

Master's Programme in People Management and Organizational Development

# Training and Development in a Nonprofit Sport Organization

A qualitative case study on balancing employee needs and organizational goals

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**Inka Mäkinen**

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## Abstract

Although many organizations recognize the importance of training and development, this is not always reflected in practice, especially in nonprofit sport organizations. This study focuses on the tension between organizational goals and actual practices, which is explored through one nonprofit sport organization in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area.

The research is a development-oriented case study that aims to examine how training and development practices serve both the needs of employees and the objectives of the organization. Based on my experience working in the case organization, I identified a need to improve training and development practices, which motivated the study.

The study applied qualitative methods: the data consisted of semi-structured interviews and an analysis of organizational documents. The study was also guided by existing Human Resource Management (HRM) literature, which formed the theoretical framework. The approaches of soft and hard HRM are used to examine how employee needs and organizational goals are reconciled in training and development practices.

The results highlighted both strengths and areas in need of improvement. The study concludes that improving training and development practices requires organizational solutions that balance the training and development needs of employees with the operational priorities and resource constraints of the organization. While the study focuses on a single organization, its findings may offer useful insights for other nonprofit sport organizations as well.

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**Keywords** Training and Development, Human Resource Management, Soft and Hard HRM, Employee Experiences, Nonprofit Sport Organizations, Qualitative Case Study

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## Tiivistelmä

Vaikka monet organisaatiot tunnistavat koulutuksen ja kehittämisen merkityksen, tämä ei aina heijastu käytännön toimintaan, erityisesti voittoa tavoittelemattomissa urheiluorganisaatioissa. Tämä tutkimus tarkastelee organisaation tavoitteiden ja käytännön välistä jännitettä yhden pääkaupunkiseudulla toimivan urheiluorganisaation kautta.

Tutkimus on kehittämislähtöinen tapaustutkimus, jonka tavoitteena on selvittää, miten koulutus- ja kehittämiskäytännöt palvelevat sekä työntekijöiden tarpeita että organisaation tavoitteita. Organisaatiossa työskentelyni aikana esiin nousseet havainnot koulutuksen ja kehittämisen tarpeista motivoivat tutkimuksen käynnistämistä.

Tutkimuksessa hyödynnettiin laadullisia menetelmiä: aineisto koostui puolistrukturoiduista haastatteluista ja organisaation dokumenttien analyysistä. Viitekehys perustui henkilöstöhallinnon (HRM) kirjallisuuteen, ja analyysissä hyödynnettiin pehmeän ja kovan HRM:n näkökulmia työntekijöiden tarpeiden ja organisaation tavoitteiden yhteensovittamisessa.

Tuloksissa tunnistetaan sekä vahvuuksia että kehittämiskohteita. Johtopäätöksenä todetaan, että koulutus- ja kehittämiskäytäntöjen parantaminen edellyttää ratkaisuja, jotka tasapainottavat työntekijöiden kehitystarpeet organisaation toiminnallisten painopisteiden ja resurssirajoitteiden kanssa. Vaikka tutkimus keskittyy yhteen organisaatioon, sen havainnot voivat tarjota hyödyllisiä oivalluksia myös muille voittoa tavoittelemattomille urheiluorganisaatioille.

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**Avainsanat** Koulutus ja kehittäminen, Henkilöstöhallinto, Pehmeä ja kova henkilöstöhallinto, Työntekijäkokemukset, Voittoa tavoittelemattomat urheiluorganisaatiot, Laadullinen tapaustutkimus

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## **Abbreviations**

HR            Human Resources

HRM          Human Resource Management

SHRM        Strategic Human Resource Management

# 1 Introduction

While many organizations recognize the value of training and development, turning these ideas into practice is not always straightforward, particularly in nonprofit sport organizations. The gap between rhetoric and reality is a central theme in this study, which explores how the tension between stated intentions and actual implementation manifests in the case organization, Espoon Telinetaiturit ry.

I work as a coach in the organization and have also been involved in designing and analyzing job satisfaction surveys. These surveys have identified areas for improvement in employee training and development, which motivated me to initiate this research project focusing specifically on the organization's training and development practices. This highlighted the need to better understand how these practices serve both the needs of employees and the objectives of the organization. In this study, I use the approaches of soft and hard HRM to analyze how these two perspectives are balanced. By combining insights from the academic HRM literature with empirical data, the study seeks to support the improvement of training and development practices tailored to this nonprofit sport context.

The purpose of the study is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current training and development practices from the employees' perspective and to produce concrete improvement proposals that reconcile both the needs of the employees and the objectives of the organization. While the focus is on a single organization, the findings may offer useful perspectives for other nonprofit sport organizations as well.

The following section introduces the background and motivation for the study, followed by the research problem and research questions. Lastly, the scope and structure of the study are presented. Before moving to the background and motivation, it is important to note that this study was conducted with the permission of Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, allowing the

organization's name to be mentioned openly. Espeon Telinetaiturit ry wishes to promote transparency and contribute to the improvement of training and development practices across the nonprofit sport sector.

## **1.1 Background and motivation**

To be effective, an organization needs a well-functioning human resource system (Khasawneh, 2011). Employees are one of the most important resources for an organization, as they contribute to its success (Amin et al., 2014; Lekavičius, 2020). In essence, an organization's strength lies in its people (Fitzgerald, 1992), making it important for human resource managers to take care of their employees (Lekavičius, 2020).

One of the most important ways Human Resource Management (HRM) can support employees is through training and development, which has become a core human resource function (Maršíková & Šlaichová, 2015). Training and development refer to the process to obtain or transfer knowledge, skills and abilities needed to carry out a specific activity or task (Niazi, 2011). HRM is all about balancing the organization's people and processes to best achieve the goals and the strategies of the organization, as well as the goals and the needs of workforces (Ashar et al., 2013). Training and development can therefore be either a benefit for the employees themselves or an important factor that affects an organization's productivity and success (Maršíková & Šlaichová, 2015).

Training and development have a significant impact on employee job satisfaction (Wajidi et al., 2023). From the employee's perspective, opportunities for training are valuable, as they lead to greater motivation, loyalty, and overall job satisfaction (Maršíková & Šlaichová, 2015). When employees receive enough training, they feel an emotional attachment and commitment to the organization and therefore are less likely to leave (Ashar et al., 2013).

My interest in the topic of the study stems from my close involvement with job satisfaction surveys in the organization, which revealed areas for improvement in training and development practices. Based on these findings, I seek to better understand how employees perceive the current HR practices within the organization. My goal is to identify what is already working and, in turn, the key challenges in improving current training and development practices. This thesis aims to produce concrete suggestions for enhancing training and development practices from the employees' perspective. While the study centers on employee experiences, it also recognizes that training and development take place within a broader organizational framework.

The aim of the Espoon Telinetaiturit ry is to promote gymnastics among people of all ages, to raise competitive gymnasts and to organize other recreational activities. The organization is a nonprofit sport organization, which means that it does not in principle aim for profit or success. In nonprofit sport organizations like Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, employee engagement and satisfaction are particularly crucial, as the organization relies heavily on the commitment and motivation of its staff, who often work with limited resources compared to for-profit organizations. Addressing employee needs through training and development is essential for supporting employee well-being and achieving organizational objectives.

The results of the job satisfaction survey conducted in December 2023 within Espoon Telinetaiturit ry are presented in Figure 1. The survey included 11 questions, which were answered on a scale of 1 to 5. Figure 1 highlights two key questions relevant to this thesis, alongside the overall job satisfaction score. These questions were selected because training and development received lower ratings, making it interesting to explore how improving these practices could impact employee satisfaction. The other questions in the survey were not specifically related to training and development and are therefore excluded from this study.

The main survey question that highlighted the need for this study was “*I am encouraged to develop in my work*”. Additionally, the question “*I get enough feedback on my work*” has been included in Figure 1 as it shows that somewhat lower ratings also appear in other areas related to training and development. The first bar represents all employees of Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, the second bar represents full-time employees and coordinators, and the third bar represents other employees in the organization.

*Figure 1: Results of the job satisfaction survey (December 2023) in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry*

*I am encouraged to develop in my work*

	3,58
	2,72
	3,79

*I get enough feedback on my work*

	3,19
	2,50
	3,35

*Overall job satisfaction*

	3,95
	3,31
	4,11

## 1.2 Research problem and research questions

This research seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do employees at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry perceive the current training and development opportunities within the organization?

RQ2: How could Espoon Telinetaiturit ry's training and development opportunities better meet the needs of its employees?

To address these questions in a comprehensive way, I will look for answers both in the literature and through existing documents of the organization and interviews. The literature review examines HRM with a particular focus on training and development within the context of a nonprofit sport organization. The literature review sets out a theoretical framework by presenting the concepts, perspectives and approaches that are central to the topic of the study and serve as a basis for interpreting the empirical results. In addition, the literature review presents empirical cases that are most closely related to the topic of this study. Although no directly comparable studies were found, the topic can still be meaningfully explored by referring to similar cases and existing research within the field of nonprofit sport organizations. Based on the existing literature, it aims to identify best practices and common challenges that can serve as a basis for evaluating the current training and development practices of Espoon Telinetaiturit ry.

The empirical part includes data collection through analysis of organizational documents, including the Action Plan 2024 and Strategic Plan 2023-2025, and employee interviews. This part aims to identify which areas of training and development at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry work in practice and which things could be improved to better meet employees' needs. Finally, the insights from the literature review and the empirical findings will be synthesized to best support training and development practices within the organization. By combining theoretical insights with practical observations, the aim is to promote the improvement of training and development practices that align employee needs with organizational goals.

### **1.3 Scope of the study**

This thesis is a qualitative case study and development project carried out in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, a nonprofit sport organization. It examines the organization's current training and development practices by recognizing both strengths and areas where improvements are needed, based on

challenges identified in the organization's job satisfaction survey. The aim is to generate improvement ideas based on both academic HRM literature and the practical needs of the employees.

To structure the analysis, the study distinguishes between soft and hard HRM, two approaches widely recognized in HRM theory. The distinction between soft and hard HRM offers a valuable framework for analyzing and balancing two key priorities of this study, employee needs and organizational goals, within a practical development context. Soft HRM emphasizes employee well-being, motivation and development, viewing employees as the key assets to the organization (Legge, 1995). In contrast, hard HRM prioritizes performance, efficiency and the alignment of HR with organizational goals (Legge, 1995). These two are distinct but complementary models which are particularly relevant in the nonprofit sport organization context, where organizations must balance employee needs with organizational objectives.

Although the study refers to HRM in general, it specifically focuses on the training and development aspect. This delimitation is based on the results of a job satisfaction survey carried out in the organization, which identified areas for improvement in employee experiences. It would also be valuable to explore other HRM functions, such as recruitment and selection or compensation and benefits, but these fall outside the scope of this study. This decision was made to gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of training and development, which was recognized as a critical area for improvement in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry.

#### **1.4 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis continues after the introduction as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature and introduces the key concepts, perspectives and approaches that underpin the analysis and provide the basis for interpreting the results.

Section 3 first presents the case organization, Espoon Telinetaituriti ry, and then outlines the chosen methodology for the study. Section 4 presents the results of the study by analyzing the data collected from organizational documents and interviews. Finally, section 5 discusses the findings of the study and section 6 concludes the thesis by summarizing the main findings and suggesting directions for future research.

## **2 Literature review**

One of the key concerns in HRM is the gap that often exists between how HRM is presented in organizational rhetoric and how it is implemented in practice. Organizations may emphasize employee satisfaction in their strategy, but in reality, they focus more on the efficiency of the organization's operations. This tension is often visible in nonprofit sport organizations, where limited resources and volunteer-based work can make balancing these priorities even more challenging. The literature review aims to better understand this gap by discovering key principles and background of HRM, as well as the possible challenges of aligning employee needs with organizational goals.

One HRM function through which the tension between employee needs and organizational goals can be explored in more depth is training and development, which is also the focus of this review. This emphasis is based on the context of the case organization, where training and development has emerged as a key area for improvement. To structure the study, the literature review highlights soft and hard HRM as useful approaches for analyzing how HRM is implemented in nonprofit sport organizations. The framework of soft and hard HRM is useful in understanding how organizations seek to balance employee needs and operational demands, revealing a gap between intentions and practice (Legge, 1995).

### **2.1 Human resource management**

To gain a comprehensive understanding of training and development within HRM, it is essential to first outline the fundamental principles and historical development of HRM. This provides the necessary basis for analyzing how HRM systems shape training and development practices and why tensions can arise between employee needs and organizational objectives.

Human resource management (HRM) refers to the policies, practices, procedures, and systems that influence the behavior, attitudes, values, and performance of employees within the organization (Taylor et al., 2008). HRM can be broadly described as the integration of people, resources, and management, where effective management harnesses individuals' skills, knowledge, and capabilities to achieve both personal and organizational goals (Rotich, 2015). According to Rotich (2015), the purpose of HRM is to attract the best talent to an organization, assign them to appropriate roles based on their skills and attitudes, manage them to maximize their contribution, and retain them for an appropriate period to maximize the value of resources. He further explains that HRM systems within an organization can be shaped by many factors depending on the type of organization, the external environment where the organization operates, and the organization's choices about how work is organized. As a result, there will be different human resource layouts within different organizations.

In the early 1900s, HRM focused mainly on transactional work, such as payroll and benefits administration (Rotich, 2015). After the 1980s, the focus of HRM shifted towards more strategic and effective overall management of an organization's workforce, contributing to the achievement of desired objectives and improving organizational efficiency (Rotich, 2015). HRM cannot be a separate actor, but it must be linked to the other practices and strategy of the organization (Lekavičius, 2020). Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) integrates HRM practices with the strategic goals of the organization (Guo et al., 2011). In contrast to the strategic approach, the emphasis in the human resource-based approach is on the value and development of human resources (Ridder & McCandless, 2010).

HRM is a complex and rapidly changing field of practice in both industry and academia (Rotich, 2015). However, it also faces multiple challenges, which require a critical perspective. One of the challenges is the mismatch between rhetoric and reality (Goyal & Patwardhan, 2020). Organizations often claim

to put the well-being of their employees first, but in practice their actions may serve primarily the efficiency of the organization (Goyal & Patwardhan, 2020). In some cases, this mismatch may be unintentional and reflect a misguided belief in supporting employees' well-being and needs, while in other cases it may reflect a deliberate prioritization of results over employees (Goyal & Patwardhan, 2020). This highlights the need to examine not only how HRM is implemented, but also the intentions behind these practices and how they are perceived by employees.

A second, closely related challenge is balancing employee needs with organizational goals (Baluch & Ridder, 2020). These two priorities can sometimes be in conflict, as a strong emphasis on efficiency can sometimes overshadow employee satisfaction. There may be different requirements within an organization and therefore it is important to consider how HRM should be examined and built. A useful framework for analyzing these tensions is provided by the soft and hard HRM, which represent distinct but complementary perspectives on HRM priorities (Guest, 1987; Storey, 1992; Truss et., 1997). Soft and hard HRM help assess whether HRM practices primarily serve employee satisfaction or organizational efficiency (Legge, 1995). These approaches are particularly relevant to this study because they provide a conceptual lens through which to assess whether the training and development practices of Espoon Telinetaituri ry primarily support employee well-being, organizational effectiveness, or both. The next section delves deeper into soft and hard HRM, exploring their theoretical principles and implications for HRM.

### **2.1.1 Soft and hard HRM**

Building on the previous section, this part will focus on two widely recognized and conceptual approaches that help to frame the improvement of training and development practices in Espoon Telinetaituri ry. These two approaches are soft and hard HRM (Truss et al., 1997). Soft and hard HRM are based on opposing views of employee commitment, motivation and development

versus efficiency outcomes. The key difference between soft and hard HRM is whether the focus is on employees or resources (Guest, 1987; Storey, 1992). Storey (1992) has stated that "It is striking that the same term, HRM, can thus imply completely opposite assumptions."

In soft HRM, the focus is on fostering employee commitment, motivation and development with employees seen as a valuable asset (Legge, 1995). This approach recognizes the importance of HRM to the goals of the organization and takes into account management's efforts to create a work environment that emphasizes employee development through training, participation and communication (Guest, 1987). Soft HRM is also associated with objectives such as flexibility and adaptability (Storey & Sisson, 1993). A key element of this approach is aligning HR policies with broader business objectives (Legge, 1995).

In turn, hard HRM reflects many of the same principles as SHRM, particularly the emphasis on aligning HR practices with organizational strategy (Legge, 1995). This approach puts the main emphasis on strategic business objectives and treats human resources like any other factor of production, without giving them an inherently central role in achieving competitive advantage (Druker et al., 1996). Hard HRM stresses HRM's focus on the crucial importance of the close integration of human resource policies, systems, and activities with business strategy (Gill, 1999). In this approach employees are seen as a resource to be used dispassionately and formally rationally (Storey, 1992). Hard HRM focuses on the quantitative, calculative, and strategic dimensions of HRM (Gill, 1999).

Truss et al. (1997) have examined the factors to determine whether organizations were using soft or hard HRM. According to Truss et al. (1997), soft HRM includes training employees and employees' perception of training and promotion opportunities, as well as communication and trust between management and staff. In turn, they describe that hard HRM includes integration of HR management and business strategy, including

performance management methods such as appraisal and monitoring the setting of work objectives. Sometimes it seems that there is a mismatch between what the research literature says companies should do with HRM and what companies actually do with HRM (Becker & Gehart, 1996). At a rhetorical level, many organizations advocate soft HRM, but the reality of the organization may look rather hard HRM (Gill, 1999).

Although organizations are examined according to which approach they emphasize, elements of both soft and hard HRM exist in any organization (Beardwell ja Claydon, 2007). Hard HRM may contain some elements of the soft HRM, and soft one could equally well produce hard one's results with a closed mindset within an organizational strategy. For example, Guest (1987) and Storey (1992), who clearly acknowledge the dichotomy between soft and hard HRM, use both approaches in constructing their own understanding of HRM.

*Table 1: Soft and hard HRM*

Soft HRM	Hard HRM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focuses on people/employees</li> <li>● Emphasizes employee commitment, motivation and development, through training, participation and communication</li> <li>● Employees are seen as valuable assets</li> <li>● Includes flexibility and adaptability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Treats employees as resources, like any other factor of production</li> <li>● Focuses on the quantitative, calculative, and strategic dimensions of HRM</li> <li>● Prioritizes cost-efficiency and productivity</li> <li>● HR practices are closely aligned with business strategy</li> </ul>

Soft and hard HRM can also be viewed from a training and development perspective. In soft HRM individuals are seen as a valuable resource whose professional growth should be supported by training and development (Gill,

1999). In contrast, according to Gill (1999), hard HRM views employees primarily as a resource to be optimized. On this basis, one would therefore expect that training would be low in those organizations that adopt hard HRM, while training would be more prominent in those that focus on soft HRM (Truss et al., 1997).

Gill (1999) has suggested that training based on soft HRM is associated with the organization's ability to thrive because of the continuous development of employees. In other words, the organization is committed to providing employees with an environment that values continuous learning and offers opportunities for development. In soft HRM, training and development are personalized and tailored to each employee's career path (Gill, 1999). Hard HRM, on the other hand, does not focus on individual development, but on ensuring that individuals have the necessary skills to perform their tasks to improve the performance of the organization (Gill, 1999).

### **2.1.2 The key functions of HRM**

While the primary focus of this study is on training and development, a brief overview of other HRM functions helps to position this focus within the broader HRM framework. HRM includes different steps, such as planning, recruitment, selection, retention, orientation, training and development and appraisal and rewards (Hoye et al., 2013; Paauwe & Boon, 2018).

Human resource planning is a dynamic process which includes analyzing an organization's human resource requirements to achieve its mission, strategies, goals, and objectives (Taylor et al., 2008). Selection methods include for example assessment tests, cognitive ability tests, aptitude sample tests, behaviorally based interviews and standard interviews (Taylor et al., 2008). Recruitment's purpose is to generate a pool of qualified candidates in the right areas, sufficient for the organization (Taylor et al., 2008). Orientation is the last part of the recruitment process, it helps newcomers quickly integrate into the organization, perform their expected roles, and stay

with the organization (Taylor et al., 2008). Training means enhancement of technical job-related skills and abilities and development is more concerned with changing attitudes and behaviors, skill building and goals to improve person's interpersonal capabilities (Taylor et al., 2008). Performance management is a holistic approach to performance that spans numerous performance dimensions (O'Boyle & Hassan, 2014).

According to Philip and Arrowsmith (2020), foundational elements such as recruitment, selection, training and development, rewards and performance management must be established before advancing more specialized aspects of employee development through human resource practices. Effective HRM requires that each strand of the suite of HRM policies and practices work together in an integrative form and to complement and reinforce one another (Taylor et al., 2008).

Even though each HRM function is relevant, training and development is explored further in the following section because of its central role in the context of this research. Employee training and development is recognized as one of the core components of human resource activities (Maršíková & Šlaichová, 2015). From an HRM perspective, organizations must embrace continuous learning (Akingbola, 2006). Well-trained employees with adequate knowledge and skills enhance organizations' higher value of their intellectual capital and competitive advantage (Maršíková & Šlaichová, 2015). To sustain valuable human resources, organizations are required to be conscious about the job satisfaction and retention of employees (Jehanzeb & Beshir, 2013). Training can also be seen as one of the most common employee benefits (Jehanzeb & Beshir, 2013). Millar and Stevens (2012) have conducted a study on Canadian national sports organizations and this study has shown that human resource training improves learning capacity and performance at both the individual and organizational levels.

## **2.2 Training and Development**

As this study examines only the training and development function of HRM, the following section will examine this area in more detail. A broader understanding of the elements that support training and development is necessary to identify what is needed within an organization. In addition, case studies of organizations with a similar context are valuable for the effective improvement of training and development practices. This section discusses findings from such studies and relevant literature.

### **2.2.1 Overview of training and development**

Training and development are important ingredients of HRM (Taylor et al., 2008). Training means the acquisition of knowledge and skills for present tasks, which help individuals contribute to the organization in their current or near-future positions (Fitzgerald 1992; Sonnentag et al., 2004). Training must result in a change in behavior such as the use of new knowledge and skills on-the-job to be successful (Fitzgerald, 1992). In turn, development means the acquisition of knowledge and skills that may be used in future jobs and tasks (Fitzgerald, 1992; Sonnentag et al., 2004). It involves the preparation of individuals to enrich the organization in the future and the act of being involved in many different types of training activities (Fitzgerald, 1992). Development is necessary so employees can meet new challenges and ensure long-term vitality of an organization (Fitzgerald, 1992). It is important to distinguish conceptually between training and development, although these terms can often overlap, making it challenging to classify certain research outcomes as one or another (Jehanzeb & Beshir, 2013).

In the organizational context, both training and development are a form of learning and there is a strong link between learning and working (Taylor et al., 2008). Learning is viewed as an expected activity that should be integrated into the day-to-day operations in the organization (Bratton & Gold, 2007). It is a process through which individuals acquire new

knowledge, skills, and abilities, thereby enhancing their capacity to function effectively (Kim, 1997). Learning occurs through practical application and feedback components (Salas et al., 2012). However, not all practice is created equal because unstructured practice without objectives, appropriate stimulation, and meaningful feedback can lead to ineffective learning (Cannon-Bowers et al., 1998). Some individuals learn better when the learning takes place within a certain environment, while others prefer being mentally activated to make connections between the new and existing knowledge (Taylor et al., 2008). Still others learn best when working collaboratively in groups and others when given the opportunity to critically think about their actions and outcomes (Taylor et al., 2008).

The larger the organization is, the greater the need for training is in general (Betcherman et al., 1997; McMullen & Schellenberg, 2003). It is also possible that employees in larger organizations are more likely to have received training than those in smaller ones (Betcherman et al., 1997; McMullen & Schellenberg, 2003). In addition, people in managerial positions are more likely to receive training than other employees in the organization (McMullen & Schellenberg, 2003). McMullen & Schellenberg (2003) also pointed out that specific organizational situations and needs will differ, meaning that assessments of the adequacy of training must be made at the level of individual organizations or within specific fields.

### **2.2.2 Training and development methods**

Training and development methods are an essential part of HRM as they provide the structure through which organizations develop employee skills and improve performance. Understanding and selecting the right methods for the organization, it is important to ensure that they meet the specific needs and goals. This section looks at different training and development methods to gain insight into how they can contribute to employee needs and organizational goals and form the basis for practical recommendations.

Training methods can be defined as a set of systematic procedures, activities or techniques designed to equip participants with competencies and skills that are useful in improving their job performance (Martin et al., 2014). A variety of methods can be used to deliver the required outcomes of skill, knowledge, attitudinal or task development (Taylor et al., 2008). The method is chosen to match the skill or task required (Taylor et al., 2008).

With the ever-changing technological advances of our time and the continual development of learning theories, more options than ever are now available in terms of how people are trained (Martin et al., 2014). Some training methods can also utilize instruction through sources other than a person (Martin et al., 2014). Sometimes training methods can be challenging to manage because they could be difficult to define, there is no one comprehensive list of types and they change rapidly to keep pace with current technological developments, making classification difficult.

However, training methods can be broadly classified into on-the-job training and off-the-job training (Wexley & Latham, 1991). Various suggestions have been made regarding which methods are classified as on-the-job and off-the-job training methods. In this research, an effort has been made to provide as many options as possible for categorizing methods into on-the-job and off-the-job training. This classification is particularly relevant to this study, as it examines how training methods can meet the specific needs of the organization. By looking at different training options, the study aims to provide practical insights into how these methods can be optimized to support employee training and development.

On-the-job can include mentoring, coaching, job rotation, job instructional training, job shadowing, and apprenticeship (Taylor et al., 2008). Sometimes the terms coach and mentor are used interchangeably, but there are differences between these two terms which are shown in table 2. On-the-job training does not need expensive off-site facilities such as classrooms or

simulators nor is there any need for outside trainers (Maršíková & Šlaichová, 2015; Raheja, 2015). The learning and actual job situations are usually very similar, as the training is given on the same machines, and the experience aligns with already approved standards (Maršíková & Šlaichová, 2015; Raheja, 2015). From the HRM point of view, on-the-job training is the most important form of training and development (Maršíková & Šlaichová, 2015). On-the-job training is usually important especially in nonprofit organizations (Taylor et al., 2008) as it is often more cost-effective and practical for nonprofit sport organizations than off-the-job training (Maršíková & Šlaichová, 2015; Raheja, 2015).

*Table 2: On-the-job training methods*

Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More experienced person serves as a role model and provides guidance and support (Weaver &amp; Chelladurai, 1999).</li> <li>• Typically, the mentor is someone in a higher position within the organization, although a less senior person with significant expertise can also be an effective mentor (Chelladurai, 2014).</li> <li>• Managers could encourage such mentoring relationships also among employees (Chelladurai, 2014).</li> <li>• The mentor should share wisdom and experience, provide support, advice, and counsel to enable the mentee to grow and develop (Taylor et al., 2008).</li> <li>• The focus is usually on the individual and the role of the mentor is to be a facilitator with no specific agenda (Taylor, et al., 2008).</li> </ul>
Coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on supporting and directing an individual through encouragement, questioning, and support (Taylor et al., 2008).</li> <li>• Coaching is different from mentoring as a coach will seldom offer advice (Taylor et al., 2008).</li> <li>• The focus is usually on enhanced performance and the role of the coach is on the specific area (Taylor et al., 2008).</li> </ul>

Job rotation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involves training for a job by working in the job for a limited duration, while still maintaining the original job (Martin et al., 2014).</li> <li>• Job rotation not only makes a person well acquainted with different jobs, but it also alleviates boredom and allows them to develop rapport with several people (Raheja, 2015).</li> </ul>
Job Instructional training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A step-by-step instruction will be given by the trainer to the learner (Vasanthi &amp; Basariya, 2019).</li> <li>• It prepares a trainee with an overview of the job, its purpose, and the results desired, demonstrates the task or the skill to the trainee, allows the trainee to show the demonstration on his or her own, and follows up to provide feedback and help (Raheja, 2015).</li> </ul>
Job Shadowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involves a trainee closely observing someone perform a specific job in the natural job environment for the purpose of witnessing first-hand the details of the job (Martin et al., 2014).</li> <li>• Requires more than just following a colleague around all day (Tyler, 2008).</li> <li>• Shadowers view the company from a different perspective and learn firsthand about the challenges facing employees in other departments. This perspective helps employees realize the impact their decisions have on other groups (Tyler, 2008).</li> </ul>
Apprenticeship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalized method of training and development that will comprise of both classroom education and formalized on-the-job training under close supervision (Vasanthi &amp; Basariya, 2019).</li> <li>• The trainees serve as apprentices to experts for long periods (Raheja, 2015).</li> <li>• The apprentices are paid remuneration according to the apprenticeship agreements (Raheja, 2015).</li> </ul>

Off-the-job training allows the trainee to learn skills and knowledge away from the day-to-day job pressures in another environment (Wexley & Latham, 1991). It often involves someone from outside the organization (Wexley & Latham, 1991). Usually then, trainees are thus exposed to individuals who not only have expertise in subject-matter areas, but who also are expert teachers (Wexley & Latham, 1991). Different off-the-job methods are for example lectures, group discussions, case studies, simulations, role

playing, e-learning and panels (Maršíková & Šlaichová, 2015; Taylor et al., 2008; Wexley & Latham, 1991).

*Table 3: Off-the-job training methods*

Lectures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mostly an oral presentation, but these may be supplemented with visual aids or handouts (Taylor et al., 2008).</li> <li>● Often used because they are easier to organize, and a great deal of information can be presented in a short period of time (Taylor et al., 2008).</li> <li>● Useful method when there is a large group of trainees (Taylor et al., 2008).</li> </ul>
Group discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A trainer leads the trainees as a group through a discussion of a given topic (Taylor et al., 2008).</li> </ul>
Case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The information is given to the trainees detailing a specific situation or problem and the trainees are assigned the task of making recommendations for the best action to solve the problem (Martin et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2008).</li> </ul>
Simulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ranges from simple individual or small group problem-solving experiential exercises. Simulations allow the participant to observe the impact of their choices without the outcomes having any impact on the real organization (Taylor et al., 2008).</li> </ul>
Role playing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Each trainee takes the role of a person affected by an issue and studies the impacts of the issues on human life and/or the effects of human activities on the world around us from the perspective of that person (Raheja, 2015).</li> <li>● Deal with complex problems with no single “right” answer (Raheja, 2015).</li> <li>● The steps involved in role playing include defining objectives, choosing context &amp; roles, introducing the exercise, trainee preparation/research, the role-play, concluding discussion, and assessment (Raheja, 2015).</li> </ul>
E-learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The participants can interact with each other but, usually for a low-cost solution, they usually learn by themselves (Arraya &amp; Porfirio, 2017).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E-Learning is an umbrella term describing any type of learning that depends on or is enhanced by online communication using the latest information and communication technologies (Nagy et al., 2005).</li> <li>• Rather than having to wait due to making up a class of students, E-Learning allows training to be conducted for individuals at their own convenience (Nagy et al., 2005).</li> <li>• The task of E-Learning is to bring a wide range of resources together (Nagy et al., 2005).</li> </ul>
Panels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dialogues among several experts sitting in front of the room (Taylor et al., 2008).</li> </ul>

Beyond the classification of training methods, several additional aspects are worth considering when evaluating training and development practices. Employees are often under pressure to convert vast amounts of knowledge into practical skills (Bodescu, 2016). Therefore, one thing to consider, especially in the case of off-the-job training, is the transfer of learning from the classroom to the actual job (Wexley & Latham, 1991). Training transfer means whether employees apply and maintain what they have learned during the training once they are back in their jobs (Sonnentag et al., 2004). Once trainees have completed the training, managers should support the training process by removing barriers and ensuring that trainees have sufficient opportunities to apply their new skills and receive feedback (Salas et al., 2012). The effective transfer of learning to the job depends on various contextual factors (Salas et al., 2012). These factors are performance opportunities, social support from peers and managers, and organizational policies.

There are also skills that are particularly important for the managers of the organization, who must develop capabilities to understand the external environment, design organizational strategies, provide feedback, and coach their staff (Pynes, 2013). Leadership development usually differs from employee training in that its learning objectives are often knowledge, skills

and competencies for higher level positions in the organization (Salas et al., 2012). In addition, Salas et al. (2012) pointed out that trainees usually have more discretion in personalizing the training content when moving from employee training to leadership development.

### **2.2.3 The role of feedback in training and development**

Feedback can be related to both on-the-job training and off-the-job training, and it can be either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic feedback is obtained directly from the work itself, whereas extrinsic feedback comes from a manager or trainer (Wexley & Latham, 1991). Employees should be informed when they have performed tasks correctly or when there are areas for improvement, as feedback enhances their willingness to learn and makes the learning process more engaging (Wexley & Latham, 1991). Feedback has a significant impact on learning outcomes (Hattie et al., 2017).

Feedback can be given during, immediately after, or before the next task (Jiang et al., 2022). To be effective feedback should be provided as soon as possible after the employee's action (Wexley & Latham, 1991). Too much feedback at one time or too early in the learning process could be confusing for the employee and lead to poorer performance outcomes (Wexley & Latham, 1991). Therefore, for each employee and at each stage of training and development, there is an optimum level of feedback.

Feedback can be positive or negative and it is important to give and receive both types of feedback (Wexley & Latham, 1991). According to Wexley & Latham (1991), positive feedback is perceived and recalled more accurately and accepted more readily than negative feedback. In turn, they noted that negative feedback is often denied, especially by employees with low self-esteem. It is easier to accept negative feedback when you have friendly and close relationships with supervisors or colleagues (Arvey & Ivanevich, 1980). Praise can also be a powerful source of positive feedback (Wexley & Latham,

1991). According to Goller and Späth (2024), one important goal of feedback is to create an emotional reaction. At best, positive and negative feedback can motivate employees, while at worst, it can leave them frustrated. They also highlight that providing the right feedback requires making truthful and reliable observations in real situations.

#### **2.2.4 Training and development: Hard HRM**

While this study focuses on the employee perspective and how training and development practices can improve employees' job satisfaction, it is important to recognize that these practices must also be aligned with the strategic objectives of the organization. Integrating hard HRM principles ensures that training and development are not only designed to meet individual needs but also to support wider organizational goals.

Training and development can be more specifically linked to HRM or SHRM (Ruta & Sala, 2018; Taylor et al., 2008). As mentioned earlier, these two cannot be completely separated and that is why training and development must also be part of the organization's strategy. This perspective supports the hard HRM by prioritizing organizational goals and efficiency.

Effective training is one element of broader business strategy that is designed to achieve the goal of excellence (Betcherman et al., 1997). It should be the responsibility of the organization to ensure that employees' current skills, abilities, and training needs are aligned with the requirements of their positions (Jehanzeb & Beshir, 2013). According to Jehanzeb & Beshir (2013), it is important to communicate business strategy, goals for individual employees, and employees' current skills and abilities and training needs. Furthermore, when employees need required skills and knowledge, it should be provided to them at the right time without any delay (Jehanzeb & Beshir, 2013).

Departments need to make sure that they have employees who can pick up the knowledge and skills that might be lost after some employee leaves the organization (Pynes, 2013). Strategies and planning are needed to keep and share this knowledge (Pynes, 2013). In general, there is no single factor that prevents some form of training or development from being offered to employees, but the decision to offer training and development is usually a matter for the senior management (Betcherman et al., 1997).

According to Wexley and Latham (1991), an organization's strategy must take account of money and resources. To avoid wasting money, organizations will use training and development interventions for the people and the situations where needed. Even if an organization cannot afford financially to carry out each step of the intervention, it should attempt to do whatever it can to approach the ideal. Training and development needs should be identified, planned, and budgeted for from the outset of any change. In all types of organizations, training and development tend to be very much a top-down decision, with strategies and funding levels being determined by management (Betcherman et al., 1997).

#### **2.2.5 Training and development: Soft HRM**

The following section will focus more on how soft HRM is reflected in training and development. Looking at soft HRM helps to understand how training and development measures can support employee well-being, motivation and commitment to the organization. In this study, it is important to explore how training not only improves employees' skills but also contributes to their personal development and job satisfaction. Soft HRM therefore not only seeks to meet the needs of the organization but also puts employees at the center and considers their individual development needs.

Training and development refer to a planned effort by an organization to facilitate the learning of job-related behaviors on the part of its employees (Wexley & Latham, 1991). Employers provide training to meet different skills

needs (Betcherman et al., 1997). It is critical that organizations implement training and development practices to ensure that their employees have the requisite knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics to confront their current work and new challenges (Pynes, 2013; Taylor, et al., 2008). In addition, organizations use training and development to improve employees' skills and develop their ability to cope with the changing demands of the work environment (Wexley & Latham, 1991). Training can be targeted to help employees learn new job-specific skills, improve their performance, or adjust their attitudes and behaviors (Pynes, 2013). Moreover, training and development can focus on improving an individual's level of self-esteem, increasing competence in one or more skill areas, or enhancing motivation to perform well in their job.

From the employees' perspective, additional training leads to better motivation and loyalty within the organization (Maršíková & Šlaichová, 2015). Effective training and development can strengthen employees' commitment and increase their willingness to perform their job well (Wexley & Latham, 1991). Retaining employees is a challenging task and there is no single method to achieve it (Logan, 2000). Despite this, several organizations have revealed that one characteristic that helps retain employees is providing them with opportunities to improve their learning (Logan, 2000). While pay and benefits play an important role in employee selection and retention, employees also value opportunities to acquire new skills, gain experience in different roles, and pursue personal and professional growth (Wagner 2000).

Training is essential for employees to meet expectations, contribute to their organizations and achieve a high degree of success (Fitzgerald, 1992). Providing training opportunities can significantly improve employee performance (Jehanzeb & Beshir, 2013). In turn, this leads to increasing job satisfaction among employees (Fitzgerald, 1992; Taylor et al., 2008). Additionally, training has a positive impact on the relationship between management and the other employees (Kalleberg & Moody, 1994).

Employers must recognize that employees are faced with new skill demands and that they are committed to their employees, which are key factors affecting the quality of the employment relationship and ultimately productivity, morale, recruitment, and retention (McMullen & Schellenberg, 2003). Employee training and development are designed to promote the person-task fit as well as person-organization fit (Chelladurai, 2014).

Despite these benefits, even when training is provided, it can be challenging to meet the demands of the job (McMullen & Schellenberg, 2003). Not all training is necessarily effective or ultimately relevant to a person's job (McMullen & Schellenberg, 2003). But even in cases where learning does take place and the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual is relevant to the job, learning may not be fully realized (McMullen & Schellenberg, 2003). For example, the employee may have no time to apply the new skill in the workplace or there may be no change in job design that allows these new skills to be used (McMullen & Schellenberg, 2003). Therefore, the aim of training should be to ensure that employees learn new skills that are relevant to their work, that changes are made to work design to support this learning, and that employees are given sufficient time to apply and use these new skills.

### **2.3 Training and development in nonprofit sport organizations**

The next step in the literature review is to investigate nonprofit sport organizations in more detail, as this study focuses on one such organization, Espoon Telinetaiturit ry. It is important to understand the specific characteristics of a nonprofit and sport organizations for developing practical recommendations to improve training and development practices. This section aims to identify the unique challenges and opportunities that shape training and development in nonprofit sport organizations, using practical case study examples from existing literature.

While there is literature on HRM in nonprofit sport organizations, research specifically focused on Finnish nonprofit sport organizations is limited. For example, many studies have been conducted in a different country and culture than Finland or have focused on HRM in a broader sense, where training and development has been only one part of the study, but not the focus. In addition, while many of these studies have emphasized the organizational benefits of training and development, fewer have focused on the employee perspective. As there is no direct literature on the subject in the exact context of this study, this section will focus on cases that are most similar to the study's context. This understanding will provide a basis for developing realistic suggestions to improve training and development practices in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry.

### **2.3.1 Nonprofit and sport organizations**

There are different types of nonprofit organizations, for example in terms of size, activities, and structure (Salamon & Anheier, 1992). Nonprofit organizations are defined as formally constituted, private, nonprofit-distributing, self-governing and voluntary-based entities (Salamon & Anheier, 1992). The nonprofit sector refers to organizations that are neither government nor private for-profit organizations (Pynes, 2013). Similarly, sport organizations, which provide sporting services from local to global levels, often rely on volunteers and endorse positive values, fair play and mutual respect (Slack & Parent, 2006). Both organization types are mission-driven entities, in which people are attracted by their passion for the mission and remain there to accomplish it (Kim & Lee, 2007).

Based on research related to nonprofit sport organizations one of the most persistent challenges is the lack of financial and human resources (Dajnoki et al., 2018; Lekavičius, 2020; Philip & Arrowsmith, 2020; Taylor & McGraw, 2006). Among these challenges, Guo et al. (2011) emphasize the effect of low and unpredictable funding on the integration of HRM in organizational practices. Salary levels are often relatively low, which requires forms of HRM

that emphasize non-financial means to motivate and engage the employees (Alatrasta and Arrowsmith, 2004). Problems with economic impacts could lead to a situation where paid staff can operate at a minimum level and training cannot be properly invested (Guo et al., 2011). This, in turn, can increase the workload of staff and increase stress levels, which may prevent in-house or even regular external human resource support.

Another challenge relates to the fact that human resource planning is not always easy in nonprofit and sport organizations, as jobs are often not full-time and turnover in such organizations can be high (Dajnoki et al., 2018). Turnover refers to the process where other employees leave the organization and other ones are replaced by new hires. The challenges of HRM in nonprofit sport organizations are not only due to poor planning or lack of awareness but are often strongly linked to the structural realities of the sector (Dajnoki et al., 2018). Practical training and development practices therefore need to take these contextual constraints into account, particularly when considering how to sustain employee satisfaction and commitment within organizations. Such structural models make it even more difficult to build long-term and consistent HRM practices, including training and development.

The specific characteristic of sport organizations is that they often rely on a combination of paid employees and volunteer-based work (Taylor & McGraw, 2006). The HRM challenge is to build a steady participation for paid employees and volunteers that reward, recognize, and empower individuals while meeting the rapidly changing needs and requirements of the sport organization (Taylor & McGraw, 2006). Taylor and McGraw's (2006) study was conducted in the context of Australian sport organizations. They found that HRM in sports organizations is often limited, with most practices focusing more on recruiting paid staff than developing employees. They also found that nonprofit sport organizations are not always able to transfer HRM practices familiar from business to their own contexts, as

nonprofit sport organizations have their own specific characteristics and resource constraints that make implementing formal HRM practices challenging.

People who have been involved in sport themselves and have a passion for the sport often end up as leaders of sports organizations (Taylor & McGraw, 2006). This can sometimes lead to a focus on the number of participants rather than, for example, the effectiveness of the organization. In their study conducted in Hungary, Dajnoki et al. (2018) found that in a sports organization operations are more like a family than a workplace, which contributes to the fact that the work and the atmosphere are not like any other company. In line with this, Philip and Arrowsmith (2020), in their UK-based study, found that HR structures are not always necessary when the organizational climate is respectful and employees feel motivated, fostering a positive and effective working environment.

Akingbola's (2006) study examines SHRM in nonprofit organizations in Canada and its results indicate that it would be important to incorporate strategy into HRM within the nonprofit sector. One problem is that nonprofit organizations often refer to HRM as part of their strategy, primarily in a strategic sense that aligns with the principles of the hard HRM focusing on organizational goals and efficiency (Akingbola, 2006). However, usually these organizations do not have the capacity to support its implementation. The fact that HRM cannot be adequately supported contributes to HRM not having a proper voice or role in the strategy process (Akingbola, 2006). This highlights how, in the day-to-day life of an organization, intentions to improve do not always lead to concrete action, especially when limited resources lead to a focus on maintaining operations. In nonprofit sport organizations, this can mean that areas such as HRM are neglected, even when there is a desire to improve.

In recent years, the role of HRM within nonprofit sport organizations and its potential to positively contribute to the well-being of employees and build

healthy communities has become a topical issue for governments, managers, researchers, and communities in various national settings (Bartram et al., 2017). HRM plays an important role in providing and developing better management for nonprofit sport organizations (Ridder & McCandless, 2010). It also increasingly affects the effectiveness of these organizations (Bastida et al., 2017).

Complex business organization human resource practices do not transfer easily to nonprofit and sport organizations (Taylor & McGraw, 2006). This is because, these organizations also have volunteer-based work, they operate with limited resources compared to for-profit organizations, they have different hierarchies and decision-making processes, and they usually emphasize the satisfaction of employees rather than the maximization of organizational success.

### **2.3.2 The role of training and development in nonprofit sport organizations**

Training is essential to the effectiveness and survival of nonprofit sport organizations (Akingbola, 2006). In these organizations, training and development contributes to reduced turnover of employees, increased motivation and improved efficiencies in processes and procedures (Arthur, 1994; Taylor et al., 2008). In addition, effective training and development are essential for nonprofit sport organizations, as they influence the commitment of employees and volunteers and to ensure that they have all the necessary knowledge to achieve the organization's objectives (Ruta & Sala, 2018). Training thus impacts the link between employee aspirations and the mission of nonprofit sport organizations (Pynes, 2013). Some of these organizations include employee training and knowledge development in their mission statements (Akingbola, 2006). For most nonprofit sport organizations, training is engrained in the process of actualizing the values and mission they set out to achieve (Akingbola, 2006).

A study by McMullen and Schellenberg (2003) has shown that employees in nonprofit organizations have experienced less training than employees in for-profit organizations. The study, conducted in Canada, focused on training and development within these organizations. Training seems to make a difference for employees in nonprofit organizations, as those who received training were more likely than others to feel prepared to do their job. Feeling unprepared to do their job properly can affect job satisfaction, motivation and commitment, according to research. This can also have an impact on organizational effectiveness. This underlines how adequate training and development have a crucial impact on how employees feel about their work. As job satisfaction is linked to the experience of being competent and supported, these findings provide an important context for this study, which highlighted dissatisfaction with training and development opportunities.

Several studies (Dajnoki, 2018; Lekavičius, 2020; Millar & Stevens, 2012) have found that HRM should be developed with both employees and the organization in mind. These studies have stated that the focus of research is on employees, but that this was based on the idea that this would also enable the organization to function effectively. The studies have emphasized that HRM in general, but also more specifically training and development, should be developed in nonprofit sport organizations to improve the performance of employees and the effectiveness of organizations. Although there is research and findings that these practices should be strengthened in such organizations, also from an employee perspective, more specific interviews on the subject are lacking. Many of the interviews have focused more on statistics and data. Combining these studies, which emphasize the role of the employee in HRM provides a better understanding of how developing HRM practices in sport organizations is not only about improving organizational performance, but also about creating practices that support employee well-being and motivation.

Training and development in HR are essential for the sustainability of nonprofit sports organizations (Ruta & Sala, 2018). This is why the

competencies that represent the core of training and development must support the strategic objectives set by these organizations. Furthermore, the skills required for adapting to change have increased the importance of training and learning in nonprofit sport organizations (McMullen & Schellenberg, 2003). In the nonprofit sport organizations, it is not only senior managers who are involved in training decisions, but boards of directors as well, through the influence they have on the management of nonprofit sport organizations (McMullen & Schellenberg, 2003).

When planning training and development opportunities within the organization, it is often more useful not to copy some system directly (Finnish Gymnastics Federation, n.d.). Instead, it is beneficial to select the best elements from different systems and create practices that work for your own organization. According to Finnish Gymnastics Federation (n.d.), it is important to consider the attitude and atmosphere of an organization when implementing training and development opportunities. It is worth noting whether it encourages learning and experimentation, shows interest in what is learned, offers support, or discourages the desire to learn and grow. The key is to identify an organization's operating environment, needs, objectives and resources. These perspectives support the idea that training and development practices cannot simply be copied from elsewhere but must be developed to reflect the culture and operational reality of each organization. The aim of this study is to develop such practices specifically for Espoon Telinetaiturit ry as an independent organization, taking into account its unique characteristics and the needs of its employees.

#### **2.4 Summary of the literature review**

The aim of this section is to present the key perspectives in the HRM literature and their relevance in the context of nonprofit sport organizations. This section also presents the knowledge and methods that have been found to work in other similar studies. The summary introduces the concepts related to the topic, highlights gaps in the research literature, and provides

tools for data analysis and discussion to address the research questions in other parts of the study. Table 4 summarizes key HRM concepts, organized by theme, key findings from the literature, relevance to the analysis, and gaps identified in the literature.

*Table 4: Key findings from the literature review*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Key findings from the literature</b>	<b>Relevance to the analysis</b>	<b>Gaps in the literature</b>
The role of HRM and training and development in a nonprofit sport organization	<p>HRM aligns employee skills with organizational goals (Rotich, 2015).</p> <p>Training and development affect employee motivation and commitment (Alatrasta &amp; Arrowsmith, 2004).</p> <p>Training and development are relevant in nonprofit sport organizations due to lower financial incentives (Alatrasta &amp; Arrowsmith, 2004).</p>	<p>To find out, how Espoon Telinetaiturit ry implements HRM within a nonprofit sport organization, considering its unique characteristics.</p> <p>Analyzes how training and development are integrated into HRM at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry.</p>	<p>Research specifically focusing on Finnish nonprofit sport organizations is limited.</p> <p>Existing literature often approaches HRM at a general level, whereas in-depth analyses of training and development remain limited.</p>
Soft & hard HRM	<p>Soft HRM focuses on employee motivation, commitment and development, while hard HRM focuses on strategic business objectives (Legge, 1995).</p> <p>Most organizations use elements of both approaches, but their balance varies (Truss et al., 1997).</p>	<p>Analyzes Espoon Telinetaiturit ry's HRM practices through the lens of soft and hard HRM to identify how elements of each approach are reflected in practice.</p> <p>Utilizes soft and hard HRM as conceptual tools to analyze how employee development, commitment, and motivation are supported in practice.</p>	<p>Soft and hard HRM have been much discussed, especially at the theoretical level, but how these approaches are reflected in practice within nonprofit sport organizations remains limited.</p>
On-the-job training &	<p>On-the-job training is often more cost-effective and practical</p>	<p>Assesses which training methods are used at Espoon Telinetaiturit</p>	<p>The literature provides a solid theoretical basis for on-the-job and off-</p>

off-the-job training	for nonprofit sport organizations than off-the-job training (Maršíková & Šlaichová, 2015; Raheja, 2015).	ry and whether employees receive more training during working hours or outside of them.  Identifies the impact of different methods on the training and development of employees.	the-job training methods, but empirical studies focusing on employees' experiences with these methods in nonprofit sport organizations are lacking.
Feedback	Feedback is essential for skill development, motivation, and retention (Wexley & Latham, 1991).  Nonprofit organizations may lack systematic feedback structures (Hattie et al., 2017).	Analyzes how feedback is given, in what forms it is provided, and how this affects employee's development in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry.	Although the importance of feedback has been recognized in previous studies, little is known about how systematic feedback practices are implemented in nonprofit sport organizations and how employees themselves perceive the importance of feedback.

As summarized in Table 4, the literature review has identified key themes that guide the analysis: the role of HRM and training and development in nonprofit sport organizations, the relevance of soft and hard HRM, the use of on-the-job and off-the-job training methods, and the importance of feedback practices. These themes are particularly relevant in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, where the realities of the nonprofit environment affect both the experiences of employees and the goals of the organization.

Research by McMullen and Schellenberg (2003) highlights how employees in nonprofit sport organizations do not necessarily receive as much training as many employees in for-profit organizations. This underlines the challenges of HRM in these organizations, as limited resources often prevent investment in training. In the case of Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, this raises

questions about how training practices are prioritized and whether employees feel they have sufficient opportunities to develop their skills.

One classification divides the HRM theoretical literature into two approaches: soft and hard HRM (Truss et al., 1997). In the context of a nonprofit sport organization, elements associated with both approaches can often be identified through analysis, although soft HRM elements tend to be more prominent, given that the main mission of such organizations is not purely focused on success and results (Truss et al. 1997). On the other hand, resources in such organizations are often limited and therefore the efficiency of the organization must also be considered. In such low-resource environments, the challenge is to balance limited resources with the need to promote employee development. This raises important questions about how such organizations can prioritize HR practices to achieve both employee satisfaction and organizational goals.

Although the role of training and development in nonprofit sport organizations has been studied at a strategic level, research has often focused on organizational policies and general practices. Instead, the experiences of individual employees and organizational perspectives have received less attention, although they could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of training and development in practice. This study aims to explore employees' perceptions of HRM practices in a specific nonprofit sport organization. Building on these findings by exploring how employees at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry perceive the training and development opportunities offered by their organization and how they could be improved to better meet their needs.

Nonprofit sport organizations often benefit from hands-on learning, which is why on-the-job training is seen as an important form of training for this type of organization (Taylor et al., 2008). Feedback is also seen as important in such organizations, where financial incentives are often limited (Wexley &

Latham, 1991). The results highlight that limited resources require nonprofit organizations to prioritize cost-effective HR practices, such as on-the-job training and feedback, to maintain employee motivation and commitment.

In such organizations, developing activities often requires a case-by-case approach (Finnish Gymnastics Federation, n.d.). It is not sustainable to directly copy other organizations' models, which is why it is important to consider the activities that fit the culture and objectives of each nonprofit sport organization. The findings of the literature review support the study, which examines employee perspectives on training and development in the nonprofit sport organization Espoon Telinetaiturit ry. Although previous research has touched on HRM in nonprofit sport organizations, there is a lack of in-depth, empirical studies on employee experiences, particularly in the Finnish context. By providing new empirical insights into training and development practices in a Finnish nonprofit sport organization, this study helps to fill an important research gap.

### **3 Methodology**

This section reviews the research methodology of the study. It starts by introducing the case organization, Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, and the Finnish Gymnastics Federation, the overarching body for all gymnastics clubs in Finland. This section provides background information to help the reader understand the context in which HRM and in particular training and development practices have taken shape. The focus is on the organizational structure, operations, and the role of Espoon Telinetaiturit ry within the national gymnastics' framework in Finland.

The case organization was selected before the specific topic of the study was defined, following earlier job satisfaction surveys that indicated potential areas for improvement. Therefore, the aim is not to present Espoon Telinetaiturit ry as the most representative example of training and development practices, but rather to provide a contextual understanding to help inform the analysis of the study.

Following this, the research design is discussed, detailing the selection of participants and questions, as well as the data collection methods. Finally, the chapter outlines the data analysis process, addresses the validity of the study, and discusses its limitations.

#### **3.1 Espoon Telinetaiturit ry**

In this research, a gymnastics club, Espoon Telinetaiturit ry is examined. The club was founded in 1978 dedicated to promoting gymnastics for children, young people, and adults (Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, n.d.). Its aim is to raise competitive gymnasts and to organize other recreational activities. The club's competitive activities are divided into five disciplines: acrobatic gymnastics, teamgym, trampoline gymnastics, men's artistic gymnastics and women's artistic gymnastics. In turn, recreational activities are offered in ten

disciplines, including the same categories as in the competitive side, as well as other activities such as ninja gym and adult gymnastics. The club also organizes guided sports activities during the school days in cooperation with the City of Espoo and various camp activities in winter and summer.

The organization is a nonprofit sport organization, which means that it does not in principle aim for profit or success. Financing the organization's activities are mainly based on participation fees for recreational activities and seasonal fees for competitive gymnastics (Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, n.d.). The aim is to keep the development of fees moderate and in line with other similar clubs. The club operates in four different locations across Espoo.

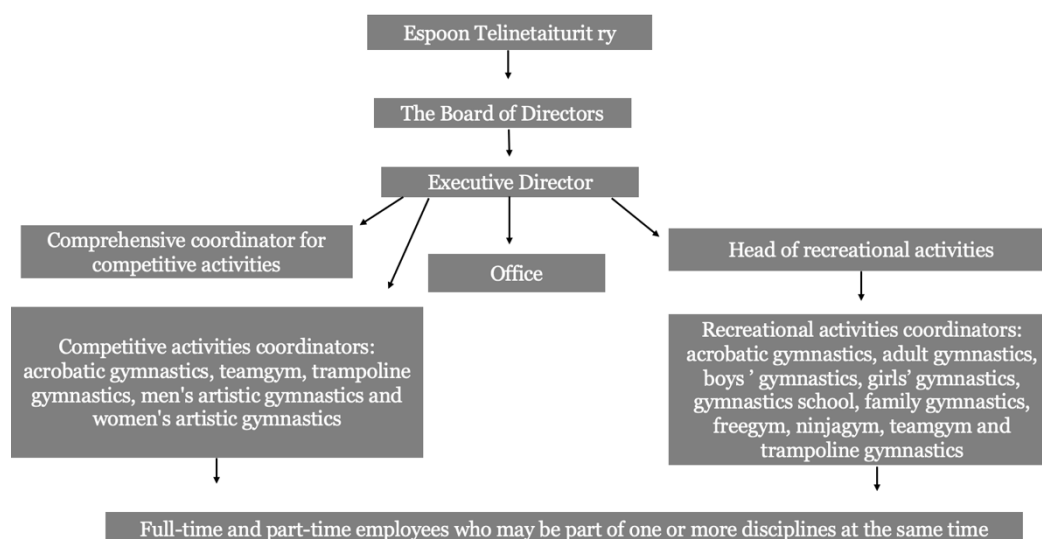
More than 3000 customers are involved each year and there are 200 employees in the organization. Of these, around 30 are volunteers, who mainly serve on the board alongside their regular jobs, and around 170 are paid employees. In Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, almost all operational tasks, such as coaching and training, are handled by paid staff. Nevertheless, the presence of volunteers reflects a culture of nonprofit activity, where motivation is often based on commitment to the mission of the organization rather than financial incentives.

The paid staff includes both full-time and part-time employees. In Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, at the top of the structure is the Board of Directors. Right after that comes the Executive Director. Below the Executive Director are the coordinators of the different disciplines and the organization's office. Each coordinator has their own subordinates and acts as one of the discipline's managers. Additionally, different employees may be under more than one coordinator, which sometimes causes confusion in the organization's structure. The organizational structure is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

The aim of the club is to be a joyful community of elite gymnastics (Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, n.d.). This implies that the club works systematically,

coaches with joy, is a family and works together. In competitive gymnastics, targets are set for each discipline. The main function of the objectives is to create a climate of respect for development and skills, and a corresponding coaching system. The objectives also include the development of staff skills, through on-the-job learning. There is a desire to invest in the skills of coaches so that these skills are more widely shared throughout the organization. The club continuously trains both recreational and competitive coaches free of charge in accordance with the Finnish Gymnastics Federation's training system. Training is provided in separate training sessions and camps.

*Figure 2: Organizational structure of Espoon Telinetaiturit ry*



### 3.1.1 The Finnish Gymnastics Federation

Since the Finnish Gymnastics Federation plays a key role in providing training and strategic guidance to Finnish gymnastics clubs, its activities are relevant to this study. As Espoon Telinetaiturit ry operates within this framework, understanding the structure and services of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation will provide a broader perspective on the training and development opportunities.

The Finnish Gymnastics Federation is a gymnastics federation whose member clubs organize a wide range of gymnastics activities (Finnish Gymnastics Federation, n.d.). The Finnish Gymnastics Federation has around 312 member clubs and a total of about 121 000 members, making it one of the largest federations in Finland. The Finnish Gymnastics Federation has top-level gymnastics in eight disciplines: acrobatic gymnastics, aerobic gymnastics, aesthetic group gymnastics, men's artistic gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, teamgym, trampoline gymnastics and women's artistic gymnastics.

The Finnish Gymnastics Federation organizes a wide range of training courses for club managers and club officials throughout the year (Finnish Gymnastics Federation, n.d.). These courses consider the individual needs of different clubs and actors. Each year, it provides training for around 4 000 instructors, coaches and club leaders. The Finnish Gymnastics Federation supports clubs in both the implementation of basic sports activities and the development of their programs. The services are delivered through local, remote and hybrid formats. Additionally, a database of materials, a website, and other information channels are continuously developed.

### **3.2 Research design**

This study explores how employees at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry perceive the organization's current training and development opportunities and examines ways to better align these opportunities with their needs. Research methods are broadly categorized into qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative approach focuses on understanding and interpretation and on the other hand, quantitative approach relies usually on hypothesis testing and statistical analysis (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). As this study requires an in-depth understanding of the research problem, a qualitative case study approach was chosen.

This study uses an intensive case study approach, as it focuses only on one organization and a deep understanding of training and development practices in this organization. Rather than aiming for generalizability, intensive case studies seek to provide deep insights into a specific context (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). In this study, the aim is to answer the research questions from the perspective of Espoon Telinetaiturit ry.

To get a holistic view of training and development, this study has examined the organization's Action Plan 2024, Strategy Plan 2023-2025 and conducted semi-structured interviews. Organizational documents have been used in the research to offer useful information on the strategic objectives and priorities of the organization, particularly in relation to training and development. A closer look at these documents helps to identify the gaps between the strategic objectives of the organization and the experiences and expectations of employees. This analysis will help the organization align its strategic goals with the needs of its employees, thereby enhancing the relevance of training and development opportunities through concrete actions.

To gather comprehensive insights into employees' views on training and development, this study employed semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews outline topics, issues, or themes and answer both “what” and “how” questions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Semi-structured interviews have some kind of structure and themes, but each interview still allows for variations in the wording and order of questions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Flexibility in these semi-structured interviews is beneficial because preplanned questions can prevent important topics from being raised by the participant. On the other hand, the fact that all the interviews have a similar frame helps in comparability and reliability of the study. The balance of semi-structured interviews makes them an effective tool for capturing the depth and diversity of employee views, while remaining aligned with the objectives of the study. From the interviews, I will gain an insight into the experiences, beliefs and needs of employees regarding

training and development. By combining the organizational documents with the results of the semi-structured interviews, an understanding of a more formal and broader approach to training and development in the organization can be gained. This allows contextualizing the views of employees, which may differ from the findings in the documents.

### **3.3 Selection of participants**

Before selecting the participants, it was crucial to consider the research objectives, and the type of information needed to answer the research questions. The aim of the study was to gain a deep understanding of the organization's operations, with a particular focus on training and development. Therefore, it was important to include participants who not only have a thorough understanding of the organization's day-to-day functions but also the ability to reflect on strategic decisions and long-term goals.

To ensure a comprehensive perspective, full-time employees and coordinators were prioritized for selection due to their involvement in administrative tasks and decision-making, providing valuable insights into training and development. Previous job satisfaction surveys indicated areas for improvement in satisfaction among this group, making their insights particularly valuable. However, as this group is relatively small, and anonymity needed to be preserved, other people actively working in the organization were also included in the interviews. Their extensive experience within the organization, whether through long-term service, their position or active involvement in competitive gymnastics, was crucial for providing a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the organization. Including both full-time employees and coordinators and other part-time employees ensures a balanced view, capturing both strategic perspectives and hands-on coaching experiences.

To ensure a diverse sample, participants working in five different disciplines were sought. All competitive gymnastics disciplines within the organization were selected for the study, to get a comprehensive understanding of how training and development is perceived in the whole organization. Based on prior observations in the organization as an employee, a holistic perspective would be necessary to develop a training and development system that supports the entire organization and not only one discipline. In addition, since the number of active employees in different disciplines is not ridiculously high, considering only one discipline would have made it difficult to protect anonymity in the study.

Efforts were made to include individuals of varying ages and at different stages of their coaching careers, to capture a broad range of perspectives. The main focus was on competitive gymnastics for a couple of reasons. First, the objectives are similar among competitive gymnasts, making them a more homogeneous group compared to those involved in recreational activities. This homogeneity allows for more targeted analysis and practical recommendations. Second, based on my long-term experience working in the organization and being involved in both the recreational and competitive gymnastics divisions, I have observed that training and development are more structured on the recreational side. In addition, the Executive Director has noted that training and development in competitive gymnastics could benefit from further improvement.

Participants were contacted via email or message. An identical invitation was sent to a selected group of potential participants, detailing my background, the main purpose of the study, the format of the interviews and the participants' rights, including the right to withdraw from the research at any time and the assurance of anonymity. The opportunity to ask questions at any stage of the process was also provided. Most individuals agreed to participate in the interviews, however, some did not respond to the invitation. Despite this, there were enough participants to ensure that the

study's objectives were met, so the lack of response from some invitees did not impact the overall data collection process.

Interviewees were assured that their identity would remain confidential, and therefore no further details about the interviewees could be disclosed to protect their privacy. A total of 12 interviewees took part in the research between May and July of 2024. Of these, seven were full-time employees and coordinators, and five were other part-time employees. The initial expectation was to interview approximately 10 employees, and this goal was met, as 12 interviewees participated. 11 of them agreed to be interviewed immediately, while one person, who did not have time for an interview, agreed to answer the interview questions in writing. This approach ensured that all relevant insights could be gathered despite scheduling constraints.

### **3.4 Selection of questions**

The selection of interview questions was a systematic process grounded in the research objectives and a thorough literature review. Initially, key themes and topics related to training and development opportunities were identified through a comprehensive review of existing research and literature. As I progressed, I noted down recurring themes and concepts and then began to combine them to find related themes. Based on these combinations, I formulated questions that were aligned with the main themes and would help generate answers that would be relevant to this study.

The interview questions aimed to find out what is currently working, what areas could be improved, and how this could be done in terms of training and development in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry. These aspects were explored through a range of themes, including motivation, communication, engagement, support and empowerment. Each theme was chosen for its relevance to understanding how training and development can be improved within Espoon Telinetaiturit ry. The interview questions also considered a job satisfaction survey conducted within the organization, specifically asking

interviewees for their insights on why there were lower ratings regarding encouragement of development. The full list of interview questions can be found at the end of this thesis in Appendix A.

As this research was based on semi-structured interviews, some interviewees were asked additional questions as needed. However, the core of the interview questions remained consistent for all interviewees.

### **3.5 Data collection**

To collect data, different methods were used. These included semi-structured interviews and a review of the organization's previous documents, Action Plan 2024 and Strategic Plan 2023-2025. In addition, my prior knowledge of the organization and its activities as an employee provided a contextual foundation for interpreting the data.

Some of the interviews in this study were conducted remotely using Google Meet, while others were conducted face-to-face with the interviewees at the Espoon Telinetaiturit ry's branches. One interviewee responded to the interview questions in writing. The interview method, time and place were chosen according to the convenience of the interviewees. The interviews lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Finnish, and the most relevant excerpts for the study were translated into English. Interviewees were informed beforehand that their responses would remain anonymous. Additionally, they were clearly informed about the purpose of the study. The interviews were recorded to facilitate the analysis phase, but they were assured that the recordings would be deleted once they were no longer needed and would not be heard by anyone other than the relevant people.

As secondary data, the Espoon Telinetaiturit ry's Action Plan 2024, Strategic Plan 2023-2025 and the job satisfaction survey conducted in 2023-2024 were used. The documents were given to me by the organization's Executive Director when I asked him which documents I could get information about

training and development in the organization. The Action Plan 2024 and Strategic Plan 2023-2025 provides a comprehensive view of the club's strategic objectives and priorities, including the current situation, areas for development and target levels for the various objectives. These include specific objectives related to training and development opportunities, making these crucial sources for this study. These documents complemented the interview data by providing a strategic context against which employees' perspectives could be compared.

The club's job satisfaction surveys have been conducted using Ilmarinen's *Työvire*-survey. The consistency of questions each year allows for comparability over time. The survey includes also topics other than training and development, but what has emerged from these surveys is the motivation for improving training and development opportunities within the club. The survey, which was used in this study and conducted between December 2023 and January 2024, had a response rate of 100/200. This survey included 11 questions and an open field for a free response. As the questions were mainly scale questions, the semi-structured interviews provide more information about training and development within the organization. The question in the survey *"I am encouraged to develop in my work"* was the one that supported the decision to undertake such study. In addition, the question *"I get enough feedback on my work"* is related to the topic of the study and the lower scores on this also support the relevance of this study for training and development in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry.

The Action Plan 2024, Strategic Plan 2023-2025 and the job satisfaction survey provide background information on the structure, culture and objectives of the organization, which helps to put the interview results in the right context. They outline how training and development measures are integrated into the club's activities and how they can be improved to meet the needs of employees.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Qualitative data can be treated either through an inductive or a deductive coding approach. This study primarily follows an inductive approach, as the aim is to identify practical improvements for Espoon Telinetaituri ry. While existing HRM theories, such as soft and hard HRM, provide a theoretical background, they do not dictate the coding process.

An inductive approach means that the results emerge directly from the analysis of raw data, rather than from preconceived expectations or models (Thomas, 2006). This approach was used in the study as it allows the data to reveal new, unexpected themes. During the coding and analysis process, I identified the following key categories based on employee perspectives: 1) the skills needed at work, 2) what already works in the organization in terms of training and development opportunities, 3) what could be further developed in this area and 4) what concrete actions could be taken to improve these opportunities. This same structure can also be seen in the results of the study.

However, while the categories emerged inductively from the data, they were refined using a deductive approach. The deductive approach supported the existing structure to ensure that the analysis of the study also supported the research objectives and research questions, but the inductive approach allowed new findings to emerge that further enriched the existing knowledge and understanding.

Before thematic coding, the interviews were carefully transcribed at a verbatim but cleaned level, meaning that the transcription captured the spoken content accurately but omitted non-verbal elements such as pauses and breaths. The aim of the transcription is to ensure that all the opinions and experiences expressed by the participants are considered in a balanced way, without leaving anything out or distorting the analysis. During the transcription phase, all identifying information was removed to keep the study anonymous.

Once the categorizing was completed, the software Atlas.ti was used for qualitative data analysis. The transcribed versions of the 11 interviews and one written response were entered into the Atlas.ti. This software was used to structure and review the original analysis in a more systematic and detailed way. The relevance of all codes was checked, unnecessary ones were removed and those that overlapped were merged. Atlas.ti helped to ensure that the analysis was systematic and that it effectively addressed the research questions. Software features, such as systematic code management and visual tools like the use of different colors helped the analysis to be consistent and accurate.

The Action Plan 2024 and the Strategic Plan 2023-2025 were not analyzed by using Atlas.ti. These documents were analyzed manually because they were concise, and it was easy to find the parts relevant to the study. The manual analysis involved a systematic review of the documents that related to training and development. Relevant passages were highlighted and categorized into themes. The manual analysis involved reading the documents several times and examining the terms and references to see that they were placed in the right categories.

### **3.7 Validity of the research**

The concept of validity is described by a wide range of terms in qualitative studies (Golafshani, 2003; Winter, 2000). This is not a single, fixed or universal concept, but rather a dependent concept (Winter, 2000). Validity in research is concerned with the accuracy and truthfulness of scientific findings (Van Manen, 1990). To validate means to investigate, to question, and to theorize, which are all activities to ensure rigor in qualitative research (Cypress, 2017). A valid study should demonstrate what exists and is accurate, and a valid instrument should measure what it is supposed to. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have pointed out in their study that the examination of validity can be divided into four different categories. These four criteria of

trustworthiness are called credibility, confirmability, consistency and transferability.

Credibility answers the question of how well the study reflects the real experience of the participants. In this study, credibility was supported by selecting participants from diverse stakeholder groups, including full-time employees and coordinators and other active part-time employees to ensure a comprehensive understanding of organizations operations and perspectives on training and development. The interview questions are based on an extensive literature review and are in line with the objectives of the study, which enhances credibility. The analysis of the research was structured based on the themes that emerged from the interviewees' responses, ensuring that the findings corresponded to the interviewees' authentic experiences and thoughts.

Confirmability indicates that the results of the study are not colored by the researcher's own preferences or preconceptions. This has been supported by the fact that the interviews have been conducted for all interviewees using the same interview guide, regardless of how the interviewee has known the interviewees beforehand. Additionally, multiple rounds of analysis were conducted to critically assess potential biases.

Consistency means that the research process is well-defined and coherent. Clear selection criteria for participants and systematic coding further enhance consistency in this study. Since the interviews were conducted in Finnish and translated into English there was a risk that the original content could change. However, special care was taken to ensure the accuracy of translations by thoroughly reviewing transcripts and preserving the intended meaning of responses.

Transferability assesses the extent to which research findings can be applied to other contexts. Since this study focuses on a single nonprofit sport

organization, its findings are context specific. However, the results of this study can provide important insights for other similar organizations and inspire similar improvements in these contexts.

In addition to credibility, confirmability, consistency, and transferability, particular attention was paid to ethical considerations throughout the research process. Although the name of the organization, Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, is mentioned openly with permission, participant anonymity was strictly protected.

Anonymization was carefully considered throughout the research and writing process. Anonymization was used to remove identifiable information and, where necessary, responses were categorized so that data could not be linked to individual participants. Additionally, before the publication of the thesis, a separate review focusing specifically on anonymity was conducted to ensure that no minor identifiable details remained. I stored all personal data, including original transcripts, audio recordings, and consent forms, securely on a password-protected, encrypted device accessible only to myself. All personal data will be permanently deleted after the thesis has been accepted and graded.

Participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time clearly emphasized. It is also important to note that no sensitive personal information was collected or analyzed. The focus remained solely on professional experiences and perceptions related to training and development.

### **3.8 Limitations of the study**

This study provided valuable information on how Espoon Telinetaiturit ry approaches employee training and development. However, certain limitations must be acknowledged. These limitations stem from the scope of the study, the selection of participants and the role of the researcher.

### **3.8.1 Scope of the study**

In this study, qualitative methods facilitated the collection of rich and comprehensive data. In-depth interviews with employees provided practical insights that helped to answer the study's research questions. This study focused on the training and development of Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, making its applicability to other organizations more limited.

The study included 12 employee interviews, which is a sufficient sample size for a qualitative study but may not fully capture all perspectives within the organization. While this study provides valuable insights into training and development in a nonprofit sport organization, its findings are inherently context dependent. Differences in organizational structures, financial resources, and employee expectations may limit direct applicability to other nonprofit sport organizations.

### **3.8.2 Selection of participants**

The study aimed to focus on employees' perspectives to better understand their experiences and improve job satisfaction. A strategic perspective was also considered, as training and development cannot be fully examined without it. However, the interviews focused primarily on employees' perspectives. In this study, the perspectives of the organization's management and board regarding training and development were not included, which may have influenced the findings. While I acknowledge this as a limitation, I made a conscious decision to exclude the perspectives of management and the board in order to focus on employees' experiences and ensure their voices were properly heard. In addition, not all employees were able to participate in the interviews due to language or scheduling constraints, which may have affected the representativeness of the results.

Although I tried to get as diverse a group of participants as possible, there are also some limitations to consider in this regard. The lack of a systematic ranking method for part-time employees introduced potential selection bias. A message was sent to selected part-time employees who were likely to provide valuable perspectives due to their long experience in the organization, the nature of their job roles, or their involvement in training and development activities. This method of selecting the remaining interviewees may therefore present some challenges in terms of consistency. I was aware during the research process that there might be some bias involved in this participant selection. However, particular attention was paid to ensuring a diverse and relevant sample, and the chosen approach was considered the most effective for identifying participants with extensive knowledge of the organization's operations and training and development practices.

### **3.8.3 Role of the researcher**

Reflexivity builds on this idea by emphasizing the importance of self-reflection to critically examine one's own preconceptions, theoretical biases and preferences (Schwandt, 1997). It is a systematic process of learning about oneself as a researcher (Kleinsasser, 2000). The role of the researcher is critical especially regarding how the data is collected, analyzed and reported.

While efforts have been made to reduce biases and ensure objectivity, some unconscious biases may still exist because of the familiarity of the organization. This familiarity stems from years of conducting job satisfaction surveys within the organization and working as a coach with groups of different ages and skill levels. Although this prior knowledge offers a strong foundation, it is crucial to acknowledge that initial assumptions and existing biases may influence the study. It should be noted that the organization's operations are partly self-evident for me, and this may cause some blind spots in the analysis.

I had a preconceived notion that the organization values training, but that its delivery is limited. This preconception may have influenced the interpretation of the interviews, although a conscious effort was made to remain objective and reflective. In addition, because I had previous colleague relationships with some interviewees, this may have influenced the way they answered questions, for example, in terms of their desire to give socially favorable responses. Although translations were carefully reviewed, some nuances in meaning may have been lost, which could affect the accuracy of the results. It is important to consider the dual role of the researcher as both insider and researcher when interpreting the findings and noting that this perspective can have its own strengths and limitations.

## **4 Results**

In the following section, the results of the study are presented. These results provide answers to the research questions and aim to support the improvement of training and development opportunities at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry from an employee perspective. The first section reviews the results of the organizational documents, the Action Plan 2024 and the Strategic Plan 2023-2025 of Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, along with their results in terms of training and development. After that, the results of the interviews are presented.

### **4.1 Organizational documents**

The Action Plan 2024, one of the key documents pointed out by the organization's Executive Director, highlights four key focus areas, each describing the current situation, areas for development, and level of ambition. The categorizations are made by the organization, not externally created for this study. These four categories are: 1) we are systematic, 2) we coach with joy, 3) we are a family, and 4) we work together. Training and development are classified under the category “we coach with joy”.

The current situation for the goal “we coach with joy” is described in the document as follows for training and development, “the expertise base of competitive coaching is narrow and not utilized in a scalable way” and “we want to invest in the skills of coaches.” In turn, this document states that the organization's development goal is to “ensure the commitment of coaches, the safety of practitioners and the quality of coaching.” The development goal is also to “achieve a broader distribution of coaches' skills across the organization.”

Under the objective “we coach with joy”, separate objectives are marked for the areas of updating and implementing the coaching model, updating and implementing the accountability program and training of coaches. Each of

these areas has its own target levels and indicators. For training of coaches, the target level is “maintaining the current level of competition coaches”. There is no indicator for this target level in the document. The general goals for objective “we coach with joy” and those relating to the training of coaches, show some tension between emphasizing change and maintaining the current level. The general objectives place more emphasis on change, while the objectives relating to the training of coaches place more emphasis on maintaining current levels.

The Strategic Plan for 2023-2025 contained many of the same development targets and target levels as the Action Plan 2024. However, an additional objective for 2024 and 2025 had been added to the strategy map, namely, to organize annual training courses containing 1-2 themes which will be defined together with the coaches. The indicators for this goal are delivery of training, number of participants and feedback of participants.

These documents have also allowed me to reflect on soft and hard HRM, as it is necessary to know what the organization thinks about training and development beyond what the employees think. It can be seen from the documents that the training and development of employees has been included in the strategy of the organization and has not been neglected. For example, in the current state of the organization, the phrase “we want to invest in the skills of coaches”, organizations development goals to ensure the commitment of coaches and the goal to organize annual training courses for employees, show that training and development are considered important and that there is a desire to include it in the organization's objectives.

The absence of a specific indicator and concrete measures makes it more challenging to fully track progress toward the strategic objectives. The failure to invest in training and development can point to hard HRM, if it is a conscious resource-centric strategy where employee development is not seen as worth the investment. However, a lack of training alone does not

necessarily mean hard HRM, it can also be due to a lack of strategy or resource constraints. Overall, the documents suggest that training and development are valued within the organization, even though some challenges remain in implementing strategic goals into practical actions.

## **4.2 Interviews**

The interview results are presented in four thematic sections, following the same structure introduced in the data analysis section. First, the interviewees' perspectives on the skills required in their work will be explored in more detail. Next, their views on the strengths and successes in the organization regarding training and development opportunities will be presented. This is followed by an examination of areas for improvement, and a separate section will focus on how the interviewees feel these aspects could be concretely addressed.

### **4.2.1 Key skills and qualities for competitive coaching**

To consider possible training and development opportunities within an organization, it is necessary to know what skills are required for the job. This is why the interviewees were asked what skills are needed in their work and how these skills are taught or supported.

Almost all interviewees pointed out that a lot is invested in sport-specific expertise in training and that it is very important to be able to coach athletes at a competitive level. However, interviewees point out that the knowledge of the sport-specific expertise is only one part of the big picture. During the interviews, the participants highlighted a wide range of skills beyond sport-specific expertise, resulting in a long list. Notably, the skills mentioned by more than one interviewee were team management, organization skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, working with different age groups and pedagogical skills. These skills underline the versatility of expertise and responsibilities involved in competitive coaching.

One interviewee divided the skills needed for coaching in competitive sport into two parts, as follows *“The first is the technical skills of the coach, such as how to teach different movements, what age to teach what and how to assist safely. On the mental side, it is important to be able to read the dynamics of the group and how the athletes work in the group, to understand the athletes and to get to know them personally.”* (Interviewee 1) This interviewee also stressed that the training offered to coaches focuses more on technical skills.

Almost all interviewees highlighted the importance of self-motivation and self-initiative in coaching competitive sport. Self-motivation refers to an individual's inner will and determination to do things without external encouragement, while self-initiative in this context means the ability and willingness of an individual to initiate an activity independently. Motivation was mentioned in the interviews and participants stressed its importance, especially in the context of a nonprofit sport organization. One interviewee commented, for example, *“Motivation should also come from something other than money, as this is a nonprofit organization.”* (Interviewee 4) This comment reflects the fact that in such an environment, intrinsic motivation has more influence than external rewards.

Self-initiative, which also came up in the interviews, was seen as having both positive and negative aspects in nonprofit sport organization context. It was described as a positive thing, especially for those who felt it aligned with their natural personality and working style. One interviewee has stated, *“In my case, being proactive in my job works, I’m also the type to ask questions and experiment.”* (Interviewee 5) The ability to develop oneself was also mentioned as one key skill by interviewees. One interviewee reflected this as follows, *“Part of this job is that you want to develop yourself all the time and become better and learn about yourself.”* (Interviewee 6)

Interviewees pointed also some challenges where support is needed. For example, one concern was how to transfer the skills learned in training into practice, while another was how to be informed about different training and development opportunities available. As one interviewee commented “*This organization does not oblige you to undergo training after certain courses, so it is your own responsibility.*” (Interviewee 4) Therefore, taking responsibility for applying what has been learned, even without full organizational support, can be seen as an essential quality of a competitive coach.

Some of the interviewees work as coordinators alongside coaching, placing them at the same time in managerial positions. These interviewees pointed out that manager skills are not taught separately in the organization through formal training. One interviewee commented “*As a coordinator, I have not been able to train as a manager.*” (Interviewee 3) Despite this, when asked about the most important skills in their work, these interviewees identified leadership skills as one of the key competencies. This highlights a potential opportunity for improvement in the organization, that coordinators are expected to behave in a managerial way but are not fully trained for this position. This situation is not uncommon in nonprofit sport organizations, where greater emphasis is placed on coaching expertise compared to formal leadership training.

In summary, interviewees emphasized that in addition to sport-specific skills, competitive coaching requires a wide range of skills, such as team management, organizational skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills and pedagogical skills. Based on the interviews, coaches' skills can be divided into technical skills, such as teaching movements and safe assistance, and mental skills, such as understanding team dynamics and knowing the athletes. Self-initiative and motivation emerged as important qualities, especially in a nonprofit sport organization. Challenges were identified in

transferring skills into practice, communication about training opportunities and lack of training in leadership skills, especially for coordinators.

#### **4.2.2 Current strengths in training and development opportunities**

To improve training and development opportunities within an organization, it is also important to identify what is already working, to support it and to target the available resources in the right place. To this end, interviewees were asked what they felt was already working in the organization in terms of training and development opportunities.

In general, the existence of training and development opportunities were seen as important by interviewees. One interviewee highlighted *“Training is an enabler in your career.” (Interviewee 3)* Another interviewee emphasized this by saying *“Training makes you feel that your work is important and that you want to invest in the quality of your work.” (Interviewee 1)* The interviews revealed that there is a lot of knowledge within Espoon Telinetaiturit ry and that it is easy to ask for help and advice, especially within one's own discipline. As one interviewee noted *“It's really nice to be a big and leading club in Finland, we don't always have to go elsewhere for training when we already have the know-how ourselves.” (Interviewee 4)* This underlines the fact that employees in the organization appreciate that practical training is readily available within the organization itself, without always having to rely on external training.

Almost all the interviewees felt that the atmosphere for attending training has been positive in the organization. As one interviewee commented, *“Every time I have asked, I have been able to get trained. Never once have I been told not to go” (Interviewee 5)*. This reflects an organizational culture that values and encourages employee development. Interviewees also stressed that being proactive provides many opportunities for training and development. One interviewee explained this by saying *“There are many types of training available, and if you are interested, you can even train to*

*become a professional coach.” (Interviewee 6)* This emphasizes Espoon Telinetaiturit ry's dedication to supporting employee development through different training opportunities.

In addition, interviewees highlighted good working conditions within the organization as a positive aspect. As one interviewee noted, *“The conditions for working are good, the club provides the facilities, practices the skills with lots of different groups to learn in.” (Interviewee 11)* This underlines the importance of providing the conditions required for employee development in an organization, which can support an employee's growth as an expert in different groups and contexts. Such conditions can increase employee satisfaction and retention, which would also support the organization's own goal of retaining skilled employees in the organization.

Cooperation between the Finnish Gymnastics Federation and Espoon Telinetaiturit ry was seen as important for training and development opportunities. For example, the camps organized by the Finnish Gymnastics Federation were seen as a great platform for learning and development. As one interviewee noted *“I find that one of the best ways to learn, for example, is through training sessions during camps.” (Interviewee 12)* Cooperation with the Finnish Gymnastics Federation shows that Espoon Telinetaiturit ry is actively using possible collaborations to train and develop its employees. This not only increases the skills of individual employees but also supports the maintenance of high-quality coaching expertise within the organization.

The fact that the training courses are paid for by the organization was also seen as a good thing that increases commitment. As one interviewee explained *“When the club supports me with the fees and offers me opportunities, that's why I want to be in this club.” (Interviewee 6)* Interviewees highlighted that training has also a positive impact on pay, as one interviewee commented, *“The fact that training has an impact on wages has motivated me to attend.” (Interviewee 4)* These comments highlight

how the organization's financial support also strength employee commitment and motivation.

Especially in the early part of their coaching career, the interviewees had experienced support and mentoring. As one interviewee explained “*When I started, I got a lot of support from more experienced coaches while I was working, informally and naturally.*” (Interviewee 1) Another positive aspect by the interviewees was the open atmosphere for asking questions and helping within the organization. One interviewee told “*The atmosphere is such that you could propose, and influence and I think it would be accepted.*” (Interviewee 3) These observations reflect an organizational culture that values collaboration and open communication. The interviews reveal that the organization provides support especially on early career for new employees through guidance from more experienced coaches. This approach not only has an impact on the development of new employees, but also on the general culture of knowledge sharing in the organization.

As a summary of the aspects that are already working in training and development at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, interviewees highlighted that training opportunities are seen as important by the organization. Training was seen as supporting career development and job quality, and many appreciated that expertise was also available from within the organization. Working conditions and cooperation with the Finnish Gymnastics Federation were seen as supporting development, and camps were seen as an excellent learning environment. Financial support for training and the possibility of salary increases through training increased employee commitment. Mentoring and support from more experienced coaches was felt to be particularly useful in the early stages of a career, and the open atmosphere of the organization allowed for knowledge sharing.

### 4.2.3 Employee perspectives on areas for improvement in training and development

To make the organization as supportive as possible in terms of training and development opportunities for employees, it is important to find out from them what could be further improved within the organization. To this end, interviewees were asked if there was anything that could be improved to ensure that training and development opportunities serve employees as well as possible.

The interviewees brought up the fact that a lot of free time is used for the training, as it often takes place on days off. The interviewees hoped that the organization would organize more internal training, which could also be scheduled during working hours. One interviewee has mentioned *“The club itself has not offered internal training for a long time. The training is basically based on the model of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation.”* (Interviewee 7)

Both coordinators and other employees pointed to a lack of systematicity in recording the training courses attended. One coordinator noted that *“I have a lack of clarity as to what training each person has had, it is disorganized. It is difficult to manage the whole thing when you don't know everything.”* (Interviewee 11) On the other hand, the same interviewee said that *“Nobody really asks me what I want or what I could do next.”* (Interviewee 11) In turn, one employee without coordinator status stated that *“I'm not sure if my manager knows what trainings I have attended.”* (Interviewee 7) These comments highlight the need for systematic training records and communication about training opportunities in the organization in different positions.

Interviews revealed a positive organizational culture where training and development opportunities are encouraged and supported but also revealed challenges in communicating about training opportunities throughout the

organization. One interviewee described, *“More information about training and development opportunities within the club has been provided in person, but I feel that the organization hasn't marketed these opportunities for all the employees. I feel that my own position has an influence on how I hear about different trainings.”* (Interviewee 1) This likely reflects differences in daily presence or communication flow between roles, rather than intentional exclusion. Such observations highlight that there is a need for a more systematic and inclusive way of communicating about training opportunities in the organization, ensuring that all employees have an equal chance to participate.

The interviewees brought up the fact that there is no follow-up after attending the training and for putting things learned into practice. For example, one interviewee stated, *“In your own head you can think about what you have learned after some training, but the organization hasn't been watching this, you have had to take the initiative yourself.”* (Interviewee 5) Furthermore, the sharing of information after the training was mentioned as one of the areas for improvement in the interviews. One interviewee noted that *“It is rare to present what has been learned after training to others, the knowledge remains for one's own use.”* (Interviewee 6) These findings show that the organization lacks mechanisms on the competition side to ensure that employees have learned from training and can put it into practice. In this way, some of the potential benefits of training can be lost.

Although interviewees saw the positive side of a good atmosphere for asking questions and making suggestions, they felt that suggestions were not necessarily acted upon. One interviewee brought up that *“I can express my opinion, but I don't feel that it is considered very well.”* (Interviewee 8) In addition, one interviewee highlighted that *“If you want something to be organized based on your own ideas or suggestions, you have to be active and organize it yourself.”* (Interviewee 3) In addition, interviewees have felt that there is no clear place or person to express their wishes and suggestions

regarding training and development opportunities. One interviewee mentioned *“There’s not really a channel to give suggestions and I feel that there is a need for one.”* (Interviewee 7) These perspectives therefore suggest that while there is a culture in the organization that makes it easy to ask questions and make suggestions, the absence of clear structures for doing so may limit the willingness of employees to put forward their own ideas.

The interviews also highlighted the importance of feedback for employee development. Several interviewees felt that there was not enough feedback on their own work. For example, one interviewee stated that *“Very little encouragement to develop at work, hardly any feedback from the employer, hard to know if you are doing your job well or badly.”* (Interviewee 8) This highlights the importance of implementing more structured feedback mechanisms within the organization, ensuring that employees receive the guidance needed for their professional growth while also fostering greater job satisfaction.

As for what is already working, it was mentioned that employees are particularly satisfied with training and development early in their careers. However, interviewees also pointed out that after a certain level, the responsibility for training is left to the individual and more support is needed at this stage. As one interviewee stated, *“There is no offer for older or experienced coaches in the same way as for young and new coaches, nor is there training in a language other than Finnish, at least not to a great extent.”* (Interviewee 9) Additionally, interviewees also cited the professional status of the coach as a problem. For example, one interviewee wondered *“What should you do about training and development when you have already reached the highest level on coaching.”* (Interviewee 11) These observations suggest that while early-career coaches are supported by training in the organization, the needs of more experienced coaches should be better addressed in terms of training and development.

Summarizing the aspects that need improvement in training and development practices at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, interviewees highlighted that many trainings take place outside working hours, and they expressed a wish for more internal training that could be scheduled during working hours. Training records are not systematically maintained, making it difficult to monitor progress. Unequal access to training information was also a concern. There is no structured process for sharing knowledge or following up on training, making it difficult to ensure that learned skills are put into practice. A lack of structured feedback was also noted, with a need for development discussions. Finally, while early career coaches receive strong support, experienced coaches have limited opportunities for development, and there is a lack of trainings targeted at them.

#### **4.2.4 Employee-driven suggestions for improving training and development**

In the final section of the results, issues raised by employees regarding how training and development opportunities could be improved within the organization are presented. These suggestions are based on the themes addressed in the previous chapters. As one interviewee noted *“With a little effort, the quality of training and development could be improved if more experiences and tips were exchanged.”* (Interviewee 7)

Interviewees emphasized that focusing on specific pieces of information during the training days is not the best way to learn, but rather through on-the-job experiences. As one interviewee mentioned *“Training could be more personal and in your own environment, when training takes place in a different environment it is easier to forget things.”* (Interviewee 8) It was also pointed out that the timing of training makes a difference to learning. One interviewee suggested that *“It would be good if the training always takes place when you have gymnasts of the right age or level, then you can put the lessons into practice better.”* (Interviewee 6)

Interviewees pointed out that training and development efforts work within their own discipline, but challenges remain at the organizational level. Employees wanted more internal training and cooperation across disciplines. Interviewees emphasized that it would be good to have a clear process on how things work between different disciplines, so that it would be as rewarding as possible for employees. One interviewee highlighted that *“It would be important to regularly sit down and go through what kind of training each discipline and person needs and who will deliver it.”* (Interviewee 3) Many coaches work in competitive side under a single discipline, but interviewees expressed a desire for cooperation between disciplines. For example, one interviewee mentioned that *“It would be nice to have the opportunity to expand one's knowledge in other disciplines, so that more could be done within the club.”* (Interviewee 10) In addition, one interviewee suggested that *“Experts in different disciplines could hold training sessions for other coaches in their own sport, because you learn best by doing.”* (Interviewee 8)

Interviewees pointed out that closer observation of work and, for example, a mentor could be useful for training and development. One suggestion was, for example, that *“The coordinator or some other mentors come to observe the lesson and then gives feedback, after which we could discuss what is already good and what should be developed.”* (Interviewee 8) It was also considered a good idea to learn from other coaches while doing the job. One interviewee suggested that *“It would be useful if we could cross-monitor the coaching of other coaches and pay attention to, for example, group management, so to things other than sport-specific skills.”* (Interviewee 1)

One of the problems highlighted was the lack of information and a systematic approach. To address this, one suggestion was to create an internal annual list of available trainings. One interviewee proposed that *“I think it would be good to have a training path within the club, where you can see which training you need to attend and when.”* (Interviewee 4) In addition, another

interviewee suggested, for greater clarity, *"It would be a good idea to record in Excel the training courses that each person has attended and up to which point each person hopes to be trained."* (Interviewee 11)

Among the areas for improvement was the fact that training is not available to all employees. One interviewee suggested that *"Training could be more widely publicized, and all interested ones could be identified on an equal footing."* (Interviewee 1) One interviewee wondered, also that *"It would be good to have training in different languages, for example English, Swedish and Russian."* (Interviewee 12)

As a solution to the lack of knowledge transfer and record-keeping after training, one interviewee suggested the following *"There could be a workshop after the training, and everyone could take a booth depending on whether it is useful for them. However, it would be compulsory to present it to others, for example as a PowerPoint or a small lecture, after the training or camp."* (Interviewee 6)

One interviewee suggested that feedback can take a variety of forms, including *"verbal feedback, written feedback or that feedback could be a development discussion."* (Interviewee 10) These comments highlight the common desire of employees for a more structured feedback mechanism that would support their development and provide clarity on what is expected of them at work.

When the interviewees were asked about skills needed in their work, they mentioned many things in addition to the training of sport-specific skills. Discussing potential changes to training and development opportunities within the organization, interviewees put forward the following suggestions: nutrition training, first aid training, psychological coaching, pedagogical training, injury prevention, and support for making difficult decisions. These suggestions were mentioned by more than one interviewee and were therefore included in the findings of the study.

## **5 Discussion**

This chapter discusses the study's findings in relation to existing HRM theories and prior research on training and development in nonprofit sport organizations. It seeks to interpret how the results reflect, support or challenge previous literature, and to highlight key implications for both theory and practice.

### **5.1 HRM and SHRM approaches in practice: soft and hard HRM**

This section discusses how the findings of the study relate to HRM and SHRM approaches, particularly focusing on how employee needs and organizational goals are balanced in practice through soft and hard HRM. As noted in the literature, HRM and SHRM cannot be completely separated, even if one is more dominant in practice (Lekavičius, 2020). In this study, the focus is primarily on the employee perspective, which aligns more closely with HRM, although SHRM considerations are also relevant. While both approaches need to be considered, they often lead to conflicts between them (Ridder and McCandless, 2010). One of the key challenges in balancing HRM and SHRM is ensuring that employee satisfaction and organizational goals are not in conflict.

Organizations may believe that they are acting in the best interest of their employees but, in practice, prioritize organization efficiency over employee training and development (Goyal & Patwardhan, 2020). This tension can be seen in the case of Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, where training opportunities are documented in organizational strategies, but employees often must take responsibility for their own development and concrete actions are lacking. Support tends to be more visible early in an employee's career, but as experience grows, the responsibility for training increasingly shifts to the employee. This raises the question: Is this a result of limited resources, or has it become a part of the organization's culture?

Based on the findings of this study, it appears more likely that the issue stems from limited resources rather than a lack of supportive organizational culture. The interviewees emphasized a positive attitude toward training, the organization's willingness to cover training costs, and an open environment for professional development, suggesting that the culture is supportive. However, challenges in systematic implementation and sustained support suggest that resource constraints may hinder the practical realization of the organization's supportive attitude toward training and development. Literature suggests that organizations should take responsibility for providing structured training and development opportunities rather than relying on employees to initiate their own learning (Jehanzeb & Beshir, 2013).

In the academic literature, two broad approaches to HRM are often identified: soft and hard HRM (Truss et al., 1997). Soft HRM emphasizes employee development, motivation and commitment (Legge, 1995). Hard HRM, in turn, emphasizes that resources are ultimately directed towards the effective functioning of the organization (Gill, 1999). Both perspectives are visible in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry after interviews and reviewing other documents of the organization. Literature supports the notion that organizations often exhibit both soft and hard HRM elements (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007).

Based on the interviews, the positive organizational attitude toward training, evidenced by willingness to cover training costs and support professional development, has a positive impact on employee motivation and commitment. This aligns with the literature, which suggests that while pay and benefits play an important role in employee selection and retention, employees are also motivated by opportunities for training and professional growth (Wagner, 2000).

One challenge identified was the limited structure for on-the-job training. The importance of on-the-job training, such as mentoring, job rotation and

internal training and development opportunities, are well recognized in the literature, especially in nonprofit sport organizations, where such approaches are often more cost-effective and practical than off-the-job training (Maršíková & Šlaichová, 2015; Raheja, 2015). However, the employees involved in this study reported that these opportunities were limited, which restricted their ability to develop their practical skills beyond the early stages of their careers.

Moreover, although some literature suggests that managerial employees are more likely to receive training than other staff (McMullen & Schellenberg, 2003), this pattern was not clearly reflected in the results of this study. Interviewees did not report any significant difference in training opportunities between managerial and non-managerial employees, suggesting that the distribution of training is not necessarily based on hierarchical position in the organization. This highlights a possible lack of structured development pathways, as there does not appear to be a systematic approach to ensure continuous learning at different levels of responsibility. When training is personalized within the organization, it aligns more closely with soft HRM principles. In contrast, when training is provided at a more general level, hard HRM characteristics become more prominent. The lack of a clearly differentiated training path for managers and other employees at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry may indicate that the principles of soft HRM are not systematically implemented across all employee groups.

The findings show that HRM at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry lacks a coherent strategy for long-term employee development. While employees value existing training and development opportunities, improvements are needed in the accessibility of training, structured feedback mechanisms and the integration of learning into daily work practices. By addressing these areas, the organization can create a more structured and sustainable training system that aligns employee development with strategic goals, ultimately benefiting both the employees and the organization. By reviewing the literature and analyzing the results, it was found that Espoon Telinetaiturit

ry considers the training and development of its employees, but concrete actions have been limited.

## **5.2 Challenges and opportunities in nonprofit sport organizations**

Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, as a nonprofit sport organization, prioritizes serving its community over productivity and efficiency. However, maintaining efficiency is essential for its sustainability. Especially in nonprofit sport organizations, where financial incentives are not the primary factor in employee retention, training and development play a crucial role in maintaining employee satisfaction and commitment (Alatrasta and Arrowsmith, 2004).

While the organization demonstrates a positive commitment to training and development, some employees have expressed in interviews that training is not always prioritized or enabled as part of their work. This indicates that Espoon Telinetaiturit ry could try to focus more on ensuring that the needs of employees meet the organization's goals. In practical terms, this means increasing the accessibility of training, creating structured feedback mechanisms, and integrating learning into daily work practices.

A contradiction arises in that while training and development are recognized as important at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry, their actual implementation lacks structure. If support decreases over time, motivation must increasingly come from within. The situation may not be sustainable in the long term, as employees who do not receive continuous development opportunities may experience stagnation or disengagement.

By addressing the areas identified in this study, the organization can create training and development practices that align the needs of employees while ensuring that the strategic objectives of the organization are met. In this study the practical solutions have been raised from the interviews, but areas for improvement have been supported also by literature. Table 5 below summarizes the practices that currently work well in the organization

regarding training and development, as well as key areas for improvement and suggested practical solutions.

*Table 5: Overview of strengths and improvement areas in the training and development practices of Espoon Telinetaiturit ry*

<b>Area</b>	<b>What already works</b>	<b>Practical solutions</b>
Organizational attitude towards training and development	Positive attitude towards training and development  Training is paid for by the organization  Especially in the early stages of a career	-
Internal expertise and facilities	There is already a lot of potential within the organization itself to teach things to other employees  Physical training environments and tools for training and development are good	-
Collaboration with Finnish Gymnastics Federation	Cooperation with the Finnish Gymnastics Federation provides external training opportunities  The camps organized by the Finnish Gymnastics Federation provide opportunities for employee training and development	-
On-the-job training	-	More internal trainings in own work environment  Mentoring and job rotation  More personal guidance, especially after early career
Systematicity and fairness among employees	-	Tracking training attendance and future preferences using an Excel-based system

		<p>Annual calendar about trainings</p> <p>Training broadly at the level of the whole organization</p>
Transfer of learning	-	<p>Everyone's responsibility to ensure that the knowledge learned is put into practice</p> <p>Within own discipline: sharing insights in team meetings</p> <p>At the organizational level: a common digital platform to store notes and key findings from the trainings</p>
Providing feedback	-	<p>Oral or written feedback</p> <p>Development discussions with managers</p> <p>Both positive and negative feedback</p> <p>Training on receiving and giving feedback, enabling colleagues to give feedback to each other as well</p>
Versatile training	-	<p>Nutrition training, first aid training, psychological coaching, pedagogical training, injury prevention and support for making difficult decisions</p> <p>More attention to these skills: team management, organization skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, working with different age groups and pedagogical skills</p> <p>More investment in training for managers</p> <p>Trainings with different languages</p>

## 6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine employee perceptions of the strengths and areas for improvement in training and development opportunities at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry. Through a review of relevant literature, analysis of organizational documents and interviews, the key strengths and areas for improvement were identified. This chapter summarizes the main findings, highlights the study's theoretical and practical contributions and provides suggestions for future research. The findings from the literature review provided a foundation for analyzing these aspects through the lens of HRM, particularly within the context of nonprofit sport organizations.

### 6.1 Main findings and theoretical contribution

*RQ1: How do employees at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry perceive the current training and development opportunities within the organization?*

Employees feel that Espoon Telinetaiturit ry has a positive attitude towards training and development. The interviews showed that the organization provides financial support for training, and employees perceive this as an important factor for motivation and commitment to the organization. This is in line with previous research that shows that training opportunities improve job satisfaction and employee commitment to the organization (Wagner, 2000).

However, the interviews also revealed challenges that employees perceive with current training and development opportunities. While interviewees appreciated the training they had participated in, they expressed a desire for more on-the-job training within their own working environment. Given that nonprofit sport organizations often benefit from hands-on learning, as highlighted in the literature, on-the-job training should be a key focus for Espoon Telinetaiturit ry to enhance training and development (Taylor et al., 2008).

The second challenge identified relates to the systematic nature of training. Employees perceive that training is well structured early in their careers, but as they gain experience, opportunities for development become fewer and the responsibility for professional development shifts more to the individual. This finding differs somewhat from previous research that suggests that continuous learning throughout a career is essential for long-term development and retention (Jehanzeb & Beshir, 2013).

A third challenge was the transfer of learning into practice. Interviewees felt that what they learnt in training is not always effectively applied at work and that knowledge sharing within the organization is fragmented. This contradicts the literature, which emphasizes that once trainees have completed training, managers should actively support the transfer process by removing barriers and ensuring that trainees have opportunities to apply new skills and receive feedback (Salas et al., 2012).

A fourth key gap relates to feedback. Employees reported that they receive little or no formal feedback on their performance, making it difficult to monitor personal development. The literature supports this finding, as constructive feedback is key to improving learning outcomes and motivation (Hattie et al., 2017).

Finally, employees also pointed out the limited scope of the content of the trainings. Interviews revealed that the focus of training is largely on sport-specific skills, but employees feel that versatile skills, such as pedagogical and interpersonal skills, are required to succeed in the workplace. This feeling of employees is also supported by the literature, which has highlighted the importance of versatile training and skills (Truss et al., 1997).

These findings reflect the coexistence of soft and hard HRM principles within the organization. While soft HRM principles are reflected in the organization's commitment to training and development opportunities,

aspects of hard HRM, such as resource constraints, limit the extent to which employees' needs are fully considered. The emphasis on soft HRM is not as strong as it could be, leaving employees with greater responsibility for their own professional growth.

*RQ2: How could Espoon Telinetaiturit ry's training and development opportunities better meet the needs of its employees?*

Based on the findings, employees highlighted several key areas where training and development opportunities could better meet the needs of employees in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry. These include improving on-the-job training, making training and development opportunities more systematic and fairer, ensuring the transfer of learning, strengthening feedback mechanisms and extending training opportunities beyond sport-specific skills.

While the theoretical literature provides an important basis for understanding training and development practices, this study has focused more on identifying concrete, organization-specific recommendations for improving training and development opportunities in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry. The next section presents practical implications for addressing these challenges and ensuring that training and development opportunities effectively support employees' needs.

## **6.2 Practical implications**

The following practical implications are based on an analysis of the collected data and existing HRM literature. They are designed to address the key areas for improvement identified in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry and to provide concrete ways to improve training and development practices in the organization.

**1. On-the-job training:** On-the-job training can be improved by increasing internal training opportunities within the organization, incorporating mentoring and job rotation and providing ongoing personal guidance beyond the early career stage.

**2. Systematicity and fairness among employees:** Training participation and future training preferences could be tracked using an Excel-based system, while an annual training calendar would help structure opportunities more effectively. Additionally, training should be organized comprehensively at the organizational level to ensure equal access for all employees.

**3. Transfer of learning:** Ensuring that acquired knowledge is put into practice is a shared responsibility. Within each discipline, insights can be exchanged in coach meetings, while at the organizational level, a common digital platform can be used to store notes and key findings from trainings.

**4. Providing feedback:** Feedback could be provided both orally and in writing, and development discussions with managers play a key role in the process. It is important to ensure a balance between positive and negative feedback. Additionally, training in both giving and receiving feedback can help create a culture where colleagues feel comfortable providing feedback to each other. The importance of feedback was also highlighted in previous job satisfaction surveys, where employees rated “I get enough feedback on my work” as one of the weakest areas. This finding was further reinforced in the interviews, underlining the need to improve feedback practices systematically in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry.

**5. Versatile training:** In addition to sport-specific expertise, training and development opportunities should be expanded to include topics such as nutrition, first aid, psychological coaching, pedagogical training, injury prevention, and decision-making support. Additionally, more focus should

be placed on developing key skills such as team management, organization, communication, and working with diverse age groups. Greater investment in managerial training and offering courses in multiple languages would improve employee satisfaction.

In addition to addressing the needs of the case organization, these recommendations contribute to the broader improvement of training and development practices within the nonprofit sport sector. Given that nonprofit sport organizations often operate with limited resources, and rely heavily on employee commitment, these proposals will not only benefit individual organizations but also strengthen the sector as a whole.

### **6.3 Suggestions for future research**

As a next step, Espoon Telinetaiturit ry should explore the practical implementation of these improvements to better meet employee needs. Further research could investigate why the objectives of soft HRM have not been fully realized in the organization. While limited resources are likely a contributing factor, they may not provide a complete explanation. Understanding these challenges would require insights not just from employees but primarily from the organization's management and board. Therefore, the management and board of the organization could also be interviewed in the future to gain a better understanding of the training and development opportunities in the organization.

To compare the results of this study with other similar organizations, more research on the training and development opportunities in nonprofit sport organizations is needed. In addition, as the world evolves rapidly, and technology opens increasingly diverse opportunities, training and development could be examined more closely from the perspective of technological advancements. In this study, online platform-based training was not specifically addressed, making it a potential area for further research. This could be explored more broadly in nonprofit sport organizations or

specifically within this organization. In addition, although the lack of training for managers was mentioned as one of the areas for improvement, further research is required to determine what kind of training would be most beneficial for them within the organization. Management training is a multifaceted area and could be covered in more detail than in this research.

By considering observations of what is already working, suggestions for improvement and areas for further research, Espoon Telinetaituri ry can improve training and development opportunities that better meet the needs of employees but also support the overall functioning and goals of the organization. Strengthening training and development practices supports not only the professional growth and well-being of employees but also enhances the sustainability and impact of nonprofit sport organizations. By investing in its employees, Espoon Telinetaituri ry sets an example of how employee-driven development can promote long-term employee commitment, the achievement of organizational goals, and broader societal impact in a mutually reinforcing way.

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## Appendix A: Interview questions

<p><i>Interview question 1</i></p>	<p>Please introduce yourself and describe your current role at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry. In which year did you start working for the organization?</p>
<p><i>Interview question 2</i></p>	<p>What skills do you consider essential in your job?</p>
<p><i>Interview question 3</i></p>	<p>How would you describe the current training and development opportunities at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry? Could you provide concrete examples of the types of training you have participated in?</p>
<p><i>Interview question 4</i></p>	<p>Have you encountered more training that is integrated into your work or training that is given separate time outside working hours, or both? What benefits and drawbacks do you see in these types of training?</p>
<p><i>Interview question 5</i></p>	<p>Since you began working in this organization, has the amount of training offered to employees increased, decreased, or remained approximately the same?</p>
<p><i>Interview question 6</i></p>	<p>What positive aspects do you currently see related to the training and development opportunities at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry?</p>
<p><i>Interview question 7</i></p>	<p>What improvements would you like to see in training and development opportunities? Is there any area that could be added or that does not yet exist but is needed?</p>
<p><i>Interview question 8</i></p>	<p>Do you feel that you have received adequate information about the various training opportunities within Espoon Telinetaiturit ry? How and from whom?</p>

<p><i>Interview question 9</i></p>	<p>Do you feel that you have been able to actively apply what you have learned in your work? How has this been supported?</p>
<p><i>Interview question 10</i></p>	<p>How do you perceive the impact of training and development on your motivation and commitment to the organization?</p>
<p><i>Interview question 11</i></p>	<p>How can employees participate in the planning and development of training in Espoon Telinetaiturit ry? Do you feel comfortable asking for help or making suggestions if you have any?</p>
<p><i>Interview question 12</i></p>	<p>Do you have any suggestions for new training programs or development opportunities that you would like to see at Espoon Telinetaiturit ry?</p>
<p><i>Interview question 13</i></p>	<p>In the latest job satisfaction survey, the statement “I am encouraged to develop in my job” received one of the lowest ratings in the overall results. What factors do you think might have influenced this result?</p>

## Appendix B: Using of AI in the Thesis

The table below describes the purpose for which AI was used during the thesis process.

<b>Purpose of using AI</b>	<b>Description</b>
Support for writing	AI was used to support writing by checking grammar, refining language, and verifying terminology.