

Chapter 12

Mitigation of Communication Challenges in the Indian Software Industry

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ABSTRACT

There have been dramatic changes in the way organizations perceive and practice communication. While a large amount of resources are allocated to learning and development function by the Indian software companies, there has been little attempt to study how the trainings help in mitigating the communication challenges faced by the employees of these organizations. The chapter attempts to understand what communication challenges are faced by junior and mid level employees, and how the effectiveness of communication related training is measured by the learning and development function.

INTRODUCTION

There have been dramatic changes in the way organizations perceive and practice communication. Communication and new technology has emerged as one of the most popular areas of research. As it grows, researchers must take into account the limitations of the theories designed for face-to-face communication when they explain the challenges

in mediated communication in organizations. Organizations today have to come to terms with a diverse work culture across countries. Besides this, a global workforce, increasing complexity of work requiring more coordination and interaction, simultaneous distributed work process as well as a much faster pace of work have added to these challenges. As organizations move to organic networked structure with more reliance on task forces and cross functional project teams, the im-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-0243-4.ch012

portance of group and inter group communication has grown exponentially.

In today's competitive scenario the learning capacity, knowledge and skills of the human capital in organizations are being recognized as key drivers to their success (Pfeffer, 1994; Huselid, 1995; Becker and Gerhart, 1996). This is rapidly gaining huge importance in the context of globalization of markets, increased diversity of the workforce, and the rapid entry of foreign investment into Third World countries (Zakaria, 2000; Bhagat and Prien, 1996). Learning at the workplace is one of the rapidly growing areas of adult education which can be largely attributed to the above mentioned factors.

Organizations lay a lot of stress on continual learning culture, more so in a virtual, fast-paced and ever changing business scenario. There can be a significant loss of money from lost productivity when there are changes in process, technology, or culture and employees are not properly trained to handle them. Since knowledge has become a key differentiator of competitive advantage, effective training is an important tool to instill knowledge in the human resources of the organization (Drucker, 1995). In this complex environment, organizations are investing heavily in their learning and development function for maintaining the competitive advantage of their human capital. The basic function of the learning and development function is to ensure that the employees are trained in the identified gaps of knowledge, skills or attitudes. In view of the highly fragmented and culturally diverse work environment, Communication training forms a very critical component of most training calendars of large software organizations in India. The trainings range from basic communication skills training like how to write effectively (Emails and business proposals), to more advanced verbal communication which could cover diverse subjects such as presentation skills, negotiation skills, holding effective meetings and cross cultural communication skills.

The chapter has two aims. The first, is to discover the various communication challenges faced by junior software engineers and mid level managers (equivalent to Team Leaders/Assistant Project managers/Project managers) working in software companies in India and second, what kind of learning interventions are imparted to minimize the communication challenges as identified by the learning and development departments of these software companies. The chapter outlines the main themes which emerged from a thematic analysis of interview data, summarizing areas of difficulty and challenges. The research is qualitative and exploratory, taking the form of inductive thematic analysis. The themes emerged from the qualitative data collected.

BACKGROUND

Many multinational companies rely on multicultural teams to perform work-related activities. Functioning in the global business environment is increasingly competitive and interdependent (Hofner Saphiere, 1996). Networked organizations, team based structures, global webs and virtual teams are becoming common additions to traditional hierarchal organizations (Shokley Zalaback, 2002). Complex organizations typically try to minimize the potential problems of communication by appropriate recruitment, selection, training and socialization. However, as Bella (1987) points out "modern organization systems, by their very nature, distort information to meet organizational needs". In other words even good human resource practice cannot prevent the "natural" filtering of information transmitted via communication systems. This is the case in the Indian software industry as well, where employees work in fragmented project based teams and have to communicate very frequently with culturally diverse teams. While employees are bought on board with basic technical skill sets, they are given intensive trainings – both

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