

## India Inc takes to theatre to train staff

LUBNA KABLY, TNN | Dec 27, 2014, 03.45AM IST

MUMBAI: "I didn't know getting a promotion would entail getting booed off-stage," quips Mamta Das (name changed). Das, like many other newly-promoted managers in her company, was nervous about conducting, for the first time, a performance appraisal of her team members. During a theatre-based training workshop, while acting out a simulated scenario, she came across as dictatorial and was booed at. Weeks later, this training paid off and helped her conduct the appraisals firmly but with sensitivity.

Theatre-based training is spreading in popularity because of its various advantages. "Trainees can emulate more easily as opposed to their reading a training manual. Companies that have opted for such trainings have seen the best results in influencing behavioural patterns - such as managing conflict or gender sensitisation," says Rahul Kapur, ED at Grant Thornton (India).

Vodafone India has been increasingly using theatre as a training medium for attaining varied objectives and catering to different participant groups. It is used to on-board management trainees, to address the needs of transitioning teams who need to break down barriers and work closely together, to impart the corporate cultural values or even for inculcating behavioural changes.

"This 'live' training format sends a clearer message, participants are actively engaged and the energy levels of the trainees are always high," affirms Ashok Ramchandran, HR director, Vodafone India.

At Accenture India, over the past two years, nearly 700 employees have enthusiastically participated in theatre-based trainings. It has leveraged upon this medium of training for various human resource related processes - specifically performance management and gender sensitisation.

"Through theatre we have trained our supervisors on the importance of communicating performance rating decisions effectively. The process involved gathering the various likely scenarios through focused group discussions. Then we narrowed down on the key messages that we wished to share with our supervisors. Subsequently, professional actors enacted real work life scenarios, at the theatre-based training programs," explains Manoj Biswas, MD-HR at Accenture India.

Interactive-theatre training sessions, where the professional actors stop mid-way and ask the trainees how they would react to a particular situation and then based on the responses enact it, has met with tremendous response, adds Biswas.

ITC also has a similar experience to share. It deploys theatre-based training both for its managerial and factory employees. "For managers, the objective is to enable enhancement of managerial and leadership capabilities, specifically in the area of counselling. For factory workers, this tool is effective both for introducing and managing change and in building a sense of greater ownership," says Saru Narula, manager, L&D at ITC.

The scope of theatre based training has also increased over the past few years. Ranji David, co-founder of Bangalore based, Yours Truly Theatre (YTT) says: "Fifteen odd years ago, theatre-based trainings were primarily looked upon as ice-breaker trainings. Today it has evolved into a tool for facilitating behavioural or cultural changes in a company." His training workshops have facilitated companies to meet diverse needs, such as improve the rewards and recognition culture, transition smoothly during change, or create greater collaboration or assertiveness.

SLK Software, is one of the companies that had benefited from such a training session that was conducted over a two day period by YTT. "The program 'Theatre for Leaders', involved participation from the leadership team, with collaboration, transformation and innovation being the message imparted. Many of the leaders who participated have requested for similar theatre-based training for their individual teams," says Manu Srinivasan, VP-HR at SLK Software.

"Topics of diversity and inclusion are popular among companies, however our theatre based trainings have covered topics such as corporate values, performance management, sales force effectiveness, coaching, or building team dynamics," says Mohan Madgulkar, India head of Steps Drama, a UK headquartered training company.

Steps Drama conducted a 'handling difficult conversations' programme for 250 sales staff of Medtronic, a large health care company. Steps' actors (who were the training facilitators) enacted various likely scenarios, the sales team was required to role play their handling of difficult conversations. At the end of the session, feedback was given to each participant to enable him to improve his ability to deal with 'difficult conversations' and challenging scenarios.

"ITC also deploys socio-drama in induction and retiral programmes that address the group as a whole. This enables recognition of shared experiences and feelings among group members, removes any sense of isolation and raises self-esteem," adds Narula.