

**Impact of Online Learning Tool on Performance
of the Recruits: Insights from a Leading IT
Company in India**

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This paper is a summary of the summer internship work done at one of the leading IT organizations in India. Broadly, the study has made an attempt to assess the effectiveness of an online training programme adopted in a premier IT organization in the country. Added to this, an attempt has also been made to study the usefulness of the said tool by the recruits. In this context, it needs to be mentioned that the recruits are asked to complete an online learning programme hosted on a web portal prior to joining the organisation.

To understand the usage and accessibility of the web portal, the study has adopted 'Hit' analysis method. This is an indirect method to find out the usefulness of the web Portal. For gathering information from the recruits, a batch of 8,000 candidates recruited from different parts of the country has been taken into consideration.

Empirical evidence reveals that the online tool used by the organisation seems to be effective enough in achieving most of the desired goals. But there are instances of poor outreach with respect to accessibility of the portal in Tier II cities. However, the study may not adequately capture the behavioural aspect of the online training programme intended in the portal. Therefore, this calls for an in depth analysis of various parameters of the behavioural study.

It is also essential to understand that the influence of a Learning Management System (LMS) in any Organization depends on its positioning and effectiveness. Therefore, it becomes extremely important to explore the possibility of improving the positioning of the online portal adopted by the organisation.

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Introduction

Of late, many organisations have started exploring the possibility of adopting a Learning management System (LMS) so as to acquaint the recruits with the online learning system and align them with the custom, culture and processes of the organisation. It is believed that a deep rooted understanding of the various aspects of the Organisation can facilitate selection of the best organization by the recruits among the available options. This can also minimize the attrition rate in the organization in the long run. Therefore, it is crucial for any organisation to measure the effectiveness of any learning management system adopted by the organisation. Against this backdrop, the present study has made an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of an online learning tool in improving the productivity of the new recruits in an IT organisation.

Upon recruitment to one of the leading IT companies in India, the recruits are asked to report to training where the transformation from a college graduate to a Corporate Associate takes place.¹⁸ Two months before reporting, the recruits are asked to undertake an online learning Program. The recruits are expected to complete the program as per the designed schedule and on the third day of reporting to training, they have to undertake an assessment test based on the curriculum of program. The focus of the online program is to promote online learning among the new recruits and to help them connect mentally to the organisation. The online learning program is intended to inculcate the culture of e-learning in the campus recruits before they report to training. The portal, created over the open-source Sakai framework is a learning management system (LMS) used for online e-learning purposes. The study is divided into three parts. Section I deals with the objectives of the study along with the data base and research methodology. In section II, an attempt is made to compare the existing LMS with Kirkpatrick model of training and evaluation. The major findings of the study is captured in section III. This follows summary and conclusion (section IV).

¹ We have not reported the name of the organization.

I Objective of the study

The study conducted as part of Summer Internship Project had the following objectives:

1. To assess the effectiveness of the online learning tool adopted by the IT organisation.
2. To develop a routine feedback mechanism that can act as a feedback loop for fine tuning the online programme.
3. To make recommendations so as to improve the existing Online Web Portal in place.

Date base and Research Methodology

The study is based on a sample survey conducted in the IT organisation. For this, an online survey was conducted through circulation of questionnaire among the faculty members and students.

To understand the usage and accessibility of the web portal we have adopted 'Hit' analysis method. A 'hit' records the number of times a recruit has 'logged in' to the web portal and duration of accessing the website during their online training schedule. In this context, it needs to be mentioned that 'Hit analysis' is an indirect method to find out the prompt usability of an online web Portal.

For gathering information from the recruits, a batch of 8000 graduates recruited from all over India have been taken into consideration. The sample students across the country are currently undergoing online training programme. The tenure of online learning for the batch was April – May 2012. A hit data taken during the first week of May 2012 was used for the purpose. It was found that the hit was from 51 colleges located across India (A, A+ and B graded colleges).

To train the employees and assess the effectiveness of the training programme, there are various methods adopted by different organisation. Among them the model developed by Donald Kirkpatrick is widely used in the IT sector.

II The Kirkpatrick Model: An overview

It is observed that the overall training evaluation at the Organisation has been closely following training model defined by Donald Kirkpatrick.

Donald Kirkpatrick has developed a very popular evaluation model that has been used since the late 1950s by the training community. The focus is to measure four kinds of outcomes that should result from a highly effective training program.

Kirkpatrick's model includes four levels or steps of outcome evaluation:

- ◆ Level 1 Evaluation—Reaction
- ◆ Level 2 Evaluation—Learning
- ◆ Level 3 Evaluation—Behaviour
- ◆ Level 4 Evaluation—Results

Level 1—Reaction

In this level, the goal is to measure participants' reactions to the training program. For this, one should measure their response immediately after the training program. Ideally, it should also include measurement of participants' reactions or attitudes toward specific components of the program, namely, the instructor, the topics covered the presentation style, the schedule, audio visuals, etc. Furthermore, each of these components can be further broken down into sub-components for evaluation. In other words, the participants can evaluate specific characteristics of the instructor especially their presentation skill. In short, level one evaluation is more than just the measurement of overall customer satisfaction. (Nazia, 2008)

Learning and transfer of learning are unlikely to occur unless participants have positive attitude towards the training program. Therefore, it is important to determine participants' reactions to the training program. Measurement of specific aspects of the training program can provide important information about what aspects of the training program can be improved in the future. Level 1 evaluation relies on the measurement of attitudes, usually through the use of a questionnaire. It is important to include closed-ended items (including rating scales) as well as open-ended items in our questionnaire. Strengths of the training program and weakness of the training program are customary as it can be measured only in Level1. (Croes, 2005)

Level 2—Learning

In this Level, the goal is to determine what the training program participants have learned during the training period. Learning outcomes may include adapted skill, acquired knowledge or desirable attitude. Some training events

will emphasize on knowledge, some will emphasize on skills, some will emphasize on attitudes, and some will emphasize on multiple learning outcomes. The evaluation should focus on measuring what was covered in the training event which is strictly in coherence with the objective of the training designed. (Croes, 2005)

Level 3—Behaviour

In this Level, the goal is to find out if the training program participants have changed their on-the-job-behaviour (OJB) as a result of their having attended and participated in the training program. The level three questions are basically to find out the impact of the training programme on the performance of the recruits. Level three evaluations specifically involve measuring the transfer of knowledge, skills, and attitudes from the training context to the workplace.

Level one and Level two outcomes are important because participants generally need to react positively to the training program (level 1 outcome) and they need to learn the material (level 2 outcome) if they are going to be motivated and able to apply what they have learned when they return to their jobs. Learning is likely to transfer only if the conditions in the work setting are favourable for transfer. In addition, there are obviously many things that trainers can do to increase the likelihood of transfer. In other words, transfer is affected by “training factors” before trainees go back to their workplace as well as “workplace factors” that operate in their workplace when they return. (Croes, 2005)

Level three is often harder than level one and level two evaluations because behaviour changes at the workplace are often harder to measure than reaction and learning directly after the training event. One must give the behaviour time to transfer and collect data at the workplace.

Kirkpatrick also discusses another popular design for measuring transfer of learning, i.e., for measuring level three outcomes. He never labelled the approach, but it is formally called the retrospective survey design. He points out that one can gather information from the training participants, the participants’ supervisors or managers, and the participants’ subordinates. The design is called a “retrospective” design because by asking the participants (or others) to think back about their behaviour before the training program started and then compare it to their current level of behaviour. Accordingly, one can assess the changes in behaviour of the recruits.

Some of the benefits of level three evaluations are as given below:

- ◆ It provides measurement of actual behaviour on the job, rather than only measuring or demonstrating positive reaction and/or learning. This is important because you want to have actual on-the-job results from the training program.
- ◆ Level three outcomes are required for level four evaluation i.e., they are the intervening variables or factors that lead to level four outcomes.
- ◆ Most level three outcomes are intrinsically useful, as level four outcomes (i.e., final organizational or business results) are never fully demonstrated due to the internal and external factors indulgence. (Croes, 2005)

Level 4—Results

In this Level, the goal is to find out if the training program led to final results, especially business results that contribute to the “bottom line” of the organisation. Level four outcomes are not limited to return on investment (ROI). Level four outcomes can include other major results that can contribute to the better functioning of an organization. Level four includes any outcome that most people would agree is “good for the business.” Hence, level four outcomes are either changes in financial outcomes (such as positive ROI or increased profits) or changes in variables that should have a relatively direct effect on financial outcomes at some point in the future. (Croes, 2005)

Here are some examples of different kinds of level four outcomes:

- ◆ Improved quality of work.
- ◆ Higher productivity.
- ◆ Reduction in turnover.
- ◆ Reduction in scrap rate (i.e., less wasted resources).
- ◆ Improved quality of work life.
- ◆ Improved human relations (e.g., improved vertical and horizontal communication)
- ◆ Increased sales.
- ◆ Fewer grievances.
- ◆ Lower absenteeism.
- ◆ Higher worker morale.
- ◆ Fewer accidents.
- ◆ Greater job satisfaction.
- ◆ Increased profits.

Evaluation of level four is difficult as it is not feasible to establish accurately the outcome of the training programme. In other words, the level four outcomes may not necessarily be due to the factors under consideration.

III Key Findings and Recommendations

The major finding of the study is based on the information gathered from the survey conducted in the IT organisation. To maintain data confidentiality, the detailed statistical analysis done in the report cannot be reproduced in this paper.

- ◆ It is obvious that students from different colleges in metro cities and tier II cities used to get offer letters from leading IT companies in the country. Hence, attracting the best candidates from select premier colleges and retaining them become a major challenge for the recruiter. This justifies the need to offer relatively better online learning programmes so as to motivate the candidates to serve the organization.
- ◆ Empirical evidence shows that many prospective recruits find it difficult to take the online training programme seriously as it coincides with the university exam. This is evident from the fact that 56 per cent of the 'A' grade colleges failed to fulfill the criterion of meeting 50 per cent of the total hits. In other words, recruits from the said 56 per cent of total 'A' grade colleges did not make an attempt to 'log in' and complete the online programme. This can also be partly on account of information not reaching the target audience in the appropriate time through different networks like friend, social networking sites and different forums as well. Therefore, the organization needs to look into the matter and address the issue at the earliest.
- ◆ It is also observed that delayed communications regarding online training schedule along with the date of joining has compelled the students to look for alternatives. Therefore, recruits from various colleges were not keen to acquaint themselves with the online training programme. This suggests, any delay in communication may lead to the recruit drifting off in search of alternatives that may potentially affect his/her decision to join the company as well as his/her impression about the company.
- ◆ Though most of the IT Company's information is being viewed by the recruit from outside, the portal needs the same content to keep the recruit abreast of what is happening in the organisation.

- ♦ It is noticed that time allocated for the online learning program is sufficient enough to complete the programme. Most of the recruits spent less than 2 hours with portal daily during the schedule of learning. However, there are instances of many recruits not being able to access the learning portal as and when desired. This has especially affected the students from tier II cities as more often they encountered the problem of accessibility. In other words, the ‘page loading error’ is identified as one of the key challenges faced by the recruits.
- ♦ It is also observed that failure to communicate the recruits about the assessment test through the web portal has resulted in approaching the pre-assessment test lightly. Therefore, perception regarding Assessment test and Quizzes needs to be improved.

IV Summary and Concluding Remarks

The study aimed at examining the effectiveness of an online portal among the recruits in an IT organisation in India. To assess the effectiveness of the portal, an online survey was conducted among the 800 new recruits who had successfully completed the online programme in the recent past.

The online e-learning initiative was developed in a Learning Management System (LMS) named ‘SAKAI’. To understand the effectiveness of an LMS in any organization there is a need to evaluate its impact on Training and Development. For this, a pilot study was conducted. An indirect analysis is also attempted with the available ‘Hit data’. In this context, it needs to be mentioned that ‘Hit’ gives the duration and frequency of recruit’s access to the portal. Having a stipulated time period and a time bound schedule, the hit analysis is an indirect indicator of the effectiveness of usage of the online portal among the students from different colleges of different grades.

The survey conducted in the study is an initiation to a periodic measure of effectiveness of the portal among the various batches in future. Based on the information gathered from the study it can be inferred that the online tool used by the organisation seems to be effective enough in achieving most of the desired goals. Also, there are instances of poor outreach with respect to the accessibility of the portal in Tier II cities. Needless to say, efforts have to be made to improve the positioning of the online portal so as to improve the effectiveness of the online training programme.

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