"The effectiveness of digital learning in the workplace as a form of training in an Irish context"

This dissertation is submitted to the National College of Ireland Business school in part fulfilment of the MA in Human resource management.

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Abstract

Purpose: This research aims to assess whether digital learning is an effective method of training for organizations to use in Ireland. To determine this three types of learning methods are explored which are as follows: Informal learning, formal learning, and blended learning. The emergence of COVID-19 has shaped the way in which companies do business. This research also aims to study if COVID-19 has affected the way in which organizations conduct training. Alongside this, the study aims to determine if digital learning is suitable for all abilities and generations in the workplace.

Literature: Literature reviewed displays how digital learning and traditional learning can be both effective and have limitations for organisations whilst using it as a learning tool in the workplace. Literature also suggests that digital learning has been impacted by COVID-19 and the emergence of the different generations into the workplace which means there are many ages and abilities that must be catered for in terms of training

Methodology: A quantitative approach was undertaken as part of the primary research for this study. This involved interviewing five participants from the HR industry. All five participants have worked or are currently working in the training and development sector within the organizations they work for. The interviews took a semi-structured approach and were conducted via zoom.

Findings: Findings reported that there was not one correct way to conduct training more it is important to take into the characteristics and the context of the organsation. All five participant's stated the preferred method of training in the workplace is a blended approach. Additionally, participants stated how covid-19 has changed the working culture in the organsation alongside the way in which employees learn

Limitations: The main limitation to this study was the sample size as there was time frame constraints which limited the researcher to interviewing only five participants. Due to all interviews being conducted during working hours the participants were limited to the time they could give to the study.

Conclusion: Research participants employed state that the most effective way for learning to be conducted in the workplace is through a blended approach which suits all industries and abilities in the workforce.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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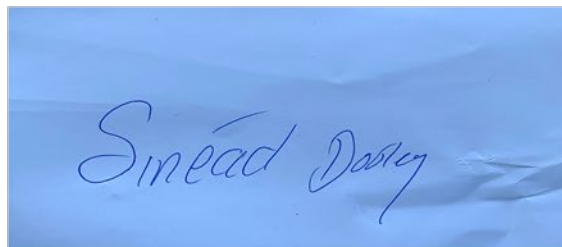
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Abbreviations

COVID-19- Coronavirus disease 2019

L&D- Learning and Development

SMEs- Small Medium Enterprises

MNCS- Multinational Companies

CIPD-Chartered Institute of Personnel Development

GDPR-General Data Protection Regulation

CPD- Continuous Professional Development

SRL- Self- Regulated Learning

Chapter 1- Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

The current business environment is constantly evolving and changing due to many distinct factors such as globalization, technical advancements, and COVID-19. Technology has come to play a significant role in people's day-to-day lives. This is evident in research conducted discovered that more than five billion people are using the internet every day which equates to more than 63 percent of the worldwide population. In contrast, 93 percent of the 5 billion people were social media users (Statisa, 2022). The digital era has also brought about significant changes in the workplace such as digital learning which has become an important aspect of the human resource function (CIPD, 2021). Alongside this the importance of learning is seen to be a prudent investment of an organisations funds and assets as it aids companies in gaining a competitive advantage in a globalised workforce (Walters *et al.* 2013).

The digital era alongside COVID-19 has accelerated the use of technology within the workforce. Meaning that organizations have had to adapt their business models and strategies to be able to

compete within the corporate world (Wright *et* al., 2020). Another implication for organizations is the emergence of millennials into the workforce. Research has shown that by 2030 that 75 percent of the workforce will be made up of this generation. As millennials have their own expectations of what the workplace should look like, employees must implement different strategies to meet the needs of this generation. Strategies include flexible work arrangements, progression within the company, and continuous learning opportunities (Kloss, 2018).

Consequently, the role of the learning and development department has become more complex as the prevalence of digital learning has grown from 29 percent of organizations implementing digital learning in the workplace compared to 57 percent in 2020 (CIPD, 2021) Although, research shows that more companies are starting to use digital learning the argument remains unsettled to which method is more effective. Past research has indicated that digital learning has many advantages, but organizations must incorporate the poor perception and high dropout rates that are associated with it. This brings into question how effective digital learning is.

Research conducted by Forbes (2021) stated that educating employees in the workplace is an essential element of how companies stay competitive. Therefore, this study aims to explore the effectiveness of digital learning in the workplace as a form of training in Ireland. It will critically explore the different methods of training which can be used in the workplace as a form of training. Alongside this, the impact of COVID-19 on workplace training will be explored and researched. This study also aims to challenge present literature and compare primary data that is collected. It's crucial to examine the advantages and limitations of both digital learning and traditional learning to gain a clear understanding of which method is a preferred form of training.

1.2 Guide to methodology

The researcher decided that a qualitative approach would be best suited to this study. This research was conducted by means of semi-structured interviews with five participants who work in the L&D sector. A thematic approach was taken in order to evaluate and analyse the data collected.

1.3 Design Layout

This dissertation is laid out in six chapters. The first chapter is the introduction which lays out the topic the researcher has chosen and the rationale behind this. The second chapter is the

literature review where secondary resources are used to gain an insight into the topic. The third chapter will state the methodology that was used. Chapter four states the findings that were collected from the primary research while chapter five discusses the literature compared to the primary findings. Finally, chapter six is the conclusion to the study

CHAPTER TWO- Literature Review

2.1 Introduction:

This chapter aims to critically analyse relevant literature regarding the different methods of training in the workplace and the way in which people learn in the workplace. Likewise, the literature review aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of digital learning in the workplace and if this method has taken over from the traditional classroom-style training. Another element of this chapter will be to review if COVID-19 had a significant impact on the training industry in Ireland. All these areas are deemed important topics due to the digital transformation that is happening rapidly which in turn is changing the function of the human resource sector. The impact of COVID-19 has been seen throughout the world as it has changed the way in companies do business in all aspects. Thus, this makes it an important topic to investigate for this study. These topics will be reviewed in closer detail in this chapter as follows: Firstly, the human resource management function will be discussed and its relation to the learning and development function. Secondly, the concept of training in the workplace. Thirdly, the impact COVID-19 has

had on training in the workplace. And finally, the various learning styles and methods which influence how effective training will be in the workplace. In essence, this chapter aims to look at the different features which would impact digital learning being an effective method of training.

2.2 Human Resource Management:

Since the 1990s the area of Human Resource Management (HRM) has been evolving as researchers have become increasingly interested in all issues relating to people management. Researchers have stated that organisations success can be based on the quality of HRM within a company (Al-Jediah and Albdareen, 2020). Likewise, organisations both small and large have become captivated by the idea of HRM. HRM can be defined as the many activities that are associated with managing employment relations in the workplace (Boxall and Purcell, 2003). Although Boxall (2007) stated that HRM also involves underpinning the knowledge, skills, and networks of employees. Hence, the main aim of HRM is to make the organisation more effective through human capital whilst maintaining moral values and ethics (Armstrong and Taylor, 2022). The HRM function has many different activities that fall under the scope of six different functions. The first function is the staffing function, this covers everything from the recruiting process right up to the selection phase. The compensation function, employee relations, and employee function are the other three elements of HRM but for the purpose of this study those will not be studied. Training and development is the main function in which this study is based around. The activities that fall under this function include identifying training needs and implementing training programmes. Furthermore, developing and implementing the training program comes next. Performance is another key HRM function that is linked to this study as it involves giving feedback following the training and this can help to increase employee performance and motivation within the workplace (Farooq and Khan, 2011). Although the HRM function may seem straightforward forward Ulrich (1998) proposed that the function holds many different challenges such as globalisation which requires companies to be more culturally aware whilst also obeying regulations. Another challenge proposed was technology, Armstrong (2006) argued that technology has a major impact on HRM as it has automated many aspects of the function. This has changed the way in which the HR department operates. In essence HRM is seen to be one of the most fundamental pillars of a company as it is the epicentre of bringing all

departments together to work united. This is concluded by Porter (2008) who states that HRM plays a crucial role in the development and competitive advantage in any firm.

2.3 Learning & Development

In a recent CIPD (2021) report, it was stated that learning is an essential element of an organisations HR Strategy. Learning is seen to be an essential element within the workplace as it helps organisations to reach performance needs by means of developing employees through different interventions (CIPD, 2021). Although, an alternative viewpoint proposed by Hoyle (2017) suggests that generic learning strategies no longer work. This can be because the workforce needs are rapidly changing and the technology is evolving which brings new methods of learning into the workplace. Learning is a topic that is deeply researched by many different theorists such as Shackleton-Jones (2010) and Moore (2008) but it is rarely explicit and defined (Schwartz & Wasserman, 2002). Although, Lachman (1997) defined learning as a change in an individual's behaviour which is trigged by an experience. Contrastingly, Domjan (2010) argued that Lachmans (1997) definition of learning is unsatisfactory due to changes in one's behaviours may not be sufficient enough for learning to occur in the modern workplace. Domjan (2010) also argued that temporary changes to an individual's behaviour such as fatigue should fall outside the definition of learning. More recently (De Houwer *et al,* 2013) described learning as something that can take place in the following three components. (1) Changes in the behaviours of the individual (2) a regularity in the environment (3) casual relation between the regularity in the environment and the changes in an individual's behaviour. Workplace learning is said to be one of the best ways in which organisations can improve organisation performance and be central to productivity within the workplace (Rainbird *et al,* 2004). While training takes places in the workplace, learning is the sought-out objective. Thus, a strategic plan must be put in place for a company to meet the main training objectives (Lynton & Pareek, 2011). Research conducted showed that "opportunity to learn" was voted one of the most important priorities for graduates when looking for a job (Deloitte, 2019). This shows that in the modern workplace learning and training is a focal point to attract and retain employees.

2.4 Digital Learning:

The use of digital learning in the corporate world dates back to as early as the 1970s when computer-based training was used for training air pilots. The emergence of the internet in the

early 2000s saw a technical revolution evolving which has continued to grow (Vancell and Patala, 2018). The literature proposes many different definitions of digital learning. One way it can be defined is as a form of learning that is delivered using digital forms which students can use to teach themselves the materials Holzberger *et al.* (2013). Noe (2010) also proposed that digital learning is a concept which is an umbrella for various applications, processes and learning methods. As the world is evolving so too is the digital world which in turn leads to more mechanisms being used for digital learning such as webinars, podcasts, virtual reality, and blogs. These developments in technology have helped to facilitate the use of bite size learning and real time knowledge sharing which allows education to be conducted outside the four walls of a classroom at the learners convince (CIPD, 2021). Digital Learning differs from traditional learning in many ways such as traditional learning is learning that is conducted under the scope of a teacher or instructor. Traditional learning also focuses more on the "What" aspect of the learning as the training is conducted in a manner where the instructor is responsible for all elements of the training. Whereas digital learning covers both the "What" and the "How" elements of the learning. This is because the learner is responsible for sorting all their own tasks. This in turn can spark curiosity and creativity within the training session and in doing so often the "how" element of the training gets answered (Titthasiri, 2013). As generation Y and Z enter the workplace, organizations have started to realise the importance of having a more dynamic workplace. This meaning that there is now more competition in the workforce environment with companies competing for the best talent. This leads to companies creating a more flexible and "tech friendly" environment within the workplace which can be facilitated by digital learning (Dalvi- Esfahani *et al.,* 2020).

2.5 Styles of Learning:

The term learning style refers to how different people take in information. There are many theories who have tried to explain how people learn from different settings and methods. One main learning theory is proposed by Peter Honey and Alan Mumford. Honey and Mumford (1983) proposed that there are four main learning styles depending on which stage of the learning cycle that the individual is at. The activist stage refers to when an individual learns most by experimenting with something rather than the traditional classroom learning. The next stage is the theorist stage which refers to those who learn best by understanding the theory behind the

action. Following on from this stage comes the reflector stage which sees the learner standing back and observing what has happened. Pragmatist is the final stage which sees the learner putting what they have learned into practice (Honey and Mumford, 1983). Honey and Mumford created a questionnaire to aid learners in determining what style of learning best suited them. The drawback of this theory is that most people exhibit more than one learning style therefore learners should not categorised or labelled (Coffield *et al,* 2004). Although a systematic review conducted by Coffield *et al* (2004) stated that there are more than four learning styles. Whilst conducting the research Coffield discovered over seventy different learning theories in which 13 learning theories were narrowed down to be seen the most effective in the modern world. The modality style is a theory which can be used in today's learning environment as it considers the different sensory modalities. These sensory modalities include verbal, nonverbal, kinaesthetic and auditory learning styles (Rolfe and Cheek, 2012). These learning styles can be identified by using VARK (Visual, Aural, Read, Kinaesthetic) questionnaire (Flemings, 1987). Another popular learning style which has not aged according to Coffield is the flexible style of learning which is often associated with Kolbs learning style theory (1984). David Kolb described learning as a circle in which the individual must pass through all the stages before completing the learning experience. The four stages include the concreate experience which refers to the individual having the experience. The next stage is the reflective observation stage which is when a learner reviews what has been learnt from the training which is followed by the abstract conceptualization which is when the individual concludes the experience. The final stage is the active experimentation stage where the individual gets to used what is learnt in real life experiences (Rolfe and Cheek, 2012).

Although, these learning theories have been around for many years Furey (2020) states that the learning theories may stem from incorrect interpterion's. Furey also goes on to state that those who study neuroscience consider the theories to be a "neuromyth" (Furey, 2020). Although, these theories are not scientifically proven and have limitations they are still heavily relied on in the current workplace. There are some reasons that companies still rely on them such as it gives organisations an insight on how to improve learning effectiveness within the workplace (CIPD, 2021). It is also common for companies to use these learning theories when creating a training programme. It is suggested that this method is still used in creating training programmes as it gives the trainers an overview of the different ways in which employees can learn Thus, this

allows the trainer to implement different styles and methods of training which can be seen to suit all employees in the workplace (Lenartowicz *et al*., 2014). In essence, these learning theories aid an L&D team to some extent understand how employees learn in the workplace but also what styles of training would be best suited.

2.6.1 Styles of Digital Learning:

There are three main ways in which digital learning can be delivered. Although many theorists have different ideas and definitions to what formal and informal learning is. Sternberg *et al (*2000) claimed that most learning is informal which takes place every day within real life events and activities related to work. Whereas formal learning has distinct characteristics such as it is provided by an educational institution, a designated teacher or trainer is involved. At the end of formal learning an award of qualification is normally given (Trinder *et al,* 2008). In contrast, Billiet (2001) argued that most learning takes place outside the traditional old-style classroom learning style and that individuals learn best from informal learning methods.

Technology also facilitates the use of informal learning within a workplace by using many different mechanisms. Knowledge sharing can be used as a form of informal learning which takes place through social networks (CIPD, 2021). Social networks are websites which facilitate communication between individuals. Facebook and LinkedIn are social networks that are increasingly used to engage employees and to create a learning environment. This can be done through means of blogs and forums which allow the employees to share knowledge and experiences with their peers. Sharing of knowledge can be seen to be an effective way of training as it enhances innovation (Fathi *et al,* 2011). On the contrary, using social networks as a form of training narrows the barrier that divides professional and private life. This is due to the characteristics of social media as it gives employees 24/7 accessibility therefore creating a culture that suggests that training can be conducted outside workhours (Forbes, 2022). Technology has also brought about another form of informal learning, "reverse mentoring" is a new phrase that has been seen in the workplace. This type of informal learning sees the younger employees being paired with a senior colleague. The purpose of this training is for the mentee to learn skills such as technological expertise from the mentor is younger(Murphy, 2012)

Blended learning is another form of digital learning which involves using a combination of both digital learning and face to face learning (Jara and Mohamad, 2007). "Flipped Classroom" is a

popular method of blended learning which sees knowledge being shared online through different channels and then a discussion occurring face to face (CIPD, 2021).

All these learning styles come with both advantages, disadvantages, and educational benefits. According to Trinder *et al* (2008) organisations must understand that integrating digital and traditional learning methods may be the most effective method. In conclusion research has shown that the most effective method of learning is the 70:20:10 theory proposed by both Lambardo and Eichinger. This method suggests that 70 percent of learning comes from working on the job of life experiences. That 20 percent of learning comes from coaching and mentoring, and the last 10 percent comes from formal learning. (Hamburg, 20201). Although the modern is world evolving with globalization and technological advancements it can be posed that the "one size fits all" approach does not apply in the training environment anymore (Vaughan, 2008).

2.6.2 The use of Digital Learning in the workplace:

As mentioned above there are three main styles of digital learning which in turn allows learning to be delivered in many different methods. Digital learning refers to all the diverse types of electric methods that are used to enhance learning in the workplace such as the internet, audio and videos (Postolov *et al.,* 2017) .Gamification is a method that is often used in organisations to create motivation within the workplace. This method is used by applying gaming perspectives into a non-gaming context (Launders and Launders, 2015). Organisations often use gamification as a part of their ongoing training. This can be seen in companies such as Virgin Media. The company adapted this method by implementing a game which saw employees answering several questions regarding their own department and general questions about the company. This helped to train employees, create awareness of changes that were happening in the company and helped to implement new ideas in the organization (Virgin Media, 2020). Although, this type of training has been questioned whether it is it ethical or not due to the mishap that occurred in Disneyland Resort Hotels in 2008. Due to the type of gamification that Disney implemented it saw employees skipping lunch and toilet breaks to win the game (Lewis, 2019)

Online courses are also another method of digital learning which organizations use for training purposes. One method that organisations use is continuous professional development (CPD) courses. These courses help to develop skills and knowledge of employees which can be completed in their own time (Heinerichs *et al.,* 2015). Typically, these CPD courses require employees to complete a certain number of hours of course work to obtain or maintain a qualification (Erkmann, Petersen, Christensen, 2019). This course work is uploaded in chucks of information and requires the learner to study material and complete an exam at the end of it. An example of an organization that implements this is the Chartered Accounts of Ireland. The company requires all its members to 70 CPD hours per year which involves the members undertaking both structured and unstructured CPD hours. Structured CPD hours refers to interactive multi-media learning and online pre-recorded conferences whereas unstructured CPD hours refers to individual home study (Chartered Accounts Ireland, 2020)

Digital learning can also take place through online scenarios which involves putting employees in real life scenarios through interactive games and courses. This type of digital learning is commonly used in organisations where they require their employees to make decisions and to be critical thinkers. It can also be used for companies who need employees to be trained on a new product (Bardach *et al,* 2021). According to research the long-term memory is gained by using online and real-life scenarios as a form of training (Peeters *et al.,* 2014). Yet it should be noted that for organisations to implement this training it is essential to look at old scenarios and correct the mistakes that happened to make sure the online scenarios training is effective (McKinsey, 2009).

Another method of digital learning that is commonly used in workplaces in Ireland is the use of virtual classrooms. This tool is conducted by means of the internet; it allows a trainer to conduct live classroom-style training. Virtual classrooms allow for employees to learn from the office or at home whilst also having the opportunity to ask questions a real-time chat window and it allows all attendees to interact with each other by using breakout groups (Aberdour, 2011). One example of a company who has implemented virtual classroom into the training curriculum is FBD insurance, which allowed training for one thousand employees to be delivered both synchronously and asynchronously (Walsh, 2014). On the other hand, virtual classrooms can be seen to lack the interaction that is necessary to fully engage in learning which in turn has

implications for motivating employees. If employees are not fully engaged and motivated the online training my not be successful (Almahasses *et al*., 2021).

Alternatively, there are other digital learning methods which can be used for workplace training such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR). Research suggests that both AR and VR can speed up the training process by fifty six percent when compared to traditional learning (Forbes, 2022).

Therefore, there are many different digital tools which can be used for training in the workplace. These methods have both advantages and disadvantages which in turn if not implemented correctly in the workplace can hinder the learning process.

2.6.3 Effectiveness of digital learning:

Digital Learning can be seen to be effective for organisations due the distinctive characteristics it holds. Digital learning can be seen as one of the most flexible types of learning in the workplace (Miyoshi *et al,* 2012). This form of learning allows the learner to select a time and place that suits them to complete learning. It also allows the learner to access a range of content which the organisation can upload at one time. This can be especially useful during the onboarding process and ease of access for all leaners (Sun *et al,* 2012). Although as mentioned above this can also be seen as a drawback as some employees may interrupt differently and conduct the training out of working hours (Forbes, 2022).

This method can be effective for employers as it allows easy access to employees training records which in turn allows employers to see what level each employee is at (Miyoshi *et al,* 2012). This is compared to the traditional way of record keeping which required employers to keep manual logs which could lead to discrepancies and could be time consuming (Crockett, 2015). For example, research conducted on the company Etisait showed that implementing digital learning in the workplace allowed employers to gain access to each employee's learning

transcript. This in turn shows the employer the progress the employee has made compared to the quarterly targets which are set by middle managers in quarterly reviews (CIPD, 2021).

Digital learning may also be seen to be effective due to the cost savings that are associated with it. One way in which digital learning can cut down on costs is the idea that trainers can engage with more employees through online mechanisms. This in turn may lead to a reduction in the number of trainers being required (Kineo, 2012). Although in contrast this may to reduce the effectiveness of the training as the quality of instruction is questionable with a larger online class (Sorenson, 2014).

Although there are many advantages of using digital learning it is important to acknowledge the drawbacks that are associated with it also. The idea of self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to how learners must be self-motivated to complete the training on their own. This concept can create difficulties due to learners becoming disgruntled or disengaged (Bol & Garner, 2011) Learning motivation is regarded as inherent of beliefs which induce learning behaviours and may improve the overall learning outcomes (Karim, 2012). If learners are not satisfied or self-motivated then the digital learning experience for them may not be suitable and therefore the required outcomes of the training will not be met.

2.6.4 Challenges of digital learning in the workplace:

Although there are many advantages to using digital learning in the workplace, it is important to look at the challenges also. Organisational disadvantages may occur when implementing digital learning for many varied reasons such as companies may not have sufficient infrastructure to implement digital learning in the workplace (Kimiloglu *et al*., 2017) Digital learning also requires unique style management due to its characteristics one of them being self-motivation. This can pose a challenge for managers as it requires managers to hold appropriate competencies in order to encourage and motivate employees in the workplace (Vallo *et al.,* 2021). A study conducted by Deloitte in 2020 revealed that poor supervisor of digital learning can hinder cooperation and therefore affect productivity (Deloitte, 2020). Although Lakshmi and Siddhardha (N.D) argues that participants need to be self-motivated rather than managers forcing them to use the digital learning tools. If participants are forced by managers and are not self-motivated the learning experience will not be beneficial to the company nor the individual.

Another element of digital learning which may be seen as a challenge is the new digital tools that are constantly being implemented within the digital learning world. This can cause stress for both managers and employees as studies have shown that 70 percent of the time implementing change fails within an organisation (CIPD, 2020). Due to this reason employees can often prefer the learning tools that they are familiar with which in turn leads to them resisting change (Corbin-Herbison, 2019). Resistance to change can occur for many reasons such as lack of knowledge, violations of trust and broken relationships (Ford *et al.,* 2008). Although Bateh *et al* (2013) stated that resistance to change can be overcome by organisations by highlighting to employees that short time challenges will turn into long time benefits for both the organization and the employees themselves.

Due to many organizations having no alternative option but to use digital learning due to COVID-19, this has caused a rise in the price of implementing it in the workplace. Alongside this digital learning requires constant software updates to make sure it is compatible on all participants devices which can be costly for an organization (Corbin-Herbison, 2019). Aside from the costs and updates that are necessary, finding the right digital learning platform may also cause problems as those on the market may not match a company's aims and objectives. (Kimiloglu, 2017). Ethical considerations may also be seen as another challenge for organizations as content and trainees' personal information must be kept confidential. Research conducted by PWC in 2020 saw that over 80 percent of Irish companies feel that trying to keep up with the complexity of the evolving threats of phishing and cyber-attacks (PWC, 2020)

2.6.5 The debate: Classroom learning VS Digital learning in the workplace

As stated above globalisation alongside many technological developments has changed the world's perspective on how we do business and has reshaped learning offerings. However, these changes have brought about a debate whether digital learning is more effective than traditional classroom style learning. Earlier in this chapter advantages and drawbacks of digital learning were discussed. In summary, time efficiency and the fact that all materials could be updateable at any time were the two main advantages of using digital learning in the workplace. Due to its diverse characteristics digital learning is seen to be more effective than classroom learning (Ifenthaler, 2018). Although, it can be argued that many organizations have rushed into the digital learning world without researching the potential drawbacks and issues that digital learning

may bring (Gold *et al,* 2010). Nafukho (N.D) argued that technology should only be used as a facilitator and that it should not be used as a replacement for a teacher. It is also argued that although e-learning can be altered at any time, the traditional classroom is designed to cater for the current needs of the company. In essence the traditional classroom teacher can cater for the specific needs on the day as in the evolving world, the needs and objectives of a company may change day to day. It is also argued that training should be conducted away from the classroom environment for many different reasons. One reason is the fact it helps participants to focus on what is being taught. Alongside this it allows the trainees to put what is learnt in the training course into practice by means of role plays and activities. (Boak & Crabbe, 2019). It can be argued that for certain professions a blended approach of learning is more appropriate. Combining both training methods has many advantages such as immediate feedback can be given and trainees are more likely to be motivated to learn (Vasanthi & Basariya, 2019). Another argument that has evolved over the years is the idea of trust. Research conducted by CIPD in July 2020 stated that 45 percent of employees believe that originations are monitoring all digital encounters within the workplace. Alongside this, 75 percent of participants felt that trust would be damaged if originations were to implement constant monitoring (CIPD, 2020)

Research conducted by Titthasiri (2013) found that traditional learning was still favoured by many employees within the organisation. From the research digital learning failed on different characteristics such as the cost of it, participants computing ability and the fact it may not be suitable for all learning styles. Although, in contrast Kramer (2007) and Gwebu & Wang (2007) argued that e-learning has brought about satisfaction in the organisation as employees have control over their own individual training needs.

In summary, there are two theories when it comes to the debate of which of the two methods are more effective. Although there is no substantial evidence to suggest which method should be used as the main method of training. This could be since pro technology theorists continue to support the use of digital learning in the workplace, in contrast to those theorists who believe that classroom cannot be replaced by technology.

2.6.6 The impact COVID-19 had on digital learning:

In March 2020 Ireland entered into a lockdown which saw many employees being forced to work from home. In turn a bill was introduced by the Irish government which encouraged organizations to facilitate working from home for their employees (Citizen Information, 2021). In turn this had a knock-on effect for organizations as they had to quickly adapt to a new way of working. The first challenge companies had to undertake was training employees on how to adapt to the digital environment and to train them on how to use the equipment (Kshirsagar, 2020). The second challenge companies faced was the idea of putting all training online. Companies had to quickly adapt to new methods of learning to upskill employees and to make sure all new staff had the skills and knowledge required to undertake their roles (Hamburg, 2021). These challenges created a digital transformation in the workplace as companies had to change business models and had to modify roles in the workplace. Thus, in turn meant companies had to rethink their company culture as how companies conduct training and learning makes up a big part of culture (Savic, 2020). In the past, companies invested little money in the world of online training due to the high level of learning that occurred informally through coaching, and self-directed learning (Yeo, 2008). As a result of COVID-19, workplace learning had to change in many ways such as adapting programs to fit all employees' needs, expand digital learning and develop alternative solutions (Hamburg, 2021). Although some companies such as Facebook and Google quickly adapted to the world of digital learning other companies were not as successful. Typically, it was the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that struggled the most when trying to implement digital learning into the workplace. This happened for several reasons such as SMEs tend to have less capital and fewer assets which in turn can restrict their ability to train staff (Nachmias, Hubscmid, 2021). Although in contrast its stated by the International Labour Organisation (2020) that for SMEs to overcome the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic investments must be made in both digital and learning. Studies have suggested that another effect the pandemic had on both large and SMEs is the way employees perceive digital learning and whether or not human-centric digital strategies in organizations are effective (Nachmias *et al,* 2021).

Although companies have faced many challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic it has also created opportunities. Research has shown that over 42 percent of core skills at present will be

outdated by 2022 (Zou, 2020). In contrast to the World Economic Forum (2020) research that stated over 50 percent of employees will need reskilling due to pandemic and the increasing use of technology in the workplace. In essence the pandemic has accelerated the trend of digital learning as it could be used to reskill employees and employers increased online opportunities.

2.7 Generation Y & Generation Z:

Scientists have categorized individuals living in the same period and sharing the same conditions into the term "Generations" (Baysal, 2015) Although Jopling (2004) described generations as "a set of birthdays of groups of people" In order to define these generations, labels are given to the certain year brackets. For example, Generation Y covers the years from 1981-1996 compared to Generation Z which refers to individuals that were born between the years 1997-2012. For this study it is important to look at both Generation X and Generation Y as Ireland has the youngest population in Europe which in turn means these generations are emerging into the Irish workforce which has implications for companies implementing training mechanisms for these groups (Eurostat, 2019). Generation Y are commonly known as the "children of globalization" whereas Generation Z are commonly known as the technology generation (Baysal, 2014). In turn, these two generations have impacted the way businesses operate as they have become the fastest growing group of employees to enter the workforce (Gaidhani, Arora, Sharma, 2019). The generation Y has distinctive characteristics such as they are highly motivated who are highly educated. In turn, this generation views the workplace as a learning environment which is done through training courses, internships and part time jobs that are undertaken throughout their lifetime. Technology is also an important factor in the workplace for Generation Y as technology-Inegrated companies are chosen over those whom are not (Berkup, 2014). In contrast, companies are now tasked with identifying the needs of Generation Z. It is important that companies understand the needs of Generation Z as they now make up more than 30 percent of the workforce. This in turn has implications for digital learning in the workplace as Generation Z make up a big part of the workforce employees are tasked with deciding what method of training should be used (Gaidhani *et al, 2019)*. Those living in the Generation Z genre have characteristics such as being addicted to technology and typically the attention span can be quite short. According to Coombs (2013) although Generation Z are "tech savvy" they do not

show the ability to solve real life problems. Which in turn also must be considered when employers are implementing training as problem solving is often used in many forms throughout the workplace.

In turn this has implications for originations, although the two generations have similar characteristics both generations may have different ideas of what the workplace should look like. Thus, HR must work with organizations to make sure all generations desires, objectives and work esteems are met internally (Cennamo *et al.,* 2008) In terms of communication generation Z prefers to communicate through text on applications such as Microsoft team and WhatsApp (Seemiller, Grace, 2019). This is compared to generation Y whose preferred method of communication which is through email. The two generations can also be seen to motivated through different methods such as Generation Y are more likely to be motivated by self-realization, competition and monetary reward. Contrastingly Generation Z are more motivated by social rewards such as freedom and non-commitment issues within the organization. This group thrive on non-monetary benefits such as job promotion, public praise, training and certified training programs (Mahmoud *et al.,* 2020). For the purpose of this study it was essential to look at what both Generations prefer when it comes to training and development in the workplace. Wong *et al .,* (2008) have stated that the Y generation are the first generation to grow up with technology therefore they have evolved in the rapidly changing environment and are comfortable with change. Therefore for training to be successful it should be given to the employees only when needed, which also can be referred to as just-in-time training. Training by this generation is preferred when it is conducted in a rapid and individual manner (Bencsik, Machova, 2016). This is compared to generation Z who prefer to learn in an informal learning environment, this group particularly enjoys learning when it is something that they are interested in (Bencski, Machova, 2016). As this generation Z are said to have many other commitments outside work it is important also that all training that is provided is flexible and engaging (Racolta, Irini, 2021). In essence generation Z have been brought up surrounded by technology, thus Dorsey (2016) suggests that this generation are the promoters of integrating technology into the workplace. Although this can create many opportunities for organizations it may also cause problems such as the organization must ensure that employees are kept satisfied and interested or employees will leave the organization.

2.8 Conclusion:

As observed in this literature, the area of learning is an important part of the HR function and the organisation. This is because learning plays an integral role in attracting staff whilst also aids in gaining a competitive advantage for the organisation. Throughout the literature both advantages and disadvantages have been seen in all three methods of learning, although there is a gap in the literature which fails to examine which method is the most effective as a form of training. On the other hand, the literature does examine the different methods of training which can be used as a form of training, but it is unclear whether these methods cater for all learning styles and generations throughout the workplace. Another element which has affected learning in the workplace is the COVID-19 pandemic, as stated overnight companies had to adapt to digital methods overnight. This in turn has impacted in the way companies conduct training in the workplace which has seen many companies adapting digital tools as a form of training.

CHAPTER THREE- Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this section the research methods will be discussed along with the reasoning behind the chosen method. Another element of this chapter is the research question and sub questions which will be discussed as this will help lay the foundation for the overall research topic. The many types of research will be discussed in order to demonstrate the reasoning behind the chosen research method. The study's ethical considerations and the limitations of the study will also be discussed within this chapter.

3.2 Purpose of Study:

This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of digital learning as a form of training in the workplace in Ireland. Although other research has been carried out internationally (Kapo *et al..,* 2020) no research such as this kind has been carried from an Irish perspective after Covid-19. According to Eurostat (2019) Ireland has the youngest population in the European Union (EU)

which is an important factor to this study as more millennials and Generation Zs enter the workplace. This in turn has its own implications as it brings a generation shift to the workplace with organizations seeing an increase in the demand for a more modern and flexible workplace. The COVID-19 pandemic also saw Ireland having one of the highest numbers of remote workers in the EU states seeing 80 percent of employees being pushed to work from home (CSO, 2020). This also had implications for learning in the workplace. This study aimed to explore the different elements which may hinder or facilitate the use of digital learning within the workplace.

3.3 Research Questions:

The four sub-questions are as follows:

Q1: How effective is digital learning as a form of training in the workplace?

This sub question is an important element in trying to conclude the overall study. From the literature there are two different viewpoints offered which fail to give an insight into how effective digital learning is within the workplace. Also due to digital learning being somewhat a new method of training in the workplace it was difficult to find up to date literature regarding this topic. This question aims to answer is digital learning useful within the workplace.

Q2: What is the preferred method of training in the modern-day workplace?

There are three main types of training approaches in the modern-day workplace: Traditional style learning, digital learning, and a blended approach. Although the primary literature explored was extensive in explaining the advantages and disadvantages of these methods, it lacked the information that was needed to discover which of the learning methods was more effective. Thus, a sub question of this thesis it to question and identify what method of training is preferred in the modern-day workplace.

Q3: What impact has COVID-19 had on the way companies conduct training in the workplace?

The impact of COVID-19 has been seen worldwide but more so companies have had to adapt to diverse ways in which they conduct business. As companies could not forecast the COVID-19 pandemic it is important to gain an insight into how companies adapted to the challenge. The third sub-question of this study will be to question whether COVID-19 has changed the way in

which companies train employees in the workplace. To gain in-depth research, this question will be expanded to what methods were used in the origination and how did the company implement these challenges.

Q4: Does digital learning cater for all ages and abilities in the workplace?

Reports have shown that there are now five generations currently employed in the workforce, meaning that the age range varies throughout an organisation. This can be a difficult task for companies to manage as each generation has different characteristics thus meaning there are different preferences regarding the area of training. This sub-question aims to discover whether or not the digital tools that are used are suitable for all age groups and learning abilities.

3.4 Research Philosophy:

One important aspect of this research methodology chapter is the research philosophy or assumptions which the researcher has before developing knowledge about a certain topic. The concept of research philosophy refers to "a set of beliefs and assumptions which are based around the development of knowledge" (Saunders *et al.* 2019). There are a multitude of various research philosophies, although the main philosophies are epistemology, ontology and axiology, each of these hold distinctive characteristics in which will influence the way researchers' views. It is essential for the researcher to be conscious of the philosophical commitments that are associated with the research process in order to understand what is actually being investigated. To select the appropriate philosophy the researcher can use the theoretical research onion framework (Sauders *et al.* 2006). This framework is read from the external layer and each layer is dissected to select the most appropriate research strategy. The two chosen research strategies for this dissertation are ontology and epistemology.
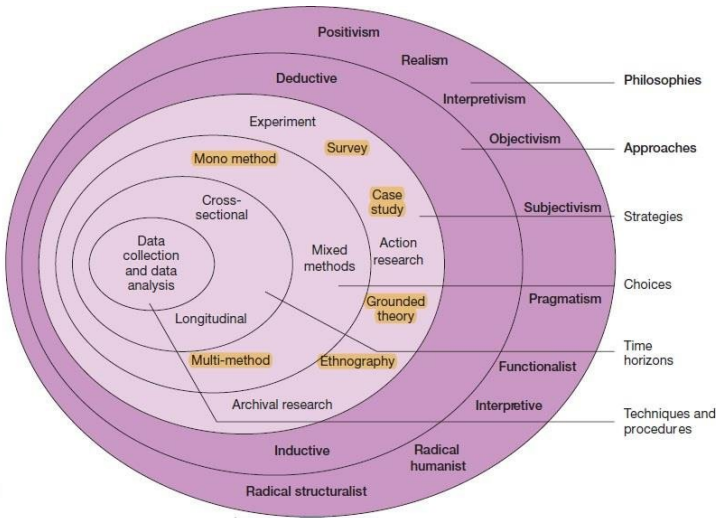
Figure 1: Research Onion

3.4.1 Ontology Framework

Ontology takes into account the nature of existence; it also takes into consideration the assumption about how the world operates. In essence, this means that the researcher takes the position of a constructivist (Saunders *et al,* 2019). For this research, the ontological position is that HR is going through change due to the implementation of technology for training purposes in the workplace. Therefore, the researcher had to question whether the pre-assumptions regarding the effectiveness of digital learning in the workplace were capable of being challenged.

3.4.2 Epistemology Framework:

Following on from the assumptions that are made in the ontology phase comes the epistemology assumptions which can be defined as "the creation of knowledge within a certain subject area" (Horn, 2012) From an epistemological standpoint it was important for the researcher to discover how effective digital learning was in the workplace as a form of training in the workplace. Due to the characteristics of technology this research may be seen to be subjective as the technology world is constantly evolving (Bell *et al.* 2018). Epistemology differs from the ontology framework as it focuses on how we know compared to ontology which focuses on what we know.

3.5 Research Methods:

Research can be conducted by many different methods. Two of the more common methods of research in the business environment are quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data can be defined as data which is collected through means of statistical methods such as surveys which can be numerically quantified and statically analyzed (Cresswell, 2014). Alternatively, qualitative data can be defined as data which is obtained by means of non-numerical data and puts emphasis on words rather than quantification (Byran, *et al*, 2003). This method is deemed to be the more suitable method for this study as it helps the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge in understanding the feelings of participants towards digital learning in the workplace. (Hignett, McDermott, 2015).

To complete this study a semi-structured interview format was selected as it allows for discovery to take place compared to quantitative method where a more structured and rigid approach is taken. Quantitative research can also be seen to solely focus on numbers which in turn can lead to themes in the data being overlooked. This can also mean that information is misinterpreted as the researcher cannot look for clarification off the participant (Magaldi, Berler, 2020).

The chosen research design is supported also by previous studies conducted which hold similar characteristics. A study which researched how workplace learning was being transformed (Zur, Friedl, 2021) used semi-structured interviews to gain an insight into how corporate managers incorporated digital learning into the workplace and what worked best for them. Furthermore, research conducted by Hult and Bystrom (2021) used a qualitative research approach by means of semi-structured interviews also. Bystrom (2021) also stated that participant validation is an important part of any research as it helps ensure the data that is collected is accurate and correct (Bryman, 2015) The research methodology was influenced by the named studies alongside many more similar studies which the researcher has reviewed in chapter two.

In essence, the design of this research aimed to gather rich primary data in order to gain an in depth understanding of the effectiveness of digital learning in the workplace in Ireland. For this research to be successful the researcher had to take into consideration the term "fit for purpose". During this undertaking the researcher considered factors such as: how many constraints the researcher may face, the resources which were available and the intended outcomes (Cohen *et al,* 2007)

3.6 Research Design:

3.6.1 Research Instrument:

Researchers often use interviews in many different formats. As stated above semi-structured interviews were used as the preferred research instrument. The researcher feels that semi-structured interviews were necessary in order to gain a clear insight into the attitudes of HR professionals regarding digital learning as a form of training. Semi-structured interviews are conducted by using a detailed interview guide which aids the researcher to ensure all themes are addressed. Although this framework also allows the researcher to prop the responses of the participant. This in turn allows for subjective responses from the individuals regarding their own particular experiences (McIntonsh&Morse, 2015).

The questions have been designed from the four main research questions: The effectiveness of digital learning, the preferred of training in the workplace, the impact COVID-19 had on digital learning and how digital learning is effective for all ages and abilities in the workplace.

There are many advantages when it comes to semi-structured interviews, as discussed above questions are formulated and structured prior to the interview. According to Denscombe (2017) semi-structured interviews give leeway to allow flexibility during the interview process. This in turn can potentially lead to more in-depth knowledge being gained as the researcher can deviate from the script if necessary. Semi-structured interviews can be conducted face to face and online with the use of technology, therefore this can also be seen as another advantage as it is an accessible framework for both participants and the researcher (Brown, Danaher, 2019). Contrastingly, this approach also has limitations. According to Denscombe (2017) results from this approach may hinder the results produced due to factors such as participants may be influenced by the presence of the interviewer. This may cause drawbacks as participants may answer questions which they think are favorable to the researcher. This approach may also be seen as time consuming due to how long it takes to transcript and analyze the data (Roulston, Choi, 2018).

3.6.2 Interview Design:

In preparation prior to the interviews a set of open-ended questions was prepared by the researcher. The structure of the interviews was of utmost important when creating the interview questions (Magaldi, Berler, 2020) In order to get an insight into each participant's background a set of "warm up" questions will be asked which will help the researcher gain an insight into the participants experience thus this data will be used as a comparison throughout the study. These questions are asked to aim to understand whether or not the participants role in the HR industry has changed over time and if so what factors have contributed to that. The rest of the interview will be broken down into three themes which aims to answer the three research questions which were mentioned above. Each interview will be conducted by zoom or Microsoft Teams which will last approximately half an hour and these interviews will be recorded with the permission of the participants. Prior to the interview the researcher will send the participants an email with the following information: (1) Prearranged questions (2) An overview of the project (3) Ethics Form (4) Statement of confidentiality.

3.6.3 Pilot Study:

The use of a pilot study for the semi-structured interviews gives the researcher an opportunity to evaluate how effective the interview questions are and to iron out any issues with the structure of the questions. It also gives the researcher a chance to practice their interview skills (Silverman, 2013). The interview was piloted with peers, and after this it was evident that some of the questions being asked were leading and therefore the researcher had to reword and rephase those questions.

3.6.4 Interview Schedule:

Participant	Title	Length of service	Duration of interview
HR 1	Head of L&D	20 years	35 Minutes
HR 2	Head of Human Resources	10 years	20 Minutes
HR 3	L &D specialist	6 years	23 Minutes
HR 4	L &D specialist	19 years	40 Minutes
HR	L &D Manager	12 years	19 Minutes

3.7 Research Sample: Purpose sampling was used by the researcher in order to recruit participants for the study. Purpose sampling is when a researcher deliberately chooses participants due to the qualities and position the participants possesses. (Battagila, 2008). A purpose sampling technique enabled the researcher to select individuals who work in the HR sector who oversee the training and development sector within their company.. The researcher felt it was necessary to interview those working directly with the L&D sector as they would be the employees who have implemented digital learning. Denscombe (2017) emphasized the importance of having a representative sample of the given population in order to conduct an accurate study. Therefore, five participants were chosen to participate in the interview and these interviewees were recruited through a gate keeper whom is known to the researcher. Although no update to date studies have been conducted on the HR profession, the latest study in 2012 showed that over 70 percent of employees in the HR profession were female. (Ulrich *et al.,* 2013). Therefore, the researcher feels the participants chosen give a true representative of the overall population of the HR community.

3.8 Data Analysis:

Depending on how a researcher uses the framework, thematic analysis can be described as a flexible approach. To analyze the data the researcher followed the framework set out by Brian and Clarke (2006). The researcher aims to analysis the data as whole and to this the data will be divided into themes. It is expected that these themes will emerge from the data that is collected from the semi-structured interviews. Bruan and Clarke (2006) emphasised the importance of

putting the raw data into themes as depth is lost when the researcher looks at the topic in a broad perspective. As most of the interviews were conducted through Microsoft teams, transcripts from these interviews were auto generated. This data will aid the researcher to identify codes by creating categories from quotes and phrases. Although, it is important that quotes from the interviews are not taken out of context. This could lead to data being misinterpreted and therefore would lead to an inaccurate analysis of the data (Silverman, 2013).

3.8.1 Ethical Considerations:

One important aspect of conducting any research is to apply all ethical principles that are relevant to the research that is being undertaken. (Quinlan, 2011). Therefore, it was important for the researcher to put all possible measures in place to avoid any breaches throughout the study. There were many codes of ethics that had to be adhered to whilst conducting the research. The first code was the General Data Protection Regulation code 2018 (GDPR) which sets out certain criteria for collecting and processing data (Irish Statue Book, 2018). Saunders *et al* (2019) also stated the elements of ethics which need to be considered when conducting research. He stated that research should be voluntary in nature and consent must be sought before collecting the data. Saunders *et al* (2019) also stated that the data obtained should only be used for the specified purpose and stressed the importance of remaining confidentiality for participants throughout the entire research. This was maintained as none of the participants that took place in the study were named. Prior to the participants undertaking the semi-structured interview they were required to fill out a consent form which also explained how the information will be stored and processed. The participants have also the right to request a copy of the final dissertation as their own wish. To make sure the information is protected all data collected will be held on password protected laptops and USB keys.

3.8.2 Validity of the data:

To make sure the data is accurate participants will have the opportunity to review the transcripts from the interviews. This can be referred to as narrator checking and it makes sure that all the information is viable (Meares, 2012)

3.8.3 Limitations:

Due to the characteristics of this research limitations accrued throughout. Due to time constraints the researcher conducted a small-scale study with five participants, this may be seen as a limitation as it could be said that a more accurate result could be obtained from larger study. The interviews that were conducted took place during the working week in which participants could only dedicate a limited time to the researcher. From the researchers perspective they felt the time constraints reduced the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge from the interviewees. The participants that were interviewed were all from the private sector, this has consequences for the study as it could be seen to not give a true reflection of all originations in Ireland.

3.9 Conclusion:

This chapter has outlined the research method that was employed in this study. The researcher set out to design this study in a way that minimizes any implications of the method adapted. The next chapter will focus on the data that was gathered alongside the findings of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR- Results and Findings

4.1 Introduction

This study set out to explore how effective digital learning was as a form of training in the workplace in Ireland. This was done by conducting a comprehensive review of secondary literature and semi-structured interviews. This chapter aims to present the findings of the study and the analysis of the research. In particular, it aims to reflect on the viewpoints of those currently working in the HR industry and how those in the HR industry view digital learning as a form of training within the workplace.

The findings present are based on a thematic analysis. Three main themes emerged from the data that was collected from the semi-structured interviews. The first theme that emerged was the role of digital learning in the workplace, alongside the subthemes were the opportunities and challenges of digital learning in the workplace. Secondly, the theme motivation emerged around the idea of self-motivation and how peer learning may be seen to be the most beneficial in the workplace. Thirdly, the theme "Industry Specific" emerged which questioned if digital learning is effective in every industry.

The researcher deemed each of the themes included to be important as the themes emerged are discussed in the broader context. In terms of the themes and subthemes, some may overlap with each other due to being featured in many different contexts.

The interview guide which was used to conduct the primary research is found in appendix four and all transcripts are available upon request.

4.2 Descriptive Overview:

Through the use of the warmup questions in the semi-structured interviews, information was gained about the participants' years of service and how they entered the HR profession. The findings in figure three shows that many of the participants were female. As the findings show, the interviewees involved have profound knowledge of the industry which is beneficiary to this study as it gives the researcher an insight into how the learning and development sector has changed over time. The results also show that 4 of the respondents were working in the learning and development sector of their company and with two respondents working in MNCs.

Figure 3- Interviewees

Participant	Gender	Occupation	Years of service	Industry
Participant **1**	Female	Head of HR	10 Years	Insurance (MNC)
Participant **2**	Female	Head of L & D	20 Years	Education
Participant **3**	Female	L & D Specialist	6 Years	Agency Work
Participant **4**	Female	L & D Specialist	19 Years	Hospitality
Participant **5**	Male	L & D Manager	20 Years	Technology (MNC)

4.3 Theme One: The Role of digital learning in the workplace:

The role of digital learning has evolved and changed the way in which organizations train their staff within the workplace. This transformation sees many more creative training methods and new software being used in organizations to motivate and encourage staff to take part in training.

4.3.1 Opportunities:

Accessibility of digital learning

The primary results showed that flexibility was the main advantage of digital learning. In this regard, the data collected shows that the use of digital learning can be seen to be cost effective for organizations which is a principal factor.

Participant one stated "*We have much higher margins when sending employees on training programs due to the online format. This is because we are not paying out for hotels, venues, or the refreshments that employees would require on a training day. So commercially digital learning is much more cost effective for us as a company*"

This was supported by participant four who stated "*As a global company, digital learning has allowed the company to save money on different elements such as travel. Employees are no longer required to travel instead they can log on to zoom or Microsoft teams and tune into the training meaning its less labour intensive*"

"*From my experience I feel like digital learning can be an effective means of training as you can use creative methods to conduct the training whilst also condensing the training into an abbreviated period (*Participant three)

Moreover, digital learning can also be seen to be effective for learners as it is so accessible to all users. Digital learning is designed to be accessed on many different devices such as laptops, mobile and tablets. This allows flexibility for employees to learn in their own time. Participant one empathised how this has made training more effective as employees have the chance to conduct the training in their own time and thus, they take charge of their own training process.

"*We give employees an hour or two a week to conduct digital training programmes on our online learning platform, this has led to an increase in productivity and creativity in the workplace. It has also seen an increase in high performers in the workplace as they are learning something they have an interest in*" (Participant one)

"*It essentially allows employees to tap into the training from anywhere. This has had an impact for our company as it allows us to send more employees on the training course as it can be easily accessed*" (Participant two)

Another element of accessibility that emerged from the primary research was the various methods of digital learning that can be used as a form of training in the workplace. All participants that were involved stated different methods and software which they use to conduct training in the workplace. In essence, there are many platforms for companies to choose from making it accessible from the viewpoint of both the employer and the employee. The five participants also stated that due to the COVID-19 pandemic they had to adapt to using more methods of digital learning. Although all participants were under the same opinion, participant two and four offered a wider prospective of how the training industry has changed with the development of innovative technology.

"The development of technology has changed my role completely, when I started my career there was no such thing as online learning. Now I am implementing training programmes which involve Zoom, Moodle, Kahoot and other software platforms" (Participant two)

"I started my career as accommodation manager in a company in London, learning and development wasn't really a done thing in organisations. I now work with many different digital tools to train staff and upskill staff. My preferred method of digital learning is zoom" (Participant four)

Participant three stated that *"When COVID-19 hit the vast majority of our solution was to use digital training. The easiest way for most people is just to get them signed up to a LinkedIn learning account"*

"As the company I work for is MNC digital learning is a massive role within in the LND role and we have an online university and there was a plethora of different online learning methods, and it was done through many different formats. (Participant five)

"Before COVID-19 we would have had in person training days on Excel, Word and other essential computer software's which were needed, now we mainly work on our training platform talent connect. If it was left up to local branches, we might not have that much material but because of the global nature of the business the digital aspect means that there are so many different courses out there that may not be available if it was left up to the Irish office.(Participant One)

From this analysis it is clear that COVID-19 has accelerated the use of digital learning in the workplace. It is also interesting to see how the MNCs were better prepared to move their training online has they had their own platforms which could be used for training purposes compared to local companies who had to use external methods. The figure below shows a visual representation of the different methods of training that are used in the workplace.
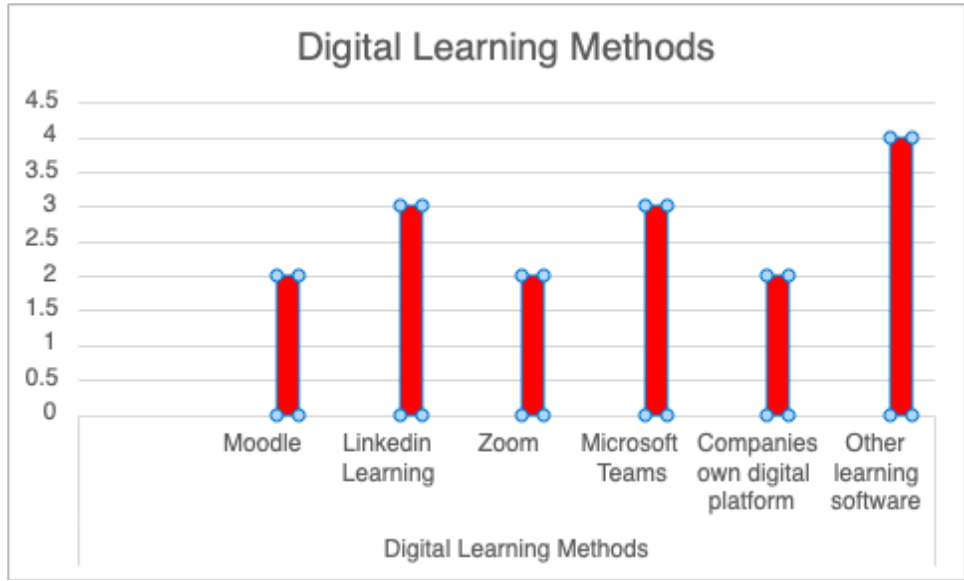
Figure four- Digital Learning methods

 4.3.2 Challenges

Training the Trainer

There was an agreement amongst participants that a major challenge for organizations implementing digital learning lies with the traditional trainer. That is to say, in order to implement digital learning in the workplace the trainer had to be taught new skills. These new skills were required for the trainers not only for online training purposes but also skills were required for trainers to restructure their training plans in order for them to be digitally friendly.

"When implementing digital training it was evident that trainers didn't have the specific skillset that was needed. Although they had the subject matter expertise and training skills, they had to learn an extra layer of skills such as digital delivery skills. This also meant that trainers had to revamp their training workshop in order to cater for the online audience" (Participant two)

"As I work as the trainer, my job changed overnight due to COVID-19. I had to retrain and rethink the way in which I conducted training. Normally training was conducted over the space of five days which involved activities and training. This was shortened due to the nature of digital learning and trying to keep employees engaged. It was particularly hard in the fact that I could no longer read the room and adjust my content. This was a new skill I had to learn (Participant Three)

"*During COVID-19 all my aspects of my training went online which meant I spent a ridiculous amount of time on zoom, its fine but I had to change and rethink my style of being the facilitator of learning to a trainer. This also meant to my content had to change"* (Participation Four)

Pre-Training

In an era where digital transformation is happening rapidly, employers have a common misconception that all employees are fully capable of dealing with technology tools within the workplace. Participants expressed that in some cases employees are not working with technology tools everyday and therefore face challenges in accessing the digital learning materials. Concerns were expressed about how accessible training was for all ages and abilities in the workplace.

"*What we were taken back by was the level of digital illiteracy among the working population. Young people who we thought were digital natives could not do the basics such as logging into zoom"* (Participant two)

Confidentiality

The issue of confidentiality was mentioned many times throughout the primary research by participants. The semi-structured interviews brought to light how employees feel when taking part in online learning. One question that was pondered on throughout the research was the idea

was digital learning ethically right. Another question which arose was the idea whether companies legally had the right to monitor employees' screens. The fact that online learning can be recorded may also hinder the learning process as participants are less likely to give input due to fear of it being shared online or recorded by other participants.

*"All learning software now of days have coding installed to monitor different elements of the training. But there is GDPR issues around most of that stuff. One company offered us a package which would have allowed us to monitor what employees had open on their laptops whilst the training was being conducted. But that is when it gets personal and legal. I suppose that could be nearly a challenge of digital learning as well, like how companies could balance it. (*Participant two)

"*Sometimes it can be hard to get employees to give real life examples. This is because they are afraid of being recorded"* (Participant three)

4.4 Theme Two: Motivation

One concern expressed amongst all the interviews was the idea of motivation. Although motivation is needed in digital style learning, it is particularly important in the digital learning environment. The participants agreed that motivation is an important role in training as if employees are not motivated to learn it can be a waste of investment and time for the organization. Furthermore, they concluded that it can be difficult to motivate employees whom are sitting in front of a screen. Interviewees also coincided that even though there is a demand for digital learning in the workplace to be the sole method of training, organizations should use a blended approach in order to keep employees engaged.

"*The answers are normally in the room and I'm just there to facilitate them coming out with the answers themselves. My job is to motivate them by getting them to commit to things by saying it out loud. Although from a motivational point, employees who take part in digital learning can*

gain a certificate at the end of each module which really stands to employees when going for promotion (Participant two)

"*It's hard for both the employees and trainers to stay motivated during digital learning sessions. Participants are more likely to be disconnected as it's harder to stay engaged for a long length of time with the screen. (Participant three)*

Another element of motivation which was evident in the interviews was the idea of peer learning, the primary research showed that peer learning can help to motivate employees within the workplace. Thus, the participants also stated that peer learning is hard to replicate through the likes of zoom and Microsoft teams even though there is "breakdown out rooms" it is still not the same. Many participants stated that many times breakout groups are used by peers as a mean to "catch up" rather than to work on the material that has been assigned to the group and this can be hard to monitor.

"*Complex problem solving or something like that is best suited to peer learning, you really need to get in there. There's no comparison for this type of learning*" (Participant four)

"*In my own opinion, I feel peer learning is the best way to learn I suppose. For millennials they are not used to engaging face to face with each other*" (Participant five)

"*The traditional peer to peer learning cannot be replicated or replaced by software, people feed off each other's energy. I feel the best way to motivate employees is to create human moments, this is a big part of L&D and motivation.* (Participant two)

"*Peer learning can be a useful tool to help motivate others in the workplace, but it also holds a substantial weight in the way it caters for most ages and learning abilities in the workplace*" (Participant three)

4.5 Theme Three: Industry Specific

This study set out with the aim of exploring the effectiveness of digital learning in the workplace. The data collected from the semi-structured interviews revealed that digital learning can work in some industries, and it does not suit the characteristics of other industries. The participants stated that there are many reasons for this. One reason for this is certain industries

require different skills sets, in which some participants stated that these skills can be hard to learn through an online environment. As all participants were working in different industries, they each had different viewpoints and arguments as to what industry digital learning would be best suited to. Participants stated that one industry which traditional learning is best suited to is the hospitality industry. There are many reasons for this such as customer service skills and communication skills are the essential skills which employees are required to have within an organisation.

"I think digital learning is industry specific, hospitality will always require face to face learning. In person training is essential for this industry as they need people to understand how to interact with customers. The employees in this industry also need to understand how to read humans body language and human moments" (Participant four)

Furthermore, participants also stated that digital learning could be useful in industries which are highly regulated and require employers to have completed certain areas of compliance. It was interesting to note that four out of the five participants have implemented compulsory manual handling courses which are conducted online. As all participants are employed in various industries it is compelling to find that some industries are legally required to supply compulsory training for staff. For example, the insurance industry requires employees to have money laundering training completed. This type of training is said to be effective through the use of digital learning. This is compared to a manufacturing company where training is required by the traditional method as employees must learn in person how to use the digital tools.

"Digital learning is great for critical control points in the hospitality industry such as in the kitchen with health and safety training. It also can be used for the accommodation sector as training can be conducted online for safe use of chemicals. In short, if companies are brought to court over compliance issues a report can be pulled and be able to show the court" (Participant four)

"Things like emotional intelligence is very tough to train through digital learning. You need to do that in person. I would do things like Kobes five choices which fundamentally about time

management. So yeah it depends on what industry you are in to determine how effective digital learning will be" (Participant 1)

"Like digital learning is useful in industries that require some kind of compliance or health and safety training. Training that is accredited for certain industries can be useful to conduct online. Although leadership skills or communication skills are intangible so it's impossible to measure. Saying this companies still throw money and resources at digital learning regardless of suitability." (Participant 3)

As stated above one challenge that was identified with online learning was digital illiteracy. This can also cause challenges due to the industry the company operates in. As participant two has worked in many industries over her twenty-year career she has tried to implement training programmes in each. From her experience in companies who rely heavily on administration roles digital learning can work well because they have the digital know how to conduct the training. When it comes to jobs such as baggage handlers and postal workers digital learning is not effective as they are not working with technology every day. Thus, traditional classroom learning would be best suited rather than trying to convert them into on online digital learning platform.

"So really, it's a huge problem. The level of digital illiteracy among people who are engaged in digital learning where they are not using computers on a regular basis is remarkably high. And it is hugely problematic for successful engagement of learners on digital learning." (Participant two)

4.6 Summary

Together, these results provide a clear insight into how digital learning as a form of training has transformed. It also shows how it can be effective in some industries but due to the characteristics that go along side it there can be challenges whilst using it. A total of five participants took part in this primary research and in doing so offered an insight into how they had implemented digital learning in the workplace. All participants involved had a great depth of knowledge due to the many years of experience they had but also with the different industries they had worked in. Overall, the results show that digital learning has changed to some extent the way organisations implement training in the workplace. Although according to the research the preferred method of learning is a blended approach as compliance training and hard skills may

be taught online. For the likes of soft skills and motivation training the traditional learning method is best suited for these.

The following chapter will aim to discuss the findings in a broader context which will be related back to the secondary literature.

CHAPTER FIVE- Discussion

5.1 Introduction:

The aim of this chapter is to interpret and analyse how the findings in chapter four are significant within the context of the literature. The findings will also be elaborated on to highlight the contributions of this research to the digital learning field.

5.2 Overview of the findings

The purpose of this study was to contribute insights to the research regarding how effective digital learning is as a form of training in the workplace in Ireland. The findings suggested that COVID-19 changed the workplace learning culture overnight and as a result this has caused many challenges for companies. However, opportunities have arose due to the nature of digital learning which have brought about benefits to the workplace.

To answer the overall research question, the topic was broken down into four different segments. These segments were broken into sub questions which will be critically discussed evaluated and analysed. In the section to follow the sub questions will be related back to the findings and the literature.

5.3 Discussion

5.3.1 Research Question One: How effective is digital learning as a form of training in the workplace?

An initial sub research question was to determine is digital learning an effective method of training in the workplace. The results from the primary research have shown that digital learning has changed the way in which companies conduct training within the workplace. The adoption of technological tools such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom and LinkedIn Learning has seen companies implementing more flexible training schemes within the workplace. This might be explained due to the fact that training can be accessed at any time and through any device. This finding was consistent with that of (Miyoshi *et al,* 2012) who stated that digital learning is seen to be one of the most effective methods of learning in the workplace as it allows the employee to take control of their own learning. Furthermore, due to the digital transformation and many more companies offering digital learning software it can be seen as a cost-effective method of training. The

primary research stated that companies have higher margins when it comes to digital learning as many costs can be cut such as travel costs and venues which are associated with sending employees on training days. All the participants involved in the research also stated how the use of free software such as Zoom, and Microsoft are an essential part of their training schedule especially those working in the SMEs. Thus, it shows that there is competition in the digital learning world which reduces the number of monopolies in the sector which in turn forces companies to lower their prices. This is contrasted to what (Corbin-Herbison, 2019) and Titthasiri (2013) stated as it was suggested that digital learning is an expensive method of training to implemented due to the constant software updates. Although this research may be seen to be outdated due to increase of technology since the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Contrastingly, the effectiveness of digital learning is hindered by different characteristics. In this regard, the results showed that digital illiteracy is a common problem that companies are face with in the workplace. This was a concern amongst participants as it was felt that many employees didn't have the basic skills to participate in the digital learning process. This was also noted by Corbin & Herbison (2019) who stated that employees often resist change in the workplace as there is a lack of knowledge around the change.

In essence, digital learning is an effective method of training if used correctly. Although there are many challenges which companies face when implementing the learning method.

5.3.2 Research Question Two: What is the preferred method of training in the modern-day workplace?

The second question of this study was to determine which was the preferred method of training in the workplace in Ireland. From the literature it was suggested that there are three viable options to organisations which they can use to implement training in the workplace. The three options are formal learning which typically takes place in the classroom, informal learning, which is usually conducted online, and a blended learning approach is a mixture of both. In accordance with present results which stated that the most effective method of training in the workplace is a blended approach. Previous literature has also stated that the best approach to training is a blended approach. For

example, Trinder *et al* (2008) stated that for training to be effective in the workplace an integrated approach should be taken. This was supported by Hamburg (2021) who also stated that companies should find the right balance between using formal and informal learning in the workplace. Hamburg (2021) also suggested that companies should consider the theory which was set out by Lambardo and Eichinger that stated for employees to learn a 70:20:10 approach should be taken. Thus, employees should have the opportunity to learn from both informal and formal learning whilst also learning from past mistakes and real-life experiences. The primary results mirrored these theorists' approach as the participants involved stated that one important way for employees to learn was through "peer learning". In this regard peer learning was seen to be hard to replicate through an online platform, it also had an impact on how employees are motivated. It was stated by the participants that human interaction was an essential part of motivation in the workplace as people learn best off "human moments". Peer learning can be seen as a way of employees empowering each other to learn but can also be seen as a form of self-motivation. This corroborates the findings of Kimiloglu *et al* (2017) who states that it is a challenge to motivate employees over digital means as managers most hold certain characteristics.

The primary research further explored how companies are tasked with the issues of GDPR and ethical considerations. Due to the nature of the digital learning environment, it leaves companies exposed to difficult situations. One of these scenarios is the idea of someone recording all learning material which is conducted online as opposed to a classroom style learning environment where this could be monitored. This has not only ethical implications for organisations but also can hinder the learning process. As employees fear they are being recorded, it can discourage employees from participating in discussions and giving real life examples through digital mechanisms. This is backed up by research conducted by PWC (2020) which stated that there are ongoing concerns from the part of employees and organisations regarding GDPR issues. In this instance, it shows from both primary and secondary research that companies prefer a blended approach. One participant stated that training which is of confidential nature is best suited to be conducted through a classroom environment. In this instance, it is also concluded

that a blended approach is preferable for organisations whom are dealing with confidential information.

The primary research also stated how digital learning is industry specific, suggesting that some methods of training are better suited to different sectors. Participants stated that hard skills could be thought online but the training of soft skills is hard to inanimate through an online environment. It is suggested that soft skills are best thought through the traditional classroom style learning. It can be therefore assumed there is no simple solution to training, but the trainer must look at the overall aims and objectives of the training to see which would be best suited. In essence, the research found that for most industries digital learning should be used as a facilitator rather than moving all training online. This supports the findings of Nafukho (N.D) who stated that digital learning should not be used as a replacement for teacher and companies should not solely rely on one method.

Overall, from the primary research and the literature that was reviewed it is evident that a blended approach is seen to be more effective for training purposes

5.3.3 Research Question Three: What impact has COVID-19 had on the way companies conduct training in the workplace?

Another objective of this research was to determine whether COVID-19 influenced the way companies conducted training in the workplace in Ireland. The results showed that COVID-19 impacted all aspects of the organisations business, as essentially companies' operations were moved online overnight. The results showed that companies struggled with this process for many different reasons such as digital illiteracy and the lack of knowledge within the L&D department. Digital illiteracy was found in many different formats such as the trainer had to learn new skills in order to conduct the training whilst employees had to be thought how to use the online software. This was also noted by Kshirsagar (2020) who stated that employees were unprepared and uneducated for the online transition. The primary research showed that companies adapted to the change by implementing different training strategies such as buying all employees LinkedIn Learning accounts. This allowed employees to upskill during the pandemic in the needed areas and Microsoft team's account were also used as a training lead tool.

According to Nachmias and Hubsmid (2021) SMEs in Ireland were the organisations who were hit the hardest by the pandemic in regards to changing the training culture within the organisation. There are many reasons for this, such as before covid-19 digital learning was less accessible and companies did not see the importance of investing in it. Although, in contrast larger companies such as MNCs had platforms that were already set up but many companies in Ireland were not utilizing these resources. Furthermore, the primary findings indicated that MNCs in Ireland benefited greatly from the online platforms which were set up. This was due to the fact that there was a wider range of resources available to them as other countries had started to implement digital learning prior to the pandemic. The aftermath of COVID-19 has seen more MNCs adapting to training cultures that are used in other countries such as the United States and Canada. Participants working in the MNC industry stated that employees are now exposed to a more globalised training method. This has meant employees are now being trained with American trainers and have the opportunity to participate in more certified courses which are globally recognized by the specific company.

There are similar attitudes when it comes to the repercussions that COVID-19 has had on training cultures in SMEs throughout Ireland. The attitudes expressed by those in the primary research and those described by Ernst & Young (2021) stated that COVID-19 has forced companies to rethink internal business models as a greater emphasis is now put on technology. The research conducted by Ernst & Young (2021) stated that fifty four percent of Irish SMEs have changed their business models to respond to the changing market conditions. This finding correlates with the primary research, as those working in Irish SMEs stated that although some elements of training have returned in person some elements have been redesigned for the online model. This finding has important implications as it shows COVID-19 has changed the learning culture of both MNCs and SMEs.

5.3.4 Research Question Four: Does digital learning cater for all ages and abilities in the workplace?

The last research question of this research was to study does digital learning cater for all employees in the workplace. Consistent with the literature, this research found that a more blended approach of learning should be taken as a learning method. This is because online training may not be seen to be effective on its own for certain learning styles. These learning styles include those who are not comfortable with the online world alongside those who learn better from doing the task rather than learning about it such as those working in manual handling jobs. Overall, this finding supports the work of Azis & Leatemia (2021) who stated that there are two ways in which self-efficacy can be broken down into regarding the use of digital tools. High internet self-efficiency is when a learner will be able to overcome the problems and discomfort which is associated with online learning. This is compared to low internet self-efficiency, these learners are not suited to digital learning as the discomfort of online learning tools cannot be overcome (Santosa & Sarwan, 2021). Overall, it shows that different ages and abilities in the workplace require different methods of learning to make sure they understand the topic in full.

5.4 Strengths and Limitations of this study:

This study had both strengths and weakness which were attached to the research. There were many elements of this study that can be seen as strengths, one main strength of this research was the participants who took part in the study. These participants had in depth knowledge about the L&D area as they had many years of experience behind them. The fact that all participants had worked in different industries also contributed to strength of this study as it helped to gain a clear understanding of all industries in Ireland and how learning is implemented in those industries. From a literature point of view, there was a great selection of papers regarding this topic which were available to the researcher. Although, one weakness of this research was the lack of update to date information regarding the impact that COVID-19 had on learning in the workplace. The digital world is constantly transforming which new creations are invented everyday, one popular invention that has come into the digital learning world is the idea of virtual reality.

Although this was discussed in the literature there was drawbacks from the primary research as none of the participants had any experiences with this method of training therefore it could not be discussed.

5.5 Recommendations for further research

As a qualitative research approach was taken for this research, it is recommended that a mixed method research approach could be taken. This is due to the quantitative method holding characteristics which could help reach a larger audience of participants and therefore add more in-depth knowledge to this study. Furthermore, a quantitative approach would have enabled a larger sample size which in turn could have aided the researcher in gaining more knowledge about the effectiveness of the digital learning world as whole.

5.6 Summary

The discussion of results provides an overview of how effective digital learning is as a form of training in an Irish context. In essence, the contrast between the primary research results alongside the literature suggested that for learning to be effective within the organisation a blended approach should be taken. From the research it is clear that both digital and classroom learning have advantages. Although due to the different styles of learning that are found in the workplace and the idea of motivation between peers digital learning is seen to most effective when used as a facilitator rather than a main method of learning. This has implications for workplace training going forward as it can be hard for companies to find the right ratio of informal learning and formal learning. One reason for this is because of the

Furthermore, this study has implications for digital learning going forward. As suggested a blended approach is seen to be the most effective method in the workplace. Although this could cause problems with the younger generations in the workplace as they are known to the digital generation and lack interpersonal skills. This in turn might suggest

that the style of traditional learning does not suit this generation. Although in contrast it could be said that digital learning does not suit the older generations in the workplace. Therefore, it may be hard for organisations to get the right balance.

The following chapter aims to summarise the results whilst also highlighting why the researcher deems them to of significance importance.

CHAPTER SIX- Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion

This study set out to determine whether digital learning is an effective method of training in the workplace in an Irish context. Chapter two reviewed a section of the available literature on digital learning, theories of learning and how Covid-19 has impacted the workplace. Chapter three outlined the research methodology; a qualitative approach was employed with semi-structured interviews being used as the research instrument. Chapter four highlighted the data that was collected from the interviews. Chapter five discussed the primary research findings in the context of the literature reviewed in chapter two. This chapter aims to summarise the results of this research and stated the overall answer to the research question.

6.2 Overall Conclusion

This study described how online platforms have changed the way in which organisations conduct training in the workplace in Ireland. Building on the assumption that learning and development plays a vital role in helping organisations to strive in current competitive markets. This study aimed to contribute information regarding the effectiveness of digital learning within the workplace. This study has found that digital learning is effective as a tool for learning, but companies should not rely solely on this method of learning due to its limitations.

The first sub research question was to investigate the effectiveness of digital learning as a form of training in the workplace in an Irish context. This research has found that although digital learning is an effective tool for training employees in certain areas it is difficult to teach "soft skills" through this method. Supporting Nafukho (N.D) who states that for digital learning to be effective it should be used as a facilitator rather than using it as the only method. This implies that digital learning is an effective method for implementing online training courses which require employees to know knowledge on a certain topic. The concept of compulsory training was mentioned in both the primary research and the literature which stated that for this type of training digital learning is seen to be the most effective. This is because it can be easily monitored and can be conducted in the form which asks compulsory questions at the end of the session to make sure the participants understand the learning in full. Furthermore, another element that makes digital tools effective for training within the workplace is the idea of

automated time-consuming activities. This has allowed companies to upload pre-recorded training that employees can refer back to whenever needs be. In this regard, it can be seen as a cost-effective method of training also as companies have stated that the use of digital tools is creating higher margins as it cuts costs on travel, trainers, and venues. This was also noted by Kineo (2012) who stated that organisations can cut costs on training as less trainers are required and there is no limit to the number of participants who can attend an online training course. In essence, digital learning can be seen to be effective in terms of cutting costs and to be used for the purpose of hard skills training or compliance training.

This study also explored the preferred method of training in the workplace in Ireland. The results showed that a blended training approach with the use of traditional and digital training is the preferred method of training in Ireland. The reasoning behind this was that motivation plays a vital role in the learning process, the results showed that employees lack motivation whilst using digital tools. In this regard, "peer learning" is said to be an essential part of training as employees feed off one another's energy, and creating human moments helps to motivate the employees to want to learn. This is also stated by Karim (2012) who points out that learning motivation is a set of inherent beliefs in which if these beliefs are not met then the training will not be successful. The current data also points out the importance of the different training, which is required for hard skills and soft skills. In terms of hard skills it is suggested that a digital learning environment would be best suited as these skills can be learned through different methods such as gamification. Contrastingly, soft skills training is best suited to the traditional classroom-style training as emotions play a vital role therefore human interaction methods are needed. Another element that emerged from the research is that learning can be industry specific, thus meaning that in some sectors classroom style learning would is best suited. This is due to traditional learning holding characteristics that let employees fully engage in the training. This was also stated by Boak and Crabbe (2018) who noted that for some jobs, role play activities are needed to ensure the learner is fully engaged and understands what is being thought.

Another element of the research was to investigate the impact that COVID-19 had on the way companies have changed their training culture. From the results, it was evident that companies have changed their training cultures in order to match the changes that are ongoing in the external environment. To be specific, the COVID-19 pandemic pushed all elements of training

online overnight and this has had a lasting impact. As seen in the results, all participants stated that they still conduct some elements of their training online compared to pre-pandemic times where the companies stated that they had little knowledge regarding digital learning tools. There was a contrast between how SMEs have changed their learning cultures compared to those working in MNCs. Those working in SMEs stated that COVID-19 had drastically changed how they conduct training as many methods that were adopted during COVID-19 have continued to be used within the workplace today. On the other hand, MNCs have said that they now have implemented a more globalised approach. Before COVID-19 MNCs put little emphasis on using the digital platforms that were available to them but now MNCs state that a lot of their training is conducted on the online platforms provided by the headquarters. As was discussed earlier in the literature review, SMEs struggled the most to implement these online training programmes as the companies had few assets and little knowledge of digital learning. Although COVID-19 pushed these companies out of their comfort zone which in essence has created more of an online learning presence (Nachmias, Hubscmid, 2021)

The study further explored if digital learning caters for all ages and abilities. The research concluded that there is a great deal of digital illiteracy within the workplace. This can hinder the learning process if digital tools are involved which shows that digital learning may not be suitable for all abilities. It was also stated that each employee has a different way of learning which would suggest that digital learning may not suit some learning styles. This was noted by Rolfe & Cheek (2012) who stated that individuals learn from sensory modalities which may not be able to be imitated over digital tools. Thus, it is stated that digital learning does not cater for all ages and abilities in the workplace.

Overall, this work concludes that digital transformation has shaped companies training culture. Furthermore, it is clear that COVID-19 pushed organisations into exploring the digital learning world which has brought many benefits into the workplace. In essence, digital learning has brought about flexibility and creativity to the workplace which is needed to meet the ongoing market demands. Although, the traditional classroom may be seen to be outdated the primary research shows it is still an essential method of training. To conclude, organisations must take a blended training approach for the training to be most effective.

6.3 CIPD Requirements

6.3.1 Addendum for future recommendations

This addendum will give future recommendations for change that are both realistic and reachable. It has been touched on briefly throughout this dissertation, how digital illiteracy is a problem within the workplace. It has also been discussed how learning plays a big role in attracting and retaining staff within the workplace. Finally, another element that will be discussed is the idea of motivation whilst conducting online training. To achieve the most for the business it is recommended that areas listed above should be improved.

Recommendation one

As discussed in the research, learning and development is an important part of the SHRM function. Learning and development can help to attract talent to organisations, but it can also help companies to gain a competitive advantage in the competitive globalised era. Hence it is important for all organisations to implement competitive training strategies. The establishment of blended training programs that enable employees to develop their skills within a workplace is now critical. To attract and retain employees, especially generation X and Y companies must implement training programs. This can be done by means of online platforms and ongoing training days. Another element that organisations can use is the idea of professional development plans, from the primary research it was an element that all participants suggested would be useful to compete for talent in the market. These personal development plans could be designed with the L&D department of the organisation and digital training platforms may be implemented in which the employee gains a qualification at the end of the course. The personal development plans could also incorporate traditional training days where guest speakers come in to train the employees. In essence, a personal development plan like mentioned above would not only

highlight an employee's strengths and weaknesses but would also cater for all learning styles in the organisation.

Recommendation Two

The digital transformation has seen many employees being left confused and frustrated as they are being tasked with using digital tools as a form of training. To combat this it is recommended for organisations to implement "reverse mentoring". This type of mentoring involves the younger employees such as generation "X" and "Y" who are more tech savvy mentoring the older employees in the organisation. Who are less familiar with technology. Organisations could create a programme of peer mentoring which takes place once a week which also involves social events. Furthermore, another important element of this mentoring programme would be the older employees mentoring the younger generation on improving their soft skills such as interpersonal communication skills which would be take place in a classroom style learning environment. In terms of time the digital transformation is a lengthy one therefore older employees need time to adapt to the new digital tools that they will be exposed to. This type of training would have many benefits for organisations such as it would allow older employees to become more confident with online platforms and can help to create diversity in the workplace.

Recommendation Three

Some affected areas which were outlined in the literature and primary research. From the interviews it was discovered participants felt digital learning has been negatively impacted by motivation. This was also mentioned by previous literature. To motivate learners during digital learning sessions it is suggested to have a fun element to the training. Gamification can be used as an element to create a fun aspect of training; employees can offer rewards such as a day in lieu or a free meal in the canteen as an incentive. Companies can also create online forms in which employees can share information regarding a certain topic in the workplace. This form could allow employees to interact, comment and give feedback which in turn can be seen as a form of peer mentoring which literature shows motivates employees. Another method of motivation that

can be used is incorporating quizzes and game such as Kahoot which brings a fun element to the training.

The first method could be rewarded once a month while the second method should be conducted once a week with topically issues that are occurring in the workplace. The last method could be conducted in the weekly training such as on Friday when employees need a pick me up to finish the week.

6.4 Costs of recommendations

The costs for these recommendations should be reasonable low as most of the training is taking place in house. For example, the reverse mentoring is something that is free for the organisation with the expectation of losing one hour a week of work. If an external mentoring company was to come in and train employees how to use digital tools it could cost the company a lot. The personal development plans can be timely for organisations to implement but in terms of return of investment could be high as it helps to motivate employees and makes sure all resources are used efficiently. Lastly, the methods that are used to motivate employees may be costly such as offering a day off or a canteen lunch but would also be seen to be beneficial to companies as employees would be more motivated to do their job. In terms of resources, the recommendations have been cantered around resources that companies would have in the workplace.

6.5 Personal Statement:

The process in which it took to write this dissertation has been a positive journey and experience. I choose a topic that I had interested in but also one that is topical in the modern workforce. I feel the depth of information regarding the future of HR has benefited me and will help me in my HR career going forward. I had no prior experience in organizing and scheduling interviews, this I feel will stand to benefit me when I enter the workforce. I feel this dissertation also thought me to write in a manner that is simple, creative and critical which I feel will benefit me in my professional career also.

Although I found carrying out this research challenging, it also has thought me both organizational, management and time-keeping skills. Another challenging element to this research was the fact that it was conducted mostly online as all interviews had to be conducted via Microsoft teams as most participants were working remotely and all interactions with my supervisor were also online. Another challenge could be seen to be the number of participants which took part in the study. These numbers were limited due to time restrictions and lack of availability which may be seen to give a narrow view of insights into the digital learning world overall. To gain more insight into this topic the researcher would have preferred to interview more participants, but a longer time frame would be needed to do so. In essence these elements made it challenging for me as I found it hard to keep myself motivated throughout the study.

In conclusion, I found this study helped me gain a grater insight the learning development side of HR and feel that it will help me in my future career as the digital learning world continues to evolve within the workplace. I also feel that my researching skills will continue to grow through the world of work

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Appendixes

Appendix one - Invitation to participate

Hi ___

I hope you are well.

My name is Sinead Dooley and I am currently studying for my masters in Human Resource Management in National College of Ireland. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project.

To help you make an informed decision on whether you would like to participate. Please take a moment to look over the information sheet along with the interview questions that I intend to ask. Once reviewed, please let me know if you are happy to participate and I will send you a consent form for your participation. The interview will take place on an online platform and will last approximately 30 minutes depending on you're availability.

I look forward to hearing back from you.

Kindest Regards

Sinead Dooley

Appendix two- Participant information sheet

Qualitative Research Study Title: An investigation into the effectiveness of digital learning as a form of training in the workplace in Ireland.

You are invited to take part in this study, before you decide if you would like to take part in this study please read the following information on the purpose of this study and the role you play in it.

What is the purpose of this research

The researcher is currently studying a master's in human resource management at the National College of Ireland. To complete her studies the researcher must complete a dissertation based on the Human Resource environment, this is a requirement in order to gain a CIPD qualification. The objective of this research is to investigate whether digital learning is an effective form of training in the workplace in Ireland. The research is being conducted due to the evolving changing environment which has seen an increase in globalization and the use of technology within the workplace.

What will taking part involve?

The interview will take place using a semi-structured approach. The interview is broken into three subsections. It will consist of fifteen questions and will take approximately 30 minutes.

Confidentiality and Voluntarism

This interview is voluntary and anonymous. Any information that is collected will be confidential. You as the participant has the right to decide if you would like to take part in this study and you also have the right to refuse to participate. The participant also has the right to refuse to answer any of the questions and has the right to withdraw at any point if desired. The Participant Consent Form will be kept confidential and will not be used for any other matter but this study. The information collected will not be available for secondary analysis. To follow NCI protocol the data will be retained for a maximum of five years and will be destroyed after this. The participant has the right to access any information they have provided at any given time

What's next?

If you wish to proceed, please agree to the consent form below. The list of interview questions are also listed below.

Appendix Three - Consent Form

The effectiveness of digital learning as a form of training in the workplace in Ireland

Consent to take part in research

▢ I... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

▢ I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

▢ I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

▢ I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

▢ I understand that participation involves...[outline briefly in simple terms what participation in your research will involve].

▢ I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

▢ I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

▢ I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

▢ I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

▢ I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in...[list all forum in which you plan to use the data from the interview: dissertation, conference presentation, published papers etc.].

Appendix Four- Interview Questions

Interview Questions:

<u>Warm up questions:</u>

Q1: Could you tell me about your title and how you entered the HR profession?

Q2: How long have you been working in your industry?

Q3:Has the role of HR changed much since you entered the profession?

<u>Digital Learning:</u>

Q4: Could you describe how your company has implemented digital learning in the workplace

Q5: What methods of digital learning have you implemented in the workplace?

Q6: How did you implement these schemes into the workplace? What challenges came with implementing these schemes?

Q7:What would you say are the advantages and disadvantages of using digital learning as a form of training in the workplace?

Q8: Have you seen an improvement in the digital learning platform quality overtime?

Q9: How do you measure who completes the training and who doesn't?

<u>Digital Learning Vs Traditional Learning</u>

Q10: Which would you consider most effective- digital learning or traditional face to face learning? Why?

Q11: Does digital learning impact how connected employees feel to their organization?

Q12: Have you kept any parts of training in the traditional face to face method?

<u>COVID-19</u>

Q13: How has COVID-19 affected the way in which you're company does business? Had the company prepared for any adverse events?

Q14: How quickly were you able to adapt to the challenges of COVID-19?

Q15: How has COVID-19 changed the way in which you have trained staff?

Q16: Do you believe COVID-19 has changed the workplace training culture in Ireland?