

Covid-19 effect: PSUs double down on soft skill development for employees

Synopsis

Companies such as National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL) and Bank of Baroda are focusing on their employees' communication, leadership and digital skills, and how to improve customer experience, officials said.



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NEW DELHI: State-owned companies in the country are in for a makeover, with many high-profile PSUs now investing in their employees' **soft skills** due to the exigencies caused by Covid-19.

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focusing on their employees' communication, leadership and **digital skills**, and how to improve customer experience, officials said.

Although soft-skill development is not new at PSUs, experts told ET that increased competition due to Covid-19 is making PSUs accelerate the adoption of such skills.

Scrutiny around non-performing assets (NPAs) and a renewed focus on digital banking due to Covid-19 has also led to many banks adopting technology, and the several skills that come along with it.

NTPC recently introduced several programmes aimed at employees at different levels. For instance, modules have been introduced on communication, presentation skills and organisation behaviour for high-potential middle-level executives.

A special manager training programme was conducted for 100 managers to improve workplace culture and build trust in teams. A handful of business unit heads have also been selected to undergo 10 months of one-to-one coaching.

"Besides building functional and technical and managerial competencies, the L&D (learning and development) programmes are emphasising at increasing the awareness on being tech savvy," an NTPC spokesperson said in response to a question about how Covid-19 had changed talent management programmes.

Prashant Pandey, country manager of Right Management, a talent management subsidiary of **ManpowerGroup**, said Covid-19 has created churn and uncertainty among firms. The company now has 20% more clients than last year, with many of these being PSUs, he said.

While private companies may be hesitant about spending at this point, that's not the case with PSUs who have well-established budgets for this, Pandey said.

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bench of leaders, and started to train 1,000 employees in the middle management and above levels for this.

“Our PSU clients are now more engaged in diagnostic conversations,” Pandey said. “It’s not one-off anymore.”

Another PSU, a petroleum company, recently concluded training on customer service for about 10,000 employees who work in customer-facing roles at **petrol pumps**.

At Bank of Baroda, the existing leadership programme has been redesigned for digital learning, and now includes subjects like ‘the next frontier in fintech’ and ‘data revolution’.

“The pandemic has brought in a situation for which there is no textbook solution to manage the change,” said Prakash Vir Rathi, general manager (human resource management) at Bank of Baroda. This has put more focus on human resources. “The sudden shift is to develop the talent to handle dynamic requirements.”

Rathi said digital banking has now become a core focus area, and for this, employees are getting training in customer service, informational security, risk management and data analytics.