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What does it take to lead projects in 21st century?

Project Management Leadership - Harmony in Diversity & Millennial Generation

Keywords:

Entrepreneurial Project Management

Modern Learning Methodologies

Leveraging Technology

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ABSTRACT

Recent IT labor market analysis from CEB reveals that "IT project manager" is the most difficult-to-fill IT role globally. This comes as no surprise as organizations embark on the journey of digitalization, it is a consistent struggle to find skilled IT project managers

CEB research shows that the project managers who possess seven critical Entrepreneurial skills deliver nearly twice the project business outcomes as their low-performing peers and are able to adapt to digitization-driven volatility much more effectively.

But these project managers aren't easy to find. Hence leading organizations are thinking of developing project management talent that can adapt to the new demands of digital era.

This presentation will dive deeper into describing how the organization has designed and delivered a program to develop the seven entrepreneurial skills in project managers: Stakeholder partnership, Judgement, Risk Management, Team Leadership, Ownership and Commitment, Learning Agility and Business Knowledge

The speaker will also cover how the technology was leveraged including WhatsApp to take the participants through the journey, governance structure, communication plans, Theatre based workshop, learning project management through dance, gamified learning, metrics and measurable benefits.

This session will be hugely interesting for the participants to understand how to overcome the challenges while designing a program to successfully roll out across 31 countries and replicate the practice in their respective organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Who is a Project Manager? A Project Manager is someone who sees a project through from its inception to its final execution. According to PMI, 'Project managers are change agents: they make project goals their own and use their skills and expertise to inspire a sense of shared purpose within the project team.

According to CEB research there are four different kinds of Project Managers-

1. **Process-crats:** Experienced project managers who use tools and templates to their fullest potential and manage projects primarily through methodology.
2. **Apprentices:** Early-tenure project managers who rely on established processes and make few judgment calls.
3. **Laggards:** Low-performing project managers that require close supervision to prevent or resolve "troubled" projects.
4. **Entrepreneurs:** Leverage their strong interpersonal skills and good judgment to effectively navigate project execution. They are flexible, prepared to change their approach if the business outcome warrants, and comfortable with risk and uncertainty.

In the current era characterized by a dynamic nature and complexity in projects and hence complex stakeholder expectations, who then is an ideal fit. The CEB research goes on to answer this question- Project Managers who fit the Entrepreneur profile are 40% more likely to deliver project business outcomes. However, Apprentices and Process-crats make up almost 60% of the total project manager population,

while less than 30% of project managers are Entrepreneurs who consistently deliver project business outcomes.

This brings in the need to develop more of the Entrepreneurial mindset within the Project Managers in the organization. Project Managers should in essence behave like entrepreneurs and take charge of the project, and work towards its success while taking ownership for it. like an entrepreneur would do. What then are the differentiating skills they possess which need to be honed?

Research by CEB [1] states the following skills as necessary in order to have

- Stakeholder Partnership
- Judgement
- Risk Management
- Team Leadership
- Ownership & Commitment
- Learning Agility
- Business Knowledge

Entrepreneurial Project Management Competency Model

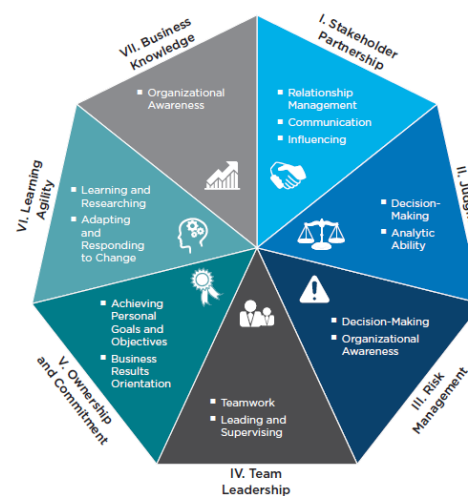


Image 1: Entrepreneurial Project Management Competency Model by CEB

Each organization with its unique needs, hence needs to work towards polishing these necessary skills in their Project Managers. In our organization, we identified the need for such Project Managers and worked towards creating a customized program which would help the existing Project Managers hone their skills in these areas.

MAIN STORY

Project Management is one of the most critical roles in IT. Unsatisfactory Customer satisfaction scores and multiple escalations during project delivery indicated a dip in the quality of Project Management which directly translated to a threat in business growth. Having realized this, our organization set out to address

the issues in Project Management, we were facing. However, we faced the following key challenges that we came across when addressing this issue:

1. Globally spread audience
2. High cost of external certifications
3. Requirement of a customizable and scalable solution

Keeping these challenges in mind, the need of the hour was a solution that was customizable, scalable, cost efficient and which would address the competency gaps of each Project Manager. We came up with a Project Management Academy, under whose umbrella would run various initiatives.

The Project Management Academy would function on the basis of three principles- Learn, Share & Act. Each initiative under this Academy would focus on bridging the gaps in the seven Entrepreneurial Project management competencies that had been identified and would also cater to a geographically spread audience. The blended learning methodology adopted would ensure the three tenets of Learn, Share & Act were followed.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT ACADEMY- OFFERINGS

The Project Management Academy offered multiple programs, which used various medium, some of which are listed below:

PMED- Project Management Effectiveness Diagnostic was an online diagnostic tool used to measure the competency gaps in employees to understand which out of the seven competencies they would need to focus on more to improve themselves.

PMStEP- Project Managers Structured Effectiveness Program was designed to identify the gap in the competencies of the Project managers and help them improve on these.

PMLeaP- Project Management Leadership Program is similar to PMStEP, but addressed those who were identified as Leaders in the organization. This was also an output based program which meant that it focused on the tenet of SHARE and ACT more than on LEARN.

PM Perspective- These were online coaching sessions where experts from the field of project management spoke on topics related to the seven competencies. Participants could learn from these experts over a 60-minute session and discuss and debate on the topics.

Leaders Perspective- On the lines of PM Perspective was the Leaders Perspective which had Leaders coaching employees.

PM Insight- PM Insight was the quarterly newsletter which gave Project managers the opportunity to share articles/ case-studies, have experts sharing their views on topics related to the 7 drivers of Project Management.

These initiatives were designed keeping the following features in mind-

- Focusing on Learn, Act & Share
- Unique Program design
- Leveraging Technology for Learning

- Modern Learning Methodologies
- A thorough evaluation mechanism
- A stable governance structure
- A Project in itself- Risk Mitigation, Project Plan etc.
- Regular communication for creating visibility

LEARN, ACT & SHARE

Following are examples of how some initiatives were designed keeping these principles in mind

LEARN- PMStEP, PMLeaP, PM Perspective and Leaders Perspective are classic examples of how Project Managers learnt the complexities of the drivers, using various mediums.

ACT- PMStEP was designed such that the participants would need to showcase how they implemented their learning in their projects. This was further vetted by their Reporting Managers. Participants of PMLeaP would need to identify and undertake a short term project and present the same to a panel at the end of the training program. The project would ensure that they learnt while doing.

SHARE- The quarterly magazine PM Insight gave an opportunity to Project managers to share their expertise, good practices and lessons learnt. Further, PM Perspective sessions, gave participants of PMLeaP, as well as others a chance to deliver coaching on Project management, thus sharing their knowledge with their peers. The Whatsapp forum and the internal social networking platform went on to inculcate the habit of discussions among the community of Project Managers.

UNIQUE PROGRAM DESIGN

PMStEP, a program designed to hone the 7 entrepreneurial competencies in a project manager, was a program that boasted of unique program design which addressed the seven drivers of Entrepreneurial Project Management by using the tenets of Learn, Act and Share. The foundation of the design rested on the following principles

- a) Measurement of project management effectiveness through a pre and post diagnostic
- b) Examination of individual competency gaps
- c) Enhancement of project management competencies
- d) Enablement of continuous learning

Measurement & Analysis

Keeping in mind the need for measurement and analysis of competency gaps we introduced the **Project Manager Effectiveness Diagnostic (PMED)**, as a pre and post diagnostic. PMED is an online diagnostic which helped identify and analyze where each individual stands wrt. the drivers of Project Management. It was administered in the form of a simple and user-friendly web-based survey covering the following employee groups:

- a) Project Managers

- b) Reporting managers of project managers
- c) Head of PMO / Operations
- d) Project Sponsors

The diagnostic was administered before the training and customized reports for each participant, were generated. These reports benchmarked their capabilities with those of their peers in the industry and the organization.

The next step was for the Managers to create their own Individual Development Plan (IDP) which would outline three competencies or Focus Areas the individual needs to work on and what are the corresponding resources they would utilize for building this skillset, along with the timelines to complete each milestone.

Learning and Application

The program consisted of three milestones mapped to the three Focus Areas chosen by the participant. Each Focus Area was nothing but a competency mapped to one of the seven drivers for developing Entrepreneurial Project Managers. Each Milestone included the principles of Learn & Act, along with sharing of knowledge and reviews by the Reporting Manager. Participants needed to earn a minimum number of Credits in each milestone in order to progress to the next milestone and complete the training.

- a) Learn – Participants were required to undertake the various learning resources mapped to the specific competencies. Learning resources consisted of both in-house as well as external resources. Apart from the self-learning, participants could participate in various webinar sessions held across different time-zones to learn more on the various drivers. Apart from these conventional methods of learning, other methods like gamification, theatre based learning, simulation based learning etc. were also offered to participants. Credits were allotted to the Learning phase to ensure that participants would undergo sufficient formal training.
- b) Share– Participants were offered various platforms to interact with each other, including Communities on the Organization Social Networking site, WhatsApp groups, and Discussion Forums held through Audio calls and Telepresence sessions. These activities were also allotted credits, to encourage maximum participation.
- c) Act- Participants were expected to apply their learning on their jobs and showcase the same in a document which would be vetted by their Reporting Manager. This was to ensure that participants would learn and apply their learning in real time.

Reviews by the Reporting Manager, helped in scoring participants and helping them earn credits to complete their milestones. Refer Images 2 and 3.

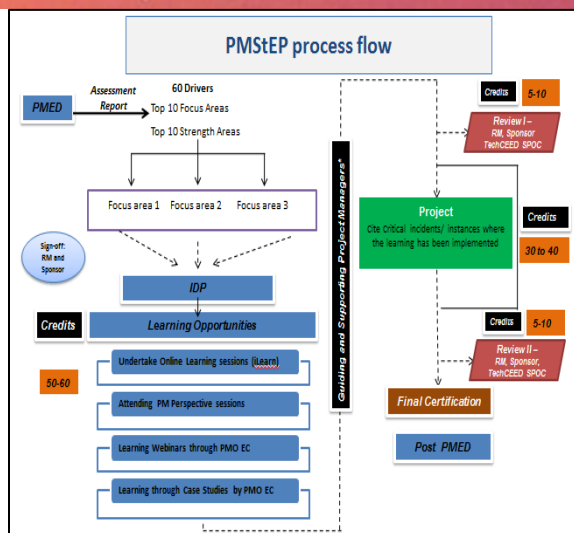


Image 2: PMStEP Process Flow

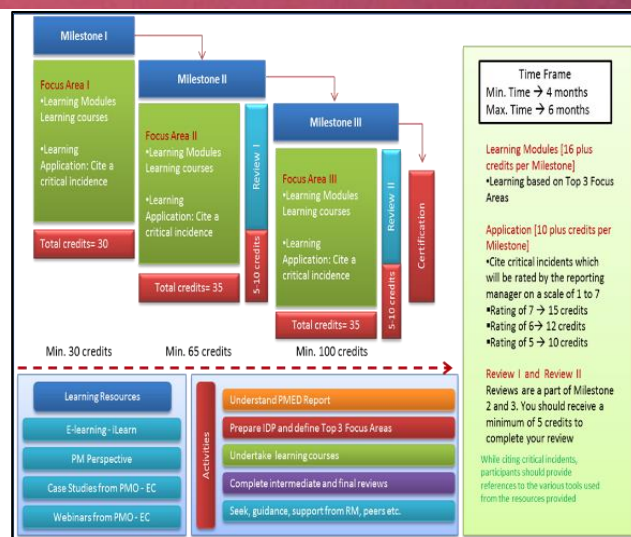


Image 3: PMSTEP Credits & Milestones

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY FOR LEARNING

Learning Management System: Our 24*7 online Learning Management System was a learning platform with a wide array of resources hosted on it. The LMS, being available anytime and anyplace was the perfect solution towards addressing a geographically spread audience.

In-House Web Application: A web application was designed in-house to serve as a single window for PMStEP and PMLeaP participants to track their progress. The web application served as a dashboard to view the current status, credits scored, and learning resources. Such a real-time dashboard reduced the dependency on tracking and monitoring the participants as well as gave the participants a clear picture of their learning status.

WhatsApp community: An exclusive WhatsApp group was created in order to foster more interaction among the participants. This also served as a forum to communicate, apart from the regular mail communication.

Internal Social Networking site: A organization had an internal social networking site which was leveraged to host a community for project managers where they could discuss and debate on various topics thus learning and sharing their knowledge at the same time. Refer Image 4.

Telepresence Sessions & Discussion Forums: Since participants were spread across locations, we made an effort to arrange Telepresence sessions where participants from various locations could see each other and discuss case studies. Apart from this Discussion Forums were organized virtually across time zones to enable interaction among the participants. Each Discussion Forum centered around one of the seven drivers of Project Management.

24*7 Helpdesk: A dedicated team, bound by SLAs was set-up to provide continuous support to the participants of PMStEP & PMLeaP.

Online Coaching: PM Perspective and Leaders Perspective were a series of online coaching sessions of 60 minutes. After the first 60 minutes of the speaker sharing his views on the topic, the next 30 minutes was open for discussion, wherein the speaker answered queries already shared or shared during the session. Questions which could not be answered during the session were encouraged to be taken up offline.

Live Meeting Sessions- Live Meetings were leveraged across online sessions, be it PM Perspective and Leaders Perspective sessions or Discussion Forums for PMStEP.

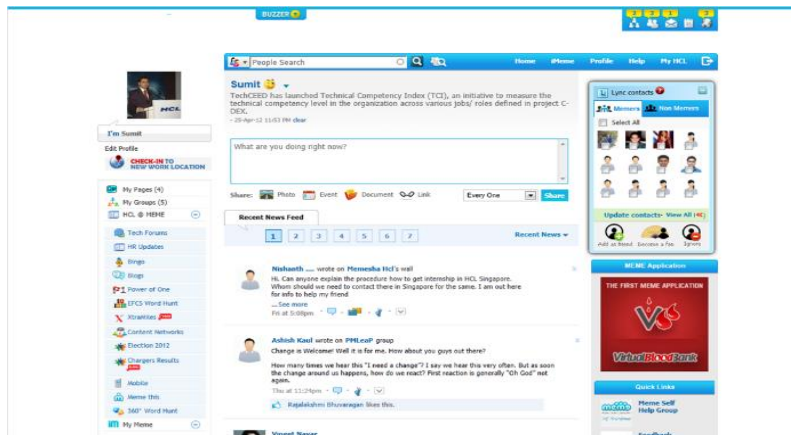


Image 4: PMStEP Community on the internal networking site- A dedicated community for PMStEP

MODERN LEARNING METHODOLOGIES

A program can be successful only if it is designed keeping the need of the target audience in mind. Creating a smooth and pleasing Learning Experience is sacrosanct, when it comes to the success of a learning intervention. In the case of PMStEP, a classroom training would not work, since the participants were geographically spread. Only self-learning on the other hand would be ineffective in improving the participant's competencies. A blended training approach, which leveraged technology and other modern methodologies was the solution. Following are the various methods which were adopted to enable learning and create a learning experience

Self-paced E-Learning: In PMStEP and PMLeaP, most of the learning was from case studies and other material hosted on our in-house LMS or from external vendors. This ensured that participants could learn, anytime, anyplace and anywhere thus addressing participants from all geographies.

Social Learning: The Internal Social Networking platform was put to good use by creating an exclusive community for the participants, where they could interact and share their knowledge.

Gamified Learning: Learning was made more interesting by introducing learning through various games like crosswords, quizzes, word-hunts etc.

Simulation based learning: Participants were made to undergo a project simulation experience which would enable hands-on learning on the significance of the various driver categories. The Simulation workshop consisted of three phases- The Planning Phase where participants received the requirement, analyzed it and planned the actions ahead, the Implementation Phase where they implemented the strategy

defined by them, followed by the Dissemination Phase which saw the Facilitator and participants in discussion, introspecting what went wrong, the good practices and what could have been done better.

Theatre-based learning: Amongst the various methods of learning, an innovative method that was used was the Theatre based learning. In these workshops, participants, divided into groups are given a project to choreograph a dance performance, with various project like situations thrown in. The lessons from these activities are discussed and debated and applied to real-time project scenarios to help learning.

Learning Champions: Top performers in PMStEP were identified as Learning Champions to help motivate the other participants to complete the training. The Learning Champions shared their expertise, experience and enthusiasm with the other participants.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

To evaluate the effectiveness of each program in the Academy a 5-step evaluation mechanism was adopted:

1. Satisfaction

- a. Did the learners find the program useful?
- b. Are they satisfied with the learning experience?

2. Learning

- a. Did the participant learn what was intended?
- b. Has the knowledge level of the participant increased?

3. Adoption:

- a. Did it reach the desired audience?
- b. Did they complete or comply as desired? If not, why?
- c. Was there a buy in from the Senior Management?
- d. Will learners recommend this program to their peers?

4. Efficiency:

- a. Was it cost effective?
- b. Were resources like time optimally used?

5. Attainment:

- a. Has it met the objectives? Are customers satisfied?
- b. Has there been a performance improvement in the participants post the program?
- c. Have there been significant benefits to the organization?

Measuring the parameters

Regular feedback mechanisms were put in place to ensure understanding the pulse of the audience in terms of the learning experience.

The reviews by the RM in PMStEP helped ensure that the participants were learning and understand the knowledge gain.

To understand if the Academy was being accepted by all, various methods were used. The Senior Management was sent fortnightly reports and were included in bi-monthly calls with the participants from the various programs to discuss on the progress, constraints and other issues that they were facing. Every call resulted in some action being taken basis the discussion. Project Managers were encouraged to share testimonials to elaborate on how a program they attended had helped them and how they overcame the constraints (Refer Image 5). Further, the Usage Analysis of the LMS for learning, done on a quarterly basis helped in understanding the trend in participants taking up the learning resources.

The cost incurred was calculated and compared to the cost of existing external certifications. The time and effort spent by employees to pursue external certifications, compared to this program was also taken into consideration.

Organizational level customer satisfaction surveys, and the post diagnostic were tools to understand improvement in customer satisfaction and the improvement in competencies of the participants. Further analysis by the Workforce Planning Team, indicated that more Project manager positions were being fulfilled internally rather than by external hiring, thus proving that there was an increase in performance.

Deepak Sharma

"It has been a fabulous experience, the vast learning available in i-learn is commendable... I think that the project management concepts have a long way to go, the learning through the channels would help participants like me to learn, evolve and utilize the experience in the betterment of the projects and organization as a whole."

Velavan Viswanathan

"...I did not mind sacrificing couple of weekends to get over this as it was overall a new learning experience for me! ...this learning experience should only help one's productivity to a great extent while gaining access to insights from industry experts that can be applied during our work/project execution."

Narayanan Dharmarajan

"...One of the great initiatives by the organization to help managers to improve their management skills through various talks, seminars and presentations. There are many learnings and takeaways from various project/industry leaders...It goes without saying that once anyone becomes part of PMSTEP, he/she would be bound to improve on project management skills. I wish that every project manager makes use of this wonderful initiative."

Kaliuga Varadhan

"...It helps employees move to the next step/level of upgrade initiative and spreads the awareness of project management...Once you start going through few sessions/resources, you find it interesting and irresistible to work through the remaining resources...I spent my time during weekends as it was so much so good learning experience with fun and excitement!"

Sreekumar Unnikrishnan

"...It was an excellent opportunity for me to brush out the rust and sharpen the edges of my project management skills...Primarily I have utilized my late evenings and weekends to complete the process."

Image 5: Testimonials from participants

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

A defined Governance structure was formed for the Academy. Refer Image 6.

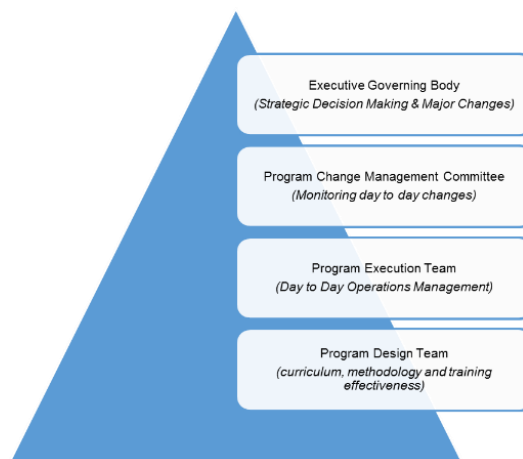


Image 6: Defined Governance structure

PM ACADEMY AS A PROJECT

The Academy was launched like a project with project plans, defined risk & mitigation, etc. Refer Image 7 & 8.

Risk	Mitigation Plan
Trainer Availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify self-placed online learning Creation of Trainer pool (Internal and External).
Training content/ resource availability	Curation of content from multiple sources
High Training Duration	Self- paced learning & nugget learning over a period of few months
Getting participants for training	Policy for each LoB to nominate 20% of existing resources to be trained in the identified Project Management skills
Selection of right participants for the training	Pre-training assessment for pre-requisite skills
Resource availability to manage PM Academy (Budget, manpower)	FY Planning to include the Project Management Academy

Image 7: Risk & Mitigation plan

s.no	category	Sub tasks
1	Skill Identification	Identification of competencies create a matrix of top skills and base skill and branching plan
2	Finalizing the approach	Vendor analysis Market and competitor analysis upskilling plan
3	Methodology creation	creation of a process flow ex: assessment> training> additional recommendation> deployment
4	Mode identification	mode of trainings for each skill to be finalized curriculum to be discussed with SMEs and finalized Look for various options available in-house / external for online / digital learnings
5	Curriculum design (for all three levels)	MOOC courses identification validate the relevant courses with SME prepare the course catalogue Duration to be finalized (for each mode)
6	Assessment to be finalized (for all three levels)	Pre/ Post assessment preparation (internal/ External/ to be created by SME) level of assessments / Learnings to be planned come up with algorithm to identify based on assessment what level of training participant will undergo finalization of certification at the end of the program
7	Trainers to be identified	internal external / external partnership cost of any to be identified Trainer availability based on demand Self nomination for basic
8	Target audience identification	validate the nomination nominations by managers Analytics- identifying people- and reasons why they are identified to go through the program pre screening of employees
9	Communication Campaign	Creation of Teasers to build interest Creation of invitation mailers Creation of Periodic mailers- to improve participation, communicate details, etc Awareness Drives with Senior Leader addressing nominated employees through webinars/ recorded webinars on the need Branding
10	Registration process	portal system to host the training and the participants status registration end to end process to be set
Launch		
s.no	category	Sub tasks
11	Governance	Rewards and recognition mechanisms Policy terms
12	Meme platform to be launched	m-learning on non-technical trainings- Intellectual property, business ethics, trade mark violations, plagiarism all registered employees to be part of the Meme page policy of platform/ admin identification and rules Tracking of the Employees over meme Activity RACI matrix
13	Training Tracking / monitoring and reporting	Steering committee weekly sync up calls Identifying KPI and matrices for reporting Dashboard preparation Risk and mitigation SOP (standard operating procedure)
14	Post training, Utilize the Trained employees for right opportunity	exploring rotation and career connect integration analytics to be used for continuous learning plan

RESTRICTED INFORMATION-

OWNER, SLA, TIMELINES

Image 8: Detailed Project Plan

COMMUNICATION & BRANDING

Be it regular mail updates, WhatsApp communications, or various other methods to attract and motivate the audience, communication in all mediums was leveraged to the utmost. Motivational teasers or mails showcasing top performers went a long way in ensuring active participation and keeping up the momentum.

Refer Image 9



Image 9: Various Communication

RESULTS ACHIEVED

The objective of the Academy was to create Entrepreneurial Project Managers, who took complete ownership of their projects and led their teams to do the same. The program as built to instill and improve the 7 critical drivers associated with Entrepreneurial Project Managers. The blended learning methodology

and the various learning resources were a step in this direction. With 500+ certified Managers from PMStEP and PMLeaP, and others who attended various other sessions, who showcased an improvement in these identified competencies, the Academy was nothing less than a success. Following are some of the key impacts that were recorded.

Short-term business impact

1. **Timely project delivery** – There was 20% increase in project delivery on time and within budget
2. **Improved customer satisfaction** – There was 4.5% YoY increase in organization's overall customer satisfaction score on the parameter of Project Management and 10% YoY increase for the same parameter for premium accounts of our organization.
3. **Increase in billing hours** – There was 25% YoY increase in billing hours of the participating project managers.
4. **Increase in number of projects managed** – 28% of the participating project managers managed more projects after completing the certification.
5. **Impact on performance** – 28% of the participating project managers were promoted in the subsequent appraisal cycle after the completion of the program.
6. **\$ 350000 saved** - Cost saving of \$ 350000 through reduced dependence on external certification
7. **Improved Post-Certification diagnostic scores** - The post certification project manager's effectiveness survey that was conducted a couple of months after the certification was complete, revealed higher scores for participants. There was an average of 32% increase in scores across the organization.

Long-term business impact

1. Enhancement of the Entrepreneurial Project Manager competencies across the organization
2. Increased internal fulfilment of Project manager positions rather than external hiring
3. Increase in best practices sharing across the organization
4. Effective use of social media as discussion forums for continuous learning
5. Projected cost-savings of \$2 million in the next 5 years

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS & LESSONS LEARNT:

1. **No one can stand alone-** In order to roll out a program of such a massive scale, across geographies, collaboration with other stakeholders is pertinent. We collaborated with various stakeholders like the Delivery Units, Senior Management, external vendors and other enabling functions to achieve better results. With collaboration comes assured sustainability and scalability.
2. **Training team should be a consulting body** - One of the most important lessons to be understood is that the training team can no longer remain a back-end service provider. The training team needs to evolve as a consulting body and play a proactive role in identifying and solving the challenges faced by customer-facing delivery teams.

3. **The digital era calls for leveraging technology and Social Media:** Technology is the buzz word in the digital era that we are part of. In such a scenario it becomes important to leverage technology in every field including that of learning. Social Media, also if leveraged effectively can prove to be an effective tool for learning.
4. **Learning Champions can enthuse** – Identifying Learning Champions and taking their support in motivating and helping participants learn was a game changer in this case.
5. **Business Endorsement is crucial** – Who would not want to take up a program endorsed by Senior Leaders? Keeping this in mind, detailed discussions were held with the Senior Leaders to create visibility about the program and to further endorse the program. Their Testimonials were used to further create visibility and encourage participation.
6. **Communication and branding can make or break-** - Recognizing achievers, motivational mailers, testimonials from leaders, WhatsApp communication, went a long way in helping us keep up the momentum of the program. Participants when exposed to the various benefits of this program, through various forms of communication, were more active and eager to complete it.
7. **All Learn and No Play makes a dull program** – An effective technique to keep the participants engaged in the program is to bring in elements of fun and excitement. This can be achieved using innovative learning methodologies like gamification, contests, dance-based learning, Satirical newsletters and interaction on social platforms.

CONCLUSION

According to The Financial Times said, “The entrepreneurial mindset as refers to a specific state of mind which orientates human conduct towards entrepreneurial activities and outcomes. Individuals with entrepreneurial mindsets are often drawn to opportunities, innovation and new value creation. Characteristics include the ability to take calculated risks and accept the realities of change and uncertainty.” In today's times when Project Managers need to exhibit these very characteristics it becomes imperative to build or bridge the gap in these competencies. Again, designing a program of such a large scale is a challenge in itself. The paper has covered what needs to be kept in mind when designing such a program and on how to execute it successfully.

REFERENCES

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