



**An Analysis of Learning and Development Offerings as a  
Motivational Tool for Productivity in Organisations**

**(A Qualitative Study of Human Resource Management Practitioners in Ireland)**

**By**

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**Dissertation in partial fulfilment of the requirements for degree in  
Master of Arts in Human Resources Management**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study attempted to peruse the opinions and perceptions of Human resources management practitioners in Ireland around learning and development offerings as a motivational tool for productivity. The reasoning of this study makes the case that learning, and development contributes to a sustained and renewed effort to motivate employees, communicate effectively, and carry out work within firms to boost productivity and the findings from this study proves that. It argues that the offerings made by firms plays a crucial role on the productive levels of employees.

This dissertation starts by linking strategic human resources and strategic learning and development with the purpose of linking all of these with overall business strategy, as well as delving into the importance of learning and development, learning and development offerings alongside its challenges with the sole aim of finding out which plays a part on the productivity of these practitioners in Ireland. The research strategy employed for this work was in form of semi-structured interviews with an epistemological philosophical framework all under a qualitative method of data collection as well as analysis. To come up with themes from existing literature as well as from respondents, thematic analysis was utilised.

Using a snowball method, individuals familiar to the researcher were interviewed. Similarly, the study was carried out with HRM Practitioners working full time in various firms across Ireland. Six (6) participants were involved in this study who made positive remarks towards learning and development and how it plays a huge part in their productivity as employees, giving new insights that was used as a basis for this study.

***Keywords: HRM (Human resources management) SHRM (Strategic Human resources management) L&D (Learning and development), productivity, motivation, e-learning (electronic learning), blended learning, COVID 19' (Corona virus disease 2019).***

## Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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# Contents

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of Problem .....	2
Study's Importance .....	3
Research Methodology Overview .....	4
Research objectives.....	4
Research objective 1: .....	4
Research objective 2: .....	4
Research objective 3: .....	4
Thesis layout.....	4
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW .....	5
Introduction.....	5
Theoretical Framework.....	5
The Human Capital Advantage Theory .....	5
A brief case study example of Google .....	6
Motivation to work theory .....	7
LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT .....	7
Different stroke for different folks (Workplace differs) .....	10
Learning offerings.....	12
Enhancing learning offerings.....	15
E- learning: .....	15
Blended learning: .....	16
Linkages between strategic human resource and strategic learning and development on the productivity of employees.....	16
Limitations of workplace learning and development as possible opposing factor for employee's productivity .....	19
Reticence of professionals to share knowledge: .....	19
A de-motivated attitude on the path of the learner:.....	20
Literature Review Conclusion.....	20
CHAPTER THREE .....	21
THE RESEARCH PLATFORM: RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODOLOGY AND MORE .	21
Research questions/ objectives: .....	21
Research question 1:.....	21
Research question 2:.....	21
Research question 3:.....	21
Research Methodology .....	21

Introduction.....	21
Research Philosophy.....	22
Research Method.....	24
Semi- structured interviews .....	26
The role of the researcher.....	27
Selection of Participants and Sampling .....	27
Data analysis technique employed by researcher .....	28
(2). Coding.....	29
(3). Birthing/generating themes.....	30
(4). Assessing themes .....	30
(5). Definition and naming of these themes .....	30
Ethical Consideration.....	30
Limitations .....	31
Conclusion.....	31
CHAPTER FOUR.....	32
DATA FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....	32
Introduction.....	32
Participants and Response Rate .....	32
Analysis of findings .....	34
Research question 1:.....	34
1.1.1 Perception on the importance of learning and development offerings on productivity .....	34
1.1.1 Quality of work .....	34
Research question 2:.....	36
1.1.1 Learning offerings available to practitioners .....	36
1.1.1 Advantages of learning Offerings .....	37
1.1.1 Employer support and admiration.....	38
Research question 3:.....	39
1.1.1 Information Deluge, Technical problems, and a dent in succession planning.....	39
Conclusion.....	40
CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION.....	40
Limitations and Possible Direction for Future Research .....	41
CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	47
Recommendations and Implication of findings.....	48
REFERENCES .....	50
APPENDICES.....	62

Appendix 1: Information sheet .....	62
Appendix 2: Consent form .....	68
Appendix 3: .....	70

## **Table of Figures**

Figure 2.1 1 Integrative components of the development of professional expertise .....	14
Figure 2.2 1 'Integrating learning in the workflow of life' .....	15
Figure 2.3 1 Employee development components.....	19
Figure 3.1 1 The 'research onion' .....	23

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

This research on learning and development offerings as a motivational tool for productivity in organisations, using Human resources management (HRM) practitioners in Ireland as participants for the study, is in tandem with fulfilling partially, the requirements for a degree in Master of Arts in HRM at the National college of Ireland. The research is being carried out by a first-time researcher who employed the use of secondary form of data collection by reviewing diverse literatures on learning and development and went further in a bid to dig deeper by undergoing primary qualitative research to better capture the perceptions and experiences of those involved.

The art of learning is becoming increasingly and even more crucial as our culture transitions to one that places a strong focus on lifelong learning (Vaughan, 2008). A significant component of this, is organizational learning, which is influenced by a varying demographic, technological, and diverse individual roles across different communities. Clifford and Thorpe (2007) define learning as the process of gaining information, improving abilities, and changing one's attitudes or beliefs to provide one or more options. In essence, due to the continuous nature of learning it calls for the attention of organisations in a changing/dynamic environment to help members of that organisation adapt (Doyle and Young 2007).

Research has argued however, that school to job shifts are no longer as clear-cut and straightforward as they previously had been (Vaughan, 2008). The concepts of a working life are no longer fixed and predefined. Knowledge need not be just personalised or confined to one entity but one which is transferrable and one which works in sync with overall business strategy (Wright and McMahan, 1992; Vaughan, 2008; Armstrong, 2009). The creativity, value, as well as a productivity of a workforce may be greatly influenced by how the whole company learns and develops and most importantly what learning offerings are available to employees.

Hughes, Zajac, Woods, and Salas (2020) in tandem with this ascertains their acknowledgement on how businesses need a trained and motivated personnel/employees to operate well and gain an edge over competitors. An uprise in workforce performance can be achieved through intentional contribution and or investment in standardized/ formal learning and development programs and interventions (Jimenez-Jimenez and Sanz-Valle, 2008; Armstrong, 2009; Jiang, Wang, and Zhao, 2012) In this sense, the workforce may struggle to perform to their full capacity without effective L&D offerings for leaders and subordinates which may inevitably affect their level of productivity. In fact, Deloitte (2019)'s Human capital trends exposes learning as a "top-rated" challenge which makes the above statement even more valid.

In the same sense, in terms of the motivation to be productive amongst employees it was found in a workplace learning report put together by LinkedIn that workers are increasingly looking for fresh learning opportunities that fit into their regular workdays



and are pertinent to the current activities. This can dramatically increase productivity since learning is provided when it is most required (LinkedIn, 2019). According to the study, 74% of workers are keen to learn in their leisure time, which strikes a balance between desired productivity rates and job learning. The requirement for flexible e-learning on the go rose by 5% from 2018 through 2019. Microlearning which offers bite-sized teachings that can be quickly absorbed and ingested on a regular schedule, was one of the primary topics of debate in that year (LinkedIn, 2019).

One can draw from the above that a well thought strategy to organizational learning offerings and productivity are now inextricably intertwined. Workplace learning becomes more important in 2022 as more HRM practitioners opt to better equip incumbent workers in contrast to hiring new talent (Armstrong, 2009; Deloitte, 2019; LinkedIn, 2019).

## **Statement of Problem**

Although findings show that the HRM profession adds value to an organization by, for example, influencing practises that take an individualised approach in terms of digital strategy. The relevance of these professionals to organisations, however, appeared to be even more relevant amidst the global COVID19' epidemic (CIPD, 2020). Similarly, before the COVID19' outbreak, skill gaps continued to be a severe problem for a great number of organisations (CIPD, 2020). This was consistent with the IrishJobs.ie index of 2021 exposing an astounding 420% rise in job openings in Talent Acquisition and Human Resources over the previous year. In accordance with the ongoing relaxation of Covid-19 constraints and the gradual liberalisation of the country, the recruiting environment is developing into a robust, candidate-led market, according to IrishJobs.ie. This dynamic is forecast to reign supreme in the employment sector (RTE, 2022).

Even though, in 2018, majority of businesses claimed to be engaged in or extremely engaged in offering employees chances for professional growth. (CIPD, 2018) curiosity inevitably gets birthed as to why this problem even exists. Could it be that priorities are not placed where they ought to? Like focusing on the needs of these professionals to learning and development interventions which could have led to low motivation to be productive fostering their exit from these firms. Or could it be that the interests and learning needs of these practitioners are not paid enough to? These findings birthed an inspiration to this research paper because it would be important to see why there is shortages in this profession in Ireland and to see what could be done best through first hand testimonials from the interviewees in this study.

Attention has been paid to the study of organisational learning tracing back to the author Peter Senge who gave great insights in his book "the art and practice of the learning organization" (Senge, 1990). Various thinkers have also recently contributed to workplace learning, in fact Garavan, McCarthy, Murphy, Sheehan and Carbery (2020a) proposed an Integrated Systems-Informed Model of Effectiveness on Learning and Development in Organisations. Similarly, in terms of professions,

the organisational learning of diverse professional group has consisted of small business enterprise (Doyle and Young, 2005), the teaching profession (Lohman, 2000) and a few others. Nevertheless, studies on learning and development especially finding out which of its offering's links with productivity in organisations, using HRM practitioners as case study in an Irish setting were rather inexistent. To this authors knowledge, available exploration by researchers on learning and the various forms of learning has been done from a quantitative or a short qualitative standpoint. Such methods as in the quantitative considers knowledge acquisition from a perspective of measurement, surveys or better put quantitative studies on learning predicts outcomes through results from numerical standpoints where in the real sense, with the way the world is moving having perception of the real world through a qualitative study is suggested (Gooler, 1990). Doyle and Young, (2007), carried out a similar qualitative study in Canada on workplace learning strategies of managers in small and large firms in knowledge-based industries, where they found learning to be as important to HRM practitioners as with other professions and also found some differences.

The need to understand the intricacies in the patterns of interactions across organisational sub-systems was identified as a gap by Antonacopoulou (1996). Her study demonstrated the value of a descriptive method used in business/management studies.

These findings highlighted above, breeds the importance of a qualitative study on the advantages of learning offerings to HRM practitioners in the Irish setting as well as the necessity of considering workers' perspectives on their experiences in the same light where part of the research questions attempted to respond to Doyle and Young (2007)'s call for future research to for example, find out what informal and formal learning opportunities are available to HRM practitioners which was modified by the researcher.

## **Study's Importance**

It is of essence to investigate the perceptions and opinions on how learning and development offerings and its impacts upon the productivity of HRM practitioners in Ireland for so many reasons but mainly considering the demand for HRM professionals soaring by 420% (RTE, 2022). The profession of HRM can be assumed to have dominance in the country. The effectiveness that comes with HRM practices and its contribution to firms' performance cannot be overlooked as they are plentiful to say the least (Armstrong, 2009; Srinivasan, 2015). Alongside the above stated, there has been a strong force backing the standards by which the profession is guided which is the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) a body that act as career partners to over 6,000 people management professional members in Ireland, the researcher inclusive.

The research respondents in this study also have the potential to develop into knowledgeable sources who can offer guidance and insightful advice in a cutthroat talent market and an ever-changing environment.

## Research Methodology Overview

An epistemological (the perception of humans about said reality) qualitative technique has been used in this study, to describe the impact of learning and development offerings as a motivational tool for productivity in organisations, focusing on HRM practitioners as selected participants for the study. The inductive approach was most suited to this study due to its nature of movement bottom-up from data captured from the personalised encounters/experiences of interviewees and or participants to generate common themes and reach a theory and overall conclusions (Patton, 1990; Baxter and Jack, 2006; Saunders et al., 2012).

## Research objectives

**Research objective 1:** To find out the perceptions and opinions of HRM practitioners in Ireland on the importance of learning and development offerings as a motivational tool for their productivity

**Research objective 2:** To find out what learning, and development offerings are available to these practitioners in their organisations

**Research objective 3:** To understand what challenges are faced by these practitioners in terms of the learning and development offerings provided to them by their organisations

## Thesis layout

Chapter 1 – Introduction: This chapter provides an overview of the study, establishes its significance, and outlines the research issues that will be investigated. The conceptual background and an outline of the study's research design are also summarised in this chapter.

Chapter 2- Literature Review: This chapters attempts to lay out the study's conceptual framework. This will be accomplished by doing a thorough analysis of the body of research on learning and development as a motivational tool for productivity, amongst Human Resource Management (HRM) practitioners, this therefore, forms a basis and framework for the present research.

Chapter 3- Research Methodology: In accordance with the study's objectives, the recommended technique is laid forth in this chapter. The study's strategy, data collection methods, and analytic techniques are covered in- depth in this chapter, along with the explanation for the procedure and source materials that were selected.

Chapter 4 – Data Analysis and Findings: This part of the study critically analyses data collected from the primary source via semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 5 – Summary of Findings: This chapter presents an overview of all the study's findings, makes comparisons with findings from earlier research, offers

suggestions for future research directions, and concludes with the author's own personal learning statement.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

This study's sole focus is on learning and development strategies and practices, which works to make sure that employees in this case, HRM practitioners acquire and develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to do their jobs well and advance in their careers for both their own benefit and the organization's.

This chapter aims to define learning, highlight strategies in which learning takes place, as well as profoundly peruse through the linkages between strategic human resource management (SHRM) and strategic learning and development (SLD) and its impact on the productivity of employees put together by knowledgeable thinkers in this area. It also explores theories on which learning leans on, challenges, and suggestions for improving the learning process and interventions to create a productive workforce.

A literature review articulates the body of research that already exists in a niched field; the goal is to provide a summary futuristic view in that discipline. This evaluation of older and more recent studies makes it feasible to pinpoint topics that might profit from additional study. This task is carried out by the researcher with the aim of carefully observing the paucity or gaps in the previous studies (Knopf, 2006; Randolph, 2009; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson, and Lowe, 2008; Quinlan, 2011).

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Two main theories were mustered and briefly explored to determine how to walk through the needs and motivation of employees for their productivity. Human Capital theory and Motivation to work theory. These theories pose positive to this study to act as a supporting framework for the literature review of learning and development and its linkages with productivity. The theory of Human capital encompasses the beauty and importance of the human capital to firms, while the two-factor motivation skill insight of Herzberg highlights the tendency of people to direct their focus toward things that help them meet their personal needs. Additionally, according to the notion of motivation to work, rewarding employees for their outstanding work has a direct influence on their motivation and productivity magnitude.

#### **The Human Capital Advantage Theory**

The Human Capital advantage theory is of the notion that, learning is a continuous long-lasting process, and the most knowledgeable, skilled, and talented individual stands out to be the most wanted by employers. This commitment to the life-long learning and development of staffs results in effective industrial innovation and

productive, high-calibre staff. A network of innovative and adaptable employees is necessary for a firm to be competitive in the market because, an innovative focused mindset amongst employees is of high essence especially across very knowledge centred industries. Increasingly, the need for organizations to concentrate on innovativeness to conform to the continuous changing nature of the economy and establish as well as maintain a distinctive competitive leverage is at a high (Bolwijn and Kumpe, 1990; Hitt, Keats and DeMarie, 1998; Nafukho, 2004; Nafukho, Hairston and Brooks, 2004, Badham, Couchman and Schubert, 2008). Organisations cannot work in isolation; however, it may be argued that the capacity of businesses to enhance their management of both a higher work volume, especially one that might have been introduced during the COVID19' disruption can be traced back to the human capital advantage of any industry (CIPD, 2020).

An annual report by skillnet in 2017 shows that the labour force in Ireland is recognised for being highly educated, highly competent, and versatile, providing a solid basis for all Irish firms, according to the demographics of the country's workforce. Additionally, it encourages direct foreign investment into the nation, boosting economic growth in a framework where investments are even more competitive and global (skillnet, 2017). Even with the economic boost, productivity gap was found between local SMEs (small to medium enterprises) and the multinationals located here in Ireland. Low levels of managerial development and lifetime learning among indigenous SMEs as causes of this gap. On a more positive note, google maybe viewed as a practical example of a company worth emulating in terms of utilising its human capital structure for the good of both the company and a lifelong learning initiative for its talent (Stewart and Rigg, 2011). A brief exemplary case study is put forth below on Googles' learning and development structure.

## **A brief case study example of Google**

In consistence with CIPD (2017) report on one of the characteristics of the new learning organisation which targets companies giving a holistic people experience, Google illustrates this feature as a company that approaches learning and development holistically. Google improves employee performance through leadership programmes and training. Over 33,000+ of its employees went through internal programmes. Encouragement in terms of staff development through rotating projects, learning from mistakes, and inviting outside coaches/learning instructors to address the workforce stands out to be one of googles forte (Stewart and Rigg, 2011; Sullivan 2013). GoogleEDU in 2010 was a platform launched by the company to improve its learning and development of its talent (Walker, 2012). The 70:20:10 model is used by the company, to foster learning inside an organisation and among individuals. It incorporates social, experiential, and formal learning into one cohesive whole (Blackman, Johnson, Buick, Faifua, O'Donnell and Forsythe, 2016) See (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020).

Google demonstrates on-the-job learning through personal assignments which are individualised, whereby successful outcomes of these projects, are turned into models to be used in actual work situations. Additionally, training sessions are tailored to the job duties of the participants, across various departments and function

of the company. Specialised courses for managers are utilised to master "nuanced motivation" techniques. Key staff competences include the capacity for clear, self-directed continual learning and adaptation (Stewart and Rigg; Sullivan 2013). Google solicits input from its staff about the kinds of programs they would want to take, and the subjects covered in such courses. To sum this up, the business design jobs that complements employees' strengths and draws right performers to the company. One can ascertain that the above stated can be an example of effective learning theory usage, for instance an 'operant conditioning' derived from learning reinforcement theory where learning takes a positive form, providing a desirable or pleasant stimulus after a behaviour (Armstrong, and Taylor,2020).

## **Motivation to work theory**

Those that are driven to learn will do so more effectively only if there is a motivation to do so (Armstrong, and Taylor,2020), it simply may be interpreted as people will learn only if organisational overall strategy aligns with theirs. Additionally, Herzberg asserts that the degree to which a job provides opportunities for reinforcing and acknowledgment/recognition influences motivation in his two-factor motivational-hygiene theory (Bowman, 2010; Brown-Crowder; 2017).

Reynolds et al., had this to say concerning the above:

"The disposition and commitment of the learner – their motivation to learn – is one of the most critical factors affecting training effectiveness. Under the right conditions, a strong disposition to learn, enhanced by solid experience and a positive attitude, can lead to exceptional performance." (Reynolds et al 2002: 34 cited in Armstrong, and Taylor,2020).

A couple of learning and talent development writers juxtaposes the effectiveness that can amount from the application of theories of learning to overall business performance by meeting specific corporate needs (Peter Senge, 1990; Armstrong and Taylor, 2020; CIPD 2020; Stewart and Rigg, 2011).

## **LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT (Definitions, Importance, Strategies/interventions, Learning theories and Challenges)**

"The capacity to learn is a gift; the ability to learn is a skill; the willingness to learn is a choice". Brian Herbert.

Continual learning, adaptation in the workplace, career pliability individual/personal development and all there is to growth professionally is changing and this change is seen interfering with employer-employee relationship (Molloy and Noe, 2009) and this implies a no business-as-usual attitude for organisations (Jensen, 2017). Organisational learning author Argyris Chris in his work on "Double loop learning in organizations" had this to say concerning the dent in employer-employee relationship in organisations, and proffers solution on how to fix this.

“Why are employees reluctant to report to the top that one of their company's products is a “loser” and why can't the vice presidents of another company reveal to their president the spectacular lack of success of one of the company's divisions? The inability to uncover errors and other unpleasant truths arises from faulty organizational learning, says this author. Such habits and attitudes, which allow a company to hide its problems, lead to rigidity and deterioration”. Argyris, 1977, pp.115-125.

He goes further to give his proposition to this problem by introducing “double-loop learning” where the cause of a problem is found and then fixed with immediate action taken. This in simple terms heightens the essence of continuous learning in organisations. This is what led Zuboff to assert in 1988 that the art of knowledge acquisition (learning) has quickly become the new workforce and the new activity to productivity as opposed to traditional construct of viewing learning as a waste of time or unproductive activity (Zuboff 1988). Even in Europe, Ireland inclusive, the bone of discussion has been one of a learning society, where lifelong learning is prioritised (Grass, 1996). With the corporate environment becoming increasingly complicated and uncertain, investment in employee learning and development (L&D) has become a critical driver of competitiveness and competence (Haskins and Shaffer 2010; Beardwell and Thompson 2014).

Learning is therefore, defined as a continuous cerebral practise or process in which knowledge, skills, capacities are deposited into a learner which can influence cognitive behaviours in an individual (Clifford and Thorpe, 2007; Armstrong and Taylor, 2020).

Development on the other hand is defined by Armstrong and Taylor (2020) as a characterised trait in an individual in terms of their skills or potential phase of growth being realised because of those learning and educational opportunities.

In combining these two components (learning and development), Harrison (2010) argues that although the phrase “human resources development” continues to be used often in academia, practitioners have never found it to be particularly appealing. There has been disapproval of this by said practitioners because they find it degrading to refer to individuals as “resources.” Although the two concepts are almost identical, putting humans on a level with money, commodities, and technology gives the idea that “development” is an impersonal, manipulating activity.

Learning and development however, is defined as an organisational process which fosters an advance in society via the collective, humanistic expert knowledge, and moral promotion and facilitation of learning which advances organisational objectives, nurtures individual growth, as well as laying a foundation for diversity, which involves assisting the development of skillsets individually and collectively through experience and learning events offered by the organisation, mentoring and coaching offered by organisational leaders, as well as independent learning initiated by employees (Harrison 2010; Armstrong and Taylor 2020).

The above stated assertion by these authors underpins itself nicely with behavioural theory of learning which can be traced back to the human capital advantage theory,

proposing continuous learning as a pattern which is embedded in the learner overtime.

When contemplating workplace learning offerings, it goes beyond just typical classroom instruction. The five dimensions of workplace learning consisting of; support, clarity, autonomy, teamwork, and upheaval which McKavanagh contrasted on learning environments in classrooms and workplaces, in his study on comparison of both. The study found that, organisational learning is more clarified, participatory, collaborative, and inclusive than traditional classroom, but still poses weak in lesser support and independence (McKavanagh 1996 cited in Smith 2003) The approaches to workplace learning are rather often classified as formal (seminars, courses that aid training, and presentations) versus informal (Action learning sets, succession planning, mentoring, coaching, and unique initiatives).

In this context, organisations must come up with a sustaining strategy to designing, implementing, and evaluating the most suitable learning programs for HRM practitioners along with other positions in the firm (Beardwell and Thompson 2014). Several authors have talked about organisational learning and how it encompasses the inclusion of the employees themselves, and this research seeks to add to that by learning from the individual perspective on experiences in relation to learning and development offerings and its impact on productivity. Evidence suggests that the distinctive functions performed by leaders and subordinates plays a part in learning. Given the distinctions of job specifications, employer-employee perception of the world may be different. Employees, however, emerge as a unit of productivity for their employers notwithstanding the self-directed learning expectations of these employees being one of preference to their employers even though employers must provide the right support to help employees spot learning opportunities and participate in communities of learning networks (Billet 1995; Smith 2003)

Additionally, with the raging talent battle, organizations are competing for a finite pool of human capital. Considering external talent acquisition is always impossible, an organization might as well cultivate its own, meaning, build a buy-in plan for developing its people for current and future positions.

Wang Cowham (2011) found that developing talent tends to be more cost effective than buying it from the talent market. As a result of this, human resources consulting businesses are predicted to make considerable expenditures in talent development efforts to reskill and upskill their staff on a constant basis as in the Google case study example of this work. This enables organizations to create firm-specific knowledge and capabilities that are tailored to their unique demands (Jooss, Burbach and Ruël, 2019). Additionally, it has a significant impact on employee engagement and retention rates, as employees respect the organization's commitment to their personal and professional growth.

Studies show the importance of L&D for business success (Costen and Salazar, 2011; Hanif, 2013). Learning and development importance have thrived in the facilitation of gaining new skills amongst employees which contributes greatly on employees' productive levels (CIPD, 2020). Another importance is the rigid free nature of learning and development, in the sense that it is not only concentrated on



employees but also employers where there is a real opportunity to share learning and embed it in organisational practise, which properly defines what it means to be a learning organisation, where emphasis is also placed on experiential learning as another important aspect of learning and development, especially in internal training situations as it encourages knowledge sharing amongst all involved (Keeling, Jones, Botterill, and Gray, 1998).

The quality of the performance supplied by employees, capacity to recruit and maintain key people, and client happiness are all indicators of importance of organization 's effectiveness and a well-structured learning intervention (Costen and Salazar, 2011).

Costen and Salazar (2011) further stresses that learning promotes job fulfilment by allowing employees to learn new skills to better serve the organization. The extra dedication that staffs invest into any learning session may result in a more productive, loyal, and dedicated workforce (Brum, 2007). One can draw conclusions from this that a well aligned individual (employee) goals and strategy of learning and development and other aspects being in synchrony with overall business strategy could stand out positively in creating a strong and healthy workforce.

Worker's value and acknowledge the company's involvement, and they reward businesses with greater devotion and effectiveness. For instance, Choi and Dickson (2010) commented on how investing in quality leadership training may boost job contentment and reduce attrition. This in actual sense is what any firm strives to achieve for a better stand at market value.

Yamamoto (2013) confirms that career workers feel learning and development is fulfilling and tends to promote loyalty. He further explained that this is due to the assumption that organizational L&D plays a significant role in the growth of staffs (Yamamoto, 2013).

## **Different stroke for different folks (Workplace differs)**

After defining workplace learning and emphasising its value, it is acceptable to move on to discuss workplace learning offers. It can be agreed, nevertheless, from past observations, that not all occupations or workplaces provide equal possibilities for learning. It is now time to go through research that focused on how workplaces differ from one another in this regard. These learning offer tactics emphasise corporate learning which leans focus on developing its human capital and increasing its wealth of knowledge and personal learning that involves itself with finding out the most suitable steps to be taken in increasing the capability of employees individually in the process of creating a culture of learning (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020).

The typical orthodox organisation characterises as an intensive kind of distribution of job tasks, with workers having limited and rigid workflow and intense supervision, one which is absent of autonomy which leaves no room for growth. On the other hand, organisations like Google in the case study example of this work where employment consistently offers fresh challenges and learning, and development possibilities can be found at the opposite end of the spectrum. In these

workplaces, employees switch between positions on a regular basis, projects are completed by teams that function collaboratively and where autonomy is part of the order of the day, knowledge sharing in this kind of work structure and productivity would be inextricably bound (Senge, 1990; Ashton and Sung, 2002; Stewart and Rigg, 2011).

These learning offerings presented by these different workplaces take shape in two ways, the structured (formal) learning and the unstructured (informal) learning. Where structured/ Formal learning is defined as the product of an organised, structured, instructor-led courses and programmes that are frequently anchored by experts in a classroom or institutional setting. Learning and community of practice literature, posits that individuals typically do their jobs in completely distinct ways from how official instructions wants it carried out. Similarly, to supervise performance, formalized structures to learning frequently provide established procedures. Nevertheless, practical, and actual work is frequently carried out via flexibility, trying out new ways of doing things, and adaptations (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Garavan et. al. 2007). Without a doubt if the question is put forward to authors of organisational learning on which characteristics best describes the workplace, majority of them would point to the informal characteristics embedded in workplace learning. It was shown by Brown and Duguid (1991) that informal contacts within professional learning communities or knowledge sharing groups via action learning sets inside an organisation contribute significantly to developing already existing skills and likely to introduce new ones. The authors argue that networking which happens with these people fosters cooperation to find solutions to issues or investigate possibilities that contradict existing established cognition.

This idea was expanded upon by other authors to encompass those who exist beyond a firm's official confines (Araujo, 1998; Tsoukas, 2002; Fuller and Unwin, 2005; Harrison, 2010; Garavan et. al. 2007).

Communities of Practice by Wenger is a famous study in this field. Wenger (1998) uses the term "community of practise" to describe the unofficial groups that individuals establish when actively engaged in cooperative activities both on the job and in their down period. People exchange their life-long learning (share knowledge), improve their internal work procedures and exchanging/negotiating meanings, all done by actively participating in these networks/communities. Thus, unstructured, or informal communities of practise can consist of third external parties like clients, action learning group members and those who are not necessarily part of the organisations integral part but can in one way or another impact new knowledge or improve upon existing knowledge. Even though the workplace stands as a site for learning individuals, the reciprocal interaction between workplace and the employee determines the success and outcome of learning offerings. For example, from a university education point of view, different universities provide learning offerings differently from the other, National college of Ireland might provide learning differently from Dublin city university. In the same sense, if a workplace provide opportunities for individuals and they do not avail themselves of that opportunity the essence of the intention behind it fails. This prompted, Billet (2004) to make a case that the degree to which the organization offers chances for such involvement and

the degree to which employees choose to take advantage of those possibilities both influence the character of employees' involvement in learning. According to this perspective, interactions between social practises and the participants (employees) engaging in that activity creates a co-construct in knowledge (Tynjälä, 2008).

## **Learning offerings**

A combination of structured processes to learning with unstructured processes can boost organisations efficacy as well as effectiveness. Structured and unstructured learning has been recognised by some authors as mutually significant components of organisational learning (Slotte, Tynjälä, and Hytönen, 2004). The authors highlight that they involve distinct approaches and results. Where traditionally structured learning takes place within the framework of scheduled instructor-led programs and is intended to develop clear, explicit understanding and abilities, unstructured knowledge acquisition on the other hand happens because of daily routine at work and primarily builds implied knowledge.

These writers state that unstructured knowledge acquisition done in isolation is insufficient, highlighting disadvantages such as; unsatisfactory results from the sub-conscious nature of this type of learning which can lead to low productivity as well as poor performance in the organisation, and failure to keep up with trend in a timely manner. It can be concluded that formal and informal learning are both intertwined, in the sense that learning whether individual or organisational via synchronised structured/formal and unstructured/informal approaches might lead to elevated knowledge acquisition that opens up fresh mental representations as well as a shift in organisational views and norms for example, studies on learning in the workplace centres itself on the previous studies tradition of the learning organisation or organisational learning e.g. double-loop learning as mentioned earlier in this work and so many other positive chapters that collaborative and collective learning entails (Senge, 1990; Wenger, 1998; Starbuck and Hedberg, 2001; Argyris, 1977). The above stated however, forms the basis for the development of expertise (see Tynjälä, Nuutinen, Eteläpelto, Kirjonen, and Remes, 1997; Eteläpelto and Collin, 2004).

It is important to note that whatever approach applied should stem from the learning needs of the individual involved as well as the strategic direction of the organisation. The definition of learning, as well as interventions and approaches, however, have been argued to be birthed from learning theories such as behavioural theory and most especially experiential theory which connotes learning from experience as earlier talked about in the first part of this literature review. This experiential learning can also be referred to as on-the-job learning where individuals learn by doing work repeatedly and can happen in form of job rotation which involves progressing through different departments in the organisation to learn new skills. Clifford and Thorpe (2007) argue in favour of this by commenting on how this type of learning intervention is effective in terms of cost and happens on the go in comparison to a structured learning intervention. Consistent with Clifford and Thorpe (2007), is

Reynolds, (2004)'s observation on how established and experienced workers may expedite knowledge acquisitions/learning process, by simple acts such as talking with each other and exchanging life experiences, working together on projects, and providing togetherness, strengthens and reinforces the practice of learning. This type of learning, which is sometimes quite casual in character, is however, believed to be far more successful than more conventional training approaches at developing expertise. Berings, Poell and Gelissen, (2008) counters this by positing that although on the job learning does the above stated, there is no room to track learning outcome due to the informal nature of this learning intervention, which is consistent with Slotte et. al. (2004)'s observations on the risks of employing only informal process as a learning approach in isolation. Billet (1995) literature on workplace learning observed that the conceptualization and facsimile of job responsibilities can also be aided by more indirect sources of assistance, such as paying attention to, actively listening, and observing other employees. The cognitive trajectory that moves from involvement with incidental to increasingly sophisticated tasks is especially notable. Lave (1990) argues that this route must also give the beginners experiences that help them comprehend the goals of the business operations, their outputs, and the criteria through which work must be done. This pathway must proceed from simpler to more complicated tasks and include experiences which creates familiarity for these novice learners in the way things are done in the organisation. For example, as cited in Billet (1995) on beginners learning and integration into the learning in the workflow of life (Deloitte, 2019; CIPD, 2021). A representation to encompass meaning pictorially in summary of the discussion above is put forth in Fig. 2.1 below.

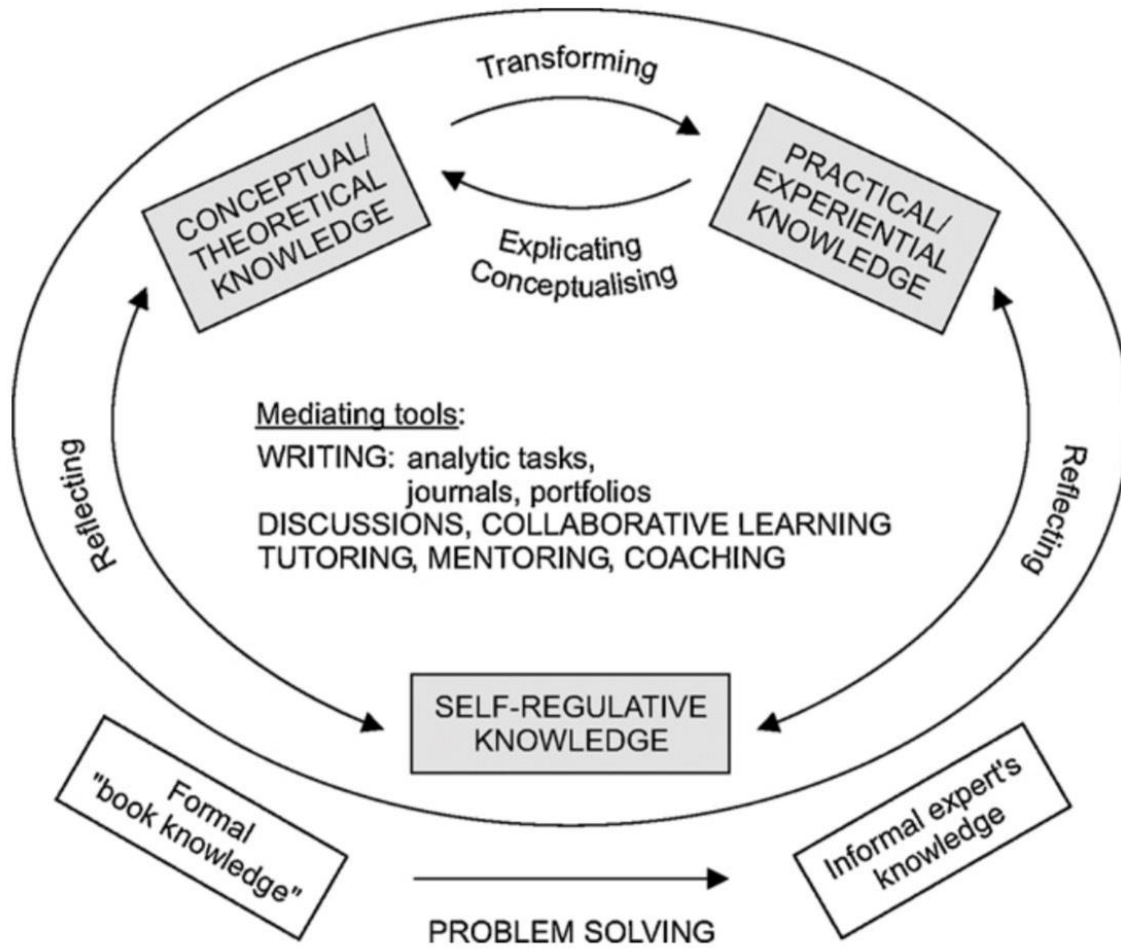


Figure 2.1 1 Integrative components of the development of professional expertise (Originally by Tynjälä et al., 2006 extracted from Tynjälä, 2008).

Fig. 2.2 represents Deloitte's comment on integrating learning in the workflow of life



Figure 2.2 1 'Integrating learning in the workflow of life'

(Source; Deloitte 2019, learning in the workflow of life)

## Enhancing learning offerings

Armstrong and Taylor (2020), highlights "induction learning", "planned experience", "coaching", "mentoring", "e-learning", "training" and "personal development planning" as means in which the learning offerings could be enhanced. From the above listed, e-learning was picked, and blended learning was added by the researcher as one way to approach learning strategically.

**E- learning:** Since this research focuses on organisational learning and the business world, definitions would be given from this podium. A few authors have defined e-learning or electronic learning as a mixture or blended medium of training methods (Strother, 2002; Welsh, Wanberg, Brown, and Simmering, 2003) which happens on a web-based structure to provide guidance and learning resources to employees (Armstrong and Taylor 2020) for the end goal of learning and development (CIPD, 2021). Just-in-time learning whereby the needs of learners are realized and met with tailored online courses, pliability, convenience, ease of access, a means to keep up with trend in business, employer branding through social platforms, continued professional development, have been referenced as some of the many upper hands of e-learning interventions (Henry, 2001; Choudhury and Pattnaik, 2020) Moon, Birchall, Williams and Vrasidas, (2005) in argument gives an interesting aspect in respect to knowledge sharing and e-learning and its linkages to an absence of physical interaction, because the context of its use and implementation informs the learning. Significantly, this form of learning may not offer cues in a contextual form which leaves little room for introspection, which could instead of leaving employees productive, mar any chances of it improving upon their productivity. Making e-learning learner-focused, promotion of learning in the work

flow of life, and creating a spiral of knowledge sharing and community of practice, aligning the community of practice or knowledge community as a support for overall organisational objectives, provide time for learning inside the organisation, and building trust springs up as success factors for the effectiveness of e-learning intervention (Chen and Hsiang, 2007; CIPD, 2021) These success factors prove relevant for re-skilling in a post COVID19' pandemic era considering the barriers to learning digitally as technological reliance in form of an absence of technological support, WI-FI problems; Instructional malpractice in form of low digital know-how and no proper training provided and lastly; Learner related problems in form of feeling alone, de-motivated and insufficient time allocated to learning (Ali, Uppal and Gulliver, 2018; CIPD, 2021).

**Blended learning:** This form of learning is a strategy that combines formal and informal method of learning which works in synchrony of diverse methods and tools in learning, which provides an absolute experience in learning (Bonk and Graham, 2012; Singh, 2021; CIPD, 2021). In this way a learning framework or design may proactively and deliberately harness community of learner discussions from learning sessions done informally which possibly promotes a better working culture and carrying out tasks at work with ease (Armstrong and Taylor, 2021; Singh, 2021). This approach to learning supports learning integrated in the workflow of life, reduces the weight and pressure related to knowledge acquisition, can lure, and attract positively employee's responsiveness to learning and enhance the quality of learning interventions as well as courses offered (Slotte and Herbert, 2008; CIPD, 2020; CIPD, 2021; Singh, 2021). Considering, that setting the stage is relevant to the effectiveness of organisations, knowledge sharing becomes a thing of comfort for learners if employers realize that responsibility falls on them in this sense by providing the most conducive working culture in terms of learning. A few learning literatures have attributed this feeling of ease and comfort to share knowledge to employing the services of a motivational coach whose role it is to have face-to-face sessions with these learners to help break down or give new insights to online courses and help these learners better understand their process of learning as well as results in behaviours and its effect on others (Prichard, Bizo, and Stratford, 2006; Slotte and Herbert, 2008; Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). This is in consideration to the fact that the gap between instructors and learners poses a challenging factor that comes in form of workplace pedagogy and Eraut (2004) observed that practising and getting feedback on performance are the primary ways to understand what theory you need in any given scenario.

## **Linkages between strategic human resource and strategic learning and development on the productivity of employees**

Strategic Human Resources Management (SHRM) has seen substantial growth in the practice of management and has been an interesting subject of research far back

as in the 1980s. More interestingly, key arguments amongst notable literature still stands on what SHRM could be defined as (Tompkins,2002; Boxall and Purcell 2000).

Wright and McMahan (1992) however, defines SHRM as HRM practices following a planned cycle to reach a business's overall goal. They went further to argue about how inconsistency in several studies placing SHRM as a concept has left a confusion on what and what not to see SHRM as.

Learning and talent development alongside SHRM literature emphasizes the importance of aligning organization's HRM strategy with an organisation's overall strategy for HR function to offer value to the organization. (Senge, 1990; Wright and McMahan, 1992; Armstrong, 2009). One can argue in this sense that an organisation deliberately enables its employees to become an embodiment of its mission and vision by defining, nurturing, and communicating the collective vision.

Productivity levels of HRM practitioners in Ireland has seen a positive high from 2021 to date, and yet the attrition rate still tends to be high due to challenges with performance management related issues like feelings of being supported and wellbeing and the need for these people in the talent market has also increased (CIPD, 2022). If Ireland draws its competitive powers from its workforce, this author believes that not just the employers, but the government has a part to play to promote a well-learned and adaptable workforce by supporting employers in whatever way they can to improve and increase the promotion of lifelong learning as a national policy (Skillnet, 2017). (See recommendation section for more)

On this note, it is crucial to establish a common goal prior to empowering employees since failing to do so may lead to several leadership issues but the proper implementation of this could lead to growth on both sides and a shareholder mindset especially from an employee perspective.

This stems from a strategic HRM point of view in which Ahmad et al. (2010) has posited on human resources, placing a premium on people as an end means, across various firms. Thinking on the fact that this study is on HRM practitioners themselves, it is now up to leadership to see that the learning and development of these practitioners is prioritised to enable a functioning people operation, and this can be done by aligning skills and abilities of these practitioners and learning needs with overall business needs which can in no doubt increase the productivity of HRM practitioners in the firm or even other professions. In his book on "managers guide to employee development" Hosmer (2015) supports the above by stating that taking the above into consideration have a lifelong impact on the growth of the organisation who proactively and not reactively takes steps to align the three components, that is skills and abilities, learning needs of the employees with overall business needs. Figure 2.2 shown below represents a modified version by this researcher about aligning skills and interests of employees and learning with business needs.

There are several approaches to guarantee that connection, one of which is the concept of a collection of Important HRM practices that would increase the



organization's performance by combining and developing a cohesion toward producing competitive advantage.

This collection of human resource best practices has been defined as strong participation leadership, employee engagement maintenance, motivation, productivity, and total quality work processes (Cho, Woods, Jang, and Erdem, 2006) which differs upon the trending needs of the business (Delery and Doherty, 1996).

To bolster this, it's worth noting that exceptional human resource management approaches, according to Schneider and Bowen (1993), can be a major source of market edge for organizations. Hence, firms need an analysis of guiding principles and practices that ensure organizational productivity is enhanced via the execution of a learned human capital especially HRM practitioners being the facilitators of learning and development as part of their practice.

Stressing further, (Heskett et al. 2008; Nayar, 2010) opines that the satisfaction of employees rises when intrinsic business effectiveness is improved, which enhances staff commitment and improves worker productivity. Increased efficiency translates into increased third-party service quality for clients, resulting in overall contentment.

Human resource management strategies critical to productivity in a firm have been recognized as recruiting and screening, learning and development, performance evaluation, and incentive systems. (Tsaur and Lin, 2004).

Focusing on a more dynamic environment as identified by Hinkin and Tracey (2010), creative human resource processes are used by various service businesses, including a lifestyle of having compassion for staff members and open discussions, adaptable planning and controlling to fit the demands of a changing workforce, imaginative methods to recruit, pick, and sustain a dedicated and productive labour force, leadership and development programs seen as an asset to the company through people, highlighting long term career paths and advancement from the inside; and finally an appraisal of performance in line with organizational goals.

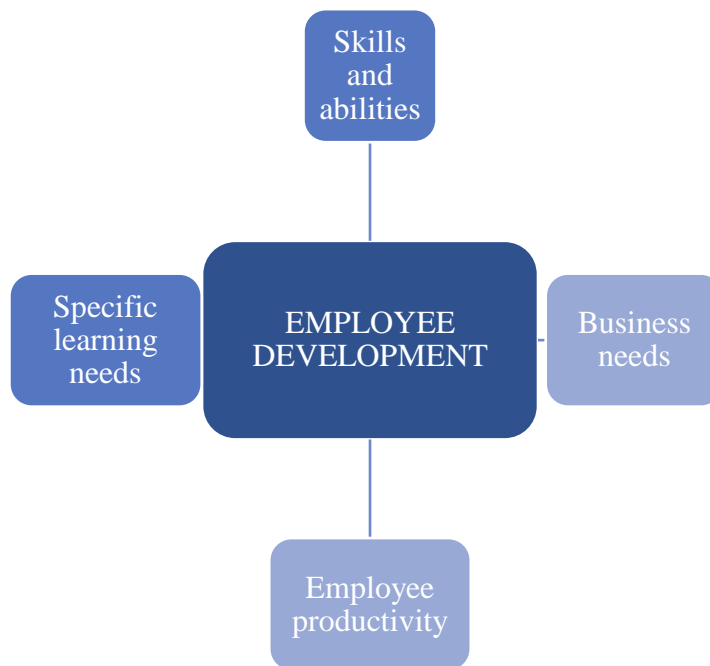


Figure 2.3 1 Employee development components

Aligning skills and abilities and specific learning needs of employees with overall business needs produces employee productivity (Original idea by (Hosmer 2015 p.3 modified by researcher)

## Limitations of workplace learning and development as possible opposing factor for employee's productivity

To provide relevant Learning and development experiences, Learning and development specialists must stay on top of the dynamic business sphere and make the necessary adjustments. The drivers of success mentioned above are very different from those of earlier centuries and would be different in the next century due to the dynamic nature of globalism. Although there are probably dozens of limitations of workplace learning and its impact on productivity, only two which the researcher finds relevant to the study will be discussed: (1.) Reticence of professionals to share knowledge (2.) A de-motivated attitude on the path of the learner

**Reticence of professionals to share knowledge:** Billet (1994;1995) cites reticence of professionals to share knowledge, coaching, and assistance as critical hinderances to the success of learning and development in organisations which in no doubt could mar the productivity of the workforce. Billet (1994;1995) concludes that these experts may, however, be unwilling or hesitant to impart their expertise due to fears of losing their position or perhaps being replaced by individuals they have helped. For instance, researchers cited several businesses that have effectively incorporated a place for sharing knowledge into their corporate cultures, including Google, IBM, and a host of others (McDermott, and O'dell, 2001). Riege (2005)

attributes the reason for failed attempts of knowledge sharing objectives in organisations to the absence of a defined link between the knowledge management strategy and overarching business objectives, with possible convictions of these organisations seeing knowledge sharing as either unnecessary or as a separate activity. Reige added an interesting perspective on how subordinate and lower-level employees sometimes hoard their knowledge from leaders to avoid situations where these leaders feel threatened by these subordinates in terms of appearing to know more. This is prevalent in an example of a concluded study on Russian found to be resistant to working or sharing knowledge with lower-level employees (Michailova and Husted 2003 cited in Reige 2005). All these factors to knowledge sharing could however, slow the process of growth in the lifelong learning process of an organisation, thereby making workplace learning challenging.

**A de-motivated attitude on the path of the learner:** Several learning and development literatures have credited employee's de-motivation to learn because of time related factors due to work pressures and other commitments outside of work (Sambrook, 2002; Thomson, Lu and Pate, 2017; Spar, Dye, Lefkowitz and Pale, 2018) Even though the success of a positive learning outcome rests on the self-motivation of that learner. This demotivation may be due to an absence of an evaluation system in place to track progress of learners. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) as a continuum proposes that evaluation is crucial to see whether the learner is achieving the desired results, to assess its effectiveness and to identify room for growth, this is consistent with Tamkin, Yarnall and Kerrin (2002) assertion that learning evaluation could track the impact of learner behaviour because of learning and its impact on others.

## **Literature Review Conclusion**

The literature review section of this work has attempted to succinctly see what learning and development literatures have said about the subject matter, defining what it is, stating its importance and linking strategic HRM to Strategic L&D with overall business needs which has emerged that there is an impact learning and development of employees plays in the productivity of employees (Hosmer, 2015). The challenges were also prevalent which could act as a stumbling block to cook up an atmosphere for successful implementation of learning and development strategy.

The reason why this researcher reviewed literatures was to come up with themes to act as a guide in achieving the research objectives of the original study. Themes like the importance of blended learning emerged, evaluation as an important tool to keep learners motivated also emerged. In consideration of the emerged themes combined with the researchers nose for information on HRM perceptions around learning as a tool for productivity, set of questions guiding the findings will be mentioned in the research methodology chapter, where explanation of and reasons for methods used will be discussed.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE RESEARCH PLATFORM: RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODOLOGY AND MORE

#### **Research questions/ objectives:**

The focal point of this research is to fathom the opinions and perceptions of Human Resource Management practitioners in organisations around learning and development offerings as a motivational tool for productivity. The direction and focus of this study was formed by the researcher's fascination of L&D, how important it is in fostering productivity amongst staffs of organisations, with a niched focus on HRM practitioners in Ireland. From the above literature reviewed the following research questions were birthed.

**Research question 1:** What are the perceptions and experiences of HRM practitioners in Ireland around the importance of learning and development offerings on their productivity?

**Research question 2:** What learning, and development offerings are available to these practitioners in their organisations?

**Research question 3:** What are the challenges faced by these practitioners in terms of the learning and development offerings provided to them by their companies?

#### **Research Methodology**

##### **Introduction**

This part of the study aims to make the audience/reader of this piece comprehend better the purpose for which this research exists, as well as the notions/philosophical aspects guiding it, the strategy followed, the methodologies chosen, the analytical

technique, and the limits it implies in existing literature and the current research issue. It begins by examining the selection of the pertinent procedures/methods and why and how they were included into this investigation. Finally, it gives a restricted background information of the contributors/participants with consideration to ethical issues.

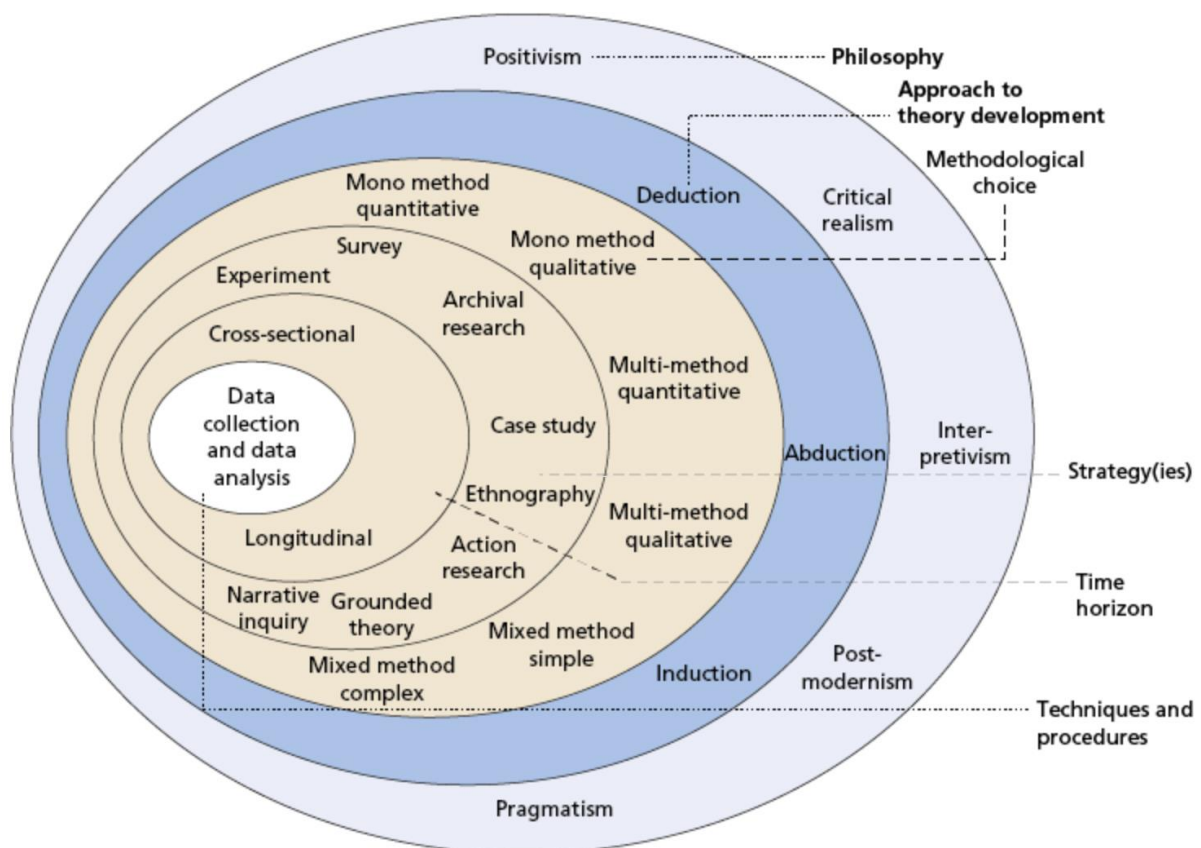
Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, (2007); (2009) explains research as the process of increasing expertise/knowledge in a particular discipline. They believe that even if the process by which this information was developed wasn't as revolutionary as the building of a fresh "human motivation theory", it nevertheless counted as the creation of new wealth of thoughts and or knowledge.

Various thinkers share in this light by pin pointing research practically to understanding the what, where, who and how of the research process, that is identifying the present problem obviously through research gaps exposed by existing literature, a granular understanding of this problem, undergoing an investigation on how to find and get information as well as knowing who and what to ask to get that information needed and finally giving meaningful interpretation to these findings (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2007; Crowther and Lancaster, 2012; Adams, Khan, and Raeside, 2014; Stokes and Wall, 2017).

Crotty, (1998) stresses the need to explain the reason behind your chosen research methods and methodology to present a serious outlook for your research amongst readers. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, (2012) argues however, that there is a distinction between research methods and research methodology, explaining that the latter refers to all forms, techniques and methods used in collection of data as well as analysing it and the former represents the ideology, science and philosophical background that births the research.

## **Research Philosophy**

Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, (2016) in their literature on research methods gives a simple yet effective definition of research philosophy as a phrase used in identifying a set of presumptions and ideas about how knowledge is generated. This definition was expanded upon by other authors describing the research philosophy as the growth of the pre-conceived research notion, knowledge of same, and its essence/nature. Even though the held notion is seen as a basic assertion of thinking, it is founded on the philosopher's deeper thoughts as well as perceptions, which are the result of cognitive efforts (Žukauskas, Vveinhardt, and Andriukaitienė, 2018). This research philosophy being talked about is represented by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, (2016) in the "research onion", which is displayed in the image in Figure 3.1 according to the authors this represents the problems behind the decision of information/data gathering methods and processing/analytics steps.



Source: ©2018 Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill

Figure 3.1 1 The 'research onion'

originally formulated by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, (2018) adopted from Melnikovas, (2018)

In argument of the above, Burrell and Morgan, (2017) exposes the inevitability of making assumptions in research which happens whether in a conscious form or an unconscious one.

In the same sense these usually involve, presumptions concerning the challenges one is confronted with while conducting the study which represents an assumption based on **ontology**, which deals with the attributes of the real world and is grouped into two forms which are subjectivist and objectivist in nature, where the subjectivist shows that societal variables' views and behaviours contribute to the notion of social occurrences, the objectivist aspect argues that social beings exist in actuality that aren't influenced by other social elements.

The second assumption as asserted by Saunders et al., (2012) is one about sentient human understanding which connotes an **epistemological** presumption, which means the perception of humans about said reality, of which this study leans on.

Finally, assertions about how much and in what aspects one's moral views are influencing their study which finally is based upon **axiology**. These presumptions inexorably influence how the researcher interprets results, research topics, and the methodologies employed (Crotty 1998; Saunders et al., 2009; Saunders et al., 2012).

The core notion of positivism, according to researchers like Easterby-Smith et al. (2008), is that it is best measured from an objective standpoint. Positivism, however, is criticized for failing to account for the fact that business is a social environment that cannot be measured objectively, which led to the emergence of interpretivism.

Saunders et al. (2012), contributes explaining interpretivism as promoting the idea there is dynamism in human roles in relation to social conditions, adding that there is an inevitable responsibility on the author of any research to define these roles in accordance with the content given. In concluding thoughts, they contend the cruciality in employing interpretivism in Human Resource Management fields along with the business world due to the interpretivist function of aiding perceptions, viewpoint and understanding of participants.

Consistent with Saunders et al. (2012), as this study focused on HRM practitioners' viewpoints and perceptions surrounding learning and development offerings as a motivational tool for productivity the research philosophical standpoint that stood as a guide was the interpretivist as the positivist philosophical standpoint was not suitable due to its attributes to objectivity.

## **Research Method**

Several authors have agreed that in terms of the research approach that there is a link between theory and research in terms of the strategy, thus it is crucial to analyse the way your study will take. Deductive and inductive approaches are the two main types. When the result is formed from a strategic viewpoint or ideas, a deductive approach is utilized, the inductive approach however, extrapolates the significance of the results from the concept and or theories (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Saunders et al. 2012; Robbins, 2017; Coy, 2019; Bell, Harley, and Bryman, 2022).

Deductive methods as discussed by Bryman and Bell (2007) are more adapted to the quantitative research methods, while inductive methods tend to be more associated with qualitative research. Additionally, deductive procedures are criticised by proponents of the inductive approach because they are exceedingly strict and provide no room for the emergence of alternative phenomenal. The inductive approach is most suited to this study due to its nature of movement bottom-up from data captured from the personalised encounters/experiences of interviewees and or participants to generate common themes and reach a theory and overall conclusions (Patton, 1990; Baxter and Jack, 2006; Saunders et al., 2012).

For the research method, Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, (2016) opines on how a positivist or interpretative ideology can incorporate an epistemological

research method. While the positivist uses the quantitative research style which is utilized mostly by scientific based studies, the interpretative philosophy therefore, uses qualitative research methods to analyse the subjective/perceived meaning of social acts.

The aims of this study could be fulfilled employing partly the positivist method as in quantitative methods, however, it may be claimed that quantitative research may not be suited to grasp in full the perspectives of many respondents and inspire them to generate extensive insights and recommendations. It was Patton (1990) who uncovered that these personalized perceptions could be effectively conveyed utilizing the qualitative method (one can argue that the word qualitative could have emanated from the word quality, making it the best way to get unfiltered opinions from participants) within an interpretivist theoretical framework, particularly when attempting to uncover similar patterns in extremely diverse situations. An interpretative research philosophy will, however, be used in this study since it aims to analyse the thoughts and perspectives of human resource practitioners working in Ireland who are affiliated with various firms, experiences, background, and age groups.

While qualitative techniques are a data gathering methodology that produces data which entails words rather than number, quantitative methods on the other end of the spectrum concentrates mostly on numbers. The author in qualitative study is more engaged in the process as they can fully comprehend the study's standpoint and are in close touch with the interviewees, whereas real communication with respondents in quantitative research is sparse or non-existent (Mason, 2002), while qualitative research might be informal to strengthen emergent insights, quantitative research is typically quite regimented. Additionally, qualitative data offers a comprehensive and in-depth knowledge of the respondent, quantitative research offers concrete data, which essentially refers to rigorously uniformed parameters. The key differences between the two are discussed above, although they should not be seen as absolutes (Mason, 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers are curious to learn how individuals create their realities, perceive their experiences, and give those experiences meaning (Merriam, 2009).

For instance, the researcher may be more interested in learning how people adjusted to adopting new working practises in a time as the pandemic, how they view this stage of their lives, how they perceive working from home versus working in an office, and other topics rather than, for example, counting how many people were forced to work from home during the COVID'19 global pandemic in various sectors which can be done through a survey of the quantitative methods (example idea curated from Merriam, 2009 and modified by researcher).

These inquiries concern comprehending their experiences and would necessitate a qualitative approach (Patton, 1990; Merriam, 2009).

Researchers have argued that the research problem determines the sort of approach that should be employed for each topic (Gummesson, 2000; Thomas, 2004; Stokes, 2017). However, there is no universal agreement on this. To better comprehend the participants' opinions and perceptions, the author chose a mono-method qualitative



technique for this study. This technique might allow the author to collect authentic facts and would also allow the participants to effectively voice their viewpoints.

Along the above stated, the qualitative method also aids in the creation of fresh topics or new theories that the writer had not anticipated.

Alternatives, such as surveys, which are often concerned with a deductive approach, affiliated with the quantitative method were avoided due to its nature that only avails opportunity for routine data collection and the comparison of variables, not for further exploration of the respondents' undiluted viewpoints (Patton, 1990).

Interviews in form of a semi-structured arrangement, were utilised in collection of data with the aid of the qualitative methodologies.

## **Semi- structured interviews**

The chosen research strategy for this study was in form of interviews which is defined as a flow of communication directly with participants, and usually happens face-to-face. Saunders et al., (2012) opines that there is validity and reliability in terms of data which comes from carrying out interviews as a research strategy which has inevitable relevance to the entire research. Babbie (2007) identifies interviews in three categories namely, structured interview, semi-structured interview, and unstructured interview (see Babbie, 2007). For this study, the semi-standardized interview style was used. Although semi-structured interview may follow a timeline with predefined themes, open-ended questions are used to accommodate unexpected replies and issues to arise (Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2009; Gerrish and Lacey, 2010). Due to the versatility that follows a semi-structured interview process, the interviewer is free to ask a variety of not so formal questions whilst exploring any unplanned problems that the respondent brings up. Flexible question phrasing allows the interviewer to employ a variety of linguistic nuances and provide explanations.

Instead of a traditional telephone interview, interviews were conducted through Microsoft teams, requiring a face-to-face virtual style of connection that is near to physical contact. While a telephone interview does not allow for participant observation but does provide convenience, face-to-face interviews allow for participant observation and the development of camaraderie. The benefit of adopting Microsoft Teams as a method includes its capability of simultaneously recording and transcribing, which allowed the interviewees to be notified of recordings and told that all information was collected on an anonymous basis. The interview time was between 30-60 minutes allocating the first 10 -20 minutes for introduction and sound testing.

The primary research subject, the review of related literature, and the concepts that arose from this literature all served as the basis for the author's creation of the interview questions. See appendix 3 for interview questions.

Apart from the questions created, to obtain a broader spectrum of ideas and more in-depth data, supplementary inquiries and follow up questions were utilised. However,

if the interviewers were veering off topic, it was occasionally undertaken to get them back in gear.

## **The role of the researcher**

In line with the interpretive epistemology of this work the project also used what can be termed a twin research design called the interpretive phenomenology analysis which Fabry describes phenomenology as:

“An approach that describes the actual way we experience the world and ourselves, but without fitting the phenomenon of our experiences into preconceived patterns of interpretation” (Fabry, 1980, p. 27 cited in Singh and Walwyn, 2017).

In this way, the researcher serves as a vehicle for gathering and interpreting data (Saunders et al., 2012; Singh and Walwyn, 2017). All the processes involved in the study was carried out by this researcher for more authenticity.

## **Selection of Participants and Sampling**

In a qualitative study the use of purposeful or purposive sampling which is sometimes interchanged with the term criterion sampling (Merriam, 2009; Saunders et al., 2012) ensures that the study's findings are pertinent to and important to the respondents.

This research used a random sampling style where six (6) people were selected due to their common characteristics. The cohort were drawn from HRM practitioners in Ireland who had learning and development interventions in existence at their organisation.

A sum of six (6) interviews were carried out and nearly all of them were reached via LinkedIn (A social platform for professionals) directly by the researcher through a structured message detailing everything that the study entailed. A general message was left on the CIPD (Chartered institute of personnel and development; the professional body for HRM and people development across Ireland and around the globe) group in which the researcher happens to be a member. Other members of the group helped share the invitation to their network who ended up reaching out to the researcher to show interest to partake in the study. As mentioned, the respondents initially received a quick introductory write up to grab their attention, and then, after indicating an interest in participating in the study, they received a more thorough information page and form of consent which was forwarded to the email provided to the researcher by these respondents. A day was scheduled for the interviews once consent papers were received, fully signed, and returned. Microsoft Teams was used as the virtual conference platform for the interviews.

It was ensured beforehand that the respondents were well acquainted with learning and development in their organisations.

## Data analysis technique employed by researcher

As a general inductive and comparative analytical technique, the interview tapes and transcripts were interpreted using thematic analysis, due to the nature of the study's connection to exploring the opinions and perceptions of individuals around a subject matter.

Braune and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as the process of identifying, assessing, and reporting themes or patterns within qualitative data as well as using interpretations to deal with a variety of topics while providing in-depth data illustrations (Boyatzis 1998).

The six (6) steps developed by Braune and Clarke (2006) were taken into action for this research. They include **(1). Familiarisation/getting acquainted** which involved getting to know the data provided by participants, as it is crucial to have a complete understanding of all the information gathered before moving on to analyse data individually (Braune and Clarke, 2006). The next step of this process was listening to the audio and transcribing it, and finally reading the text and making notes, while getting acquainted with overall data.

A tabular example of data transcription from researchers' analysis

TRANSCRIBED DATA	NOTES TAKEN
Interview question 5: Do you feel that learning and development offerings impacts upon your productivity? How	Acknowledges learning and developments' importance and its positive integration into work
Participants response: "Absolutely it does, because you incorporate it into your job and by attending say webinars or external training, you get to speak to other people and hear a different viewpoint and it can maybe spark something in you that you think ohh I hadn't thought of it this way. Or perhaps we should be doing this. It's like a I love learning. So, for me personally having all this learning material available to me and the support available is a huge motivator for me and makes me more interested in my job and It's really appreciated when people share their knowledge. You need somebody on hand who is a subject matter expert who can help you out with the tricks of the system. So yeah, for me, absolutely learning and development is a motivator and makes me more productive in my work."	<p>Recognises networking as a learning avenue to acquire new knowledge</p> <p>Acknowledges the impact of knowledge sharing</p>

**(2). Coding** which is described as the process of identifying certain text parts, in form of phrases or sentences, and assigning brief titles, or codes, to indicate what those texts are about. A short example text would be this research being focused on the perceptions of HR practitioners concerning linkages between learning and development as tool for productivity, from the data gotten through the semi-structured interviews.

In a bid to be thorough at this point, the researcher read over every interview's transcript and marked anything that stood out as significant. In the process of going through the material, the author kept adding additional codes in addition to marking all the phrases and sentences that match these codes as well as eliminating any irrelevant piece that was not important to the researchers work.

After reading the text, a compilation of all the information into groups that are coded was done. With the help of these codes, the researcher was able to quickly

summarise the key ideas and terminologies that are re-occurring all through the data.

**(3). Birthing/generating themes** was the next step, where the researcher looked over the codes created and identified patterns among them, leading to the development of themes.

At this point, decisions were made by the researcher that some of the codes should be deleted since they were either too ambiguous or not important enough.

**(4). Assessing themes** where the researcher ensured that these themes accurately and usefully portrayed the data collated. The researcher then revisited the data collection and contrast these themes with it. In a situation where the researcher ran into issues with existing themes, the researcher had to merge, combine, eliminate, or introduce fresh themes, having in mind the need to produce quality themes that are more appropriate, useful, and accurate for the study.

**(5). Definition and naming of these themes** entails coming up with a brief and clear name for each topic, definition of themes involves itself with clarifying precisely what is meant by each theme and determining how it helps one comprehend the data. For example, the researcher might peruse the themes that were created like “reliance on experts” and decide precisely who is meant by said experts in this theme. The researcher might decide birth a better name for the theme as “learning from the experienced”. In summary this process involved the researcher making the best decisions to come up with suitable themes. The last step of analysis carried out by the researcher was **(6) writing up** on the analysed data.

## **Ethical Consideration**

The main goal of conducting research as that of a qualitative study is that it entails protecting the respondents' privacy, and the concerns of informed permission, anonymity, and secrecy are of utmost significance (Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2009). Before information was gathered from respondents, a commitment was taken to fully disclose all potential ramifications to these participants. The researcher made sure that there were no hazards to the respondents and that no damages was ever done to them. The researcher adhered strictly to the process involved by giving out consent forms and information sheet to the respondents. The information page included introducing the researcher, disclosing information on the study's purpose and methods, and maintained guidelines in accordance with the National College of Irelands' standards in relation to ethics, and phone contact information as well as email address of important persons to reach out to in case any of the respondents had questions that needed to be answered in more detail. Additionally, measures were taken to protect respondents' confidentiality and hide their true identities. This was accomplished by using the proper pen names to represent various people and categorising their replies. The participants were given the assurance that all information obtained would be treated with absolute secrecy in line with the relevant regulations. Participants were made aware that this data would be saved on a

password-protected laptop and would be erased after the study has been authorised. Lastly, the respondents were informed in advance of all components of the study and given the choice to revoke their agreement at any moment.

## **Limitations**

Despite being one of the greatest ways for acquiring data, interviews have several drawbacks (Merriam, 2009; Saunders et al., 2012). It often limits generalisation since they typically include smaller sample where in this research a total number of 6 people represented a massive professional body. It is, therefore, implausible to think that everyone in society would view things similarly. Since it is impossible to know whether the author has obtained credible data, believability might be another problem that arose. Additionally, there could be partiality present throughout the interviewee's responses as well as from the interrogator, who might use trial-balloon questions to sway the subject. The researcher faced problems with getting people to agree to partake in this study, where some were simply not interested or had no time to partake in the study. Another limitation was time constraints in line with arranging interviews, considering that the researcher juggle summer work life balance with undertaking a big project as this, the researcher had to make out time that suited the participants for this interview to happen.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter's main goal was to describe the research strategy used to address the questions of the study. As of now, all or most of the needed research characteristics have been described in depth, outlining exactly how this work was carried out. An epistemological qualitative technique has been used in this study, to describe the impact of learning and development offerings as a motivational tool for productivity in organisations, focusing on HRM practitioners as selected participants for the study. The selected participants in one way or another provided acumen from first-hand experiences of the impacts of learning and development offerings on their productivity which assisted in comprehending the key issues involved. It is now time to hear from Irish employees on their perceptions around learning and development as a motivational tool for productivity in their organisations. This can be found in the next chapter titled data findings, analysis, and discussion.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Introduction**

The approach taken by this study to address its research questions and objectives was examined in the preceding chapter.

Three of the objectives of the research are aligned with the findings that are reported in this chapter. Manual organisation and theme structuring were done with qualitative data, which was extracted from the interview, done through the aid of virtual application software named Microsoft teams. Questions guided by the research objectives were asked to a small population of exactly 6 HRM practitioners to have a rough idea around their perception and experiences on the importance of learning and development offerings on their productivity, the learning and development offerings available to them and challenges. Finally, to give a heads up to the reader of this work, incognito names were used to refer to the participants in accordance with ethical considerations and protection of identity.

#### **Participants and Response Rate**

As earlier mentioned, six (6) employees of similar industries participated in this study out of a bigger population of the profession. Four (4) of these participants were of an information and technology background, The other two participants were of a financial services background where one of them was specific to a (financial technology) FINTECH industry. A total of 24 people were contacted via LinkedIn social platform and most CIPD member group medium on LinkedIn, although about 10 were interested to participate, the researcher made sure to select practitioners within the HRM industry who had an active learning and development structure in place. All ethical protocols were observed to make sure participants understood what the study entailed, and they were all in full agreement. The interview session which lasted about 30-60 minutes made it possible for the researcher to transcribe raw data, organise it and prepare for analysis. In the verge of taking notes and getting familiarised with the data from the interview some themes emerged which includes, employer-employee relationship, learning productivity dependent on outcome and more which will be revealed along the line. The table below shows the participants, gender, industry, position, duration of employment and pseudonyms used to identify them where R represents the code used.

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Duration of employment</b>	<b>Position</b>
Participant1	Female	Financial technology company (FINTECH)	R1	15 years	Senior learning and development specialist
Participant 2	Female	Information and technology software company	R2	1 year	Recruiter
Participant 3	Male	Information and technology software company	R3	9 months	Associate recruiter
Participant 4	Female	Financial services	R4	1 year	Human resources business partner
Participant 5	Male	Information and technology services	R5	7.5 years	HR Learning partner
Participant 6	Female	Information and technology services	R6	1 year 2 months	Human resources lead

This study sought to find out the perceptions and experiences of Human resources management practitioners in Ireland to find out if learning and development offerings play a part on their productive level.

Firstly, it was found that these practitioners match up with Skillnet annual report in the literature concerning the Irish workforce “we draw a great competitive strength from our workforce, a well-educated, highly-skilled and adaptable workforce has been a core tenet of Ireland’s economic and industrial policy the need to increase in-employment engagement in lifelong learning is a national policy objective” (Skillnet, 2017). 100% of the interviewees agreed that indeed learning is very important to them, and they thrive based on lifelong and continuous learning which is also found in the literature mentioned by Zuboff (1988) explaining that “the art of knowledge acquisition (learning) has quickly become the new workforce”.

It was also discovered that a range of these practitioners have an active range of learning and development offerings available to them in their organisations. Regarding the learning strategies nearly all respondents favoured blended learning as a key productive force for them over one or the other form of learning, although it was found that not all the organisations utilised blended learning approach, some of the interviewees shared challenges with utilising just one form of learning strategy and this was consistent in Slotte et. al. (2004)’s observations on the “risks of employing only informal process as a learning approach in isolation”.



Knowledge sharing was another theme in line with literature reviewed that was mentioned by interviewees, while some expressed how networking and teamwork enables them to build already existing skills as highlighted in the literature (Brown and Duguid 1991; Wenger, 1998).

Many of those interviewed had learning and development practices actively running in their organisations and in-house learning platforms were utilised by their organisations.

An absence of a learning and development structure put in place by their organisation for newer and or junior employees was found as something prevailing according to some of the interviewees, this developed as a new theme that emerged in the literature in terms of succession planning. Although the literature reviewed mentioned making new beginners in the organisation acquainted with the learning flow of the organisation (Lave, 1990; Billet, 1995), a distinction was spotted by the researcher on the actual meaning of what some of the respondents truly meant by that and the theme emerged that there was a dent in succession planning.

## **Analysis of findings**

**Research question 1:** What are the perceptions and experiences of HRM practitioners in Ireland around the importance of learning and development offerings on their productivity?

As highlighted severally in this work, the focus of this study revolved around trying to grasp the perceived notions of HRM practitioners in Ireland around the importance of learning and development offerings on their productivity. The respondents shared their experiences and insights based on personal grounds on how important learning is to them and the major theme that was captured by the researcher in discussions around this question was the 'perception on the importance of learning and development offerings on productivity', where a sub-theme emerged under this labelled quality of work.

### **1.1.1 Perception on the importance of learning and development offerings on productivity**

The respondents expressed their experiences on how important learning, and development influences their capacity to be productive. Most of the respondents attributed learning and development to their quality of work and effectiveness even if they worded it differently.

#### **1.1.1 Quality of work**

One of the interviewees, R1 in particular talking from a senior learning and development specialist point of view attributes her learning and development offerings and productivity linkages to the outcome of learning results and explained it in her words "*Yes, the learning offerings available to me absolutely does impact my productivity because I work for a knowledge intensive industry, meaning that what I know is what I can actually translate to what I can deliver to clients and colleagues, so yes, definitely if the training is done well, it does affect my productivity quite a lot and On the contrary, if the training is done poorly then it means that I will have a lot of troubles with the new product*

*when I start working and that can affect not only my productivity, but even my morale in the long run because I want to feel effective and I will feel like I don't know what I'm doing when I do my work poorly*". This point of view on the importance of learning is consistent with (Costen and Salazar, 2011) who asserts that employees are satisfied only when a learning intervention is successfully implemented.

R2 reported similar view *"Oh, definitely. If you want to be able to do your job properly or be more productive, you need to be able to read kind of the systems and your responsibilities around you"*.

R3 and R4 perceived and described the importance of learning and development offerings and its essence to quality of work and productivity in similar ways, while R3 commented this *"And that has had a positive impact on my productivity in a sense that it has allowed me to do a lot of convincing"*.

R4 shared similar views from a more personalised standpoint by commenting this *"These skills are going to stay with you. So, whether you use them within the company or if you move forward, having the extra skills is a motivating factor, as well as keeping you relevant and up to date"*.

These views shared by these participants shows that learning and development offerings if present are equally important in acquiring skills that follows the learner for life. This is supported in the literature reviewed by a few authors who believe learning and development promotes job fulfilment and in this case productivity through the learner's ability to realise their growth stage and skill building because of learning offerings (Costen and Salazar, 2011; Armstrong and Taylor, 2020).

R5 and R6 revealed that at least most Irish organisations are going in line with learning and development trend in trying to align goals and needs of learners and employees with overall business goals. For example, R5 explains the advantages of the learning offerings available to her in this way *"I think absolutely, yes. I think, you know, if we didn't have these learning interventions specific to different roles and levels in place, then certainly our productivity probably wouldn't be as great So certainly, I think that's how it would improve productivity, because you have the right tools, and the right resources in place"*.

R6 on the other hand from a more personalised point of view and a twist to it reported *"I think learning and development can enhance it if the opportunity is right and if it's a good fit at a point in time. And then sometimes it may be a mismatch. And I think it's also whether it's forced upon you, you know, whether it's an opportunity that all people in the team need to do it or whether it's a certification that's required from a client, maybe they they're not ideal opportunities and they could put a bit of stress around someone and whereas an opportunity that you kind of actively pursue yourself is different because you're invested and you've chosen to do it yourself. So, there's probably in my eyes two aspects to it"*.

Both R5 and R6 had something to say about aligning learners needs with business needs, although worded differently, this was shared in the learning and talent development literature reviewed on the importance of aligning organization's HRM strategy with an organisation's overall strategy for HR function to offer value to the organization. (Senge, 1990; Wright and McMahan, 1992; Armstrong, 2009). This

also links well to the case study example on Google, presented in the human capital advantage theory part of this work and how they align individual needs with business needs.

In conclusion, it has shown from the first question that there is a positive impact of learning and development on the productivity of these practitioners who have shared different perspectives and opinions on how learning and development offerings impacts their productivity. Although no entirely new theme emerged, a tweak in opinions by these practitioners gives an up-to-date perspective to how learning and development offerings is viewed by HRM practitioners in Ireland, for example in terms of succession planning.

**Research question 2:** What learning, and development offerings are available to these practitioners in their organisations?

### 1.1.1 Learning offerings available to practitioners

It was discovered that a range of these practitioners have an active range of learning and development offerings available to them in their organisations. For example, such as the more traditional induction training, classroom-based training which held most learning offerings through to online e-learning programmes, webinars, and blended learning, on to the lesser popular but still motivational offering of coaching and mentoring and knowledge sharing amongst teammates. The table below shows the range of learning offerings provided to each participant, for a succinct purpose those who fall under similar category were put together.

Learning offerings	Participants
Formal classroom-based training	R5 and R6 have a wide spectrum of structured formal classroom training available to them
Induction training, e-learning interventions, webinars, blended learning, and motivational offering as coaching and knowledge sharing amongst teammates.	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5 and R6 all confirmed this range of learning offerings as present in their various firms. R1 is however excluded from the coaching sphere as she had no structured coaching system in place in her organisation.

The presence and or absence of these offerings shows evident in the literature that “structured and unstructured learning has been recognised as mutually significant components of organisational learning” (Slotte, Tynjälä, and Hytönen, 2004). For the most part self-directed learning was the order of the day and the most common reply given by participants. For example, *“there's a huge range of resources internally, and it really is potentially up to the employee to drive that as much as possible. It can be facilitated*

by resource managers or managers. But I think ultimately our approach is that it's driven by the employee (self-directed)". (Participant R6).

### 1.1.1 Advantages of learning Offerings

The participants were asked to put forth the benefits of the various learning available to them, and there was a mix of opinions regarding this.

Participant R1 who has an extensive induction training provided through e-learning available to her in her firm expressed that it helps in learning about new products and skills *"Really helps you, firstly in learning about new products and being able as well to do a refresher course whenever you need. It is a profit for me, especially when you must work with the new skills you have acquired whenever you have to start working with the specific product. And I think that's very, very helpful to have such an extended induction training."*

Participant R1 made it clear that in fact the COVID 19' pandemic outbreak has forced more of an e-learning intervention, sharing specific challenges regarding this which will be revealed in the next research question.

Participant R3 on the other end of the spectrum shared the advantages of the learning offering provided to him by his firm *"I think the major advantage of the e-learning is that I have found myself to be learning and developing quite a lot. One of the things that it does teach me is how to manage my autonomy. And by that, I mean within our workplace, we really get a lot of freedom or autonomy to work the way we want to work"*.

Participant R5 on the other hand shares the advantage of the learning offerings available to him from a learning partner eye, being part of the facilitators of learning he believes that having diverse internal learning specialists allows the opportunity to access knowledge when needed which was found in the literature where (Chen and Hsiang, 2007; CIPD, 2021) lists providing time for learning inside the organisation, and building trust springs up as success factors for the effectiveness of learning interventions".

*"From day one, you are given all the resources to learn, whether it be the learn platform or knowledge sharing communities, which is massive in my company, we have a huge amount of knowledge sharing communities that are set up either formally or informally and we call them communities. And so, let's say if we have a group of HR professionals across multiple different locations, which we do, uh, potentially we'll form a community and knowledge share. We'll have lunch and learn sessions, or we might pick a specific topic and have a joint sprint on it across locations to see if we can kind of share best practices and see what work"* (Participant R6).

Participant R6 expresses the accessibility to the learning platforms at any time as one advantage and introduces the theme on knowledge sharing and communities of practise, the information shared by this participant shows that in her company there is an in-house system for learning called the level up that acts as a guide for career growth and in her words *"it shows me the path to my next promotion and essentially all the information along the way"*(Participant R6).

It can be concluded in this regard that blended learning and all forms of learning is utilised by most of the Irish firms represented in this study, although one or two of the firms lack in the full range, some form of blended learning showed evidence and it is backed up by literature that this approach to learning supports learning integrated in the workflow of life, reduces the weight and pressure related to knowledge acquisition, can lure, and attract positively employee's responsiveness to learning and enhance the quality of learning interventions as well as courses offered (Slotte and Herbert, 2008; CIPD, 2020; CIPD, 2021; Singh, 2021).

Participant R4 introduced a new perspective/theme to the discussion by relating the advantages of the learning offering provided from a Human resources business partner point of view *"When we're recruiting as well, we speak about our learning and development policy and how we support, so it is actually a recruitment tool as well as motivation."* Although this was not categorically mentioned in the literature, it may serve as a tool to infuse into recruitment strategies.

### **1.1.1 Employer support and admiration**

Under this heading expressions by some of the participants, at least 70% praised their employers as being supportive to their learning and development. For example, R4 mentioned that *"The environment is very supportive, so I imagine some people, you know, getting the sign off for the support of learning from their managers or their organization would be a problem, but I'm very happy to say in this organization it is not the same. It is very much promoted as part of our culture"*.

Explaining on a personal level, participant R4 had this to say *"So, for me personally having all this learning material available to me and the support available is a huge motivator for me and definitely makes me more interested in my job."*

Participant R2 shared similar expressions but specified to evaluation sessions with managers *"One cool thing that we do in my company as well is kind of having growth conversations with your managers every single month"*. This was found as important tool for growth in the literature reviewed by Armstrong and Taylor (2020).

R2 and R3 expressed that their employers support them financially for their development not just for the company's benefit but for career growth R2 is quoted on this *"one of the benefits that we have is that they give us 5,000 euros per year to invest on our career growth"*.

Molloy and Noe (2009) assert that continual learning, adaptation in the workplace, career pliability individual/personal development and all there is to growth professionally is changing and this change is seen interfering with employer-employee relationship. Yamamoto (2013) also confirm that career workers feel learning and development is fulfilling and promote loyalty and in this case productivity.

**Research question 3:** What are the challenges faced by these practitioners in terms of the learning and development offerings provided to them by their companies?

This question was asked in collaboration with the others to understand what challenges these practitioners faced in terms of learning and development offerings provided to them by their firms and three of the respondents unanimously shared similar views.

A theme emerged which the researcher titled information deluge, technical problems and a dent in succession planning.

### **1.1.1 Information Deluge, Technical problems, and a dent in succession planning**

*“The only challenge to me is being overwhelmed with so much information, that you would have from the learning and development team. This can result in avoiding the learning platform. And then where do you go? What do you learn? So many things to learn that you then feel like, okay, I'm, I'm a little bit demotivated now. I'm just going to go back to my work”.* (Participant R2).

Participant R4 thinks this information deluge/overload could impact upon productivity and demotivate her as an employee *“It's too much like there's so much available online that it's a bit like going on to Netflix. It's hard to know what to choose and there can be some pressure on people to take on extra learning or study, and if they're in a busy job and have family commitments as well, that it can be stressful trying to juggle.”*

*“The only downside to all of that is that sometimes it can be a little bit overwhelming specifically because it is quite advanced compared to some companies”.* (Participant R6).

Participant R1 confirms in same words of Billet (2004) on the reticence of professional to share their expertise as a major challenge in trying to effectively getting the most out of knowledge sharing as part of on-the-job learning, in her words *“this is a relational challenge, a situation when you find the very experienced colleague that for some reason doesn't want to share their knowledge and maybe because they want to preserve their workplace”.*

Other challenges that matched the literature like technical challenges as mentioned especially in the knowledge intensive industry like IT (Information technology) (Participant R1). Evident in the claims by CIPD (2021) and other authors in the literature.

Participant R5 and R6 both mentioned the restricted learning structure to more experienced and younger colleagues as another challenge, in which the researcher

tagged a gap in succession planning. For example, participant R6 reported this “*we have got a fantastic portfolio for our experienced and high-end executive salespeople, but we have very little for our junior workforce. So, I think we have we have gaps, around you know the younger workforce learning and development maps*”. This was not found in the literature.

## **Conclusion**

A thematic analysis was conducted based on the respondents' replies and the stated study goals. These gave rise to a variety of new and old topics from the literature. A concise critical commentary would be used to offer a summary of the findings in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION**

This section of the study aims to briefly discuss the findings in the previous chapter.

For a start it is worth noting from the findings that most Irish employers as in the study are catching up to the trend of effective human capital maintenance as earlier talked about in the first half of the second chapter of this work on human capital advantage theory (Jimenez-Jimenez and Sanz-Valle, 2008; Armstrong, 2009; Jiang, Wang, and Zhao, 2012). Commenting from an external perspective it seems to be that these employers understand what (Zuboff 1988) observed that learning has quickly become the new workforce and the new activity to productivity as opposed to traditional construct of viewing learning as a waste of time or unproductive activity. A unanimous response on how learning is a continuous and lifelong process was evident in the findings. All participants found it effective that their organisation provided them with in house learning platforms and it shows that these organisations are interested in building their talent instead of buying. This is consistent with (Wang Cowham 2011) on the cost effectiveness of building inhouse talent.

In trying to find out what learning offerings was present in these firms the researcher asked this specifically to the participants and it was found that although informal learning was favoured by at least 80% of the respondents, it emerged that participant R1 was interested in more formal learning systems and motivational learning enhancement like coaches to explain better where difficulties in an area developed attributing the increasing need for this in her organisation to the COVID 19' pandemic which introduced a mandatory shift in the way business is done, most employees have been forced to work from home reducing the physical contact with team members for knowledge sharing. This intervention has been suggested by

learning literature for organisations to hire a motivational coach whose role it is to have face-to-face sessions with these learners to help break down online courses and help these learners better understand their process of learning as well as results in behaviours and its effect on others (Prichard, Bizo, and Stratford, 2006; Slotte and Herbert, 2008; Armstrong and Taylor, 2020).

To gain a sense of whether learning offerings had an impact or not in their productivity, participants were asked, how important do you think learning and development opportunities are to your productivity? It was derived that the importance of learning to participants was ranked in the order of the calibre of their output and quality of work. A study consistent with (Costen and Salazar, 2011) and Choi and Dickson (2010) who attested that investing in quality leadership training may boost job contentment and reduce attrition. The finding was also consistent with that of (Cho, Woods, Jang, and Erdem, 2006) who specified total quality work processes as one of Human resources best practice. For example, participant R1 commented in line with this *“so yes, definitely if the training is done well, it does affect my productivity quite a lot”*. During this study Participant R3 related the impact of learning and her productivity with the benefits of using it as a recruitment tool from an HRM standpoint, where learning and development policy is mentioned to potential candidates as a key employer branding tactics, a new theme that was not present in the study.

Finally, to gain an insight as to whether the Irish organisations had challenges like that in literatures on learning through this small sample interviewed from a wider population, the researcher asked about the challenges faced by these practitioners in terms of learning and development offerings, while challenges like learner related, time constraints and technical problems were evident as in literature (Uppal and Gulliver, 2018; CIPD, 2021), a possible new threat was found that was missing in the literature which was themed information deluge, learning and development of younger employees was found to be at a minimal according to (Participant R5 and R6). This meant to the researcher that these employers might not be putting succession planning of the younger workforce at the fore front of the business and according to researchers, the younger generation is the workforce's game changer and future, and they are highly demanding of their professional development and are crucial because they make up a larger proportion of the population than any earlier millennia. They are also very career-conscious and will move quickly if their expectations are not fulfilled (Merchant Jr, R.C., 2010; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011). Although this was not found in the literature it might contribute to the literature on learning and development and might act as a possible focal point for future research.

## **Limitations and Possible Direction for Future Research**

To explore further topics and get over the limits of the study's small and restricted sample, more research is required. Subsequent studies could gain from using



either qualitative or quantitative, together, or more specifically because this study was done using a qualitative study, it would be interesting to carry out similar studies using quantitative method to measure how productive people are in using learning interventions. Studies could benefit using bigger samples than did this study, and should consider covering not just various regions, but also different size businesses, particular counties within Ireland, different functions/levels within the HRM function, or different professions, for example, the aviation sector in Ireland. More precise research questions could include: How has the COVID 19' pandemic changed your view of learning from past learning experiences? For quantitative studies questions could be: What is the best way to measure learning interventions and its relationship with productivity?

## **PERSONAL LEARNING STATEMENT**

This study was carried out in partial fulfilment of acquiring a master's degree in human resources management at the National college of Ireland.

The researcher would first like to extend an appreciation to her college for the opportunity given to carry out this research as it has had not just a positive influence but one to hold for a lifetime.

As they say, learning is a lifelong process, and it is not static but continuous in nature. In trying to carry out this study to showcase my learnings and understanding of core course concepts throughout my study year, I have in the process learned more than I ever envisaged.

Working as a sales advisor for a retail company where I am opportune to put newcomers through an unstructured learning and development/ training awakened my interest in learning and development. I chose this study and more so, its impact on productivity because I am one person who believes that for me to be productive there must be progression in terms of my learning and development and most especially learning offerings must align with my interests and learning needs because I feel a bit laid back when I do not see a room for growth.

I was able to evaluate my interpersonal and communication abilities and pinpoint the areas that required work thanks to the

discussions with my supervisor Mr Richard Heywood, although I had a big fright on what area to niche my research down to, he guided me through it, always assured me that I got this, and this motivated me to keep going.

One of the most crucial tools in communication is asking questions, which is used to elicit responses and obtain agreement. Since it is an essential instrument for information gathering, it was crucial to acquire straightforward responses in the early stages of the project when I needed guidance from my supervisor. But I soon realised that it was difficult to gather precise information since the way a question is posed immediately affects the response.

To communicate effectively, you must both talk and listen. I demonstrated what is known as active listening, which I learned about during my study in mediation and conflict resolution which was part of the key courses for this degree, by using gestures as well as a variety of verbal and non-verbal cues, such as head nods my head, jotting down key comments, and simple expressions of corroboration. Making eye contact with my supervisor to demonstrate that I understood and were engaged in what he was saying helped to reaffirm the above. A few research questions that were crucial to the overall success of my study were identified when I was developing the plan for my research project. I put all my efforts towards

locating the answers to these queries. Although I believe I was able to satisfactorily respond to most of the research questions, there were a few areas where I could have done more study and spent more time and resources. According to the input I received from my supervisor, I appear to have been successful in achieving the goals of my research project.

Since this was the first substantial research project I had undertaken, I initially found the work to be a little intimidating and questioned my ability to do it perfectly. But as the project moved along, things began to become more obvious, and my enthusiasm and confidence increased. The first time I met with my supervisor was on June 16, 2022, immediately after finishing my exams. I discussed my topic choice and the rationale behind it with my supervisor at that meeting. I explained my plan to him, along with the tools and techniques I meant to employ.

I felt that I had effectively explained the motivations behind and goals of the issue I had selected, and my supervisor appeared to be pleased with my decision and approach. In addition, we had a great conversation when I asked for his opinion on things like study methodologies. Overall, the initial meeting was a great success and solidified my thoughts, providing me with a direct path to my goal. Since I knew exactly how to prepare for the assignment after our first meeting, I felt a lot more confident.

I faced some difficulties like trying to juggle a big task as this with my job. To catch up with the workload, I would always put down at least 200-500 words after work, bit by bit it all came together.

Another difficulty I faced was in trying to get participants for the study, although it was hard in the beginning, being a CIPD student member helped me get people who were interested, who contacted me through the member group on LinkedIn as I had made a public post explaining the urgent need for participants for my study. The platform has really helped me gain connections and network with credible and lifelong individuals, one to keep for life. My Technological abilities also improved because of the project. Along with expanding my understanding of people development and introducing me to the Irish corporate environment through participant interviews, the research helped me strengthen my organisational, time-management skills, writing succinctly of which was a big struggle, and skills in public speaking (although I hail from a mass communication background where my bachelor's degree opened me to a world of journalism which entailed facing people and asking questions, this research helped me hone this skill better). All in all, I will be able to employ these knowledge, skills and abilities achieved through this study in every part of my life.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study has indeed proven that yes learning and development offerings does in fact serve as a motivational tool for productivity in organisations.

The study also showed that one of the characteristics that sets apart a company where learning is embedded in the culture, is that it embraces the context in which it functions and its unpredictability, as well as the fast pace of global dynamism.

With this in mind organizations engaged in the research might be classified as learning informed and apprise organisations.

It may be highlighted that workplace learning in this regard of the expanded attention paid to employee learning and development is a response to these issues confronting the business operations. The key issues of making improvements and driving innovation, all emphasize enhancing leeway in a bid to retaliate speedily to the rapidly changing world (Haskins and Shaffer 2010; Beardwell and Thompson 2014).

Learning and development offerings are crucial for boosting employee morale and productivity, and as several respondents to the study acknowledged, productivity is influenced by the calibre (quality) of the work produced and the results. It has been reaffirmed in both previous literatures mentioned in this work and in conversations with respondents in this study. It was also clear from the preceding chapters that several important themes had arisen, some of which were explored but are not directly related to the study issue. However, certain findings can be argued to diverge from the current literature, while others can be claimed to enhance it. Even though this study identified few significant similarities between Human resources management practitioners and those in other professions, some discrepancies were nevertheless discovered.

Numerous learning opportunities, obstacles, drivers, and results found in this study were comparable to those found generally across other sectors and professions and were congruent with those reported in the literature. One obstacle to learning that affects negatively on productivity was identified (information deluge), and it emerged as a new theme. As highlighted in the section on potential areas for future study, this might be an area to investigate.

It emerged from this research as noted in the literature that most Irish organisations in this study as part of the eruption introduced by the COVID19' pandemic have

moved learning to a more digital platform which has had to mean Improved availability to high-speed broadband, the emergence of applications like intelligent machines and virtual reality-based learning, and enhanced learner comfort with technologies that may assist learning (CIPD, 2021). In conclusion, the overall findings in this research lays a foundation that the culture of a workplace, as well as how learning is set up and supported, determines what can be learned and how it can be learned, even though pedagogical consideration is vital. The general strategy used to encourage and promote learning as well as the learning process has a significant role in the calibre of the learning employees' overall experiences.

## **Recommendations and Implication of findings**

**Continuous learning is a must:** Judging from the study it can be concluded that continuous learning is supported in all organisations represented in this study. Employers should, therefore, keep that already existing momentum going. Employers in the same sense must be more intentional with staff members to ensure that they are either aware of the learnings that are available to them or that they are applying those learning interventions as well. Similarly, building a system to support continuous learning requires collaboration amongst many stakeholders. Although some of the participants attested to being financially supported to pursue learning needs and career interests, Implication for employers lacking this initiative might pursue a collaborative move with higher institution in Ireland for higher training that aligns at a pace that meet market trends. This implies that industry figureheads must make sure that the idea of these initiatives are taken into consideration.

### **Fill the succession planning gap**

Employers could also look into Investing toward getting third party facilitators who are, you know in business for a specific purpose around trying to enhance learning and development on particular subjects such as for example, sales or leadership development where you know for those junior workforce or young ones as opposed to just development of just the older workforce to create the right balance needed, so that the junior or younger workforce are ensured that they have an opportunity to grow and of course in a way that improve and enhance their productivity.

### **Provide benefits for individual contributors**

In terms of knowledge sharing and the problems with professional reticence at all levels, it would be ideal for employers to make knowledge sharing benefits available to those who are skilled in an area, to promote a secure and trust centred transfer of knowledge to other colleagues by this expert. This might imply giving not just monetary rewards to the best knowledge distributor in a company, but employers might offer for instance, extra paid holiday, gift vouchers to get whatever they are interested in, just as a thank you for being an individual contributor.

**Make digital learning conducive:** Finally, in trying to promote a culture of digital learning which seems to be the order of the day, employers need to recognize that although information transformation by digital learning can be very less expensive and enhance touch on participation and involvement in active knowledge acquisition/learning, However, it may not be any less costly than conventional classroom forms.

**The government contributes:** The government also comes to play in this digital learning era, at a time when all labour expenditures are being scrutinised and squeezed, this researcher thinks the government has a role to play by motivating firms to increase their expenditures on e- learning for their employees. This might be accomplished by giving the traineeship tax greater flexibility and allowing companies to utilise the money for various types of approved learning trends to stay on top of market edge.



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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Information sheet

### ***AN ANALYSIS OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OFFERINGS AS A MOTIVATIONAL TOOL FOR PRODUCTIVITY IN ORGANISATIONS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTITIONERS IN IRELAND.***

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important to bring to your understanding the reason for this research and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether to take part.

#### *WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT?*

My name is Emmanuella Isede, and I am completing my master's degree in Human Resources Management. Throughout my professional life and studies, my core interest has been people management, customer service, learning and motivation of others, with aspirations to focus on corporate learning and development. This study consists of my final dissertation, and it proposes an analysis of learning and development as a motivational tool for productivity in organisations: a qualitative study of human resource management practitioners in Ireland.

Learning and Development has been carved out to be a practice of HRM. Individual employability, professional growth, and competitive advantage all need the development of human capital and to see productivity come to life in organisations, the feelings and perceptions of this practitioners must be taken into consideration about facilitators that makes this possible. As a result, developing employees' knowledge, skills, and attitudes is a critical

organizational HR activity, and it is regarded as one of the most significant HR problems that organizations confront. Previous research has not yet provided granular investigation of the perceptions Human Resource Management practitioners themselves around learning and development, its benefits, challenges and what could be done better as well as proffer suggestions around the organisational interventions that may improve their experience. This work suggests exploring these topics through the thematic, qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with HRM practitioners in different sectors of organisations in Ireland. Thanks to their experience, these professionals may provide insights and suggest organisational interventions to foster learning and development as a tool for productivity.

#### *WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?*

Taking part in this research involves engaging in an interview of the duration of 40 to 60 minutes that will touch on the opinions and perceptions of the interviewee around the different learning programs they are exposed to, the support received from their companies and their suggestions to improve their learning experience as well as give suggestions on how best they can be served better to foster motivation within them to be the best at what they do. All interviews will take place in English and be audio or video-recorded via Skype, MS Teams, or a mobile recording application.

#### *WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?*

You have been selected through a snowball approach because of your experience and or exposure with Learning and Development as a practice in HRM.

#### *DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?*

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to refuse participation, refuse any question and withdraw at any time without any consequence whatsoever.

#### *WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?*

This research aims to learn from the experience of HRM practitioners in Ireland due to their experience to draw up general guidelines and recommendations to the challenges around learning and development. No physical or psychological harm should come to a participant because of participating in the research as no sensitive or potentially triggering topics will be discussed. Technical details regarding products and services provided by companies will not be discussed and, in case they arise accidentally in conversation, will be edited out of transcripts.

#### *WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?*

Confidentiality and anonymity of the participant and any individuals they talk about will be guaranteed by anonymising individual and companies names, for example by referring to them as Interviewee A and Company X.

The only details about each participant directly mentioned in the dissertation will be age, job title, gender, and region.

The only situations in which confidentiality may be broken are if I have a strong belief that there is a serious risk of harm or danger to either the participant or another individual (e.g., physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, concerns for child protection, rape, self-harm, suicidal intent, or criminal activity) or if a serious crime has been committed.

It is important to note that non-anonymised data in the form of signed consent forms and audio recordings are collected and retained as part of the research process.

#### *HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?*

Signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in a password-protected hard drive to which only I have access until after my degree has been conferred. A transcript of interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further 5 years after this. Under freedom of information legislation, you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

This research does not avail of any funding and presents no conflict of interest to the best of my knowledge. In case I decide to include direct quotes of the interviews within my dissertation, I will contact participants to confirm them before they are included.



*WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?*

My final research will be used to submit my dissertation and may be used in the future for conferences, publications, or teaching purposes.

## WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

Please contact me or my supervisor in case you have additional questions.

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**[THANK YOU SO MUCH]**

## Appendix 2: Consent form

### **AN ANALYSIS OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OFFERINGS AS A MOTIVATIONAL TOOL FOR PRODUCTIVITY IN ORGANISATIONS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTITIONERS 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 the researcher conducting semi-structured interviews and asking questions in relation to learning and development as a motivational tool for productivity in organisations.
- 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 in researchers' dissertation.

- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in a password-protected hard drive to which only I have access until after my degree has been conferred.
- I understand that a transcript of interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further 5 years after this.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Emmanuella Nkem Isede, Master in Human Resources Management, National College of Ireland.

*Signature of research participant*

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Signature of participant

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Date

*Signature of researcher*

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

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Signature of researcher

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Date

## **Appendix 3:**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How long have you been working in your company?
2. What position do you hold?
3. What kind of learning and development offerings are available to you in your organisation?
4. What were the advantages and disadvantages of these learning and development offerings?
5. Do you feel that learning and development impacts upon your productivity? How?
6. What challenges and barriers have you encountered in learning and development as an HRM practitioner?
7. Which learning and development interventions do you think your organisation can assist you with to enhance your productivity?