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A NASSCOM initiative

NASSCOM Reskilling Series

Wipro's Journey

INTRODUCTION

Nowhere is the impact of the shifting digital landscape as visible as in India's large IT services organisations that work with all the leading companies around the globe. The pace and scale of digital disruption is compelling the Indian IT industry, to evolve talent development models in parallel to the changing business models. Through this reskilling series, NASSCOM explores how Wipro is driving learning transformation in the digitally transforming world.
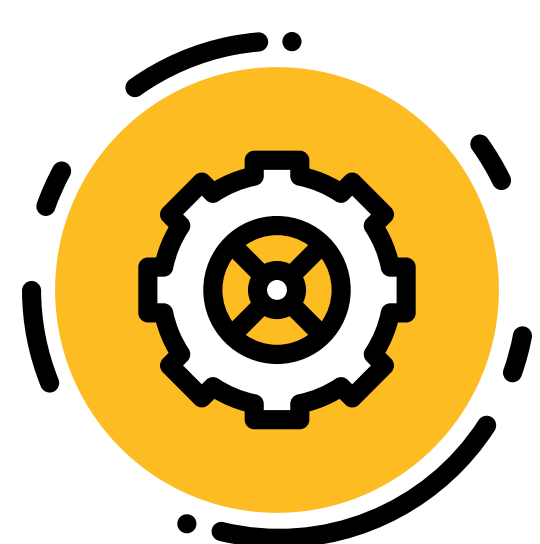
How Wipro drives Digital Transformation

'We know that we don't know' is the maxim of the wise that Wipro follows. In its journey to embrace the new and future technologies, Wipro is looking at frameworks and tools to be prepared. The technologies in demand at Wipro can be placed in two buckets, first, those technologies that are already in high demand termed '*Digital Technologies*' and second, those where demand is likely to come up, or '*Emerging Digital Technologies*.'

Technologies belonging to the first category have many familiar players that have taken on avatars in the digital world. Full-Stack, DevOps, Micro Services, Big Data (that includes the whole gamut of AI and Data Science) and IoT. Full-Stack includes Enterprise Java, Modern Web and Microsoft Full-Stack. Core Java, Hibernate and Spring continue to be in high demand along with MEAN Stack and MERN Stack. Even testers are required to have Full Stack capabilities these days.

In Wipro's world, technologies belonging to the second category, are largely cloud-based, such as AWS, Google Cloud and Azure. Cutting edge technologies like Pivotal Cloud Foundry and Blockchain also belong to this category. The promise of these technologies is high.
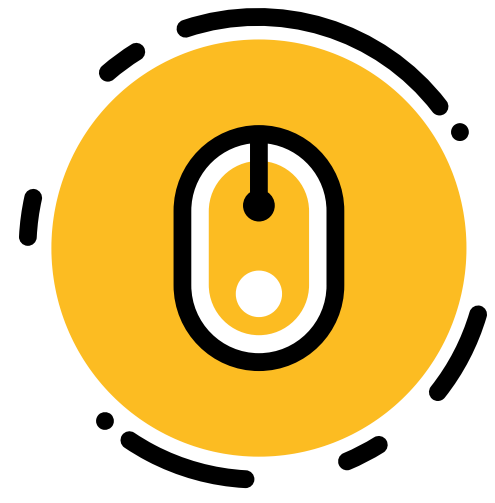
The Balancing Act

There is no denying that investing in digital skills training will result in long term rewards, by empowering the organization and its employees, augmenting their competitive advantage and guaranteeing that they don't get left behind in the race. Nonetheless, the training cost per employee in digital technologies can be very high (for example, the training cost in Pivotal, at an architect level can be as high as $20,000 per person). Thus, there is a need to carefully plan how many to train on what.

Not training enough people may run the risk of not having enough talent to meet future demand. Training too many may lead to un-deployed resources looking for ways to utilise their new skills. Business and talent leaders need to have crystal balls to arrive at the right mix! With the experience of the past year or so, Wipro feels that it is reasonably in control of planning the talent mix of the organisation but admits that you can never get it completely right.

Practically, there will always be projects where the team will not have desired composition. There is a need to have just-in-time learning that can prepare the team to do what they need to do. It is here that Wipro has FutureSkills, the industry-led learning ecosystem catalysed by NASSCOM, very useful. Through FutureSkills, learners can build awareness and skills in layers, starting with building the foundation through breadth and improving the speed to learning depth, once demand becomes visible. Wipro has not only enabled the platform to its employees for learning, it has also picked up AI & BigData as two skill areas for which its SMEs are curating the content on the platform.

Hands on application is the key

Intelligent technologies need a different approach to training than the legacy approach. Technologies and tools change rapidly, and clients want to deploy the next, new shiny thing. However, with clients unwilling to take the risk on to-be-trained or just-trained resources, it is important for a services company to be able to show that the resources on a project have hands-on experience.

No certification, on any technology in Wipro, takes place without an application level assessment and in many cases, crowdsourced projects are done by learners to practice their skills. Wipro bought Topcoder, two years ago, and its internal instance, called TopGear is a platform where assignments and projects are available for learners to get hands on experience in real-life projects.

The TopGear platform prime focus is to transform the workforce in 'digital' and 'in-demand' skills. It consists of 80 + cloud-based development environments.

It has over 1750 learning assignments and case studies covering 170+ skills. It provides virtual development environments for the employee to gain hands-on experience in emerging digital skills.

The platform also provides structured learning paths which enable employees to develop skills suited to business requirements. At TopGear, business units' crowdsource their projects as well, which are presented as project challenges to employees where they can compete and win cash rewards. This is a win-win situation for the organization and the employee both.

Till date, over 92,000 employees have registered on the platform. There are about 38,000 users engaged in enhancing their skills which include employees, who have completed one or more learning assignments. In addition, there are over 3,000 employees who have won cash rewards in real-life projects challenges. The number of cash reward earners is growing at an exponential rate every quarter. Wipro aims to expand this platform to include new and evolving technologies and more real-life projects.

Measuring learning

A few months ago, going by a trend in the industry, Wipro calculated the number of learning hours and found that they had trained more than 2 million learning hours in the previous financial year. While this is an impressive number, Wipro is not considering this as the Holy Grail. Given the varied sources of learning that learners use to learn, tracking all the non-formal time isn't captured in this number. Tracking this number seems to have become an anachronism as the shape of learning changes.

A person is considered certified only after a demonstration of the skills learnt.Some skills take a few hours, while others may take multiple weeks.

The training department measures itself on the number of people certified and will eventually move to the number of people deployed since that the talent gap is having a direct impact on business growth.

Learning takes place from multiple sources, within the organization and outside it. Wipro encourages its employees to take charge of their own learning, supports them in acquiring as much knowledge as they 'can' and 'want to' from whichever source they prefer and develops personalized learning plans for each employee. Thereafter, employees are invited to take assessments through learning assignments that certify the quality of their learning.

Key Digital Reskilling initiatives at Wipro

It is important to recognise that in the IT industry today, only about 20% projects are based on the emerging technologies. However, this percentage is growing at a 20% CAGR. Therefore, who needs to be skilled on what requires careful planning, in light of the unknown future. Wipro has divided Digital Learning needs into 3 categories – Awareness, Knowledge and Expert. The table below captures the same.

AWARENESS	KNOWLEDGE	EXPERTISE
Over 125,000 employees across the organisation are digitally aware. What these digital skills are and why they are important.	Over 70,000 employees, with various experience levels, across the organisation, have chosen at least 2 digital skills in which they can comfortably make conversations with customers. Min 50 hours learning investment in a year.	Deep Skilling programs – internal and from partners, with extensive hands-on and capstone projects. Min. 12-16 weeks of learning experience.
Of 125,000 employees, about 55,000 employees are developing at least one digital skill beyond awareness.	**Trend.Nxt & Digital.Nxt:** Through these initiatives Wipro is building in-depth knowledge in at least 2 digital skills for more than half its employees in IT. Hands-on experience is a big focus area.	Wipro has work integrated learning programs for freshers & laterals from premier engineering & management colleges. These are mostly weekend classroom sessions spread over 2 to 4 years.

Thinking out of the box

Wipro is trying different ways to solve the talent gap problem. A major initiative covers learning tracks on several foundation skills like Java, C++, Analytics and Automation Testing. Employees are encouraged to build their digital skills at a foundation level in each of the skill tracks. Depth in one or more skills can be built on top of the foundation skills as the demand materializes.

In another initiative to minimize bench time, skill-clusters have been created based on business demand on the new technologies, that learners can leverage to train & certify themselves on high-demand skills and get deployed to a project.

The reskilling story continues with many other initiatives such as weekly Future Ready webinars, partner content from Udemy, FutureSkills and internal learning content with hands-on assignments. Given the vast and changing landscape, Wipro will continue to experiment and drive its learning initiatives through tools and platforms, making the learning journey, deeper and immersive for the learner. Reskilling is a business imperative. Skills on the new technologies are simply not available in the quantity and price for a valid business case. Wipro has created a huge number of resources for the learner and is now looking at learners to take advantage of this opportunity.

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