

India Inc innovates with learning

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Nearly 20 senior leaders at IT solutions company Mphasis listened with rapt attention as external coaches taught them how to use the art of storytelling to communicate better, with not just employees but also clients.

The objective of the two-hour programme organised by the company in August was clear – to use the power of words and the gift of weaving them into conversation to better relate with others.

"It was an experiment that worked well for us. Storytelling creates a real emotional connect and the benefits are being seen through higher levels of engagement," Puneet Bhirani, chief people and administrative officer at Mphasis, told ET.

Doing Things Differently

Mphasis brings in external coaches to teach leaders how to use storytelling as a technique to communicate



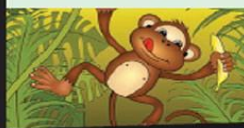
Yes Bank has a theatre-based learning programme

Mahindra Comviva screens movies to teach employees about coaching and group dynamics



EY is summarising lengthy case studies into short animated videos

Thomas Cook India has built business scenarios into the format of a board game



Sasken Communication Technologies takes its manager-level employees out for adventure camps

The company wants to extend this training to at least 300 leaders by March next year. It is also driving cornerstone values through puppetry programmes, another experiment that Bhirani said is creating a tangible impact. Mphasis is not alone. Companies across sectors are fast realising that with millennials accounting for almost half the workforce, teachings must be made more contemporary.

"It's important to bring in freshness to learning from time to time, to revise conventional methods of teaching. A novelty factor, which may or may not have a big impact in the long run, definitely creates exhilaration for employees," said Pallavi Jha, managing director at Dale Carnegie Training India.

Yes Bank, aside from gamification learning modules that offer an immersive learning experience for employees, has a theatre-based learning programme. Employees learn from this offbeat and lively medium, one that invokes a behavioural change in them and boosts their selfconfidence.

"New ideas are essential if learning has to take place," said Deodutta Kurane, group president for human capital management. The bank also organises team-building activities where each employee participates with a drum; the rhythmic thumping helps them learn the tenets of teamwork, coordination and collaboration.

It's not just theatre and storytelling. Other companies are experimenting with cinema, outdoor activities and board games in an effort to increase the recall value of teachings.

Mahindra Comviva has screened movies such as The Karate Kid and 12 Angry Men to teach coaching and group dynamics respectively. These connect real emotions to learning and implementation, executives said.

At Thomas Cook India, business scenarios are built into the format of a board game to better help the learning of employees who understand the travel industry but need their business acumen sharpened. Hypothetical situations are presented to participating teams, helping employees creatively experience different contexts.

"Today, engagement and training need to be much more innovative and experiential in nature than before. We have enhanced our learning processes through activities that include drama, music, interactive board games and simulations," said Mona Cherian, head of human resources at the Mumbai-headquartered travel and travel-related financial services company.

Consulting firm EY has recently put in place role-playing. Employees take on different characters and tackle issues related to corporate dynamics.

"We're also trying to be more innovative in the way we tackle case studies," said Sandeep Kohli, national director at EY. "These studies are often long and we found that all employees were not necessarily always up to date on them. So we're now summarising them into animated videos, injecting a bit of humour to brighten up an otherwise conventional task," he said.

The company has also started sending out comic strips to employees, post-learning and development programmes, to reinforce the teachings. The effects, Kohli said, have been phenomenal, building better recall.

India Inc also recognises the value of the outdoors. Yes Bank runs heritage walks as part of its induction programme, helping new recruits imbibe organisational values in an outdoor environment.

Sasken Communication Technologies is also thinking beyond the four walls of the office. It takes managers out for adventure camps to help build leadership and team management capabilities.

"In today's scenario, a mix of traditional and out-of-the-box thinking is necessary to keep employee interest levels high. We always consider a combination of classroom and outdoor activities, to encourage physical and mental well-being," said Swami Krishnan, vice-president of employee engagement and development, Sasken Communication Technologies.

Meanwhile, consumer goods company Marico has given the classic 'case study method' a twist. The company creates short stories using real-life cases on ethics and governance that help bring alive real-life dilemmas, challenges and moments of truth. "The collective debate and conclusions bring out the multiple perspectives around an issue and help members learn to deal with such matters appropriately," said Ashutosh Telang, chief human resources officer.