

Becoming self-sufficient to address development needs through the Global Knowledge Buddy Program

Best Achievement in Cultural Transformation & Sustainability to deliver a high performing Enterprise Excellence culture

Synopsis

The Global Knowledge Buddy (GKB) Program has played a key role in achieving the organization's strategic objective of enabling the right skilled workforce ready to meet future and changing demands. The network of Global Knowledge Buddies (GKBs) participating in the GKB Program provide support in knowledge sharing and skills development across the globe, enabling IBMers to share expertise and experience on topics deemed critical by the organization and specific locations.

A crucial aspect of the program is that GKBs are performing their program related tasks on a voluntary basis on top of their primary job role. GKBs can apply for a GKB Achiever badge, that is a validated indicator of their accomplishment, skills, knowledge and dedication in leading high-quality internal training courses at IBM.

In order to enable locations to become self-sufficient in addressing their skill development needs we have piloted an agile-aligned approach structured around GKBs. To satisfy locations' learning needs in a timely manner and to the best effect, the GKB Program aims to build a local team of trainers – Subject Matter Experts (SME) who are the best fit to conduct learning considering the local cultural and language requirements. By engaging Subject Matter Experts who have hands on experience with a given topic, the learning sessions have a focus on real business challenges and employee needs.

So far during this year GKBs have delivered 38 classes for over 700 participants covering overall over 10k student hours and generated approximately \$55 k USD savings on trainer travel alone.

The strategic objectives and scope of the Operational Excellence project

The strategy is to create a pool of GKBs at strategic locations who can fulfill training demand at their own site, thus enabling locations to become self-sufficient in addressing skills development needs. A crucial part is to identify local SMEs, who are not only experts in a given field but are also open to learn the role of a trainer and can later-on apply training techniques successfully. Considering local skills needs, locations run a discovery session with the Learning & Development (L&D) team to identify the topics in scope for the GKB expansion event. Once topics are defined, locations perform a pre-screening of potential participants based on the skills required to deliver the classes in need. The goal is to select 10-15 GKBs during the process who then participate in a

1-2 weeks long workshop. To help future GKBs on their upskilling journey, GKB expansion workshops are designed and delivered by experienced trainers. Workshops are planned methodically to support GKBs in acquiring training skills and techniques as well as gain confidence in the training environment. The train the trainer (TTT) sessions include multiple opportunities to practice and are always followed by a pilot class delivered by GKBs in front of a live audience. Attendees are limited in the workshop; it allows quality time for practice during the workshop and later when training opportunities arise. To share experience and new ideas, GKBs have a forum via social media tools. Quarterly showcase and retrospective calls allow an opportunity to review training results (Net Promoter Score), reflect on what went well, what could be improved and agree on action items. Using agile ceremonies help GKBs to improve and create a culture of constructive feedback and continuous improvement. The GKB program is key in helping sites increase employee engagement, enable self-sufficiency and support the Agile Transformation at IBM.

Implementation process and timeline

Implementation started by leading discovery sessions with stakeholders, including senior management team and executives, on learning development needs globally, helping the Project Team (PT) understand the topics and locations in scope, and creating the funnel of work. PT provided skills attainment levels by topic to help sites find the ideal candidates. Once potential GKBs have been identified, PT trainers traveled to the location and ran the GKB expansion event.

A lot of brainstorming was required to plan the expansions' schedule that varied for each location depending on the topics in need and the candidates' availability. The events followed the same pattern though: all GKBs started with a Generic Train the Trainer (TTT) workshop on training techniques, then based on their profile, attended topic-specific TTT(s) to get familiar with the material and practice for delivery. A key component of all expansions was to provide a training opportunity right after the topic- specific TTT(s) so that GKBs can practice delivery, observed by experienced trainers.

Survey feedback (including Net Promoter Score (NPS) was submitted by students and the data analyzed for each session. To reduce manual workload related to feedback analysis, Robotic Process Automation (RPA) was leveraged that helped reduce daily tasks from 1 hour to 5 minutes. Lead trainers running the GKB expansion ensured that quality time was spent on discussing feedback results and provided detailed recommendation on potential areas for improvement. Collaboration, prioritization, active listening and clear expectations were key elements of successful project implementation. Using agile tools and techniques created transparency for stakeholders and allowed the PT to iterate the process as necessary.

Once a GKB expansion was completed in a location, a local site representative was nominated as focal point to collect training needs and organize classes. The PT continues to provide support in class feedback management (RPA) and ensures that quarterly calls are utilized for continuous improvement.

Impact and business results

In 10 months, 72 GKBs have been upskilled to deliver classes in prioritized locations across all geographies (China, Japan, Philippines in Asia Pacific, Hungary, Slovakia in Europe, Brazil, United States in the Americas). Project Team has spent altogether 57 days to upskill GKBs who have delivered classes equal to 67 training days within this short timeframe. GKB expansion has a huge impact on global Learning and Enablement team's serviceability, the ratio between training demand and training delivery has improved from 40% to 70%. Locations no longer need to wait for a trainer from the global team to travel there and run a learning session, they have their trainers on site who can fulfill the need.

GKBs have delivered 38 classes (715 participants, 10,360 student hours) so far and generated approximately \$55 k USD savings on trainer travel alone.

The value generated through the GKB expansions can be expressed not only by the hard benefits (savings in dollars), but also the soft benefits; higher skills attainment levels on strategic topics, increased employee engagement, spreading a culture of self-sufficiency and continuous improvement.

Strategic topics in scope for the GKB expansion events were organizational transformation management, teaming, leadership skills, client facing skills and project management.

An objective way of measuring the impact of classes is to analyze feedback provided by training participants. Feedback results have been outstanding (YTD Net Promoter Score = 78); 82% of class participants would recommend the classes delivered by GKBs to their colleagues. 96% of the students agree that the course met the defined objectives and 95% indicate that they will be able to apply the learning in their job role.

Thanks to the classes delivered by GKBs upskilled through the program, one quarter of the organization's employees have built stronger client facing skills (Client focus, Conflict management, Goal settings, Active listening, Client engagement, Coaching, Stakeholder Management, Agile, IBM strategy) resulting in better client relationship and client satisfaction. In terms of leadership skills (Goal Management, Setting expectation, Leadership, Feedback, Mentoring, Coaching, Agile, Change management, Networking, Motivating others, Teaming and Collaboration, Personal influence, Delegation), half of the employees within the business unit in scope for the program have grown their skills from no skill or entry level to foundational which helped in achieving better employee engagement result due to more skilled leaders. Every fifth employee had a chance to participate in a class focusing on developing teaming and collaboration skills crucial to build high performing teams. Project management was another focus topic for the GKB expansion events. 1 employee out of 10 attended a class to learn more about agile and waterfall project management as well as developed risk and stakeholder management skills. Classes around client focus and project management had direct impact on how operational teams interact and communicate with customers. 20% of the coworkers within our organization improved their skills on transformational leadership (Personal Influence, Teaming, Leadership,

Transformational Leadership) and have understood what it takes to be a leader in times of transformation.

GKB Program has beneficial impact on employee engagement on two levels. It allows SMEs to share expertise and experience, grow training skills and provides them an opportunity to be exposed to a wider audience and progress their career. On the other hand, attendees of classes delivered by GKBs benefit of the training courses run on their locations enabling them to grow specific skills, if needed in the local language and tailored to their business needs. The program has become key to close employees' skills gaps who then can achieve better business results by being more productive and adopting new ways of working. GKB Program is also crucial to manage and retain talent.

The program helped spread a new culture in IBM, the culture of self-sufficiency. Instead of relying on others, IBMers thrive to become self-sufficient not only on the field of Learning and Development but on other areas of work as well. By leveraging the GKB program, local teams referenced above are prepared to be more self-sufficient in meeting their education needs.

Continuous improvement is a pillar of the GKB Program, feedback is provided to GKBs after class delivery and retrospective calls are scheduled to discuss the outcomes and agree on actions on how to improve. Ongoing monitoring of feedback results helps Learning and Development team to track which locations and GKBs need further support. Besides social media channels, quarterly showcase and retrospective calls provide additional forum for engagement and collaboration. These practices have an impact beyond learning and has become part of the organizational mindset.