

SLK's Project Owner Certification Provides Valuable Upskilling

SLK Software Pvt. Ltd

Best Advance in Competencies and Skill Development

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Company Background



**THE
AUTOMATION
COMPANY**

Company-at-a-Glance	
Headquarters	Bangalore
Year Founded	2000
Revenue	\$75 million to 100 million
Employees	2,500
Global Scale	India, Singapore, USA, France, Netherlands, Germany and UK
Customers/Output, etc.	SLK provides software services to help their customers service their end customers by improving speed to market, cost optimization and enhanced customer experience through disruptive technologies, applied innovation and purposeful automation
Industry	IT Services for Banking and Financial services, Insurance and Manufacturing and Supply chain
Website	https://www.slksoftware.com/

Budget and Timeframe

Budget and Timeframe	
Overall budget	6,000
Number of (HR, Learning, Talent) employees involved with the implementation?	Eight
Number of Operations or Subject Matter Expert employees involved with the implementation?	10 (Business Leaders, Quality Head, L&OD, SMEs)
Number of contractors involved with implementation	None
Timeframe to implement	December 2020-June 2021
Start date of the program	Dec. 7, 2020

Overview

Keeping in mind the requirements of the customers, organization and the employees, The Automation Company L&OD team had to create the program architecture. This program had to address the competency gaps in the individuals and instill a sense of pride in them. They had to take over the ownership of the project and confidently manage it to deliver the customer satisfaction and delight.

SLK had already introduced a new role – Project Owner, which was beyond the role of a project manager. It was to bring out the essence of pride and entrepreneurial mindset in the role owners. The leaders firmly believed that this is a pivotal role; the PO is the nucleus of the project. The successful delivery of the projects depends on the skills, competency and attitude of the PO.

The first step was to define the competency and skills required.

L&OD team took the below steps to freeze the competencies of the Project owner role:

- L&OD worked with delivery heads and head of Process & Quality to understand their expectations from the POs.
- L&OD conducted focus group discussion with project managers to understand the performance outcomes /the expectations of the role of a PO.
- The CSAT scores threw up a lot of information on the existing gaps and the expectations from the customer

- The team discussed with a few Project Owners to understand their challenges and the support they would require in executing their role
- The team also researched the PM competencies across proficiency levels recommended by various certifying bodies.

Through all the data aggregated, the team created the Project Owner competency grid for SLK.

Based on the competencies defined, and the challenges highlighted, the team created the draft of the program design. The whole program was a 100% partnership between the business leaders and the L&OD team. The business heads drove the discussion and supported the TNA process. Together with the business, the L&OD team identified certain gaps in the competency and skills of the Project Owners:

- Many POs had taken up the role without a formal certification and were not familiar with the basic components of Project Management and the skills required to address it.
- There was no clear understanding of the “Why” and “what “and “how” of the various processes and templates, nor an understanding of the features of the PM Platform and how to use them. The POs felt that updating on the tool was additional work.
- There was limited understanding on how to manage risk; scope a project properly; and do the planning; manage stakeholders, and problem solving. Hence, these came as the priority areas to be addressed.
- With no change in designation, understanding the importance and scope of the role and being proud to be identified to lead a project was lacking.

Scope of the Program

The SPOC program is an enterprise-wide activity. All POs (Appx 180) from the two verticals of BFSI, MFSC and the horizontal service lines are the participants of the program. This program is critical to the organization as the Vision for 2025 is to increase the revenue of the organization by 5x. This would be possible by keeping the customers happy. Customers would be happy/satisfied with quality and timely delivery

Evaluation Metrics

The L&OD team agreed with the business leaders to consider the change in the Project Health Score as the measurement of success. PHS is a weekly activity where both the Project Owner and the Process and Quality team update the status of the project — RAG.

The assumption was that once the POs are skilled and competent to manage the project effectively, the PHS would automatically improve.

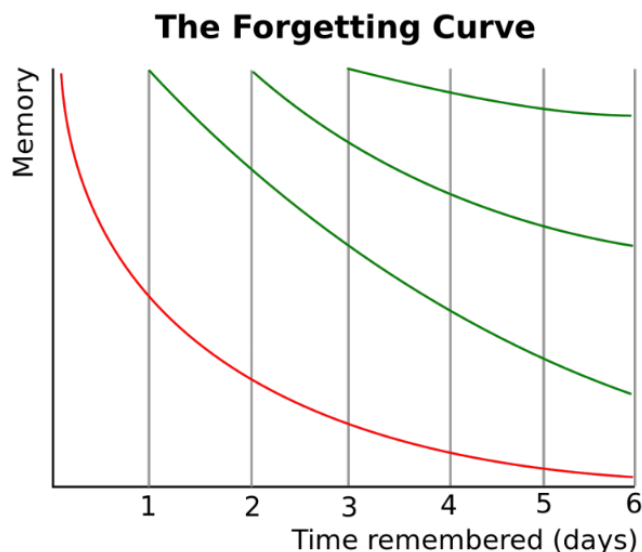
Improvement of CSAT scores was another metric that was agreed upon.

To ensure that the objectives are met and there is a change in the whole attitude of the PO, the team followed a multi-touch point approach for the program design. It was important to do focused interventions back-to-back at regular intervals to ensure that there was maximum absorption, retention and application

Design of the Program

The objective of the program was to create an internal certification process that ensures the POs are equipped to perform their role efficiently. The target was challenging, as the team had to cover over 180 POs in seven months. The design had to be robust and holistic in approach.

Figure 1: The Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve



Through the program, SLK had to transform their tribal knowledge, experience and practices into a scientific training process, which took into account The Ebbinghaus forgetting curve or the memory retention curve. The design had to adopt spaced learning and multi-touch point intervention methodology so that the concepts learned during the span solidifies over time and are etched on the minds of the POs.

Based on the various inputs collected during the TNA, the L&OD team created SPOC — SLK's Project Owner Certification. The team firmly believed that it had to be a multi-touch point, with the business partnering in both the content creation and the delivery of the

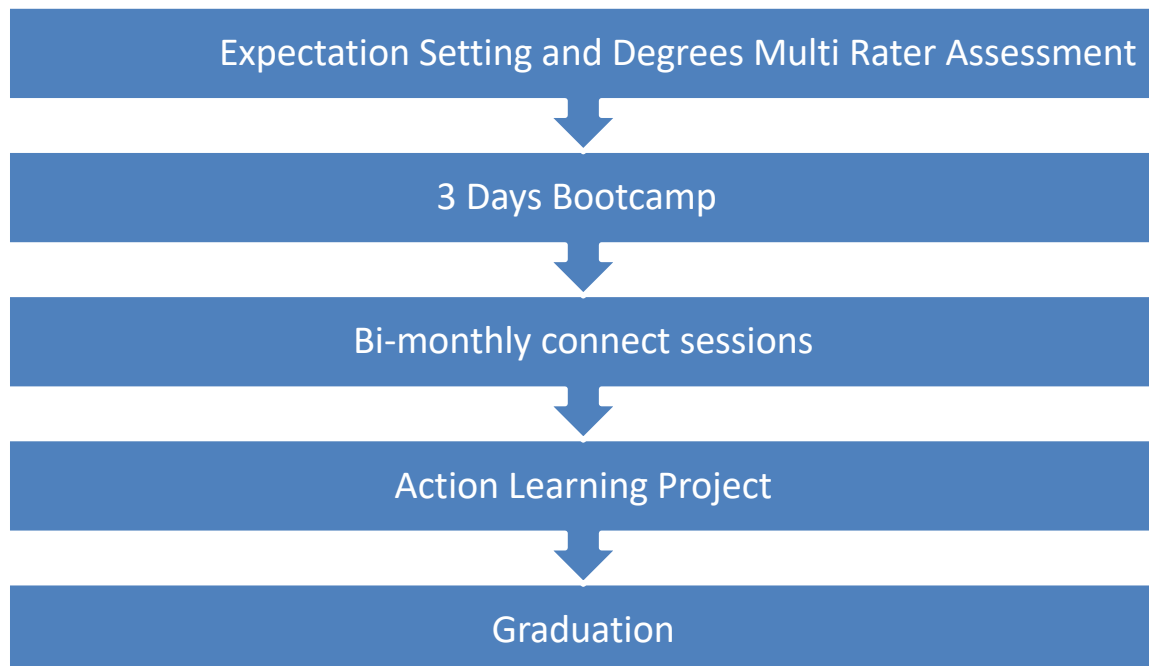
programs. They decided to run the program internally to ensure that the whole concept was discussed with the SLK context only. The whole program was experiential with case studies and discussions. The project scenarios were simulated to ensure that the participants have to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills in a controlled environment.

The first step was to create a competency framework and clearly define the performance outcomes that were expected from employees in the role. A scorecard with weights was created to ensure that objective evaluation metrics were available.

The next step was to develop an Assessment to understand the gaps at individual levels. The team built a Multi-Rater Assessment (MRA) to remove any biases in the assessment. The assessment was filled in by the Project Owner, his/her Manager and one member from the Process and Quality team associated with the account. This provided a clear insight into the Strengths and areas of improvement of the PO. The items of the assessment were derived from the competency framework that was defined for SLK Project Owners. This made it wholly relevant and reliable.

The participants had to go through the below steps for the certification.

Figure 2: Steps for Certification



Pre-Assessment (Launch and Completion of MRA)

An automated MRA (Multi Rated Assessment) was built and individual PO was rated by the PO, Project manager and the Process and Quality point of contact. The results of the rating also gave us a lot of insight into tailoring the right content for the audience. The program framework, delivery methodology, content, assessment criteria were designed based on the input received from the multiple stakeholders. Based on the gaps identified from the MRA, an individual development plan (IDP) was created for each of the POs, and self-paced e-learning programs were mapped.

Figure 3: Training Intervention — Program Design

Day-1	Project Management Essentials
Day-2	Project Management Platform walkthrough and SLK Specific project management processes and practices
Day-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder Management • Problem-solving tools/techniques and parallel thinking using The Six Thinking Hats concept
Touch point-1	Project scoping and planning ; Resource management and costing
Touchpoint-2	Escalation management and Risk Management

During the Training (25 hours of focused intervention — Three days’ Boot camp)

The Day 1 Session starts with a kick-off from the delivery head; setting the expectation and helping participants establish the connection between what is being offered vis-a-vis their expectation. The Delivery head also walks the participants through the importance of being certified as SPOC and how this adds value to their career, their teams and the organization.

The next session is a detailed walk-through into each areas of project management. The facilitator is a seasoned project management SME. The facilitator uses three to four case studies, group/individual level activities and helps participants to learn the core principles of Project Management using immersive and experiential learning techniques. At the end of the session, the facilitator helps participants to understand, appreciate and exhibit the key values of being Project Owners and ways to deal with the challenges associated with it.

The facilitator does a deep dive into concepts like Project Planning, Scoping, Estimation, Tracking, Stakeholder Management, Escalation Management etc.

The Day 2 Session starts with a quick assessment of the Project Management Platform tool -a homegrown internal web-based tool used to capture and analyze the project performance and project health status. Participants would have gone through a video demo of the tool before attempting the quiz. The individual scores are shared with the participants to make the audience aware of the knowledge gaps. The facilitator is an SME in Process and Quality and conducts the session covering areas like Project Initiation, Project Execution and Project closure. The facilitator uses case studies, discussions and assessments as teaching techniques to ensure participants are engaged and learn the concepts holistically. The session is followed by a Post assessment with 20 MCQs designed to check the knowledge level.

The second session is facilitated by a delivery leader. The session is aimed at making participants understand and appreciate the concept of project monitoring and control through group discussions and case studies.

Day 3 begins with a session on “Stakeholder Management.” The objective of the session is to help participants understand the concepts of Stakeholder identification, categorization, analyses and management. The session is conducted using techniques like storytelling, experience sharing and usage of tools like PI Grid (Power to Influence and Interests) for Stakeholder analysis. The facilitator further does a deep dive into the area of conflict management and introduces the concept of the Thomas Kilmann Mode. This helps the participants to understand their natural preference — the style they would naturally take in a conflict situation and how they should adapt their styles to the context.

In the second half of the day, the facilitator introduces the concept of problem-solving tools and techniques, explains parallel thinking using The Six Thinking Hats concept and engages the audience through case studies and group discussions.

Delivery Methodology: Classroom-based ILT using case study based, group activities, quizzes and assessment

Bimonthly connect (first touch point after the Boot camp).

15 Days after the Boot camp, the participants reconnect in this session. The facilitator is a seasoned project manager who does deep dive into areas like Project Scoping and executions, resources and cost management, The class is divided into three groups and each group is given a case study to work on. After spending 15 minutes, each team is

asked to present their findings/solutions from their case studies. Each team is scored by other teams' basis their performance. The facilitator finally summarizes the discussion and ends the session by sharing his/her viewpoints

Bimonthly connect (second touch point after the Boot camp).

30 Days after the boot camp, the participants reconnect in this session. The facilitator focuses on areas like Escalation and Risk management. The class is divided into three groups and each group is given a case study to work on. After spending 15 minutes, each team is asked to present their findings/solutions from their case studies. Each team is scored by other teams' basis their performance. The facilitator finally summarizes the discussion and ends the session by sharing his/her viewpoints.

Post-Training Evaluation

Action Learning Project:

- To ensure that there was a transfer of learning from the training rooms to the projects, each participant was required to submit the action-learning project in a specified template.

The template captures:

- Problem statement — what is the problem or challenge that they are trying to address through the project
- Actions (What action or learning the PO would be implementing as a part of ALP)
- Impact (What would be the impact of the implementation)
- Learning (what are the key learnings/take-away)

Graduation Criteria: The Participants should have more than 80% attendance and must have scored more than 70% in the ALP (final assessment)

Graduation Ceremony: Participants who successfully complete the SPOC journey are awarded with completion certificate and a trophy

Delivery of the Program

SPOC is a multi-touch point program adopting the blended methodology. The participation in the program was through manager nominations.

The first step was to organize a meeting with all the managers to set expectations on the requirement of the training. The meeting emphasized the importance of the program from the organization and individual perspective.

The cohorts were limited to only 20 people to ensure individual attention and equal opportunity to all.

The entire facilitation activity was owned by multiple facilitators from L&OD, Business and the Quality team. This ensured that there were multiple perspectives provided to the participants. The different facilitation styles removed the monotony. It was also important to ensure the training artifacts were frozen to keep the experience standard across batches.

The boot camp and the touch points were classroom sessions to encourage collaboration and peer learning. Participants shared their experiences and best practices. They were encouraged to come up with examples of how things went wrong with certain projects and how they brought it back on track. The whole methodology was facilitative with the group doing the maximum amount of talking and the facilitator moderating the session. All the programs were designed to be experiential with many case studies. The best part was the business leaders facilitating such sessions and coming up with stories and examples of SLK. This made the training totally customized and relevant to the participants. Through case studies, the participants discussed, debated and explored various options of dealing with project related challenges. The whole workshop and the touch points were highly engaging with practical and hands-on activities.

WhatsApp groups were created to provide offline support and encourage discussions among the participants.

Participants had offline activities like going through the recording of the features of the Project Management Platform. They were tested on their knowledge before the session on the tool. This helped in:

- Ensuring all the POs understood the tool
- Give them a platform to ask questions and clarify their doubts during the session by the Process and quality team.

Skill-soft courses helped the participants in areas where they needed further support. The MRA had helped identify gaps and IDPs were created accordingly.

Change Management Efforts

Since this program had dependency on multiple training resources and multiple batches, the L&OD at SLK built the delivery capability and delivered the sessions in the absence of original identified delivery resources.

The biggest challenge that the team faced was in getting a buy-in from the business on the design presented to them. The three-day boot-camp suggestion resulted in a lot of resistance and push back. All the targeted participants were billed resources and the 3-day training would create a loss to the accounts; convincing customers on the non-availability of their key contacts for three days was a task.

The L&D team had to take a firm stand that to make the program effective there has to be a highly focused intervention. Once convinced with the logic the Business Heads supported the design and encouraged their leaders to take a call on the billing loss.

The other challenge was that certain leaders were skeptical if the program would fly. They felt there were multiple attempts before and none of them had gone beyond one batch. They were convinced of the seriousness of the program when the L&OD team went with a complete schedule of the program; there was a clear plan for seven batches.

What worked was that the business was taken into confidence right from the beginning. The exercise done with the business leaders through Focus Group Discussions, competency mapping, content creation brought in a shared ownership of the program. Success of the program became equally important for the business.

Another big challenge that we had to face was that the launch happened in the middle of the Pandemic. Not all employees were coming to office and were working from their hometowns. The organization was working at a 20%-40% capacity. Convincing them and getting people to travel down to Bengaluru, which is SKL's headquarters, was a big challenge. After the pilot when the participants started talking about the program, nominations started coming in.

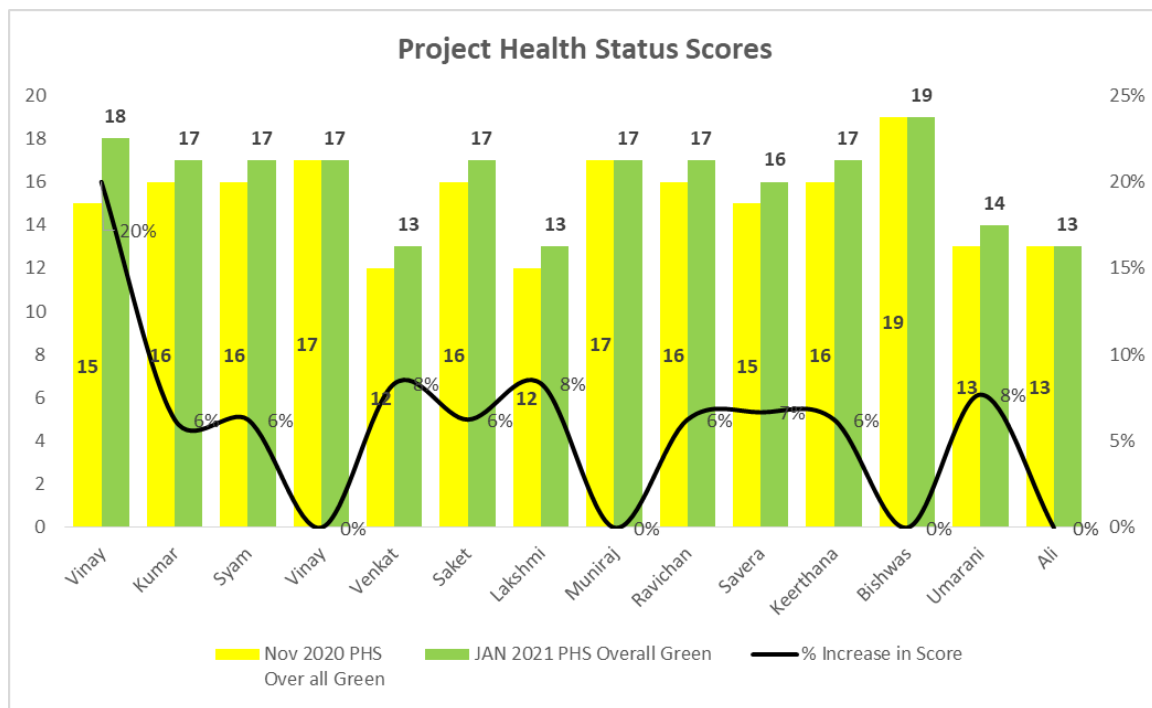
All the facilitators identified for the boot camp and later touch-points were leaders and there would be sudden exigencies, which they had to attend to. Therefore, having back-up plans and getting the L&OD team equipped to step-in and facilitate was the workaround that was created

Measurable Benefits

Training Need Analysis:

The L&OD team in consultation with the delivery and quality team devised the multi-rater assessment. The SPOC program content was designed based on the inputs from this multi-rater assessment, which was triggered to the PO, his/her respective manager and his/her PPQA partner.

Figure 4: Project Health Scorecard



Inferences

Project Health Scored (PHS) is a key metrics used to evaluate project success. The above graph is derived from random sampling of the of POs PHS data who underwent the SPOC training during December 2020 and March 2021.

Each Project and its PO (project owner) are color coded on different parameters. This analysis shows increases in Green statuses for each PO for the month of January 2021 (Green series in bar graph) when compared with Nov 2020 PHS data (yellow series in bar graph). There is clear upward trend in their internal project scoring.

Figure 5: Improved C-SAT Scores

Org/vertical/ CBU	Overall Rating	Delivery Commitment	Quality and Productivity	Right the First Time	Competency	Project Management
ORG (167)	6.41 ⬆️(6.37)	6.33 ⬇️(6.45)	6.21 ⬇️(6.19)	6.19 ⬇️(6.16)	6.28 ⬇️(6.24)	6.11 ⬇️(6.21)
BFS (103)	6.41 ⇄(6.41)	6.36 ⬇️(6.48)	6.21 ⬇️(6.25)	6.17 ⬇️(6.26)	6.27 ⬇️(6.30)	6.04 ⬇️(6.27)
Banking Customer 1	7.00 (NA)	7.00 (NA)	6.00 (NA)	6.00 (NA)	6.40 (NA)	7.00 (NA)
Banking Customer 2	6.63 ⬆️(6.45)	6.58 ⬆️(6.45)	6.41 ⬆️(6.18)	6.37 ⬆️(6.18)	6.37 ⬆️(6.25)	6.32 ⬆️(6.27)
Banking Customer 3	6.31 ⬆️(6.22)	6.35 ⬆️(6.33)	6.04 ⬇️(6.06)	5.85 ⬇️(6.00)	6.06 ⬇️(6.16)	5.48 ⬇️(5.89)
Banking Customer 4	6.12 ⬆️(5.89)	6.00 ⬇️(6.33)	6.12 ⬆️(5.83)	6.12 ⬆️(5.89)	5.90 ⬇️(5.88)	6.00 ⬆️(5.81)
Banking Customer 5	6.22 ⬆️(6.00)	6.28 ⬆️(6.27)	5.97 ⬇️(5.80)	6.00 ⬆️(5.64)	6.09 ⬆️(5.87)	5.83 ⬆️(5.82)
Banking Customer 6	6.00 ⇄(6.00)	5.75 ⬇️(6.00)	6.00 ⬆️(5.50)	6.00 ⇄(6.00)	5.60 ⬇️(6.20)	5.50 ⬇️(6.50)
Banking Customer 7	6.31 ⬇️(6.55)	6.38 ⬇️(6.45)	6.13 ⬇️(6.32)	6.00 ⬇️(6.27)	6.38 ⬇️(6.44)	6.31 ⬇️(6.41)
Banking Customer 8	6.44 ⬇️(6.58)	6.32 ⬇️(6.60)	6.25 ⬇️(6.49)	6.26 ⬇️(6.56)	6.38 ⬇️(6.50)	6.00 ⬇️(6.49)
Banking Customer 9	6.75 ⬇️(6.83)	6.75 ⬇️(6.83)	6.69 ⬇️(6.83)	6.75 ⬇️(6.83)	6.70 ⬆️(6.67)	6.62 ⬇️(6.67)
INS (27)	6.44 ⬆️(5.95)	6.39 ⬆️(6.37)	6.31 ⬆️(5.79)	6.33 ⬆️(5.68)	6.30 ⬆️(5.88)	6.20 ⬆️(6.08)
Insurance Customer 1	6.39 ⬆️(5.64)	6.35 ⬆️(6.21)	6.27 ⬆️(5.62)	6.26 ⬆️(5.36)	6.29 ⬆️(5.70)	6.15 ⬆️(5.93)
Insurance Customer 2	6.75 ⬇️(6.80)	6.62 ⬇️(6.80)	6.50 ⬆️(6.25)	6.75 ⬆️(6.60)	6.40 ⇄(6.40)	6.50 ⇄(6.50)
MFSC (37)	6.38 ⬇️(6.46)	6.19 ⬇️(6.41)	6.12 ⬇️(6.20)	6.14 ⬆️(6.11)	6.27 ⬆️(6.25)	6.23 ⬆️(6.12)
Manufacturing Customer 1	7.00 ⇄(7.00)	7.00 ⇄(7.00)	7.00 ⬆️(6.25)	7.00 ⬆️(6.00)	7.00 ⬆️(6.60)	7.00 ⬆️(6.50)
Manufacturing Customer 2	6.35 ⬇️(6.39)	6.13 ⬇️(6.34)	6.02 ⬇️(6.16)	6.00 ⬇️(6.03)	6.18 ⬇️(6.21)	6.18 ⬆️(6.06)
Manufacturing Customer 3	6.00 ⬇️(6.50)	6.17 ⬇️(6.75)	6.42 ⬇️(6.50)	6.67 ⬆️(6.50)	6.53 ⬆️(6.40)	6.33 ⬆️(6.25)
Manufacturing Customer 4	7.00 ⇄(7.00)	6.75 ⬇️(7.00)	6.75 ⬇️(7.00)	7.00 ⇄(7.00)	6.90 ⬇️(7.00)	6.50 ⬇️(7.00)

Inferences

Customer Business Units (CBUs) which nominated maximum No. of POs showed significant improvement in their CSAT scores (Ones highlighted in Green color). The highlighted area shows an upward trend in the score compared to the last year's CSAT (shown in the bracket next to each score). POs contribution helped the BUs to not only improve their Overall CSAT scores, but also on one of the important scoring parameters i.e., Project Management. This is a core competency for any given Project owner and the whole SPOC program is designed with an objective to improve on this competency.

Overall

Key Findings:

- It was a good opportunity to understand the challenges of the POs and provide them individual support where required.
- It was also an efficient platform for leaders to drive home the importance of the role and create a sense of pride in the role-holders.
- It helped explain the career path for the Project Owners and also identify the star performers for fast-track growth.
- The program created a sense of pride in being identified for the role and the training made them more confident about managing their projects/deliverables.

Lessons Learned:

- The program reiterated that spaced learning interventions would help absorb, retain and apply the learnings.
- Peer learning through experience sharing helped internalize the concepts and the process better.
- Having business partnering in facilitation ensured that relevant and real-time case studies kept the participants engaged and involved.
- The case study methodology got the participants to look at the given situation from diverse angles and come-up with solutions, with perspectives that were at times better than the solutions applied in the actual context.

Future Outlook:

- Based on the improvement seen through the PHS score and the CSAT, business leaders strongly appreciated the need for the program for their POs and have now made it mandatory for all role holders.
- SPOC is a mandatory component of the functional training mapped to the learning path of employees from P-4 to M-1.
- The program EVOLVE on people management has been created from the inputs received from the MRA reports and the feedback.

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