TALENT MANAGEMENT IN THE AGE OF CHANGE: RESKILLING AS A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

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ABSTRACT

In an era characterized by rapid technological advancements and shifting workforce dynamics, talent management has emerged as a critical focal point for organizations striving to maintain competitive advantage. This study explores the strategic imperative of reskilling within the broader context of talent management amidst constant change. As industries evolve, organizations must proactively equip employees with new skills to adapt to emerging technologies and market demands. Reskilling not only enhances employee capabilities but also fosters a culture of continuous learning and adaptability, essential for organizational resilience. By prioritizing talent management and reskilling, organizations can navigate the complexities of change, ensuring they remain agile and prepared for the future workforce landscape. The findings aim to provide a framework for leaders to design and implement effective talent management strategies that resonate in the age of change, thereby securing a sustainable competitive edge. This study investigates employee perceptions of reskilling programs across various organizations, highlighting their critical role in program effectiveness. Findings reveal significant variations in employee views and also uncovers gender and age-related disparities in attitudes towards reskilling. Women show a strong inclination for continuous learning despite underrepresentation in leadership, while older employees tend to resist change. The study emphasizes the importance of targeted interventions, management support, and a culture of ongoing learning to enhance skill development, boost employee confidence, and improve retention rates.

Keywords: Reskilling, Retention, Talent management, Continuous learning, Agile, Gender, Perception

INTRODUCTION

In today's business landscape, an organization's talent has become its primary competitive edge. The success of a company is directly tied to its employees' performance. When staff members possess unique skills, it sets the organization apart from its rivals. Human Resource managers face the dual challenge of not only acquiring but also retaining a skilled workforce in this competitive environment. Talent management has evolved into a complex and crucial task. Effective talent acquisition strengthens an organization's strategy. Despite an increase in global job seekers due to economic conditions, certain sectors and regions still face significant talent shortages, exacerbating the issue of "Talent Mismatch". The modern corporate world demands

multitasking abilities, making talent acquisition increasingly difficult. Consequently, finding the ideal candidate for a specific role has become more challenging. Employee retention has emerged as a major hurdle for organizations. The evolving business landscape requires HR to adopt a more strategic approach, focusing on building employee engagement as a key tool for talent management. This process encompasses how individuals join, progress within, and exits the organization. Successful talent management relies on a robust organizational structure. Given that superior talent can shape a company's future, talent management should be prioritized. Effective implementation of talent management strategies enhances employee engagement, which in turn boosts organizational performance. There's a direct correlation between higher employee engagement and increased productivity. Out of the different aspects of talent management process, this study focuses on the continuous improvement of the workforce in the organization.

In the last 20 years, businesses have increasingly recognized the strategic importance of talent management (TM) and talent development (TD) in achieving their goals. Companies are now focusing more on identifying, attracting, and nurturing skilled employees within their organizations. This shift aims to cultivate a pool of potential leaders from within, ensuring a steady supply of capable individuals to guide the company in the future (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen, & Scullion, 2020; Wolfswinkel & Enslin, 2020). Despite the widespread recognition of succession planning as a valuable tool in the business world for maintaining a ready supply of qualified candidates to fill vacant positions, many companies have been hesitant to fully embrace and implement this practice (Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2010; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Sonnenberg, van Zijderveld, & Brinks, 2014). The shortage of skilled personnel to step into crucial roles when vacancies occur continues to be a challenge for many organizations. To address this, companies need to implement strategic approaches aimed at fostering employee growth and expanding their internal talent pool. One particularly effective method to achieve this is through the adoption of inclusive talent development (ITD) practices (Asplund, 2020; Baum, 2008; Golubovskaya, Solnet, & Robinson, 2019; Kulkarni & Scullion, 2015; Murillo & King, 2019) with a focus on reskilling initiatives. Reskilling involves acquiring entirely new skills and capabilities that enable an individual to transition into a different role or career. Reskilling is the systematic process of providing individuals with the knowledge, skills, and expertise necessary to perform their jobs effectively. It is a well-organized and planned activity designed to impart information to recipients to achieve specific goals or outcomes, often facilitated through training initiatives. Reskilling is a crucial component of continuous learning and is vital for career advancement in the digital age. While the idea of reskilling employees applies to companies across various sectors, it is particularly crucial for the information technology (IT) industry. The field is highly dynamic and constantly being disrupted by the emergence of new technologies. As businesses strive to adapt to shifting market conditions, evolving customer needs, and digital transformation initiatives, their skill requirements for IT professionals also change accordingly. Reskilling IT professionals become essential to ensure they can meet the organization's changing demands and remain relevant in this rapidly transforming landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Talent management is a complex and multifaceted concept. Sireesha and Ganapavarapu (2014) define talent management as placing the right person in the right job at the right time and place. The ultimate goal is to ensure organizational success. Collings and Mellahi (2009) define it as activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which

differentially contribute to the organization's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization. Tarique and Schuler (2010) argue that talent management is crucial for multinational enterprises to gain and sustain a global competitive advantage. Singh (2012) emphasize that talent management has become crucial in the era of globalization and intense competition. Sparrow and Makram (2015) propose that talent management creates value through the strategic combination of talent philosophies, pools, and management practices. Rana and Abbasi (2013) found a positive correlation between talent management, employee turnover, and organizational efficiency. Talent management is a gradually emerging concept in the business world. Organizations, especially those operating globally, are increasingly recognizing the value of human capital as a crucial component for gaining a competitive edge in the 21st century (Sheokand and Verma, 2015; Bano and Rehman, 2011). Effective talent management practices are seen as beneficial for long-term company success (Oladapo, 2014) and enhanced performance and productivity (Collings and Mellahi, 2009). Similarly, Kamil et al. (2011) emphasize that organizations need to implement effective talent management strategies to achieve rapid growth and high performance. Effective and transparent talent management practices foster a work environment that allows employees to enhance their skills and competencies, equipping them for shifting business landscapes and new roles (Sastry, 2013). This necessitates a focus on workforce development (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

Technology is transforming personal lives and workplace dynamics. As it advances, it will phase out repetitive jobs while creating new roles that require human qualities such as empathy, social intelligence, adaptability, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving (Gram and Pearson, 2018). With the rise of digital transformation, routine tasks are increasingly automated, leading to the decline of traditional jobs even as new opportunities emerge.

The World Economic Forum forecasts that by 2025, half of the workforce will need to acquire new skills because of emerging technologies. Over the next five years, more than two-thirds of the skills currently seen as essential will evolve. Furthermore, by 2025, a third of the skills identified as crucial will be technological, even though they aren't considered vital today (Li, 2022). These anticipated impacts of digital transformation and automation on the global workforce underscore the importance of strategic planning for reskilling and upskilling to support organizational growth and innovation (LinkedIn Learning Report, 2020). Businesses must ensure that their employees possess the skills required in a rapidly advancing technological landscape. Reskilling and upskilling initiatives can help achieve this goal. By investing in their workforce's skill development, companies can adapt more effectively to market shifts and capitalize on new opportunities. It's essential for businesses to recognize the need for a unified approach that combines people, processes, and technology to drive growth and performance. Training programs tailored to the demands of digitalization can help realize this comprehensive strategy. Furthermore, organizations that provide opportunities for professional development are more appealing to potential hires and are better equipped to retain their existing talent. As global economies evolve, the demand for ongoing learning and skill enhancement is increasing. This rise is driven by the need for competencies in complex problem-solving, critical information evaluation, creative thinking, effective people management, work organization, emotional intelligence, sound judgment, decision-making, negotiation skills, and mental agility to adapt to new and changing circumstances. To meet job expectations and remain relevant, employees must

refresh their existing skills with new knowledge in response to the shifting workplace landscape, ensuring fulfilling and successful careers. Therefore, organizations must foster a culture that promotes continuous learning (Phadnis, 2023). In a highly competitive environment characterized by automation, digitization, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and big data, this approach will ensure the company's agility, sustainability, and success. It is essential for an organization's strategic goals to incorporate continuous learning. Companies should integrate career development into their workforce evolution strategies and make significant efforts to ensure that learning opportunities are accessible, available, and affordable for their employees (Li, 2022).

Reskilling is essential as rapid changing technology increasingly impacts organizational processes (Yamuna et al., 2023). Research by Samuvel and Gilsha (2023) highlights the significance of continuous training and development in enhancing performance, productivity, career advancement, and employee engagement. Reskilling allows employees to learn new skills, boost their productivity, and increase their value to the organization (Sahana and Nagaraj, 2023). Moreover, it plays a role in improving employee retention. As digital and hybrid work models become the norm, gaining new skills is vital to mitigate economic issues like decreased productivity, GDP contraction, and increased unemployment. Addressing these needs is imperative, requiring both businesses and employees to adapt to ongoing technological changes. Organizational leaders play a pivotal role in facilitating reskilling and upskilling to meet future demands (Sawant et al. 2022).

Research Gap

Although numerous studies highlight the essential role of reskilling in ensuring market relevance and competitiveness for employees and businesses, there is a notable shortage of empirical research focused on how information technology companies implement reskilling strategies in practice. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the actual methods used for reskilling training and gaining insights into trainees' perceptions of these approaches.

Objectives of the Study

In light of the identified research gap, the study's objectives are outlined below:

1. To evaluate employees' views on the reskilling training methods implemented in the organizations involved in the study
2. To investigate whether employees' perceptions of the reskilling training methods is dependent on their demographic factors, gender and age group.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on IT companies located in West Bengal, a state that has made considerable efforts to attract foreign direct investment, especially in the electronics and software sectors. Consequently, West Bengal has emerged as a major hub for the IT industry, offering several competitive advantages, including a favorable geographical location, robust physical infrastructure, and a dynamic education system. To facilitate the transition of Bengal into a knowledge-driven, technology-oriented welfare society, the state aims to lead India's IT, Information Technology Enabled Services (ITeS), and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sectors, as outlined in the "Information Technology and Electronic Policy

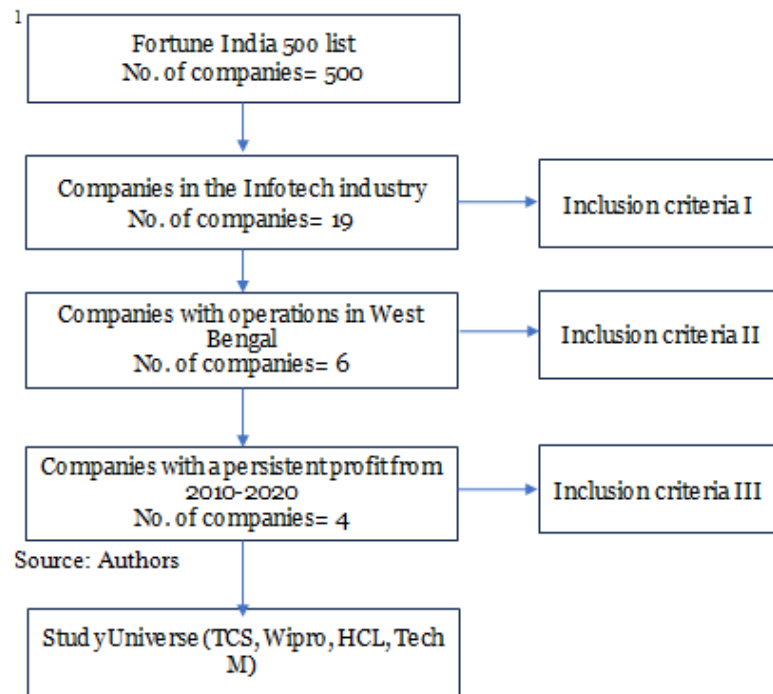(2018). The study universe is illustrated in the chart below Figure 1:

FIGURE 1
UNIVERSE OF THE STUDY

Using specific inclusion criteria, the study focused on four companies: TCS, HCL, Wipro, and Tech Mahindra. Together, these organizations have a global workforce of 1,028,000 (according to their 2019-2020 annual financial reports) and employ about 16,000 people in Kolkata. A closed-ended questionnaire about reskilling training methodologies was created based on existing literature and distributed to employees through a simple random sampling method, resulting in 1,242 valid responses after filtering out incomplete submissions. The research is descriptive and utilizes probability sampling for the study's sample. The survey included a questionnaire with 22 questions addressing the purpose, need, design, methods, factors influencing training approaches, and the outcomes of the training interventions.

Each parameter was evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, which included the following response options: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The responses were assigned numerical values as follows: strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neither agree nor disagree = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1. This numerical assignment helped organize the data for more detailed analysis.

The data reliability has been tested using the following formula.

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1}\left(1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{k}\sigma_{y_i}^2}{\sigma_y^2}\right)$$

σ_{yi}^2 is the measure of variability related to the individual values of 'i'

σ_y^2 is   the   measure   of   variability   linked   to $y = \left(\sum_{i=1}^{k} y_i \right)$
K represents the number of individual units, values, or data points that together form the measurement under investigation.

The value $\propto$ for the given sample is 0.82.

The value $\alpha > 0.7$ indicates that the data demonstrates reliability in terms of internal consistency (Taber, 2018), suggesting that the data collected for the study is suitable for further analysis.

Investigation and Findings

To evaluate the first objective of the study, the hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H_0:   *The average scores indicating trainees' perceptions of the reskilling training methodology do not differ significantly among the various organizations included in the study.*

The alternative hypothesis is

H_1:   *The average scores indicating trainees' perceptions of the reskilling training methodology differ significantly among the various organizations included in the study*

The data is initially assessed for normality to determine its characteristics, allowing for the application of suitable statistical methods for analysis. The normality of the data is evaluated using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The test indicates that the data is not normally distributed. Therefore, instead of using the parametric test ANOVA (analysis of variance), non-parametric tests have been utilized.

To evaluate the first objective involving four organizations in the study, the Kruskal-Wallis test has been employed to assess the null hypothesis. The test statistic is defined as follows:

$$H = \frac{12}{N(N+1)} \sum_{i=1}^{k} \frac{R_i^2}{n_i} - 3(N+1)$$

Where,

- **K** = sets of evaluation
- **N** = overall sample size
- **n_i** = size of the sample of the i-th group
- **R_i** = total of the ranks related to the i-th group

Table 1		
TEST RESULTS AMONGST STUDY ORGANIZATIONS		
Value of H	p-value	Decision
140.18	2.2*10-16	Reject

Since the p-value of $2.2*10^{-16} < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected at a 95% confidence level. This indicates that the average score of trainees' perceptions of reskilling methodologies varies significantly among the organizations in the study Table 1.

To determine which organization has the highest average score for trainees' perceptions

of the reskilling methodologies, the average score values for each sample unit related to a specific organization were calculated Table 2.

Table 2 AVERAGE SCORE OF TRAINEES' PERCEPTIONS OF RESKILLING METHODOLOGIES ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION				
Companies /Particulars	Wipro	Tech M	TCS	HCL
Number of sample units	378	108	594	162
Mean score	4.094637	3.447391	3.800505	4.039282

Therefore, based on the average scores of trainees' perceptions of reskilling methodologies, Wipro etches the highest mean score among the trainees.

To tackle the second objective of the study, the research examined whether trainees' perceptions of reskilling training methods in their organization depend on their demographic characteristics. To guide this investigation, the hypothesis is stated as follows:

H_{01}:   *There is no significant relationship between trainees' perceptions of reskilling training methods and their demographic factors.*

The alternative hypothesis is

H_{11}:   *There is a significant relationship between trainees' perceptions of reskilling training methods and their demographic factors.*

To evaluate H_{01}, the Pearson chi-square test statistic is employed. It is defined as

$$T = \sum_{ij}(f_{ij} - f_{io}.f_{oj}/n)^2 / \left(f_{io}.f_{oj}/n\right)], \; i = 1, 2, \ldots, k \text{ and } j = 1, 2, \ldots, l.$$

Where
- f_{ij}: observed frequency of the $(i, j)^{th}$ cell.
- f_{io}: a total of the ith class of A, where A= the set of responses given.
- f_{oj}: a total of the jth class of B, where B= the clusters under the demographic category

Under H_{oi}, $T \sim x^2_{(k-1)(l-1)}$ for large n.

When the observed chi-square statistic exceeds the tabulated value of the chi-square distribution table, we conclude that there's sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. This decision is made at a 5% significance level, considering (k-1)(l-1) degrees of freedom.

Perception of Employees with Gender

Regarding the demographic factor of gender, the participants' responses within an organization are organized into a k*l contingency table, and the χ^2 value is computed.

The null hypothesis H01 is further categorized according to each demographic factor. The null hypothesis related to gender will be:

$H_{01.1}$:   *Employees' perceptions of reskilling training methods in a company are not influenced by their gender.*

And the alternate hypothesis is

$H_{11.1}$: *Employees' perceptions of reskilling training methods in a company are influenced by their gender.*

If the observed value of χ^2 is greater than the tabulated value of χ^2, then we reject $H_{01.1}$ at a 5% significance level with 3 degrees of freedom.

Table 3: χ^2 test values for gender

Table 3 χ^2 TEST VALUES FOR GENDER				
Gender/ Company	Male	Female	Observed χ^2	Tabulated χ^2
Wipro	324	54	204.12	7.815
TCS	378	216		
HCL	54	108		
Tech M	108	0		

Since the observed value of χ^2 is greater than the tabulated value at a 5% level of significance with 3 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that employees' perceptions of reskilling training methods in the company are influenced by their gender.

Perception of Employees with Age

For the demographic factor of age, the participants' responses within the organization are organized into a k*l contingency table, and the chi-squared (χ^2) value is computed. The null hypothesis related to age will be:

$H_{01.2}$: *Employees' perceptions of reskilling training methods in a company is not influenced by their age.*

The alternate hypothesis is

$H_{11.2}$: *Employees' perceptions of reskilling training methods in a company is influenced by their age.*

If the observed χ^2 value exceeds the tabulated χ^2 value, then $H_{01.2}$ is rejected at a 5% significance level with 9 degrees of freedom.

Since the observed value of χ^2 is greater than the tabulated value of χ^2 2 at a 5% level of significance with 9 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that employees' perceptions of reskilling training methods in the company are influenced by their age Table 4.

Table 4 χ^2 TEST VALUES FOR AGE							
Age/Company	20-30	30-40	40-50	& above	20-30	Observed χ^2	Tabulated χ^2

Wipro	108	216	54	0	108	222.6831	16.919
TCS	135	297	108	54	135		
HCL	0	81	81	0	0		
Tech M	54	27	27	0	54		

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The success of any initiative largely depends on how it is viewed and received by its target audience. This section of the study focuses on employees' perspectives regarding the reskilling programs implemented in their organizations. It investigates how employees perceive these efforts to develop new skills, as their opinions greatly influence the effectiveness of these initiatives. The findings reveal significant differences in trainees' perceptions of reskilling training methods across the organizations studied, with Wipro receiving the highest average score. This indicates that Wipro employees have a favorable view of the reskilling methods used in their company compared to others, making an impression that the organization prioritizes employee growth through succession planning while maintaining an edge in the competitive business environment. Consequently, other organizations should assess the gap between planning and actual execution of these programs, highlighting areas for improvement to better meet trainees' expectations. This could involve refining aspects such as purpose, needs assessment, training design, delivery methods, factors influencing training approaches, and outcome analysis.

The study found that employees' perceptions of reskilling methods are affected by the demographic factor of gender. Existing literature indicates that men and women have different learning style preferences, with women showing a greater inclination toward lifelong learning compared to men (Erica, et al. 2007; Öz, 2022). Data reveals that many organizations have low representation of women in senior leadership positions—12.6% in TCS, 33.3% in Wipro, 26% in HCL, and 43% in Tech M, according to their 2020 annual reports. This contrasts with women's commitment to lifelong learning. Therefore, organizations should recognize this gap and seize the opportunity to develop women-focused leadership and training initiatives, promoting a more balanced gender representation in higher organizational tiers. This approach could help address gender disparities and encourage greater participation of women in lifelong learning opportunities.

The data indicates that age influences how trainees perceive their training programs. This effect is often linked to the association between aging and a decline in cognitive and intellectual abilities (Ackerman, et al. 2002). Generally, older individuals are more likely to resist change and prefer the status quo compared to younger individuals (Ebner et al., 2001). Additionally, they are more hesitant to adopt new skills, as noted in research by Kanfer & Ackerman (2005); Warr (2001). It is crucial to address the varied needs of adult learners, despite the challenges involved. Existing literature shows that self-perceptions significantly affect motivations and behaviors related to personal development (Vianen, et al. 2011). Organizations can introduce interventions like behavioral programs, mentoring, and coaching to help reshape limiting beliefs and alter fixed self-perceptions, which can lead to lasting improvements in their development. Managers or supervisors can serve as change agents, encouraging team members to take risks, implement new strategies learned during training, and mentor them towards guided career growth. This approach can enhance employee confidence and improve talent retention. Moreover, when managers show support for training initiatives, it fosters a culture that values continuous learning and self-improvement among trainees.

The rapidly changing global work environment requires organizations to prioritize knowledge acquisition and create effective frameworks to navigate these conditions. In other words, organizations must adopt frameworks that resonate with their mission, values, and goals to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Kanten, et al. 2015). Consequently, it is essential for organizations to customize their frameworks to align with strategic objectives and the prevailing internal and external contexts, as organizational structure significantly affects both individuals and the overall organization. This alignment is particularly important in talent management, as a well-defined framework can enhance recruitment, development, and retention strategies, ultimately fostering a more engaged and skilled workforce.

CONCLUSION & FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The future of talent management will rely more on successful reskilling efforts as organizations aim to stay competitive in a fast-evolving landscape. By examining these aspects, researchers can offer valuable insights that assist organizations in creating and implementing effective talent management strategies, utilizing Artificial Intelligence to not only reskill employees but also improves overall performance. Continued research will be vital for meeting the needs of the future workforce and ensuring sustainable growth. Additionally, further studies could focus on customizing reskilling programs based on demographic factors tailored to specific industry requirements.

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