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LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Growing champions: Investing in learning

Building a talent pipeline requires investment in learning as Aircel's experience with its Academy reveals

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IN BRIEF

Aircel is investing in creating a culture of learning in order to grow a robust pipeline of leaders within the organisation.

The Indian telecom industry is no stranger to volatility and change; it is one of the most dynamic and competitive sectors of the Indian economy. India has been amongst the fastest growing telecom markets worldwide and is the second largest telecom market in the world, in terms of subscribers. The telecom sector in India has evolved from the erstwhile paging technology to the astounding 4G technology in a decade. To maintain market share, the technology continues to evolve at a fast pace and companies scramble to keep abreast of the changes in the industry.

The pace of transformation for Indian telecom companies is unprecedented and unparalleled to any near historical example from the western world, where this transformation spanned 35 to 40 years. The unprecedented pace has put undue strain on talent management practices to keep the

workforce competitive and updated. To adapt to the challenges of the sector, Aircel has found a strategy that has a dual focus: hiring right talent and investing in growing talent from within.

Aircel emphasizes that 'hiring right talent' means a commitment to hire people who not only have the requisite skills and competencies, but can also learn and adapt to the Aircel culture. They expect people to thrive on ownership and team work in an environment where people are not micromanaged. Sandeep Gandhi, Head of HR at Aircel, shares that Aircel's brand values of being simple, creative and trustworthy are clearly translating in the Employee Value Proposition. "Our Campus Recruitment programme that allows us to visit premier institutes, deserves a special mention. Aircel placed twenty incumbents for the most critical and front-end functions like marketing, sales and customer service in the last year; and aligned them with the Acad-



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Schooling leaders

The Academy is divided into various colleges (leadership, professional support services, sales and marketing, service management, technology, content, systems and processes). While the content and systems teams at the Academy aren't full-fledged colleges, they form the backbone of the academy's work. The content team devises innovative ways to disseminate information and help people learn, such as through e-comics and street plays. Supporting the business and managing growth as the organisation grows, through developing leadership capability, is the mandate of the Academy. The members of the Academy are dedicated to making learning a different experience for employees and instilling a learning culture at every level. Apart from focus on functional competency at the ground levels, the Academy also has a development programme for top leadership that is similar to executive coaching.

emy Department for an intensive training of 1 year. Nowadays, organisations do not invest on training these resources; however, we believe that doing so will always reap benefits as it aims to improve the effective and productive contribution of an individual," Sandeep says confidently.

The other arm of Aircel's people strategy is the in-house learning and training centre, the Aircel Academy. According to Sandeep, "If we look at the organisation structure and the recent movements at the senior level, we haven't had many reasons to look outside the organisation for talent. The Academy's robust mechanism of grooming talent through mentoring, coaching and other various programmes has equipped us to mitigate urgent and strategic business needs. The Academy came into play to grow champions within the organisation."

He further added that during the recent organisation restructuring at Aircel, the credence of Aircel Academy was once again established as they could mentor the requisite talent at a pace complementing the business needs, which otherwise could have been very difficult for them, considering market dynamics and their

growth plans. Sandeep commends the programmes conducted by the Academy in partnership with Universities like Harvard and Duke, which have given many seconds-in-command for the organisation, who are ready to take on higher responsibilities. "As far as the cost-benefit analysis is concerned, you can't really assign values to assets like the Academy. The kind of resources that are developed within the organisation, at a pace complementing the business needs along with saving the cost, time and energy of sourcing a talent from outside, especially for senior positions, is tremendous," he states.

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“The Aircel Academy is testament to Aircel's commitment to creating a culture of learning. The whole structure, the concept, the thought process and one could say almost every little brick of this Academy has been designed by Sandip Das, Director Aircel. For him, the Academy is the heart of Aircel,” shares Charan David, Head of the Aircel Academy.

Envisioned as the CHRO, COO and Director's resource pool for leadership and solutions to specific business concerns, the Academy's focus areas are sales, customer experience, marketing, technology and internal development programmes to create a culture of high performing people.

Charan is emphatic. “We work towards ensuring that every employee experiences the academy at least once a year as a participant. Our aim is that everyone in Aircel should aspire to attend the Academy programmes, especially since our focus on management excellence through tie-ups with Harvard, Stanford and Duke Universities has created a learning path for leaders. People should stay in Aircel because of the tremendous learning they receive here.” ■

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