

## Overhauling Leadership Development Programs: A Digital Transformation Journey

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Face-to-face classrooms had been used to deliver Professional Development Education (PDE) - leadership development programs - at IBM for several years. These global programs have been designed for high-performers in the organization, and are part of the mandatory education an employee needs to complete to qualify for progression.

Earlier this year, the Learning and Knowledge (L&K) team embarked on a journey to digitally transform these programs to create a blended version – online / virtual and face-to-face sessions.

Until a few years, only functional / technical training programs were deemed ideal for delivering using a digital medium – eLearning, mobile learning, webinars – virtual delivery of behavioral training programs were rarely considered by organizations.

However, the learning ecosystem around us has undergone a drastic change.

And, several organizations are now considering moving leadership development programs to a more digital format. And, the rationale behind this change could be varied: budget constraints, ease of deployment, enrollment numbers, and so on.

But, the challenges behind moving activity-heavy (case studies, brainstorming, presentations) learning programs to a virtual format are significant. The learning design team has to consider learner engagement levels, learning effectiveness, and learning retention to make the new format successful.

### Overall Solution

This brand-new learning experience – the **Consulting Academy** - leverages cutting edge learning technologies, like social / collaborative learning, gamification, to create a sustainable learning ecosystem for learners.

Blended learning solution and flipped classroom = 6 weeks of learning:

- Weeks 1-3: Pre-work
- Week 4: Face-to-face classroom sessions (2.5 days)
- Weeks 5-6: Post-work

A participant receives a digital badge when he/she successfully completes all the components of the program.

A Digital Experience Framework (DEF), cohorts, discussion threads, post-course learning retention interventions, assessments all form part of the learning journey.

## Deployment

This major shift from a classroom-driven program to an online-heavy program required a fresh look at the deployment strategy.

The result: a new deployment journey, new roles, and activities for both the Geo L&K management and the Global deployment team. For instance, technical support was a part of the new deployment strategy. The teams worked together to create a seamless learning journey for learners.

L&K teams had to learn to adapt to the new site, the new content, work on an exhaustive communication plan, track course completion statuses closely, and handle queries from learners - the new experience was also a culture shift for most learners.

## Pilot - Implementation

**The Band 7 program was piloted in Europe in September. More than 50 practitioners from all over Europe successfully completed the online pre-work and the classroom sessions in Madrid.** Participants used Slack and the course discussion threads effectively to share their experiences; and after the classroom session, went on to complete the post-work successfully.

**Next, the Band 7 program was piloted in India; where some 80 practitioners completed the new learning journey.** The L&K team in India planned three parallel classroom sessions in Bangalore to accommodate the learners. Train-the-trainer sessions were organized to equip the trainers.

And, the result - excellent feedback from the learners:

*"Both microsite + links to special content worked very well for me, especially considering, that you are doing a pilot here. The Slack channel was very helpful too, if you have any questions to ask - definitely keep up with that."*

*"The flipped classroom is a perfect idea. It gives everyone a chance to learn in their own pace, make notes, screen dumps etc. The whole set-up with all the educational material and during the F2F classroom was very professional, well- structured and a really good learning process."*

*"This course has been very useful in enhancing the consulting skills, it has help me to reflect things that I have been doing and better ways of doing it."*

*"The flipped classroom helped a lot to practice on the theory instead of just sitting & listening. This made the course much more interactive and engaging."*

*"Great learning experience, with the combination of e-learning and classroom. The e-learning felt very well designed and valuable."*

*"I really like the interactive components, visuals, videos, and content used in this digital prep course."*

## Challenges

- **Designing the Program: Co-creation spread across several geographies can be a challenge**  
Learning objectives, new modules; Extensive discussion with Learning and Knowledge leaders from across geographies  
Standard vs. Custom Content: limited customization for each region
- **Pre-work completion:** Pre-work completion was a challenge for both the pilots – learners were not simply not accustomed to completing more than 10 hours of online learning for professional development education: this marked a cultural shift for learners.  
Event managers used multiple communication channels to remind learners to increase consumption.  
We have incorporated a lenient approach for the pilots as far as pre-work completion is concerned; however, we are planning to allow only participants who have completed a certain percentage of the pre-work in the classrooms sessions. Well, what is the incentive for learners who invest time and effort to complete the pre-work on time?

## Next steps

- We are leveraging learner feedback extensively to come up with a v2.0 next year. Overall positive feedback from both learners and leaders
- Addition of coaching interventions: We are also working on a coaching network to boost post-course learning.