

What will be the long-term perspective of Executive Education For 2021?

Digital transformation, cost reduction and operational efficiency, together with business continuity in the context of the pandemic have become the top priorities of most companies' strategy for 2021. Meanwhile, more than two-thirds of companies (69%) still list digital transformation as their number-one priority for this year.

The results of an annual study conducted by Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO among representatives of major companies with more than 1,000 employees provide clear evidence of this fact. Most of the respondents in the study were HR-directors, L&D or T&D managers. The survey was carried out in late 2020 - early 2021.

The results showed that half of companies (50%) are giving second priority to cost reduction and greater operational efficiency, while just over a third of organisations (34%) list business continuity in the context of the pandemic as their third priority.

Denis Konanchuk, Head of Executive Education Department, predicts that businesses will continue focusing on digital technology for another two to three years.

Digital assets significantly affect the second priority of companies – cost reduction and greater operational efficiency. "The digital aspect of business has become a strategic factor for competitive advantage. It gives traditional products added value and helps shape new business models," Executive Director of SKOLKOVO Centre of Digital Transformation Nikolai Verkhovsky comments.

"Business continuity in the context of the pandemic is impossible without a new approach to interaction," Denis Konanchuk emphasises.

"The focus of corporate business training has shifted from empowering individual employees to creating flexible cross-functional teams," he notes.

A survey conducted by Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO revealed that some companies have already shifted the training paradigm.

"The bank's operational strategy rests on the development of our agile teams, which is driving digital transformation. Managers may or may not be part of the teams depending on their participation or interest in a particular process," Managing Director for Human Resources at Raiffeisenbank Vladimir Khimanych remarks.

The main tasks that companies are setting for their employees for the coming years are related to the prospective transition to hybrid work formats, as the study notes. The survey participants reveal the first part (63%) as being ensuring effectiveness in remote work mode, and the second (61%) – employee training and development for new challenges. In light of this, for 2021, 56% of medium-sized and 76% of major companies plan to continue implementing their executive education programmes. Priority is given to strengthening competencies in the management of digital transformation, change, and cross-functional interaction.

"The most important question is how to combine control of employees, freedom and online operations," Professor of Business Practice and Academic Director of HR Business Partner (HR BP) programme at Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO Elena Vitchak explains. "Another challenge is how to break out of the functional basket thinking paradigm. We are talking about a qualitatively different management of the employee experience, attracting people to solve tasks based on a particular profile from large-scale marketplaces for competencies and skills. It will be a more dynamic format."

The results of the study also support Elena Vitchak's vision. The creation of high-performance teams is the most popular of the 43 topics among the requests for the training of top and middle-level managers of the company. 62% of the survey participants chose it.

Meanwhile, an increasingly important study area is new growth points for companies. These are corporate entrepreneurship, company sustainability, and mega-project management. They open up a long-term perspective, as Denis Konanchuk believes.

In addition, experience from the past few years has shown clearly that companies are able to develop faster once they incorporate diversified teams, which may range from representatives of different cultures to carriers of different opinions and approaches. This format allows approaching situations from different perspectives and finding out-of-the-box solutions, as Managing Director for Educational Programmes and Deputy Vice-Rector for Academic and Educational Affairs of Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO Marina Karban concludes. This functions as a system of checks and balances, saving the decision-maker from making one-sided and overly aggressive decisions. Similarly, numerous studies have shown that the presence of women on the boards of companies gives a significant boost to development and has a positive impact on the company's overall performance, as she explains.