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The role of digital learning platforms in addressing complex problems

What is the first thing that pops into your mind when you read the words 'learning platform', 'digital learning', 'Ed-tech'? Do you think about its accessibility, features, content and mode of delivery? Or do you think about who it is being designed for, what is the purpose, content delivery method? Will it be self-paced and/or free of cost?

We recently piloted an ed-tech platform with youth trained and are undergoing training at our training centres. The platform is designed as a potential solution to provide content to help youth upskill themselves, and improve accessibility to employment opportunities through its various functions and features. This platform was recently piloted with almost 400 youth from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan to understand its efficiency and usability. Any youth who is on the platform fills out basic details about themselves, their education, current activity status, etc. In addition to this, they are also encouraged to fill out the 'Skill Profile' section which captures information on the skill training they have completed/are pursuing, the platform then suggests suitable courses to the youth. The rationale behind doing so is to get access to opportunities to upskill themselves in their chosen field. This further enables them to get access to better job opportunities in the future. Based on the information that youth input in their profile, the platform also prepares a resume/CV for them and gives them tips on how to prepare for an interview. Youth can also view job openings in their industry/fields and apply if it aligns with what they are looking for. The platform also gives them the opportunity to contact the employer in case of any questions during the application process. In that sense, the app does bridge a lot of gaps for youth by making information on upskilling, job opportunities, and similar networks more easily accessible.

Takeaways and learnings from this pilot based on our experience as an implementation partner:

- **Assessing the need for the platform** - Co-creating and discussing the platform and its features along with different stakeholders would add value to the target audience and mitigate potential challenges during the implementation stage.
- **Ease of accessibility** - The platform required youth to have an email ID in order to login to the platform. While a majority of the youth did, they had to enter it each time they had to login to the platform, which was one of the inhibitors. Furthermore, there is a high tendency that youth may not be using their email IDs with a lot of ease. Ensuring as minimum entry barriers as possible makes it easy to access the platform and also its continued usage.
- **Establishing a clear USP** - While the learning platform could have several features, highlighting one or two clear features and how they would add value to the user becomes very important for the user also to understand how and why they need to use the platform.
- **Understanding the end user** - In our case, youth were residing at the centre when their training was on-going. Therefore, youth would normally get to access the platform only in the evenings after their training for the day. At times, youth would perhaps not have the bandwidth to engage with a new platform that requires their understanding and time to get accustomed to. This was also one of the potential deterrents that came in the way of youth using the platform. Another limitation was the language of the content that was posted on the platform. A majority of the youth are comfortable with and fluent in vernacular languages however, the platform was designed in English and hence, the youth found it difficult to navigate and consume the content on the platform.

While the pandemic has definitely led to the development of the digital learning landscape, we think it becomes important to reflect on how apps and learning platforms are being designed for and if there is a genuine need for the same among the community. Apart from thinking about the accessibility of the platform/application, reflecting on how much we are asking from the end user with respect to the time and effort spent on the app is another important aspect. While I do believe that the digital revolution is here to stay, analysing how best technology can be leveraged as a potential catalyst to solve problems is something that needs to be thought about more. Considering that problems like unemployment, access to and the quality

of education, poverty, etc., are all complex problems - how and where does technology fit into the picture and its role is something that this pilot exercise has left me pondering!

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