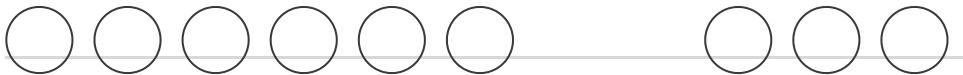


# 'Covid-19 has been a catalyst for learning transition'

*Despite the challenges posed by the current times, businesses have realized that critical workplace learning and employee skill building can't be put on hold, said Archana Bhaskar, CHRO, Dr Reddy's Laboratories, in an exclusive interview.*

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Archana Bhaskar, CHRO, Dr Reddy's Laboratories

Archana Bhaskar, CHRO, Dr Reddy's Laboratories shares insights about how learning & development needs took forefront in a pandemic hit world and how this opened a plethora of new age learning opportunities, not only for the employees but also for the organizations. Edited excerpts of an exclusive interview with Apeksha Kaushik:

## How the employee Learning & Development strategies have evolved in the last few months?

Employee [capability building](#) has always been at the forefront at Dr Reddy's and this necessitates having strong L&D practices. We inspire people to reach their full potential through work and continuous learning. At our organization, which is learning-centric, the strategic focus has been on strengthening digital and [virtual learning](#) programmes, and learning in the flow of work.

The [COVID-19 pandemic](#) has been a catalyst for this transition and has resulted in Learning & HR professionals doubling up their efforts on making the learning function entirely virtual via the digital methods as swiftly as possible. Within a week from the time lockdown was announced in India, our COVID-19 learning response team ensured our critical capability building and onboarding continue.

Even as we moved rapidly to put employee safety first by cancelling in-person sessions, the

need to keep employees motivated, and meaningfully engaged while working from home during these uncertain times became extremely important. We launched virtual programmes such as 'My Dost', 'Kahoot', and weekly 'Learning Sessions', specifically for Corona Times, which focus on working remotely, leading during crisis, resilience and performance Management.

'Learning in the flow of work' is another new-age strategy that we are adopting to accelerate the impact that learning can have on employee and business performance. COVID-19 has made this strategy even more rounded making it necessary for us to look for learning resources and methodologies that keep learning targeted and give choice and flexibility of learning anytime, anywhere especially during these unprecedented times. During the last few months, we have not only conducted learning events within Dr Reddy's, but also made the best use of learning opportunities that were made available by many reputed organizations and universities worldwide.

### **What has been the biggest challenge in attaining learning inclusivity for organizations?**

**Inclusive learning** practices are instrumental in creating and maintaining a learning environment for all participants to be meaningfully engaged and to ensure they are open to ideas, perspectives, and ways of thinking that are distinct from their own. The common challenges that L&D professionals and organizations have to navigate while attaining learning inclusivity are – shorter attention spans of learners, increased ask on personalized approach, all time availability of a myriad of learning resources and solving for not just learning, but application and improved business performance.

Our L&D strategies are devised around solving these challenges and have led us to success in translating learning to an increased business performance. A case in point, SuCCEED (our cultural and transformational journey of capability building for employees at our manufacturing facilities), and our flagship leadership development programmes, not just resulted in individual performance but translated into increased business performance consistently year on year.

### **What has been some of the latest **learning technologies** that you have embraced and something that you see as a viable option for your organization and industry, at large?**

Despite the challenges posed by the current times, businesses have realized that critical workplace learning and employee skill building can't be put on hold. This is where investing in sound learning technologies has come in handy and ensured business continuity.

We have been actively working on institutionalizing our LXP ([Learning Experience Platform](#)) as one of our key priorities since the last fiscal. LXPs allow organizations to have multiple content sources, engaging user experience, sharper focus on personalization, extensive analytics and AI assistant.

Another thoughtful technology investment that organizations can make is in Virtual Classroom platforms. These AI powered digital platforms let you create a digital twin of on-campus trainings. The virtual classroom holds real-time lessons remotely while offering the same collaborative tools and the level of interaction possible in a physical classroom. Investing in some of these new-age technologies also helps in attaining learning inclusivity for organizations.

In my view, the stronger learning capabilities that are emerging now are not topical; they will rather stand as a positive long-term outcome from this sobering period.

### **How do you see the trends in L&D evolve for future workplaces?**

The future belongs to virtual learning. Given the pandemic, there are reduced chances of in-person trainings in the near future. Otherwise too, organizations have been rejigging their 'virtual learning' platforms to make learning available anytime and anywhere, for some time now. Learning in the flow of work is another progressive trend emerging for future workplaces by having micro and macro learning resources that are sharp and engaging.

Conducting a rapid triage of the entire portfolio of learning offerings, and to prioritize what is necessary to adapt to a virtual or digital-only format, plays an important role in any organization. Another element is, creating and institutionalizing a unified capability building approach that brings various tenets of employee learning (technical, functional, behaviour and leadership) to provide a seamless employee experience. Focusing on LXP and not just Learning management system (LMS) will further add to this experience. Organizations will look at designing the learning modules for shorter interactions and providing more time between sessions to strengthen learning.

L&D professionals now more than ever are required to partner with business to leverage the functional expertise to design and deliver meaningful interventions. At Dr Reddy's, we have been working on partnering with business/line managers to have them own the learning & development of their people, including delivering and developing technical learning modules. Early this year, we conducted a first ever and the largest festival of learning in the organization – The People Development Week, where 150 leaders and subject matter experts from across the

organization conducted 200 learning sessions covering over 18,000 employees.

I have also seen some fantastic collaboration across different organizations in sharing best practices in L&D. I believe learning from other organizations and sharing our own best practices in L&D can help learning leaders worldwide be of service in the best way possible for the businesses at any given time.

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