

Wingspan

Taking Digital Learning to New Heights

How an internal learning platform became a market success.

Launched in April 2018, the learning experience platform (LXP)

Wingspan was the brainchild of Infosys Co-Founder and Chairman Nandan Nilekani. He had observed that several critical trends were reshaping the world economy. For instance, digital natives were increasingly expecting the learning environment at their workplace to be available 24/7. The late 2000s were also a time when Infosys' corporate clients had just started on their digital transformation journey. Hence, capturing talent and market share was a strategic priority for the company.

In contrast, the learning delivery landscape at Infosys then was decentralised and fragmented, with a plethora of applications developed for myriad groups of

users. Human resources also had to contend with giving recognition to the diverse range of certification that Infosys staff called themselves—had acquired through third-party massive open online courses (MOOCs) and learning providers, such as Udacity and Coursera.

The ultimate push to build a new digital learning platform thus came from Chairman Nilekani, who believed Infosys already had the talent, experience, and capability to do so. The task then fell on Thirumala Arohi, Senior Vice President and Head of Education, Training, and Assessment (ETA).¹

NOT JUST A NEW LXP

Infosys understood that the profound change the information technology (IT) giant needed was not simply a technological upgrade, with cutting-edge bells and whistles attached to the new LXP. There were several critical questions that Arohi and his team had to grapple

with: What would truly differentiate the company from its rivals? How should they proceed to build the next-generation learning platform?

Essentially, Infosys had to reimagine its talent strategy and transform how its staff work. The company needed to become so attractive that it would be an employer of choice, especially for digital natives. Jobs should be designed to align with new capabilities requiring technical and solution expertise in digital areas. Accordingly, the rejuvenated learning ecosystem should be equipped to train upwardly mobile Infosys. However, there was also another objective behind the refresh: By transforming the organisation and realising the digital potential of Infosys, Infosys could demonstrate to its clients that it could walk its digital transformation talk. It could also convince them that it knew exactly how to prepare others to ride the digital wave.

Part of the new talent development strategy was to introduce an employee upskilling plan which would profile employees' skills, and then recommend target skills that Infoscions could attain via the structured learning paths and competency development enabled by the platform. For example, by completing these new learning paths, Java programmers at Infoscions could expand their career profile to include roles such as cloud software developer or IT operations specialist within a month. Similarly, a consultant could prepare to apply for a data scientist position within five weeks by following a curated learning plan that combined theoretical modules with hands-on, project-based learning. These pathways were designed collaboratively by the Infoscions Learning and Development (L&D) team, along with human resources and organisational development counterparts, to align with market demands and client goals.

Arohi's team also divided employee skills requirements into three categories—core, new, and emerging skills—according to the time horizon under which Infoscions could acquire those skills during their tenure. The team further developed specific training programmes and learning paths, taking into consideration the fact that individuals would approach their training not only based on varying skill levels, but also according to different job categories.² They also planned to incorporate the concept of 'cohort', which emphasised that learning

was to be a social activity and not a solitary endeavour. Finally, learning became purposive and performance-driven, where managers played a key role by discussing with their staff the best potential learning paths and the expected outcomes.

DEVELOPING WINGSPAN

The only friction between employees and their learning should be their motivation.

– Infoscions Chairman and Co-Founder, Nandan Nilekani³

In October 2017, the L&D team under Arohi kicked off the Wingspan project. Four design tenets guided the team's decisions. First, the new LXP had to facilitate learning anytime, anywhere, and on any device. Second, learning had to offer "real life, first-in-class curated content". The LXP also had to result in a psychologically safe environment where learners could gain mastery and develop confidence to apply their new skills.⁴ Third, learning on the LXP was supposed to be engaging and fun. By introducing games and social learning mechanisms into the LXP, learners could feel engaged and connected, even when they were learning by themselves. This was where the design for the new LXP took inspiration from gaming platforms where gamers could connect with one another across different geographies; it was just that in Infoscions' context, the idea was not only to have fun, but also to learn new things. Finally, learning must create an impact. Acquiring new skills and knowledge on the new platform

therefore needed to be tightly integrated with Infoscions' human resources and IT systems, enabling the assessment of Infoscions' progress in their personal and professional journeys.

Arohi and his team wanted to design a platform that would be intuitive and easy to use for everyone. It needed to feel as seamless and familiar as popular digital platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, YouTube, and Spotify.⁵ To achieve this goal, they initiated focus group discussions to listen closely to the needs of Infoscions. These groups even included a few of Infoscions' own clients. What emerged from these discussions was the expectation that the new LXP should be able to promote "learning anytime, anywhere, and [on] any device". Learners also wanted to be able to share their personal learning paths with others, akin to how Spotify users could share their playlists with the outside world. As Arohi pointed out, "Why shouldn't learners enjoy the same flexibility to share their personal learning paths?"⁶

Learners could find a variety of searchable content on Wingspan. The platform could also recommend continuous learning opportunities and ways to access resources at the users' disposal. Other offerings included bridge programmes, which were structured solutions that enabled employees to shift their careers within an organisation, thus providing new opportunities that would otherwise require higher education.⁷

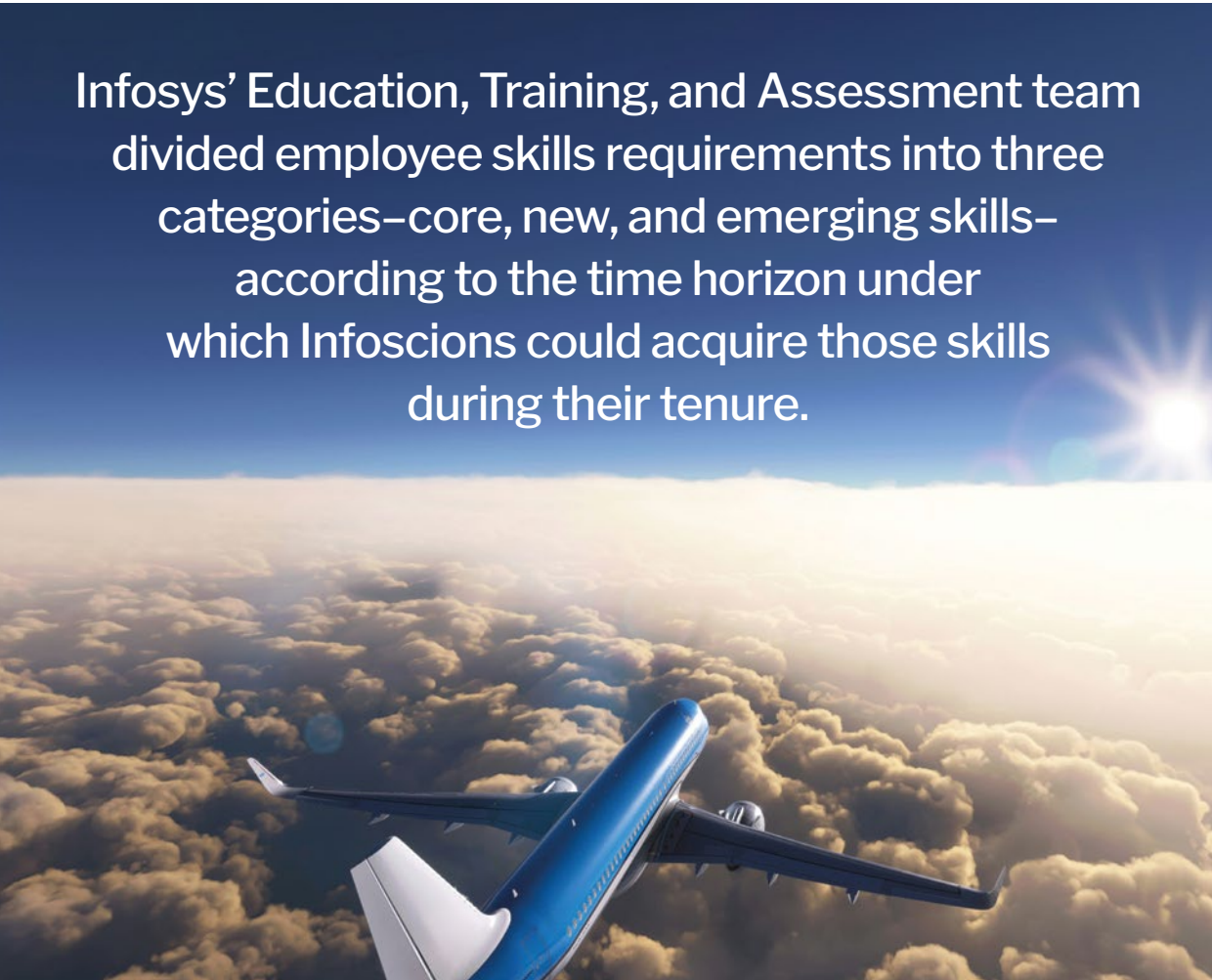
Finally, Arohi and his team made sure to introduce artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), Internet of Things (IoT), and other emerging technologies to Wingspan to make the learning experience more immersive and effective. As Arohi highlighted, "Today's learners do not seek just learning content, learning sessions, or training programmes; they really seek experience."⁸ For example, AI would provide Infoscions with more personalised recommendations on suitable courses. The platform would also enable peer learning as learners could find mentors among colleagues who had completed similar training programmes in the past. This marked a fundamental shift in learning philosophy from the traditional 'sage on the stage' model to the more collaborative 'guide on the side' framework. Under this model, the instructor was

no longer the sole repository of wisdom and knowledge. Instead, learners became the focal point by fostering peer learning through active participation in a collective learning journey with others.

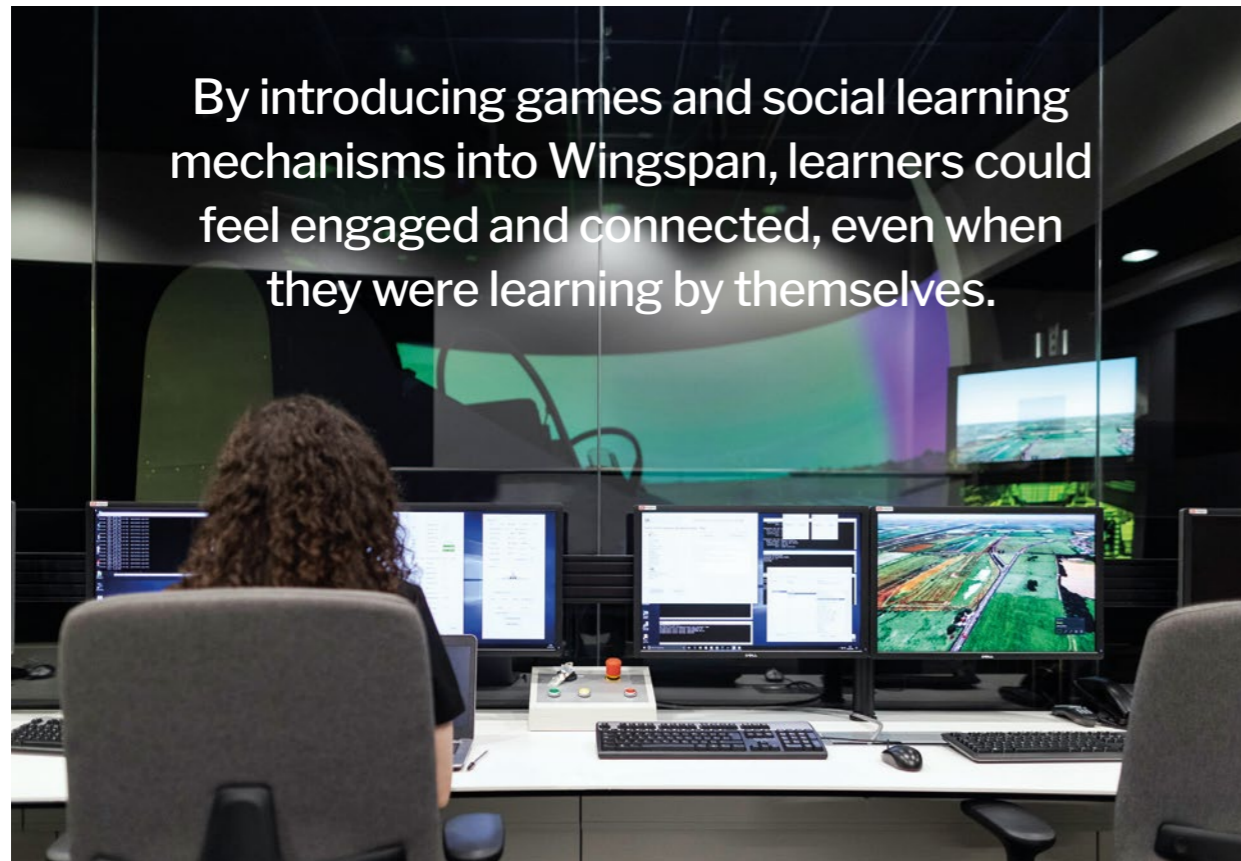
INFOSCIONS EMBRACING WINGSPAN

On April 24, 2018, Wingspan was rolled out within seven months of its initiation, a feat accomplished by a team of just 20 Infoscions, with Arohi acting as the overall project manager. The team approached the development in an agile and iterative way, delivering three beta releases before the final rollout.

Before the launch, some Infoscions were concerned that Wingspan would 'cannibalise' existing learning platforms, practices, and processes. There was also some hesitation over whether to switch from Udemy,



Infosys' Education, Training, and Assessment team divided employee skills requirements into three categories—core, new, and emerging skills—according to the time horizon under which Infoscions could acquire those skills during their tenure.



Coursera, and other established MOOC providers. Others argued that Wingspan would dilute the relevance of in-person education at Infosys' corporate university, the Global Education Centre. Despite the trepidation, over 90 percent of Infosys employees, or about 180,000 Infoscions, had successfully tested Wingspan by the end of 2018.⁹ According to Arohi, "We've seen a fantastic response, with about one-third of the employees using it on their own time at night and on the weekends."

AN LXP NOT JUST FOR INFOSCIONS

The commercial version of Wingspan became available for Infosys' clients and partners in September 2018. It had taken only another five months to convert the original Infoscions-only LXP for external deployment. This move came about because word on Wingspan had got out to the clients and partners soon after it was launched within Infosys, and interest had been mounting.

The timing was also ideal for an external launch. The proprietary learning portals developed by large companies were often complex, overpriced, and yet underutilised by their own staff. The growing consensus was that employee learning should not be burdensome. By the late 2010s, even smaller companies had ditched building their own learning platforms from scratch in the wake of the near ubiquity of powerful search engines, rich knowledge repositories, and highly interactive online media. One needed to look no further than Google, Udemy, and YouTube.

The reception from the market was overwhelmingly positive. Many companies had signed on to Wingspan, thus validating Infosys' belief that "learning is earning". One of the LXP's most notable clients was the German IT giant Siemens, among other multinationals from finance, pharmaceuticals, and other industries. Infosys firmly believed that what worked for Infoscions could be adapted to work for its

clients as well. Through Wingspan, the global tech advisory firm aimed to help its clients accelerate their digital strategy in research and development.¹⁰ When specific functions were unavailable, Infosys would absorb the costs of co-developing them with the client as new features in Wingspan. By serving as a one-stop shop for learning and knowledge sharing, Wingspan quickly became the clients' unified digital platform, enabling enterprise-wide access to rich, contextualised content for all staff.

RIDING THROUGH THE COVID-19 CRISIS

On March 24, 2020, India went into lockdown as COVID-19 swept through the country and Infosys switched to remote work mode on the same day. Consequently, over 9,000 trainees who had been housed at its Mysuru residential campus were sent home, so they resumed their training online through Wingspan.¹¹ The transition to working and learning from home was smooth because Infosys had already implemented policies allowing Infoscions to do so for up to nine days a month with their manager's permission.

During the pandemic, Infosys also added a range of new features to Wingspan, including fun and light-hearted quizzing tools designed to help learners stay engaged. These features were developed after Arohi and his team had recognised that learners often struggled to maintain attention during extended synchronous or 'live' sessions.

WHAT'S NEXT?

By March 2021, over 240,000 Infoscions were spending an average of 45 minutes per day on Wingspan.¹² At that time, the platform was offering more than 2,700 courses created by Infosys' educators and its external partners, including Knowledge@Wharton, Harvard ManageMentor, E-Cornell, IEEE, and Microsoft Learn.¹³ As many as 30,000 users logged on during weekdays, and at least 7,000 continued to do so over the weekends.¹⁴ Outside of Infosys, Wingspan had become the organisational learning platform of choice for more than one million client users.

In May 2022, Wingspan was selected to be the digital platform behind Infosys Springboard, the company's flagship environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiative.¹⁵ By aligning with the Infosys ESG Vision 2030 to enable digital skills at scale, it became the primary LXP to empower people, communities, and society with digital skills to be successful in the 21st century. The initiative was led by a dedicated group of experts collaborating with the Infosys ETA team, curriculum partners, non-profit organisations, and a global network of leading educational institutions.

The LXP had clearly taken off in a matter of just three years, embodying what Arohi said about Infosys as a place where "lifelong learning is the North Star for organisational progress and talent development".^{AMU}



DR ADAM TATARYNOWICZ

is Associate Professor of Strategic Management at Lee Kong Chian School of Business, Singapore Management University

DR WEE-KIAT LIM

is Senior Associate Director at the Centre for Management Practice at Singapore Management University

MAHIMA RAO-KACHROO

is Case Writer at the Centre for Management Practice at Singapore Management University

This article is based on the case study 'Wingspan: Infosys Digital Learning Platform Takes Off in the Age of Disruption' published by the Centre for Management Practice at Singapore Management University. For more information, please visit <https://smu.sg/5hqj> or scan the QR code below.



For a list of endnotes to this article, please visit <https://smu.sg/z9fc> or scan the QR code below.

