

**Leading the Hi Po Brigade: The SAP Way**  
**Leveraging Employee Engagement through Learning and Development for**  
**Competitive Advantage with special focus on Generation Y**

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**Abstract**

The corporate world could not stay aloof from the wave of globalization, demographic changes and technological advancements. One of the prominent & most talked about drivers of this paradigm shift is the influx of the Generation Y in the workforce. India's boasts of the world's youngest population across the world. Managing, engaging & retaining Generation Y by way of Talent Management practices has become the order of the day & is in fact turning out to be the great challenge for corporate professionals

The following conceptual paper tries to present in the best possible manner distinctive traits of Generation Y & the way it can be catered to by way of customized learning & development practices, supplemented by relevant company mentions.

**Keywords:** Talent Management, Employee engagement, Gen Y, learning & development

*"We take pride in our human resource policies, employer branding programs and innovation initiatives all leading to creating products that benefit our customers. We believe that by taking care of the people, the processes and policies will take care of themselves"*- Anirban Dey Managing Director, SAP Labs India.

**Introduction**

For decades, business conglomerates identified & groomed high potential talent at different levels placed them at specially chosen & challenging roles within the organization and then observed the outcomes, with the aim to improve shareholder returns and the consequent business acceleration.

SAP labs India a recognized leader in providing collaborative business solutions to all types of industries was one such organization, that launched a high potential development program (Hi Po) for identifying and helping high potential employees to excel beyond their productive capacities.

The organization had always believed in the power of talent and was firm on the fundamental that talent was inimitable and so was it inevitable to leakage .Consequently shareholder returns & business acceleration should be followed with leadership development. This was clearly articulated by its people mission, which stated, "SAP people mission is to make our employees best by nurturing their skills and potential to ensure SAP's continued success as an amazing growth company". The organization could clearly sense that current business environment was markedly volatile with the influx of Gen Y providing a major thrust of challenge to the organization.

The workforce majorly Gen Y responded well to fast results and positive environment but simultaneously possessed very little attention span. They were also marked with their constant urge of engagement.

Leading & developing them was a challenge for the HR leaders of SAP. This was addressed by one of the development initiatives called Hi Po.

High Potential (Hi Po) program at SAP India Labs was aimed at growing the talent base and bringing about skill improvement. What made the initiative unique was that it not only catered to employees who performed well but also to those who had the right attitude and potential. It helped the company boost the morale of its employees. The Hi Po also led to global recognition when SAP India Labs also won the “Global HR Excellence Awards for innovative HR practices in the global services industry.

### **The Hi Po program**

The development program at SAP was based on two guiding principles: the importance of stretch assignments within the company and the importance of personal involvement of the boss.

Keeping these in lines, the development programs at SAP Labs India were designed in a manner that Hi Po's could get hands on experience in the area they were being trained in. The programs were also coupled with activities that allowed them to set goals for themselves, work as a team and implementing their skills towards achieving their goals. The development program was executed in a phased manner and included

### **EGDE:**

A leadership development program aimed to reflect, inculcate practices and behaviors that enhanced high performance whether in teams or otherwise using SAILING, a platform customized for learning. The focus areas of these initiatives were leadership and excellence. SAILING took the employees out of their comfort zones and placed them in an altogether new environment. SAILING required agility, skill, teamwork, focus. Combination of these traits translated into real life business applications that allowed the employees to excel.

SAILING was a medium through which Hi Po's were propelled to move forward by transcending their comfort zones to work around unforeseen circumstances.

The leadership development programs were followed by programs on communication skills, executed through customized theater workshops which aimed to prepare the Hi Pos with the non verbal skills needed in order to make an impact during the communication opportunities. The workshops drew its inspiration from range of theater activities. These theater workshops provided an opportunity to Hi Po's to re connect with their bodies and become aware of using their body movement in a consistent & impactful manner. It also provided them an understanding on establishing similarity between what they said and how it was being said.

The workshop laid emphasis on experience rather than theory. It provided a platform for the Hi Po's to get in touch with their own spontaneous energy and a way out to utilize their energy to convey their goals and passion effectively.

The final phase of the development program was the goal-setting program. The execution team utilized Neuro Linguistic Programming & its allied application to unleash the power of unconscious mind. The workshop was driven by the medium of games, which provided the candidates to align their life goals.

### **The Flipside of the Development**

Developing high potential talent has become a central priority for any organization in the current business environment. Largely organizations and their HR leaders are engaged in developing bench of competent leaders by their HR interventions. All said and done this had a flipside to it as well. Identification and development of high potentials was motivating for selected candidates, it lead to potential disengagement for the audience left out. This issue was addressed by SAL India labs in an innovative and creative manner. The HR leaders at SAP India Labs had cited that some of the development initiatives were

decided by the employees themselves enabling them to introspect and devise these development plans.

### **The Take Ways**

At SAP India Labs, these development programs encouraged the employees to provide a fresh perspective to ideas, inculcate new thinking and innovative practices in their day-to-day life. Ankush Mane, a software engineer at SAP India labs shared his experience as, "I got the opportunity to work on Hi Po program called Project 23. The core take way from this program was to understand how the issues are looked from the higher management perspective. I got the chance to work with managers managing managers and got the opportunity to learn from several people who participated in it. Overall, the SAP lab does a lot to mentor the Hi Po's in the organization. It recognizes its employees and gives a feeling that the company is willing to invest in them to build their careers."

Globally, organizations have understood the pragmatism of talent development and management. Consequently, organizations are setting aside a portion of their budget for developing their talent internally. This has brought business acceleration and the much-needed competitive advantage.

What makes the developmental program as SAP stand out are that each programs were designed in a manner that Hi Po's could get a hands on experience in the area they were being trained coupled with activities that allowed them to set goal for themselves.

### **The Way Ahead:**

While the need for highly talented leaders will always continue, organizations that focus on developing their Gen Y workforce to take up important roles will always have an advantage. SAP had always aimed at nurturing talent at all levels. However, one of the major differentiators of these programs or workshops was that they were specifically targeted towards the high potential employees.

The key challenge here for the organization would be identification, segregation of talent maintaining a high benchmark across different sized teams, different lines of business and different geographies.

Bhuvaneshwar Naik Vice President HR SAP Labs India had rightly quoted, "Given the vast talent pool in the organization this is the major challenge in launching the program".

### **Questions:**

1. Critically analyze the importance of Hi Po program for engaging Gen Y
2. Do you think programs such Hi Po development leads to corporate branding? Justify your answer