction

Learning involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in discovering one’s surroundings. It is a life-long journey that is from the womb to the tomb. Learning can also be viewed as how a person acquires and develops new knowledge, skills, capabilities, behaviours, and attitudes (Armstrong, 2009). Learning has taken place when people can demonstrate that they know something that they did not know before and when they can do something they could not do before (Honey and Mumford, 1996). Much is being said about online learning during COVID-19 locked down. There are both bouquets and brickbats for online learning worldwide.

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Online learning may mean many things to many people. It essentially is different from a physical gathering where the learners assemble to a place to learn. The terms online learning and e-learning are interchangeably used. Distance learning is an umbrella term where online learning can be one mode within its broad categories. There can be distance learning with the use of a Learning Management System (LMS) with much less interaction with the learners. While the intention of reaching out to the learners remains the same, the intensity of involvement of both the teacher and the learner significantly differs in both cases (Dharmasiri, 2019).

According to encyclopedia.com, online education is a flexible instructional delivery system that encompasses any learning via the Internet. Online learning allows educators an opportunity to reach students who may not be able to enrol in a traditional classroom course and supports students who need to work on their schedule and at their own pace. On the one hand, it offers far greater flexibility. On the other hand, there are serious concerns about the overall effectiveness.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Online Learning

Effectiveness is all about achieving the desired results. This can be approached in many ways. Let me attempt a structured way of doing so by using McKinsey's Seven S framework, involving *strategy, structure, systems, shared values, style, staff, and skills*. Some fundamental questions that need to be raised and answered in each of the above Ss will clarify how effective online learning is all about.

Strategy:

- 1. Is there a clear game plan to use online learning as a core mode of delivery?*
- 2. What specific objectives are to be achieved through online learning?*
- 3. How is online learning connected to the long-term plans of the host institution?*

Structure:

- 1. Is there an assigned team with clear responsibilities to take care of online learning facilitation?*
- 2. Is there flexible decision-making in the institution to ensure the smooth functioning of online learning facilitation?*
- 3. Is there a satisfactory level of presence of the needed technology and infrastructure to ensure online learning facilitation?*

Systems:

1. *Is there a robust Learning Management System (LMS) that is linked to online learning facilitation?*
2. *Is the online learning assessment through LMS adequately supported by the other systems (such as human resources and administration) in the institution?*
3. *Are there adequate controls to ensure the consistency of online learning facilitation?*

Shared Values:

1. *Is there an identified set of core values that support initiatives such as online learning facilitation?*
2. *Are there key behaviours stemming from the core values that support the commitment required for online learning?*
3. *Are there reviews that assess the level of demonstrating the core values by the team members involved in online learning facilitation?*

Style:

1. *How participative is the overall management/leadership style of the institution?*
2. *How adaptable is the organization, particularly its resource personnel, in embracing new technology?*
3. *Is there an engaging and encouraging style towards online learners being demonstrated?*

Skills:

1. *Are there required information communication and technology (ICT) skills within the organization for online learning facilitation?*
2. *Is there a process to strengthen the learners' skills in getting the best out of online learning sessions?*
3. *Is there a mechanism to develop the skills of the learning facilitators to offer the best using the available online learning platform?*

An overall satisfaction level for the above questions is required to solidly support an online learning initiative with strategy, structure, systems, shared values, style, staff, and skills.

On the other hand, from the learner's perspective, the availability of affordable technology such as broadband facilities could be a challenge in some cases regarding Sri Lankan scenarios. One may argue that the digital divide between the "have"s and "have-not"s may prevail here as well. Inequality in education can be further widened as not all children have the necessary facilities for online learning during prolonged curfews, lockdowns, or when schools are kept closed indefinitely (Nanayakkara, 2020).

Pham and Ho (2020) describe the Vietnam scenario, where e-learning up until now has played a peripheral role in the formal education systems related to higher education (HE) there. With the unprecedented outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the application of e-learning in HE is poised to become much more prominent in the learning institutions of Vietnam. They discuss the challenges of reaching economically deprived communities and how it became a success story. Many such cases can encourage countries such as Sri Lanka to ensure the equitable inclusivity of all deserving learners in meaningfully outreaching to them.

From Virtual to Real with a Blended Learning Approach

Morvant (2020) shares a few concepts around the creative formats that some have adopted to address the needs of the students.

Blended:

In general, this model is one where students have some in-person time and some online time. The standard structure can be 50/50, with half of the time in-person and the other half asynchronous online content and engagement. Other divisions are possible as long as the content and learning objectives of the course are equivalent to that of a three-hour in-person course. The traditional blended teaching practice (pedagogy) moves direct instruction to the asynchronous online portion and uses the in-person for high-impact engagement activities.

Flipped:

This model moves direct instruction to an online format (video or reading) and uses class time for dynamic engagement and problem-solving. A discussion-based course with prior reading assignments is a pre-video version of a flipped classroom that goes back centuries. For some disciplines with more graphical or dynamic content, videos of the instruction before the class can prepare students for in-class engagement and critical thinking. It may require creating or curating videos for students to watch online and low stake assessments to assess if they are

prepared for the in-person activities but uses valuable in-person time for the most impact. Due to the use of in-person time on high-level engaged activities and critical problem solving, this is a recommended model for courses that have moved to a blended format.

Dual Delivery:

This model is based on early teleconferencing courses. The instructor teaches both to in-person students and students in a remote location at the same time. The difference between the older system with specific sites and today's version is that students could engage through Zoom or a similar platform anywhere and not be tied to a specific location. The model requires students to either be in-person or online at the same time and engage with the instructor either through in-person or online engagement methods.

HyFlex:

This model is a complex pedagogy to execute but gives the most flexibility to the students. Based on students' choice, it can have a majority in-person, a majority online, or a hybrid of both. Although sometimes associated with dual delivery, it is a more advanced concept with student engagement that spans both in-person and online within the same structure integration of in-person and online pedagogy. The main feature of the HyFlex model is the choice for a student to choose in-person or online.

Hutton (2021) highlights the need to have personalization as one of the methods used to enhance educational content to keep employees engaged. Personalizing the e-learning journey refers to incorporating experiences like meaningful feedback, having accessibility across multiple devices, and participation in making their video content. By personalizing instruction, trainers can better evaluate what learners already know and tailor the training programme to better suit and test their knowledge to each individual.

As McBride (2020) observes, gamification has also proven to keep learners engaged and active in the learning process, which could be especially helpful for online training. Gaming design in courses conducts an activity to spur learners and reward them with incentives as they progress. Rewards can be specially curated for the audience, making them relevant to their preferences and needs.

Pioneering Local Applications

The author was involved in online facilitation during the pre-COVID-19 for both local and international audiences. The Master of Public Administration (MPA) offered by the Postgraduate Institute of Management (PIM), University of Sri Jayewardenepura, adapted a blended learning approach to reach out to the North and East with study groups Jaffna, Trincomalee, Vavuniya together with the Colombo group. After the ending of the war, it was significant assistance for the military personnel to engage in meaningful learning, while being in service in the North and East. It also catered to the deserving public sector officials and academics around the country to enhance their competencies.

The overseas study groups of PIM's MBA programme in Dubai, Doha, Muscat, Kuwait City, Bahrain, and Dhaka also have a blended learning experience. The resource personnel from Sri Lanka had a significant portion of their subject contents delivered during pre-COVID-19, and now the entire process has become online. The PIM was one of the first among the state-sector higher education institutes to resort to Zoom-based online sessions since March 2020.

Way Forward

The author's involvement in conducting webinars and virtual training sessions for leading corporates in Sri Lanka was an encouraging sign of the novel learning in the new normal. While exploiting the opportunities offered by the online learning solutions, a blended approach is much recommended in terms of overall effectiveness. The post-COVID-19 era will have ample opportunities for such a combination to ensure flexibility and focused results. Such an endeavour should be a vital aspect of a holistic approach to enhancing learning in Sri Lanka.

With adequacy and accessibility ensured, the promising prospects of learning in the post-COVID-19 era can be envisaged. It is a solid case of responding to the VUCA 1.0 *reality* (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) with a VUCA 2.0 *response* (Vision, Understanding, Confidence, and Agility) (Dharmasiri, 2020). It is worthwhile to reflect on what Henry Ford said about learning. "Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young."

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Customized Training Programmes Offered by Sri Lanka Institute of Training & Development

Sri Lanka Institute of Training & Development (SLITAD) has the distinction of being the largest grouping of training & development professionals in Sri Lanka. Therefore, SLITAD is able to recommend the most suitable trainers to deliver any specific training programme based on the experience, exposure and expertise required to ensure credibility and effectiveness of delivery. The programme modules and lesson plans are peer-reviewed to ensure quality assurance. Programme participant and other stakeholder feedback as well as the progress follow-up with the client organizations are done to assess the performance of our faculty of trainers continuously.

The flagship professional courses offered by SLITAD include National Diploma in Training & Human Talent Development and Certificate in Training & Human Talent Development. In addition, the other public programmes include Certified Life and Business Coach, and SLITAD Certified Trainer.

SLITAD has two approaches to providing training programmes, namely, public programmes and customized programmes. Public programmes are suitable if an organization does not have an adequate number of participants with a given training need. Such public programmes are conducted by SLITAD from time to time, attracting nominees who have a common training need from different organizations. Customized training programmes can be organized catering to a specific training need or several training needs in modules by a trainer or a team of trainers recommended by SLITAD based on their expertise and experience.

Depending on the specific organizational requirements, the customized training and development interventions offered by SLITAD may include one or more of the following: (i) conducting a Training Need Analysis and Assisting in prioritizing; (ii) recommending training and development solutions; (iii) recommending trainers/management consultants; (iv) assessing pre-programme status; (v) pre-programme exercises/assignments/projects; (vi) delivery of the programme; (vii) post-programme assessment; (viii) post-programme follow-up; (ix) follow up interactions for implementation of learning back at work; and (x) booster programmes for continuing developments of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Technology Integration for Enhancement to Transformation in Blended Learning



Dr. Samantha
Rathnayake*

“Through self-directed learning, students are driven to find solutions to create a product that has value. Digitally astute students engage through such models as blended learning, flipped classrooms, games, and virtual learning. Inherent in these approaches is a high level of choice about what to focus on, leading to greater ownership over learning and personalized ways to demonstrate understanding.”

Keywords: Technology in education, blended learning, transformation in education delivery

Introduction

This article intends to explore the current role in integrating technology into education to transform current teaching practices. Technology is becoming progressively present and instrumental in our teaching/facilitating approaches. To effectively implant and fully elevate technology, professionals engaged in education need reliable learning frameworks as the foundations of instruction. Without proper support structures and learning activities grounded in sound pedagogy and technology in the teaching platforms, one would be risking the process. Having only a bells-and-whistles presence would only provide a seeming impact on learning. Hence, only when technology is integrated with purpose and aligned to acquiring new knowledge and skills more authentic learning will occur, and learners will be better equipped to compete in the real world.

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Blended learning

Blended learning refers to a course, which combines traditional face-to-face (F2F) classroom teaching with teachers and students and the extra addition of a computer-learning component. According to Sharma and Barrett (2007), a blended learning approach combines F2F classroom methods with computer-mediated activities to form an integrated instructional system. If implemented well, students in a blended learning curriculum may learn more out of class than they will in course, using their new skill set that utilizes the most up-to-date software available. In the past, digital materials have served a supplementary role, helping support F2F instruction. However, with the blended learning concept, technology now plays a significant role in the actual learning material, completely changing the traditional way of how students learn. A well-structured blended learning course will have no learning time restrictions and allowing students to learn autonomously at a pace that suits them.

Technology in education

Present-day computers, mobiles, and the internet have revolutionized education by making access to facts and information instantaneously, significantly changing the way we learn. The ever-changing modern-day world of education is constantly adapting these technologies to benefit teachers, students, and society in general. Prensky (2011) claims that with currently available technologies, students are now learning in a way that was never possible before. Another academic in the field, Warschauer (2011), puts forward three primary goals for using technology in education: first, to improve academic achievement, second, to facilitate new kinds of twenty-first-century learning, and third, to promote educational and social equity. Modern-day technology can transition from teacher dependence to learner independence that much smoother, further boosting the concept of learner-autonomy in modern-day pedagogy.

Need a Transformation in Education Delivery: Is it in place?

Puentedura (2006) developed the SAMR model, and it was intended to encourage educators to enhance the quality of education provided via technology significantly. The Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR) Model configures a process for seeing how educational technology can facilitate the teaching and learning process. Further, the SAMR model displays how educators commonly employ a progression integrating new technologies into instruction. As an educator progresses along the continuum, technology

becomes increasingly embedded into the learning activities. The further one proceeds along the continuum, the more effective the integration of technology would become as an instructional enhancement. Authentic student engagement and learning are the defined outcomes expected in this framework. The approach allows for constructive dialogue regarding activities and their assigned levels. The SAMR Model consists of four classifications of technology use for learning activities as follows:

- *Substitution*: The technology provides a substitute for other learning activities without functional change.
- *Augmentation*: The technology provides a substitute for other learning activities but with functional improvements.
- *Modification*: The technology allows the learning activity to be redesigned.
- *Redefinition*: The technology allows for creating tasks that could not have been done without the use of the technology.

Way forward

Having discussed several contemporary frameworks and models, the challenge is to create pathways for rigorous and relevant use of digital tools in the current context of, notably, the COVID-19 pandemic transition. Technology can be an effective tool, but it remains just that, a tool. In a virtual setup, educators may engage in imparting subject knowledge. However, we may miss the life learning factors (soft side of life) in the technological platform. Therefore, educators provide the backbone of the student's learning experience. The outcome is and should be capability development. Hence, specific instructional design methods need to be adopted, requiring rigorous, relevant, and goal-oriented features.

Information should not be confused with knowledge of evaluating digital tools. Knowledge is the recall of information, observation, finding, or naming. Teachers define what knowledge (not information) students will need to apply when using a digital tool. It requires work and careful planning to implement the use of digital tools in defined ways. Before introducing a digital tool into a learning context, teachers should understand how they will support students and how they will manage it independently. Also, educators should contemplate how this online tool will allow us to hone in on each student's thought process and provide targeted, formative feedback that can be immediately and usefully applied.

In moving from enhancement to transformation, some practices may be very effective in this sphere. One step is to take social media as a predominant tool globally it fosters personalization, creativity, and collaboration, giving students infinite ways to create artefacts of their learning and knowledge. Another step is to make use of devices students already have, know, and use. This enhances the understanding, increases productivity, allows students to grow their research skills, and gives teachers the chance to teach appropriate digital responsibility. Also, creating spaces for making, collaborating, and tinkering would be a handy approach in this regard. They are giving students chances to build and create using real-world tools and solve open-ended, real-world problems. These spaces provide students with challenging problems to solve where there is no one correct solution. Through self-directed learning, students are driven to find answers to create a product that has value. Digitally astute students engage through such models as blended learning, flipped classrooms, games, and virtual learning. Perhaps, one of the best steps would be giving students access to open courseware and open source technology. Inherent in these approaches is a high level of choice about focus on, leading to greater ownership over learning and personalized ways to demonstrate understanding.

It is argued that the promotion of autonomous learning may lead to the total disappearance of the teacher. However, it is more likely that teachers/educators will continue to play an integral role in education and learning, whether technology-based or not.

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Human Resources Development (HRD) Challenges of the 'New Normal'



Dr. Padmasiri
Ranawakaarachchi*

“It is inevitable that there would be skill gaps to be addressed. Still, organizations are in the recovery process and need to develop their staff to cope with challenges in this new age of work. Rapidly changing business environment requires that the employee possess knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) needed to cope with the emerging challenges to be competitive in the market.”

Keywords: The new normal, emerging challenges, e-learning platforms, human resources development, training, and development

Today we are moving through the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and technology is evolving faster than ever. The challenges of globalization and new technological developments have forced organizations to change how they manage their business. They are required to adapt to new strategies for their survival and growth. Thus, the role of Human Resource Management (HRM) has been changing dramatically. Being innovative and responsive to changing business environments requires greater flexibility. The trend towards the elastic company is affecting the Human Resource (HR) function, too (Bernardin & Russel, 1998, p. 47). This trend has inevitably led organizations to focus attention on Human Resource Development (HRD) to build new capabilities to manage these challenges effectively as such HRD professionals need to develop employees at all levels to enhance their capabilities to bridge the skill gap.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, challenges have become more demanding. Today we are faced with the worst pandemic in a century, and COVID-19 has not spared any country in the world, from the giants of the USA, China, France, Italy, and India, to the poorest countries such as Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, and Niger.

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As reported in numerous articles written by economists and others, it is very difficult to make predictions of the impact of COVID-19 globally, because it will depend on the spread of the disease and the measures respective countries take to fight against the deadly pandemic.

The situation in our country, Sri Lanka, will also be similar to that of other countries or may be even worse than some of the other developing countries. Apart from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sri Lanka's economy was not in good shape in the recent past. As such Sri Lanka has a daunting task ahead that requires a collective effort from all stakeholders. In that context, HRD professionals have to play a more crucial role in addressing the emerging issues and many other current issues.

The pandemic has disrupted human life in all aspects and paved the way for significant behavioural changes in everyone. The term 'New Normal' became the buzzword in all COVID-19 prevention campaigns. Much discussed is the 'Future of Work' (ILO, 2019) in many international fora, and the transformations in the workplace have become a reality sooner than expected. Technological innovations were among the topics discussed under the future of work and how organizations should transform their workforce by re-skilling, up-skilling and redeployment. Most organizations were not ready for the change due to various reasons, including financial constraints and resistance to change.

Nevertheless, under this 'new normal', organizations were compelled to introduce radical changes to their operations, such as scaling down their operations, temporary closure of offices, flex employee levels, assigning new responsibilities, and facilitating remote working etc There inevitably are skill gaps to be addressed. Still, organizations are in the recovery process and need to develop their staff to cope with challenges in this new age of work. A rapidly changing business environment requires that the employee possess knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) needed to cope up with the emerging challenges to be competitive in the market. IT literacy has especially become the essential skill for everyone, not only for their professional life but also for their personal lives. During the pandemic situation, social media platforms became very active, and even ordinary citizens had to use their smartphones to order their essentials online. Therefore, HRD professionals should take initiatives to re-skill and up-skill employees to be comfortable in their new workplace and home environment.

This is not a new phenomenon for HRD professionals, as they always search for ways to enhance employees' effectiveness in their jobs today, and prepare them for tomorrow. Both

academics and industrialists have recognized the importance of training and development for a long time. Training is seen as a major catalytic force for augmenting human productivity in all spheres of development (Kumar & Singh, 1996).

However, training and development and the learning environment has been completely changed, and e-learning platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Classroom have taken over from the conventional classroom type face-to-face training methods. Although they have been extensively used in developed countries, developing countries like Sri Lanka have enormous challenges in applying new technology. IT literacy, financial constraints, infrastructure facilities, and people's attitudes are the main constraints in adopting technological changes. Irrespective of those constraints COVID-19 has forced us to adopt the new technology.

With the unexpected changes under the new normal situation, some of the job roles became obsolete and redundant. Many skill gaps have emerged and up-skilling and reskilling programs have been introduced to cope with the situation. Most of these programs are meant to address immediate challenges and may be used as contingency plans. As discussed earlier, not only in business organizations, but in the education sector from primary to undergraduate and postgraduate levels, all lectures/teaching sessions are conducted on e-learning platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Classroom. It is evident that both resource persons and participants do not possess adequate IT literacy and are not comfortable in the new teaching and learning environment. Mental health implications, too, have become a concern in some situations. In this context, human resource development challenges at the country level are enormous and need the immediate attention of the authorities.

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Membership of Sri Lanka Institute of Training & Development (SLITAD)

SLITAD is a unique professional body with membership of Training & Development (T&D) professionals who belong to diverse sectors ranging from corporate to public to technical, vocational and tertiary education to defence services, etc Besides, they represent a multitude of functional disciplines encompassing Training, Learning & Development, Human Resource Development, Organizational Development, Coaching, Lecturing, Management Consultancy and Learning Content Development. They are in a continuing journey of learning as T&D professionals in their roles as trainers, training content developers, training administrators and training managers.

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Roles of Training and Development Professionals in Making People Digital-Transformation-Ready for the New Normal



Ravi Rajasinghe*

“Digital transformation not only presents enormous opportunities for those who learn and adopt it, but also enormous threats for those who ignore and avoid it. T&D professionals have undeniable roles to play in making people in organizations, ranging from leaders at all levels to front-line employees, digital-transformation-ready.”

Keywords: The new normal, training and development, digital transformation, role of training & development professionals

Current context

With the emerging new normal due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen an unprecedented acceleration of digitization of systems and digitalization processes. The circumstances have compelled organizations to adopt and implement digital strategies that would have otherwise taken many years, if not decades. This article explores the roles of training and development (T&D) professionals in preparing people for a holistic digital transformation to harness the full potential benefits for the individuals, their organizations, and their stakeholders.

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How new is “the New Normal”?

In the Oxford Dictionary, the phrase “the new normal,” which had originated in the early 1920s, is defined as a “previously unfamiliar or atypical situation that has become standard, usual, or expected.” Besides, according to authors Davis (2009, p. 1) and Elnaj (2021), “the New Normal” had been used in history repeatedly to describe the rapid changes and drastic adoption of new technologies in the periods following major crises such as wars, pandemics, financial crises, and natural or man-made disasters. The examples for post-crisis rapid advancements and adoption of newly emerging technologies range from aeronautics after the 1st World War to the quick adoption of e-commerce in China after the SARS epidemic in 2005.

Why preparation for adoption of new technologies becomes a prerequisite for survival and growth in the New Normal

During a business-as-usual period, changes and new technology adoption take place at a slower pace. That gives ample opportunity for both individuals and organizations, who are laggards, to catch up. In the new normal, the transformed companies that have accelerated the adoption of new technologies gain critical competitive advantage in cost, differentiation, market focus, or market access over their laggard competitors who would be wiped out from the market. While some global brands such as Fujifilm, Apple, and Netflix innovated and adopted new technologies critical to their industries early, their laggard competitors such as Kodak, Nokia, Blockbuster could not survive.

Davis (2009) emphasizes the certainty of the post-crisis period that the business and economic context will not be the same as its pre-crisis state. Leaders “preparing their organizations to succeed in the new normal must focus on what has changed and what remains basically the same for their customers, companies, and industries.” The new normal “will be an environment that, while different from the past, is no less rich in possibilities for those who are prepared” (p. 3).

This critical need to be prepared can be summarized through Charles Darwin’s wisdom from *On the Origin of Species*: “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.”

Impacts of Digitization, Digitalization and Digital transformation

The new technologies encountered in the previous waves of change primarily impacted a given industry or a category of related industries. However, the Fourth Industrial Revolution brought about by the Internet resulting in digitization, digitalization and digital transformation is creating rapid and profound impacts on almost all industries disrupting the very foundation of their business models while giving them unprecedented opportunities (Xu et al., 2018, p. 90). For better clarity, the technical terms of digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation can be reviewed in terms of goals, activities, tools, challenges, and examples, as given in Table 1.

Table 1: Digitization, Digitalization, and Digital Transformation Reviewed

	Digitization	Digitalization	Digital Transformation
Focus	Data conversion	Information processing	Knowledge leveraging
Goal	Change from analog to digital format	Automate existing business processes and operations	Change company's culture, the way it thinks and works
Activities	Convert paper-based documents, photos, audios and videos into digital format	Creation of entirely digital processes	Transformation into a digital company
Tools	Computers, conversion, encoding equipment	Integrated IT systems, smartphones, data-capturing devices, specialized software systems	Matrix of new (currently disruptive) new digital technologies
Challenges	The volume of items and the resulting time to deal with	The financial cost of acquiring systems and customizing	Resistance to change, Time is taken for the majority of staff to adopt
Examples	1. Scanning paper-based documents as images, 2. Standalone biometric attendance control and monitoring machines, 3. Brochures converted to static web pages	1. Automated electronic individual transaction processes e.g. Point of Sales (POS) System 2. HRIS Systems with automated processes: e.g. recruitment, training, performance management 3. Websites with customer interfacing processes	1. Back-to-back Integrated decision support systems such as from order to delivery, 2. Integrated ERP Systems across functions 3. Web-based eCommerce, customer experience platforms

Source: As adopted from Savić, D. (2019). From Digitization, through Digitalization, to Digital Transformation (p. 37)

The challenges of digital transformation to an organization

The mere investment in digital infrastructure and advanced software systems does not necessarily mean that an organization can harness the power of new technology. Making the best out of digital technologies requires leveraging cross-functional knowledge through a fundamental shift in how the organization thinks and works. Making an organization wholeheartedly ready does not start with technical knowledge and skills, but with creating awareness and developing positive attitudes in people through effective communication and training on the vision of the transformation, and why they are doing what they are doing.

Benchmarking the best practices of T&D professionals

Benchmarked organizations that have become successful in digital transformation have an effective organization development (OD) and change management (CM) programme orchestrated by internal and external T&D professionals, playing twelve roles as follows.

Table 2: The Twelve Roles to be Played by Training and Development Professionals to ensure success with Digital Transformation

Roles played by T&D professionals	Responsibilities
1. Steering committee member	Be a strategic partner: “Figure out your business strategy before you invest in anything.” Decisions need to be made quickly, and groups from all over the organization need to get involved (Tabrizi et al., 2019). Formulate OD&CM policies, processes, project plans and training schedules, while reporting progress and obtaining acceptance to ensure smooth implementation.
2. Project team member	Coordinate with staff managers and line managers to ensure the achievement of project milestones.
3. Internal change agent	Help align and coordinate with all OD&CM project stakeholders using their familiarity with and understanding of people, the company, the industry, and circumstances to “leverage insiders” (Tabrizi et al., 2019).
4. External change agent	Ensure results by helping the organization to sort out issues such as teething problems by being an independent moderator and expert equipped with OD&CM domain expertise and years of experience and exposure in similar projects elsewhere.

Roles played by T&D professionals	Responsibilities
5. T&D administrator	Ensure all sessions and events are held as scheduled with the intended participants, obtain their feedback and monitor achievement of session objectives.
6. Facilitator	Ensure obtaining the participation of all collaborators by leading the sessions for strategic planning, project planning, and team building, etc . . . for them to own the project.
7. Master trainer	Ensure training of trainers to increase the ability to impart training to many participants within a short period and enhance in-house expertise.
8. Technical trainer	Ensure all learners are competent in using the digital systems and processes that they must utilize to obtain the expected benefits.
9. Coach	Help the learners with their specific learning gaps or challenges
10. Internal Customer Care	“Recognize employees’ fear of being replaced” (Tabrizi et al., 2019). Empathize and help them by clarifying matters, resolve their doubts, and help them to sort out any real concerns. Reinforce the inspiration in opportunities that come with the challenges and the spirit of resilience needed for survival during times of transformation (Buheji, 2020). “Design customer experience from the outside in” (Tabrizi et al., 2019).
11. Mentor	Enable and empower young technical talent to improve their leadership, interpersonal and emotional competencies in obtaining cooperation from those who are not cooperating without antagonizing them.
12. Knowledge manager	Ensure embedding of the learning inside the organization by fostering pools of user champions and internal trainers and creating the learning, understanding, and sharing culture to sustain the new knowledge in the organization without having to depend on external experts and trainers.

Source: Author

Conclusion

Digital transformation not only presents enormous opportunities for those who learn and adopt it, but also enormous threats for those who ignore and avoid it. T&D professionals have undeniable roles to play in making people in organizations ranging from leaders at all levels to front-line employees digital-transformation-ready. Overcoming these challenges can only be done through awareness building, participatory strategic planning, organization development, change management, cultural transformation, and facilitating a learning organization - all of which are in the repertoire of training and development professionals.

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“E”RA of Training and Development in “the New Normal’ - A Psychology-Based Approach



Pradeepa Kekulawala*

“E-learning facilitates not only real-time learning and instruction but also on-demand or need-based access by learners as and when necessary. In an era where time and competing priorities reign supreme, this is a luxury. Moreover, e-learning spans geographical boundaries without needing to be physically present and can connect people while segregation is achieved if demanded by socio-cultural and or practical realities.”

Keywords: The new normal, psychology-based approach, training & development

We live in uncertain times and terms today. We are experiencing hitherto unknown challenges in the present context of the COVID–19 global pandemic. Getting used to, living with, and riding over the realities of social distancing, while getting on with day-to-day life, is easier said than done. To a society that is attuned to close human interaction and engagement despite the technological tools available for the last couple of decades, and the last decade, in particular, the idea of distance interaction for social and business purposes has proven to be challenging to say the least! In developing Asian societies such as ours where principles of governance and social discipline are at an all-time low, the discipline of voluntary distanced interaction is harder and must be enforced authoritatively and statutorily. Having said that, it

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is fair to state that the whole world is grappling, to varying degrees, the challenges of getting on with life while being "so near yet so far" to one another.

Businesses have to continue; industries need to survive and global economic activity needs to keep ticking. The North to South shift in market dominance, the geopolitical trade wars and financial market fluctuations, made more complex by the pandemic, is the new normal, or the underpinnings on which life and business rest.

Inasmuch you cannot have businesses running without any human interaction save for totally e-commerce-based transactions and business activity, much of the traditional human engagements of enterprises have been converted to "E-based" or technology-assisted distanced engagements: keeping social distancing to the maximum. This paper focuses on the very important aspect of keeping the human resources of business organizations equipped, tooled and developed to meet organizational objectives in the present climate.

Training and development of people is an integral part of business continuity. Therefore, it is of far more importance and necessity to ensure the T&D activities continue even more vigorously and focused in the present context. Businesses may switch their priorities and investments based on the realities they face. However, the ideas presented herein are from an academic and professional 'best practice' standpoint. The challenge and the requirement today are to achieve the same effectiveness and ensure that the learning objectives of T&D engagements are met as the objectives are based on holistic organizational needs.

Technology-assisted T&D appliances are many. Many software, tools, and platforms have been introduced lately, adding to the existing tools that were not fully or optimally utilized during the 'old times' of pre-COVID-19. Going on the understanding that Training aims to help employees be good at their current job and deliver performance expectations, while Developmental engagements include a host of other activities including training, and prepares them for the future; the need of the hour is to explore and discover the most effective way of designing and delivering these "E-learning" activities and engagements. According to FAO (2021) "E-learning is the use of electronic devices and technologies to deliver a variety of solutions to enable learning and improve performance."

The learning dynamics

There are many theories of learning, spanning centuries to the present, and practices designed based on the psychology of learning. For this paper, the author has highlighted in his opinion the most predominant learning theories, domains, cycles and effectiveness gauging through which T&D approaches are proposed in an "E-learning environment."

Learning theories and domains

The learning theories introduced are – Cognitive, Behaviorism, Constructivism, Humanism and Connectivism. Let us examine each. The cognitive theory historically espoused by Plato, Descartes and Piaget (as cited in Grider, 1993) proposes that learning takes place through the thinking and feeling of a human being where external forces (felt or applied) guide one's thinking. Behaviourism theory researched by Watson (as cited in Gardner, 2006) propounds that interaction with the external environment influences learning; and that positive reinforcement is the core process. Constructivism theory propagated by Dewey (as cited in Vanderstraeten & Biesta, 1998) speaks of learning through unique experiences, such as active learning based on what is experienced. Humanism theory, to which Rogers made pioneering contributions (as cited in McLeod, 2014) brings forth the reality of learning effectiveness through physical and emotional satisfaction within the learning environment. Connectivism theory (Goldie, 2016) states that people learn more effectively through the connections they make with the way content is presented, such as activities and media, if it excites them positively. More recent research in psychology has brought forth few other theories out of which transformative learning theory by Mezirow (as cited in Kitchenham, 2008) and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) needs mention, as theories more akin and integral to andragogy or adult learning based on experiencing, reflecting, and absorbing.

The learning domains of human beings, also influenced and supported by the above theories, are identified as cognitive (Bloom, 1956), affective (Krathwohl et al., 1964) and psychomotor (Harrow, 1972), where the stimulation of mind/thinking, heart/emotion, and physical body are key to anchor learning. Furthermore, an individual's learning cycle would consist of preparing, capturing, absorbing, and reviewing. The above findings bring us to the core of the matter. How do we effectively anchor learning to draw out the expected present and future performance of our people?

The proposed approaches in an "E"nvironment

Kirkpatrick (as cited in Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006) introduced as far back as in the 1950s a model where the effectiveness of T&D is measured in four stages – a reaction, which is the immediate positive or negative responses to the experience; learning, which is the short to midterm retention and anchoring stage; behaviour, which is influenced, changed, or expected behaviour in conduct and performance; the effectiveness of which must reflect in the results or bottom-line. This has been a proven model for over three decades based on available professional (peer and personal) and published experiences. Going beyond the above, Kaufman & Keller (1994) introduced five levels of effectiveness as “enabling/reaction, acquisition, application, organizational outputs and social consequences” more fully establishing that there must be purpose behind every T&D engagement.

Today’s challenge is to design and deliver T&D programs to capture the hearts and minds of people while facilitating and retaining physical excitement. Fundamental needs would be for the learning to be experiential, pragmatic, relevant, and involved, translating to a tangible positive impact on the organization and society.

Design and delivery strategy

We see today's biggest drawback and challenge as content development and presenting in E-learning to achieve the desired outcomes. It is a concern indeed that schools, to most corporates, adopt traditional facilitation approaches, which are not effective at all. Mostly it is in the instructional style through lecturing or public presentation methodology, that cannot hold the attention and involvement of the audience, let alone lead to absorption. When it comes to programs of longer duration, the audience is lost totally. Here are some strategies to come out of this predicament in on-the-job competency building and development training/engagements.

The quality of E-learning programs (as cited in FAO, 2021) must be enhanced by ensuring that you have learner-centred content addressing specific needs relevant to their lives and/or profession. It must also be segmented to allow assimilation of new knowledge with adequate and flexible time for learning i.e. granularity, with creative, motivational, and engaging content to enrich learning the experience. Interactivity to sustain attention and personalization for self-learning/self-paced learning is imperative.

Simulation

One of the most effective and pragmatic tools would be a simulation. This must be in virtual reality or real life. Multimedia tools and simulation software can be used to engage and involve the audience. Content must be developed to present real-life experiences where participants actively interact with the facilitator and each other. Case studies also can be incorporated into the content. This approach would be highly effective for on-the-job skill development. The content must be fully dynamic with constant changes and different experiences to attract attention, create interest, generate a desire to be engaged, and propel action. The focus here is behaviourism and constructivism igniting the affective and psychomotor domains of learning.

Gaming

People like to play. Whether it's physical contact or distanced interaction, being competitive and the need to win or succeed is an inherent characteristic in rational human beings. Online gaming has become an addictive engagement the world over. The reason is that gaming takes individuals to high levels of excitement and larger-than-life roles which keep the adrenaline flowing. However, organizations must focus effort to "cutover" to the gaming approach utilizing proprietary software. Customized gaming tools or organizationally oriented tools would be more relevant and pragmatic than standard market software. Here you are addressing humanism and connectivism, and this is ideally suited for developmental facilitation and training. The facilitator can play the role of coach, mentor, and moderator in anchoring the learning. Gaming stimulates the cognitive and psychomotor domains of people predominantly and the affective faculty with the right stimulation.

Interactive engagement

However-much simulation and gaming approaches transcend the traditional instructional or lecturing approach, you cannot totally discontinue one-to-one verbal facilitation or 'teaching-learning' interactions. It is a necessity. The gaming and simulation have minimum or need-based intervention and facilitation by the moderator/trainer, in contrast in the one-on-one approach, the presentation part is mainly on the trainer. Here the shift in strategy must be to make the experience fully interactive. Audio-visual facilities are a given and audio-visual connectivity by participants always is a must. The facilitator must provide and create opportunities for discussion, argument, presentations and use many non-traditional

visual, auditory, reading, and Kinesthetic (VARK) techniques to engage the audience. The monotonous one-way approach mostly seen now is a waste of energy and resources. Interactive learning addresses the cognitive and humanism theories and stimulates cognitive and affective domains of learning.

Online courses with blended learning

Self-paced, self-learning courses both for skill and knowledge acquisition and for qualifying or continuing professional development (CPD) purposes can be developed and hosted where the attraction of 'anytime' accessibility, learning at your own pace without pressure motivates people to engage in learning activity; and also, accessibility to a facilitator from time to time for interaction makes it value-adding.

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) and large audience centred knowledge dissemination: A MOOC is a facilitated online course (as cited in FAO, 2021) that captures a large audience. Typically, knowledge sharing in nature. Webinars on matters of topical interest for enhancing knowledge and online "knowledge fora" or knowledge management systems/portals within communities and organizations to make available access to stored and tacit knowledge of specialists are novel ways of e-learning.

Advantages in E-learning

E-learning facilitates not only real-time learning and instruction but also on-demand or need-based access by learners as and when necessary. In an era where time and competing priorities reign supreme this is a luxury. Moreover, e-learning spans geographical boundaries without needing to be physically present and can connect people while segregation is achieved if demanded by socio-cultural and or practical realities. E-learning also enables us to reach specialist knowledge sources where and when necessary, such as consultants, subject specialists for extra input online, and designated facilitators, further enriching the experience. The ability to capture and deliver learning to a much larger audience than in a physical setting, translational facilities, and the ability to use existing infrastructure (equipment) for learning activities and post-learning feedback and performance monitoring are key advantages.

Challenges

Technology, investment, and competencies are the main obstacles to E-learning. Availability of technology infrastructure and connectivity is an issue, especially in developing countries. The affordability of initial investment or set-up costs with content development as an integral part is another hurdle. The lack of tech-savviness and E- facilitation of scientific and practical knowledge amongst trainers is another drawback. These are realities to be dealt with in migrating to an Era of techno-based training and development. However, once set up or accomplished, it would serve as a worthwhile ongoing investment as equipment/ infrastructure can thereafter be used over time; e-learning trained facilitators serving as value-adding corporate assets. Therefore, the show must go on. The right time to start is now.

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**Calling for Papers to be Published in the Next Issue of
Sri Lanka Journal of Training & Development**

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The Members of the Sri Lanka Institute of Training and Development (SLITAD) are hereby cordially invited to submit articles for the next Sri Lanka Journal of Training & Development issue to be published in January 2022.

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To promote collaboration between SLITAD and national training and development organizations of other countries and other like-minded practising Training and Development professionals and academics, a limited number of non-SLITAD Members also might be invited to write articles upon their expression of interest.

Theme of the next issue, Volume 2, Issue 1 to be Published in January 2022 is as follows:

‘Training, Learning and Innovation to Create the Future of an Organisation’

More details and the guidelines to submit the articles will be posted on the official website of the Sri Lanka Institute of Training & Development. Please visit <https://www.slitad.org.lk/>

Thank you.

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