



# Organizational participation in competency development programs for employees working from home during Covid-19 pandemic

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**Abstract:** The success of an organization may be based on its dedication and devotion towards meeting its goals and objectives. The sudden outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic has appeared as a challenge for various organizations all over the world. This pandemic has given an opportunity to tackle the situation with zeal and enthusiasm and keep motivating the workforce so that they can be updated to take up the future challenges. To conduct competency development programs for employees working from home has become truly important for organizations to keep themselves abreast with the chronic situation. The competency development programs in normal course of action are completely different and simple to be followed while in case of online programs the process is bit complicated to be pursued smoothly with efficiency. Thus the purpose of the research is to identify the coherence of organization objectives with its participation in competency development programs. Moreover also to identify the level of determination which is displayed during this tough times, and innate need of developing employees and improving their skills in order to keep them motivated towards the current as well as upcoming future projects.

**Index Terms -** *Competency development programs, Covid-19, Organization, work from home*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Competencies are the core skills possessed by the individuals as employees that are mutually beneficial for the companies for their human resource functional requirements. Competency development is one of the main functions of human resource management amongst other functions like recruitment, selection, compensation, training and development. The process of conducting competency development program is not a onetime process; rather it's a continuous course of action. Organizations are customary to conduct these development programs on continuous basis in order to match the available skills set with the desired skills of the company, moreover to enhance the employability skills for better and smooth achievement of their goals.

The sudden outbreak of worldwide Covid pandemic has created many obstacles for the world of business. The same has posed several challenges to the human resource department to perform their function well. The outbreak has forced the employees to work from their home. At the same time after great losses the companies need to return back on their tracks of operations and start following the various organizational functions in a smooth way. It is relatively simple to perform other operational functions smoother than conducting Human resource functions without physical presence.

This piece of research work intends to understand the mindset of companies in relation to their competency development related programs in these crucial times. It will further help to understand the insight motivation and approach followed by organizations for conducting these development programs. The outcome will eventually support the understanding the seriousness towards the goals and objectives of the HR function of the organizations.

## II. Literature Review

It is important to be acquainted with the term 'Competency development' before understanding its actual role in the corporate world. Different implications have been suggested for the term competency development in past few years. With more focus on research and development the term has been introduced more broadly in its scope of knowledge.

The term has received its special significance in management field with the more advancement in Human resource Management. Traditionally, the acquisition of desired skills, knowledge, ability, attitude, psycho-motor skills etc. by an individual can be defined as competencies and the organization efforts to update the set of required skills in employees come under the scope of competency development programs. Human resource development aims at constantly assessing competency requirements of different individuals to perform the job assigned to them effectively and provide opportunities for developing these competencies to prepare them for future roles in the organization (**Sugumari R., Rupa S, 2014**). A broader definition of competency development states it as "an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or a situation" (**Spencer and Spencer, 1993**). The role of competency development lies under the fact of enhancing the success of organization and employees (**Delamare Le Deist & Winterton, 2005; Lawler, 1994**). Competency is defined as capability or ability. It is a set of related but different sets of behavior organized around an underlying construct" (**Boyatzis 2007**).

Now a wider approach is followed for implementing the concept of competency development to competency management in which its true meaning can be integrated with the planning function of human resource management. It can be further understood to provide a favorable analysis of assessing the current human capacity based on their competencies against the needed competencies in the organization according to its vision, mission, goals and objectives. **Forrier, Sels and Stynen (2009)**, define competency development as: "an important feature of competency management which encompasses all activities carried out by the organization and the employee to maintain or enhance the employee's functional, learning and career competencies".

The question can be raised at this point that what are the needed competencies for an employee in an organization for improving their working efficiency at workplace. Functional, learning and career competencies are the three suggested competencies which are important at work (**Kuijipers 2003**). The significance of these three competencies can be realized by proper planning and strategy development for enhancing the capabilities of the manpower in the organization.

In spite of various training programs, it is important to understand why organizations invest in competency development programs. Is it the way to strategize some particular issue, an expression of opportunism or related to fashion trends? (**Ellström 2008**). Many theories answer this question from which two important viewpoints of competency development can be discussed. The two views are technological-functional perspective, conflict-control perspective and Institutional perspective. The development programs from technological-functional perspective aim to develop new or increased competence requirements due to environmental conditions or changes in the organization. The conflict-control perspective competence development in this perspective can be seen as an instrument for ideological control and as a means of replacing or complementing other forms of control, that is, technological or bureaucratic forms of control (**Offe, 1976; Edwards, 1979**).

In Institutional perspective a company's investments in competence development can be analyzed as symbolic arrangements with the function of exemplifying and communicating, inwards and outwards, conformity with the values with which the organization wants to be associated with the objective of strengthening its legitimacy. In the same way, an increase in the education requirements for a given post can be assumed to have a symbolic legitimizing function (**cf. Collins, 1979**).

### ***Competency Development programs for reenergizing the workforce in Covid times***

The worldwide pandemic has influenced almost all the parts of the world and their economies. Its reaction can be realized in all the sectors irrespective of manufacturing or service sector. The sufferings and losses occurred during these times cannot be ignored neither its impact on future business and the style of operations can be overlooked. So in order to understand the issue minutely it is important to analyze the entire situation from beginning to current scenario.

The pandemic was a complete shock to the business world. No doubt looking at the situation many solutions are adopted by business sectors in order to affect the business operations as lesser as it can be. The purpose of the research is to understand the about the measures taken by corporate world in order to overcome the critical situation. The adoption of exponential technologies by the developed markets has de-accelerated the smooth flow of various factors of production.

The new term *Industry 4.0* has gained popularity even before the pandemic. But the occurrence of pandemic has triggered its usage in practical world. It was difficult to normalize the come back on work but the advent of digital reality made the business survival possible to an extent. The advancement and growth in virtual or digital know-how has provided ease of work to various business platforms. Irrespective of physical presence, time zones and country borders people could stay connected to their teams via digital mode using *Skype, VOIP, email, cloud storage etc.* To develop the required competency for accessing all the desired feature of digital platforms was necessary for an uninterrupted work culture. However, this transition is not uniform for every sector of the economy. Considering the manufacturing sector it was difficult to coordinate and manage the operations, the new norm of following *social distancing* was needed to be developed among workers, supervisors and the entire production team to perform shop floor functions. Emerging new business models and swift shift towards producing healthcare & medical equipment would also require workers to be re-skilled and up-skilled. Various other adopted technologies like *Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT)* was already on its rise, Robots playing a vital role in reducing health risk for workers and optimizing assembly operations. Skilling the workforce on machine learning, 3D designing, driven by *Artificial Intelligence* got the momentum during the *Covid* times. The *New Normal* work culture is introduced from Tele-Health to Robotic Process Automation and from Online Classes to Virtual Internship Technology Transition is reshaping the consumer behavior patterns and business models. The corporate world thus needs their workforce skilling, re-skilling and up-skilling on *Industry 4.0* technologies along with *Social-distancing* norms as more companies are expected to move towards Automation.

#### **Requirement of Post-Covid skills for Employment:**

The alarming situation for corporate enforced them to update the work culture and analyze the requisite skills for meeting upcoming challenges of the future. The *Sector skill councils (SSC)* need to identify the latest and potential job roles. The Ministry/Departments like Automobiles, steel, electronics, textiles should target to develop 5-9 skill development courses. Instead of approving various authorizing and standards awarding bodies, SSC should be the only awarding body in the sector. A great revolution needs to be observed in education sector and the affiliated universities and institutions should be shouldered with the responsibility of amalgamating a proper mix of theory and practice. Industry should provide inputs to develop industry based programs, internships and apprentices for preparing new workforce. The National Skill Qualification Framework should be reworked to create linkages between certification levels and number of hours of contact classes need to be restructured and the ability to provide Micro Certification / Degrees should be introduced. Some alterations in the regulatory structure of *MHRD* need to be done for expediting these changes. A strong skill development system in form of online learning infrastructure needs to be created for promoting virtual learning, internships and online programs.

The massive change occurred in the business environment due to *Covid* reasons gave rise to mandatory changes needs to be followed dreadfully. The entire industry needs to introduce variety of changes in working style. It is interestingly revealed that 99 percent of learning and development executives believe if skill gaps are not closed in the next 3 to 5 years, customer experience and satisfaction will be affected as well as product development and delivery, and the company's ability to innovate – resulting in an erosion of growth (**LinkedIn's Workplace Report 2020**). The report also cited that 57 percent of talent developers will focus on leadership and management skills, 42 percent on creative problem solving and design thinking skills and, 40 percent on communication skills.

#### **Introduction of Innovative Skills/Competencies**

New skills that need a bullish approach for creating an energetic economy should be introduced in the lifeline of any economy that is 'business' rigorously. The scope of digital intelligence should be expanded for creating more and more reach towards customer feedback and satisfaction.



Table: 1

Competencies	Specification
<b>Data Analytics</b>	Analytical skills for analyzing data, handling big data, cloud computing
<b>Digital Marketing and coding competencies</b>	To keep abreast with latest business developments digital skills as well as coding, web development are requisites.
<b>Critical Thinking</b>	Evaluating the available information from different perspectives to utilize it in best way
<b>Originality and advancement</b>	To be attentive enough for updating and offering novel products according to the environmental changes.
<b>Technological Innovation</b>	A business accustomed with technology innovation grows more. The internet related technologies like AI, cloud computing, IIOT, Robotics, programming skills etc are the essential skills which can boost any business.

**Table1** gives a snapshot of latest skills which are needed for keeping business updated with the recent changes.

### ***Challenges for continuing the provisions of skill development***

Multiple industries carrying multiple working culture and methodologies have faced their own set of challenges during the pandemic. Broadly the classifications of industries in manufacturing and service sectors have tried to handle the situation with the best efforts they could do, but the desired efficiency could not be reached. The different sectors faced different challenges in organizing their skill development programs.

Due to physical presence restrictions, the biggest challenge was of developing appropriate computer skills to the desired workforce. At the same time arranging secured shop floor in terms of health and hygiene was major concern for the program developers. To develop the desired competency in employees, was necessary for smooth flow of work; simultaneously it was a tough task for the developers to conduct the work related programs.

Thus developing enough skills in employees has been a challenging task for the organizations. In fact, in an analysis it is estimated that 14 percent of the global workforce will need to be reskilled entirely, and 40 percent will need partial reskilling to continue with their current occupations (**McKinsey Global Institute, 2017**). Corporate leaders surveyed by MGI indicated the need was urgent, with up to 70 percent of US and European executives talking about significant reskilling needs by 2020.

At some places the managers and trainers were not satisfied with the training programs conducted due to the unpreparedness of the system to face up these challenges. Most of the learners and trainers in distant educational programs also faced this problem. The ILO-UNESCO-World Bank survey respondents overwhelmingly reported the disruption of work-based learning due to the closure of enterprises across all regions of the world. Affirmative responses to this question ranged between 95 and 100 per cent of respondents across regions. In most countries where essential enterprises in the construction, manufacturing, and personal services sectors remained open, on-the-job training activities either stopped or continued in restricted numbers with the addition of strict health and safety measures (**Survey ILO 2021**).

### ***Gap realism in the delivery of apprenticeships and other practical skills***

Facing the critical situation was as difficult as delivering practical skills to the manpower during this situation. The circumstances direct to prepare the employees for being innovative and being able to operate remotely. It was the need to inculcate the fundamental skills in employees more than the technical skills. The focus of companies shifted and designed talent strategies that focus on digital, cognitive, social and emotional skills. These skills can develop the overall work approach of an employee irrespective of their job role hence it's a 'no-regret investment for a company. Development of technological infrastructure like internet, devices, connectivity, lack of user friendliness with the learning platforms, financial restraints were the major obstacles in online skill development programs. Apart from this building a positive mindset of employees towards maintaining the efficient working culture working from home has been the biggest gap which has to be fulfilled. Hence the organizations tried to bridge the gap in delivering the practical and emotional skills in their employees by providing motivational training and practical program with the help of greatest tool internet and its connectivity.

### ***Reestablishing Business in accordance of trends***

The trends *pre-Covid* were slightly shifted towards remote working but got accelerated even more *post-Covid*. A recent survey revealed that almost three in four CFOs plan to “shift at least 5 percent of previously on-site employees to permanently remote positions post-COVID-19” (**Gartner CFO Survey**). Managers tried to figure out the model of leading their teams and method to maintain cohesiveness in teamwork. The pandemic has directed the learning approaches to be digitized through live videos and social networking.

When the pandemic has changed the lifestyle of people, at the same time it has changed the way of shopping and eating habits as well. In the same way a massive shift can be observed in the overall business tactics and strategies. Thus it is now important for companies to understand that what could be the lasting employment-landscape shifts that could require the large-scale re skilling of workers. The popularity of e-commerce over traditional Brick and mortar shopping got accelerated more during the pandemic. In Europe, 13 percent of consumers said in early April that they were planning to browse the sites of online e-tailers for the first time. The popularity of ‘cure and care’ concept motivates a secured work culture at shop floor. The ‘cure’ part is taken care by the expert domain while the ‘care’ part a lot of existing workforce were potentially deployed following certain standards and conditions. For example, the highly skilled airport staff workers, hotel staff and other hospitality workers, who have worked in a demanding service sector. They are trained to cater to customers under testing conditions. They can be engaged proactively as healthcare workers and customer-facing tasks in hospitals. At the same time along with such developments there were some losers and some winners. Many personalized service providers had to shift their services to online platforms where it was hard for them to match. Online platforms could not prove to be much useful for many trainers and coaches. Apart from these many shop floor workers are underutilized during this period.

### ***III. Conclusion***

Business which can be remarked as the life-line for any economy got a *Covid* shock. The setback is not easy to recover the losses. It is difficult to realize the true impact of *Covid* effects over the economy. The organizations are working hard towards minimizing the *Covid* effects over their business and at the same time making efficient use of their manpower by providing them best skill development programs with the help of different tools and methods especially internet technologies. Different sectors in trade and commerce are adopting cure and care techniques both at expert as well as at the shop floor maintaining security standards. The sensitivity of pandemic times has to be handled carefully, without compromising the business ethics. Then and then only the business world can be sustainably establish.

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