

*Effectiveness of Bite-Sized Learning for Organisations:
The Certis Continuing Professional Development Case Study*

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Abstract

Bite-sized learning has been touted to be the next best thing for Learning & Development professionals in large organisations. With access to digital devices and digital apps, and with adult learners becoming more savvy and less interested in long durations of courses or learning programs due to falling attention spans (Clark, et. al.), bite-sized lunch and learn programs have taken on a new focus in corporate organisations. However, there have been very little research and effectiveness testing done in organisations to measure the learning effectiveness and application through such programs. This article provides such a learning effectiveness testing for a Continual Professional Development (CPD) program, jointly organised by Certis Corporate University and Institute of Adult Learning Singapore, conducted over three lunch time sessions for close to thirty personal assistants and executive assistants from Singapore, Hong Kong and Australia in a global security technology company. Pre and post testing was conducted and results analysed along with qualitative and quantitative insights from the learners and their supervisors to determine the effectiveness and application of learning at work. Results from the study show positive data reflected, with over 40% moving from agree to strongly agree in achieving learning outcomes and over 80% qualitative responses acknowledging direct application and improvement at work. The findings from this study will be useful for corporate companies and organisations that want to design better bite-sized programs that are engaging and effective in helping their people learn at work and improve their work performance, without committing long duration of hours into training.

Keywords: Bite-Sized Learning, Lunch and Learn, Learning and Development, Adult Learning

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Introduction

Bite-sized learning (Koh, et. al. 2018) has been touted to be the next best thing for Learning & Development professionals in large organisations. With access to digital devices and digital apps, and with adult learners becoming more savvy and less interested in long durations of courses or learning programs due to falling attention spans (Clark, et. al., 2005), lunch and learn programs have taken on a new focus in corporate organisations. However, there have been very little research and effectiveness testing done in organisations to measure the learning effectiveness and application through such programs.

Personal Assistants and Executive Assistants from Singapore, Hong Kong and Australia participated in the Continual Professional Development organised by Certis Group and the Institute of Adult Learning, Singapore. The program termed, Winning Conversations, saw participants learn from a guest speaker on achieving greater success at work by supporting and making bosses job easier. The learning outcomes were delivered through three lunch time sessions of one hour each, and conducted virtually over Zoom. The focuses for each session were; session 1, Speaking to Influence, session 2, Communicating Assertively, and session 3, Saying NO. Pre and post testing was conducted on the sessional learning outcomes, and results analysed along with qualitative and quantitative insights from the learners and their supervisors to determine the effectiveness and application of learning at work.

Prior to organising the CPD and deciding on the learning content, a learning needs analysis was conducted through two virtual focus group discussions. The identified learners were asked questions, through an online poll, about their daily tasks, daily work requirements and also challenges faced, as well as desired learning needs. Majority of the responses pointed towards communication skills as a main challenge faced at work. This can be seen from the consolidated word cloud in figure 1.

Figure 1: Word cloud of challenges faced and learning needs of identified learners at work



With the learning needs analysis data, the trainer was able to co-create with the organisation leadership a more purposeful and relevant training program.

Real case studies

Research Study

This experiment aims to assess the effectiveness of the CPD programme. It aims to improve workplace performance and team learning by improving team access to bite-sized and relevant knowledge that can be immediately applied at work.

The research methodology involved two pre-design focus group discussions to understand learning needs of the identified learners, this was followed by the conduct of the pre-survey

to understand prior skill, knowledge and competency levels, after which the CPD is conducted and a post-survey conducted.

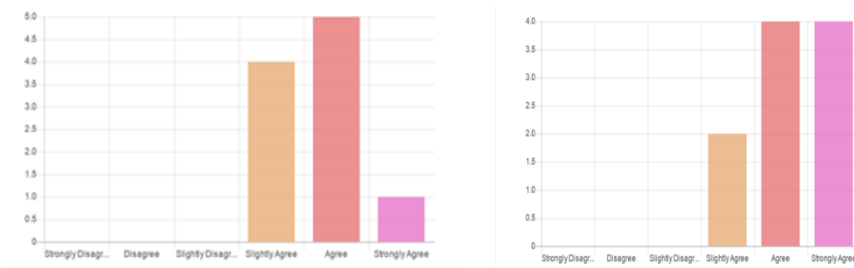
The pre and post survey questions were a self-report questionnaire specifically in four areas of communication skills; Influencing others, Psychological safety, ‘Saying no’, and Perspective sharing, and aimed to capture data on Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom, et. al., 1956) and Level 1 and 2 Kirkpatrick’s training evaluation measures (Kirkpatrick, 1994).

Data Analysis

This section highlights pre and post survey results on awareness and application of communication related skills at work. All sections show a large number of learners reflecting a shift from slightly agree to strongly agree as a result of the CPD learning and content.

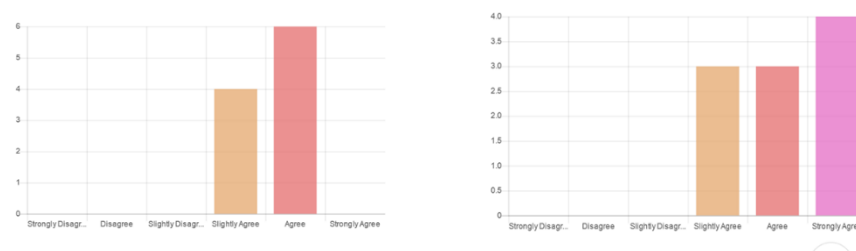
1. Influencing Others – saw a 30% increase in strong agreement to be able to apply this pre and post the CPD.

Figure 2: I can influence others through communication



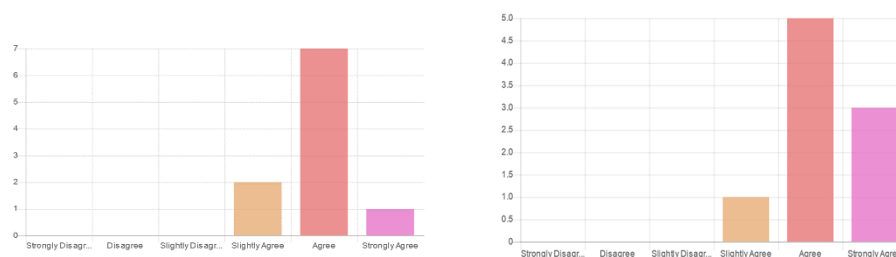
2. Psychological Safety and Voice – saw a 40% increase in strong agreement that they are better able to share what is on their mind.

Figure 3: I say what’s on my mind in a manner others are willing to consider my views



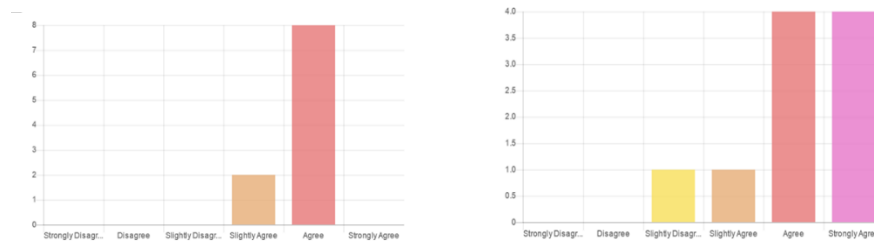
3. Saying No – more than 40% increase in strong agreement to being able to know when and how to say no.

Figure 4: I know when it is valid to say no to others



4. Perspective Sharing – and a 23% increase in strongly agree responses to encouraging others to share their perspectives.

Figure 5: I encourage others to share their perspectives



Discussion

From the data analysed, there is observable impact from the CPD programme on individual's confidence of the various communication frameworks, awareness of scenario-based applications and finally application at work to improve performance.

Overall pre and post survey results show a 40% increase in self-reported strong agreement in confidence in using the frameworks learnt through the CPD, applying them in the correct situation or better situational awareness and finally acknowledged application at work and with their supervisor.

Figure 6: Overall pre and post results



The learning aligns with the Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, et. al., 1956) on cognitive levels of learning, from Level 1: Remembering, Level 2: Understanding, Level 3: Applying, Level 4: Analysing. Levels 5 and 6 Evaluating and Creating are not within the scope of the study.

From the qualitative feedback, we see evidence from learners in Levels 1 to 4. With levels 1 to 3 demonstrated from learners acknowledging post of the CPD, on learning new frameworks;

R1 *"Very insightful as I learnt new ways to be more firm which will be helpful in my job."*

R2 *"I have learnt better ways to assist my supervisors and to coordinate with my peers through the frameworks."*

And also for Level 4: Application at work;

R1 *"Practical techniques that we can use in our course of work."*

R2 *"It's enlightening to come together to learn different approaches of communication and how we can apply it at our workplace."*

Conclusion

From this program study, quantitative and qualitative research and implementation, results show positive data reflected, with over 40% moving from 'slightly/agree' to 'strongly agree' in achieving learning outcomes and over 80% qualitative responses acknowledging direct application and improvement at work. There is also observable impact from the Bloom's taxonomy perspective, from understanding, to applying learning at work.

In conclusion, the CPD programme has achieved its intended objectives and the study shows positive results in learning new skills, frameworks and knowledge as well as positive application at work and even enhanced confidence in work tasks and performance after the implementation of this programme. This reinforces the andragogy of using bite-sized learning approaches for busy professionals and adult learners, who require just-in-time learning so they can immediately apply at work. This reinforced the interest and effectiveness of keeping these professional learners engaged in small groups and over shorter durations as compared to one to two day workshops that will take the employee entirely away from work.

The findings from this study will be useful for corporate companies and organisations that want to design better bite-sized programs that are engaging and effective in helping their people learn at work and improve their work performance, without committing long duration of hours into training.

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