

Aalto University

School of Science

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Iines Vuorjoki

# **Solving Challenges and Opportunities – Applying Design Thinking into Human Resource Development**

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Supervisor: Jari Ylitalo

Advisor: Ville Ojanen

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**Author** Iines Vuorjoki

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The world of work today is complex and constantly changing. It requires organizations and employees to continuously learn new skills, adapt, and change behavior. Instead of struggling with finding talent and needed skills, many organizations are focusing more energy towards developing talent and skills within the organization. Hence, Human resource development (HRD) functions have gathered more interest among researchers and practitioners.

This research aims to gather qualitative data on the current state of Finnish HRD practices and suggest how the area of human resource development could improve through the application of design methods. The data was collected from 11 case companies through semi-structured interviews with HRD professionals.

The study suggests that HRD professionals are currently trying to solve challenges and opportunities related to supporting learning, sharing the responsibility of learning, and combining strategic objectives with individual needs through learning and development. The case companies are keen on decentralizing the responsibility of learning, so that it divides between different stakeholders within the organization. Much emphasis is put onto the individuals, and for them to communicate their developmental needs and wishes. Supervisors have a significant impact in supporting learning and communicating learning needs. The HRD's role is more of an enabler; they provide sufficient learning opportunities and work in combining the strategy with the employees' needs and wishes.

The research also indicates that design thinking, its tools and methods could be applied onto HRD practices. Design practices could help in making the process more user-centered. It could allow HRD functions to find and create solutions that provide better effectivity and results.

This study provides knowledge onto the constantly changing and evolving field of HRD and highlights new focus areas for both researchers and practitioners.

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Tämän päivän työelämä on monimutkainen ja jatkuvan muutoksen alla. Tämä työelämän muuttuva luonne vaatii yrityksiä ja työntekijöitä oppimaan uusia taitoja, sopeutumaan ja muuttamaan käytäntöjään jatkuvasti. Sen sijaan, että organisaatiot yrittävät löytämään uutta ja tarvittua taitoa yrityksen ulkopuolelta, he ovat suunnanneet enemmän energiaa organisaation sisäisen tiedon ja taidon kehittämiseen. Siksi henkilöstön kehittämisen ala kerää yhä enemmän huomiota ja kiinnostusta tutkijoiden ja ammattilaisten keskuudessa.

Tämä tutkimus pyrkii keräämään kvalitatiivista tietoa henkilöstön kehittämisen tilasta suomalaisissa organisaatioissa. Lisäksi, tutkimus pyrkii ymmärtämään miten henkilöstön kehityksen alaa voisi kehittää muotoiluajattelun keinoin. Tutkimustieto kerättiin laadullisilla haastatteluilla 11 suomalaisen yrityksen henkilöstön kehittämisen asiantuntijoiden kanssa.

Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että henkilöstön kehittämisen ammattilaiset kamppailevat parhaillaan oppimisen tukitehtävien, oppimisvastuun, sekä strategian ja yksilön tavoitteiden yhdistämisen kanssa. Tutkimuksessa mukana olleet yritykset pyrkivät hajauttamaan oppimisen vastuuta organisaation eri sidosryhmille. He näkevät, että yksilön rooli ja vastuu oppimisessa on suuri; heidän tulisi nostaa esiin omia kehitystavoitteitansa. Esihenkilöillä on tärkeä rooli oppimisen tukemisessa sekä oppimismahdollisuuksien viestimässä. Henkilöstön kehittämisen ammattilaisten rooli on muuttunut enemmän mahdollistajaksi; heidän tehtävänä on tarjota riittävästi relevantteja oppimismahdollisuuksia, sekä yhdistää yksilön kehitystarpeita ja organisaation strategisia kehitystavoitteita.

Lisäksi, tutkimus ehdottaa, että muotoiluajattelu, sekä sen työkalut ja metodit voisivat tukea henkilöstön kehittämisen ammattilaisia siten, että prosessista tulisi käyttäjakeskeisempi. Muotoiluajattelu voisi auttaa henkilöstön kehittämisen ammattilaisia löytämään ja luomaan oppimiskäytäntöjä, jotka tarjoavat entistä parempia tuloksia ja tehokkuutta.

Tämä tutkimus tarjoaa lisätietoa jatkuvan muutoksen ja edistyksen alla olevaan henkilöstön kehittämisen alaan – niin tutkijoillekin, kuin ammattilaisille.

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**Avainsanat** Henkilöstön kehittäminen, HRD, Muotoiluajattelu, Strateginen henkilöstön kehittäminen, SHRD, Työssä oppiminen, Oppimisen tuki, L&D

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# Foreword

The process of writing this thesis endured plenty of hard work and emotions from excitement to frustration and back. I am most grateful for all the support I received and everyone I encountered during the process. It brought me joy to see how others got as excited on the topic – your encouragement and thoughts brought even more meaningfulness to my research.

Firstly, I want to thank my thesis supervisor Jari. Your endless support and our nearly endless discussions truly helped me move forward and collect the best bits and pieces to work with. I hope you found this process as fruitful as I did.

Secondly, all of you who participated in the interviews – a big thank you! The best part of this study was no doubt, the discussions with you. I truly enjoyed each interview and am grateful for the opportunity to discuss with such brilliant experts in the field. I am hoping for more of those discussions, even though this thesis is now finished.

Finally, I want to thank all my friends, family and colleagues who have supported me through the ups and downs of this project – and throughout my university career. I do not believe I would have reached this far without you.

For the reader, I hope you enjoy reading this thesis. I hope you gain new insights, thoughts, and ideas, and that you have the courage to try and put them into practice. I am most pleased to continue the discussion with anyone who wants to reach out.

Although my studies are now coming to an end, I do not want to end learning. And for all the companies out there – I wish you continue providing meaningful learning opportunities for everyone.

Helsinki, 25 February 2023

Ilnes Vuorjoki

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# **1. Introduction**

This research studies the current state of Human Resource Development – further referred to as HRD – practices and aims to understand what challenges and opportunities HRD professionals are facing. The goal of this study is to create a thorough understanding of the HRD field at its current state and give recommendations onto which areas future researchers and practitioners could focus. Following the idea of design, this study focuses both on understanding the current state and challenges of HRD practices and on observing whether design practices could be applicable to enhance those practices. The underlying idea of design thinking is that the current state of the matter should be well understood before proceeding to creating solutions. For example, to create a profitable new service, you must understand who would benefit from the service, what value would it bring or what problem would it solve. However, although this research gives some initial recommendations and suggestions for future researchers and practitioners, the creation and testing of these recommendations fall out of the scope of this study, due to the nature, depth, and length of a master's thesis.

This first chapter briefly describes the motivation for the study and background information about current trends and needs in the HRD field. A hypothesis is made, and it is followed by the objectives and research questions. Finally, the structure of the thesis is presented.

## **1.1 Background and Motivation**

The complexity and the changing nature of the world of work today, requires organizations and employees to continuously adapt, change, and learn new skills. Organizations are currently struggling with finding talent and needed skills, thus more focus is aimed at developing talent and skills within the organization (Noe, et al., 2014; Workday Designers, 2021). Crook et al. (2011) suggest that a company's competitive advantage relies heavily on its intangible resources, such as human capital. Hence, organizations are putting more effort into developing and maintaining sufficient talent and skills, and learning has become an inevitable part of today's work.

To enable workplace learning, companies have created Human Resource Development (HRD) functions. HRD has been recognized within researchers already in the 1960's (Hamlin & Stewart, 2011). According to Hamlin and Stewart (2011), there is no single definition for HRD that researchers and practitioners agree on. However, certain key characteristics and purposes appear in most of the suggested definitions. In short, Hamlin and Stewart highlight that the goal of HRD is to improve individual, group, and organizational performance, develop knowledge, skills, and competencies, and enhance human potential. While the definitions for HRD vary, so do the processes, methods, and theories HRD professionals rely on. As organizations, employees, and situations are also different, this variance in thought and practice may not be an issue, rather an opportunity to tailor solutions accordingly (Garavan, et al., 2007). Moreover, as the need for workplace learning has been well recognized among practitioners and researchers, nowadays, more focus is put onto how to manage and support learning, as well as measuring and improving its effectiveness.

Another area with varying definitions and terminology, is the field of design. Best (2006) describes design as both a verb and a noun – it is both a process of doing, and the final result. Over the years, design and its methods and processes have expanded onto new fields such as business and service development (Brown, 2008). Buchanan (1992), suggests that perhaps design and design thinking have expanded to several new fields, because design is not related to any specific subject matter, and because design processes are flexible. Design can be applied onto many fields of the human experience, and the specific subject comes from the designer and the problem they are aiming to solve. Hence, this expansion of a designerly approach could also be applied into HRD. Moreover, Garavan, et al. (2007) suggest that as the HRD profession becomes more complex, new challenges will occur that will in turn need solving. They further clarify that HRD professionals could benefit from new perspectives to give birth to novel solutions. Moreover, Mootee (2011) argues that the habits and processes of design thinking are natural for all of us, not only for the designers.

Thus, the implementation of design thinking into HRD practices could be beneficial for both the HRD practitioners and the employees within these organizations. As the underlying idea of design thinking is that by truly empathizing and understanding the users current state, challenges, and opportunities, one can create better and more user-centered products and services (Best, 2006).



## 1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

To improve employee training and learning, it is crucial to understand the people who design, buy, and implement the training programs. Often these tasks are performed by a company's HRD team. To help them create and maintain a sustainable learning culture, we must understand them better: what resources do they have, what theories and practices do they rely on, and what challenges do they face. Thus, the aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of HRD teams' state, practices, resources, and views. By creating a better understanding of HRD teams' current state, we can better define their problems and needs, and thus gather important information to answer the demands. Secondly, this research aims to observe whether design thinking is already seen and utilized in HRD practices, or whether it could be applied. This objective relies heavily on the hypothesis that a designerly approach could bring benefits for HRD teams and their practices when designing, leading, and supporting employee training. Moreover, a design approach could potentially make the learning conventions more user-centered, and thus improve their effectivity. Finally, based on the findings and observations gathered during the study, the aim is to combine theory with practice, and to create recommendations on how HRD teams could further improve their performance, efficiency, and practices.

Based on these objectives, two research questions were formed as follows:

**RQ1:** What challenges and opportunities HRD teams have in designing and supporting learning and development?

**RQ2:** Could design thinking be used to better design and support employee training?

The first research question focuses on the current state of the HRD teams. Moreover, it brings focus onto what challenges and opportunities HRD teams are aiming to conquer. The second research question aims to understand whether a design approach could be applied onto HRD practices, or whether HRD professionals have already taken advantage of design methods. Based on these two questions, this research aims to comprise a thorough understanding of the current state and future possibilities for HRD practices.

### **1.3 Structure of the Study**

This research begins with a literature review that aims to gather information about the current state of HRD. The focus will be on current HRD theories, practices, objectives, and potential challenges along with brief explanation of design thinking models. To combine theory with practice and to gather more extensive knowledge on the field, further empirical research will be conducted via interviews.

Chapter 2 will discuss the theoretical background of HRD's current state and design-thinking. In Chapter 3, the methodology behind the empirical research will be explained. Chapter 4 focuses on the findings and results that are drawn from theory and the empirical research. Final analysis and discussion will be presented in Chapter 5.

## **2. Background**

This second chapter presents relevant background, articles, studies, and theories for the thesis. In section 2.1, I examine HRD practices and the underlying theory. This section aims to provide a clear view on the current state of HRD, its challenges, and rising trends. In section 2.2, I discuss workplace learning and what is HRD's role in it. I examine how adults learn at work and how employee learning is supported. In the last part, section 2.3, I examine design thinking, its theoretical background, and where and how it is applied into practice. As the aim of this research is to understand what challenges HRD practitioners have and conceptualize whether design thinking tools could potentially solve some of these challenges, this third section aims to provide sufficient background and knowledge to create suggestions for further research and practitioners.

### **2.1 Human Resource Development**

The constant changes of the world require individuals and organizations to change, learn, and develop (Lemmetty & Collin, 2022). As learning has become an essential part of the world of work, more focus is put on human resource development and its functions. To provide a sufficient background for the empirical part of this research, this section investigates research on HRD, its core purposes, as well as workplace learning, and its current trends.

#### **2.1.1 Core Purposes of Human Resource Development**

The term Human Resource Development (HRD) has several definitions, theories, and models that are both complementing and competing (Garavan, et al., 2007; Hamlin and Stewart, 2011). According to Hamlin and Stewart (2011), there are over 20 definitions of HRD presented after the 1960s. This segmentation of theory can cause difficulties within researchers and practitioners (Wang and McLean, 2007), yet it can also be seen as an opportunity to remain creative, find new perspectives, and better comprehend the complexity of the field (Garavan, et al., 2007, p.3; Mankin, 2001). Furthermore, as organizations are different and under constantly changing environments, Garavan, et al. (2007) argue that it can be beneficial to have

multiple theories that can be adapted into each organization and their culture. On the contrary, Wang (from Wang and McLean, 2007) argues that the lack of a clear and unified definition presents the field as immature and discourages further development.

In their study, Hamlin and Stewart (2011) investigated the various definitions of HRD and aimed to clarify what HRD's purpose is. They did not create a clear definition for HRD, but they recognized four core purposes from which two or more were presented in most of the compared definitions'. As some consensus was found within the definitions they reviewed, they suggested a unified definition could be created later. The four core purposes of HRD, suggested by Hamlin and Stewart (2011, p. 210), are:

- *“Improving individual or group effectiveness and performance”*
- *“Improving organizational effectiveness and performance”*
- *“Developing knowledge, skills, and competencies”*
- *“Enhancing human potential and personal growth”*

In addition, the link between these core purposes and business strategy should be considered. The definition of Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) presents HRD activities in connection with the organization's strategic goals (Garavan, 2007). According to Garavan (2007), SHRD's goal is to align the HRD activities with the strategic business goals, by developing knowledge that is specific to the organization. Moreover, in the book *Strategic Human Resource Management* (cited in Tseng and McLean, 2008), Garavan argues that SHRD must engage several stakeholders in their activities and carefully consider the external environment to understand the competition and market they are operating in.

To create a better focus for this research, these four core purposes along with the strategic approach will be used as the basis of HRD, and they will be compared to the empirical research results. A definition of HRD used in this research is described as follows:

“HRD's aim is to improve individual, group, and organizational effectiveness and performance by developing strategically important knowledge, skills, and competencies, and enhancing human potential and personal growth.”

## 2.1.2 Workplace learning and Human Resource Development

Learning has become an increasingly important part of work, because developing human capital is essential for gaining competitive advantage (Noe, et al. 2014). This thesis refers to learning as a process of acquiring new knowledge and skills, and changing behavior and attitudes (Billett, 2004). According to Crook et al. (2011), the company's competitive advantage is highly affected by its intangible resources, the human capital. Noe, et al. (2014) argue that organizations' human resource development activities, along with other factors such as work design and policies, play an essential role in how knowledge is gained, transferred, and utilized. Therefore, they imply that HRD practices affect companies' ability and effectiveness in gaining a competitive advantage in the market.

Traditionally, workplace learning has emphasized the importance of formal learning and training (Noe, et al., 2014). Nowadays, research shows that more companies are aiming to develop informal learning practices, change the perception of learning, and integrate learning and training to the business strategy and other development activities (Anderson, 2015; Noe, et al., 2014). Doornbos et al. (2008) define informal learning as the changes in cognitive activities, behaviors, skills, and attitudes. These include learning through self-reflection, learning from other people, and learning from other sources such as books, articles, and videos. Noe, et al. (2014) imply that with these changes, learning has become a more natural part of work, it is more self-directed, and the social environment has a larger impact on it.

Clardy (2018) further suggests that organizations are shifting more focus onto informal learning. Formerly, a popularly known distinction between formal and informal learning is the so-called 70% model. The 70% model claims that 70% or more of workplace learning happens informally. The model is often attached to a distinction that the remaining percentage divides onto 20% of developmental relationships, and 10% of formal learning conventions although other models have also been suggested (Clardy, 2018). Clardy however argues that the research behind the 70% model is vague, questionable, and insufficient, hence it should not be utilized strictly. They rather suggest that HRD function should focus efforts on the effectivity of all types of learning. Thus, HRD's role should shift between a trainer, a designer, a facilitator, and a manager of learning. Clardy defines the structuring of workplace learning as follows:

*“...defining the desired learning objectives of the process; providing organized instructional materials, resources, and/or experiences; preparing the learner and/or the trainer,*

*supervisor, mentor, and/or coach to carry out and/or support the activities; assuring access to the right people at the right time; establishing evaluative procedures to verify meeting the objectives; and/or using some kind of administrative oversight to the process.”*

Moreover, research suggests that although companies could focus only on formal or informal learning, it is not recommended (Cameron & Harrison, 2012; Clardy, 2018). As most of the crucial learning happens informally, formal learning alone does not provide sufficient results. Similarly, informal learning alone is not sufficient (Clardy, 2018). Clardy suggests that focusing only on informal learning, may cause inequalities in learning opportunities, as some individuals are less likely to participate or take advantage of informal learning opportunities.

### **2.1.3 Current trends for learning and development**

Development needs vary significantly between countries, markets, and companies – even among teams and individuals. However, some trends are visible within learning and development – further referred to as L&D – throughout the working labor (Dondi et al. 2021). For example, in Anderson’s research (2015) with Chief Learning Officers (CLO) the results showed that in 2015, CLO’s were looking to implement more informal learning practices, provide more self-paced online learning possibilities, and to better integrate learning into company strategies and other talent management activities. Informal learning is considered as those activities that take place outside of structured workplace learning events. It is often spontaneous and happens through everyday interactions and experiences. Informal learning activities could be for example asking for help and advice or happen through trial and error. However, Billett (2020) suggests that even informal learning can be guided and supported through pedagogical and relevant practices. Moreover, Anderson’s (2015) research revealed that greater emphasis was placed on self-paced and self-directed learning, as well as online learning opportunities.

As workplace learning shifts more onto informal learning conventions, the learning becomes more self-directed, and the learners’ responsibility grows (see e.g., Noe, et al. 2014; Bell 2017). Lemmetty and Collin (2022) argue that the responsibility for learning should not lie only on the individuals, as the results of learning may benefit the whole organization, or even the society. They further elaborate that the responsibility of learning should lie on all stakeholders

accordingly. For example, the government can fund workplace learning, the HRD can organize learning opportunities, the supervisors can support and guide the learning, and the individual decides what to learn and how much effort they wish to put into it.

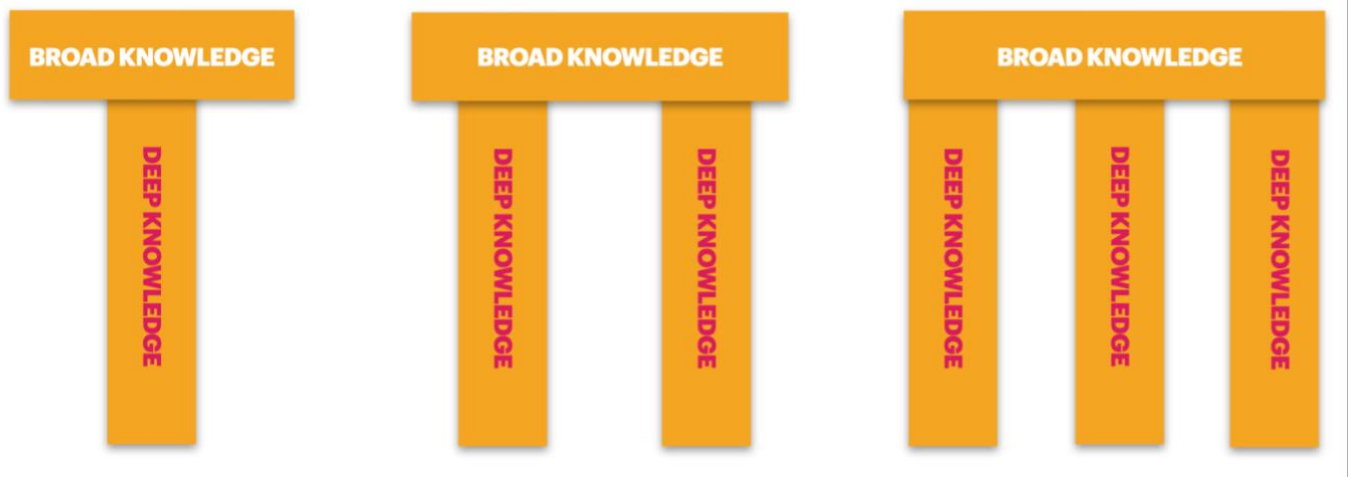
A recent workplace trend report from Workday Designers (2021) revealed that many HR professionals were struggling with finding talent. Hence, the focus is shifting more onto developing talents, knowledge, and skills. Furthermore, The Workday Designers' report emphasized making learning visible within the company and focusing on learning while doing and making learning part of the everyday life. The HR representatives who were involved in the study, believed that employee development helps not only in gaining competitive advantage, but also in making the workforce more committed, wellbeing, and achieve greater results.

Regarding trending skills and talent, Dondi et al. (2021) studied which skills people see relevant in the future. Their research gathered insights from 18,000 people in 15 countries. Through these findings the authors created a list of 56 skills or attitudes that will likely be relevant in the future, even when automations and new technologies take over jobs. They argued that as the importance of technical and physical skills will diminish new skills like social, emotional, and technological skills will reach greater emphasis. Dondi's study further emphasized that people with better proficiency in these areas, were likely to be employed with high incomes and more satisfied with their work. Moreover, these skills and attitudes are essential for people to add value, operate in a digital environment, and continuously adapt to new ways of working.

Moreover, Conley et al. (2017) suggest that the complexity of the world requires for knowledge and expertise from a diversity of disciplines. They argue that individuals are required to have both deep expertise in a certain field, and cross-disciplinary skills to engage with other experts and fields of knowledge. This distinction is also called T-shaped expertise, and it is often related to IT workers (see Figure 2.1.3). The depth of expertise is represented by the vertical part of the 'T', and breadth of expertise by the horizontal part of the 'T' (see e.g., Conley, et al., 2017; Heinemann, 2009; Wetcho et al. 2022). For example, the deep knowledge could consist of expertise in a certain system or a tool, and the broad knowledge would consist of skills such as communication, management, and business processes (Heinemann, 2009). Several other models have been proposed, including the Pi-shaped model (see e.g., Burry &

White, 2020), which suggest having deep expertise in two areas, along with broad expertise, or an M-shaped model which highlights combining three areas of deep knowledge along with broad knowledge (Wetcho et al. 2022) (see Figure 2.1.3).

*Figure 2.1.3: T-shaped expertise, Pi-shaped expertise, and M-shaped expertise (Combined from: Conley, et al., 2017; Heinemann, 2009; Wetcho et al. 2022; Burry & White, 2020)*



## 2.2 Supporting factors of employee learning

Noe, et al. (2014) implied that learning has become more self-directed and learner controlled. This shift gives employees better autonomy and greater impact on what and how they learn and could thus ease the workload of HRD practitioners. However, Bell and Kozlowski (2002) argue that increasing learner-control can cause learning to become ineffective. They imply that although this could seem a cost-effective way to develop human capital, learners are different and require differing assistance from HRD.

### 2.2.1 Learning Individuals

Regarding prerequisites for learning, the learning environment should be supportive (Noe, et al., 2014), the learner should have internal motivation (Bell, 2017), and perceive the knowledge meaningful (Salas, et al., 2012). In addition to these, learning requires time and energy (Russ-Eft, 2002). Hence, learning demands for prerequisites. Noe, et al. (2014) suggest there are three



areas that learning design and learning designers should consider. The first area is creating conditions where “*the learner is both actively participating and socially embedded with other learners and the instructor*”. The second focus area emphasizes the learners’ autonomy in deciding what to learn. Finally, the third focus area suggests arranging collaborative learning conventions. As learning is increasingly happening online (Noe, et al. 2014), and becoming more self-paced, it changes the learner’s role in the process. Nowadays, learning requires more self-determination and self-leadership skills. Regarding autonomy, some structure and support should be given to the learner, to gain the best results and make learning more efficient (Cromwell & Kolb, 2004; Bell 2017).

Moreover, Noe, et al. (2014) argue that individual differences and characteristics, along with situational factors, affect employees’ learning. They suggest that individual characteristics impact how motivated or likely a person is to learn. For example, individuals with proactive personalities are more likely to engage in informal learning activities. Situational factors, such as learning design or organizational support, can also improve or hinder the learning outcomes. For example, Keller and Suzuki (2010), discuss how e-learning may often cause higher drop-out rates, than in-person training. They suggest this relates to a motivational drop among the individuals, as the method of learning may feel lonesome, unstructured, or unsupported. Noe, et al. further suggest that learning should be considered from a ‘*person-in-situation*’ perspective, where both the individual and the situation are considered to influence learning. Moreover, Orvis and Leffler (2011) suggest that organizations should aim to recognize what kind of support their employees need in self-paced learning, to design better self-development programs. They further argue that there are five characteristics that imply how likely a person is to take on a self-directed self-development program.

The first of these is learning goal orientation, which refers to an individual’s desire to acquire new skills, master new situations, and improve their competence. According to Orvis and Leffler (2011), people with a higher learning goal orientation are more likely to need less support in self-directed development processes. On the contrary, people who have lower learning goal orientation may need support in realizing the personal and organizational benefits that could occur when developing certain skills. The second characteristic is self-efficacy for self-development which refers to the individual’s beliefs that they can learn certain skills. Those employees who have low beliefs in their ability to develop new skills, should be encouraged to begin a learning activity and shown that they are believed in. The third

characteristic, openness to experience, refers to an individual's level of curiosity and excitement for new experiences. If a person is not open to new experiences, they may require assistance in understanding the value of the development program. The fourth characteristic is conscientiousness. Conscientious people want to achieve plenty and are often persistent in working hard towards their goals. Moreover, conscientious people are likely to possess better skills in organizing and planning their actions. A person with lower conscientiousness is likely to need more assistance in engaging with and planning their self-development activities. They should also be encouraged to understand the importance of self-development. Finally, the last characteristic is a proactive personality. These people often have higher intrinsic motivation in learning and advancing in their careers. Less proactive people may need support in getting started and advancing in their self-development activities. (Orvis and Leffler, 2011)

### **2.2.2 Support from the Human Resource Development department**

In addition to enabling learning and activating, encouraging, and engaging people to learn, HRD's activities should also consider how the knowledge is transferred into practice. The transfer of training refers to how the trainees apply the learned skills, knowledge, and behavior into their work (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Campbell and Cheek (1989) suggest that training transfer happens best when the training program and the work environment co-operate. Baldwin and Ford (1988) identified three training-input factors that affect the training transfer: Training Design, Trainee Characteristics, and Work-environment Characteristics. The Trainee Characteristics are *Ability, Personality, and Motivation*. Training Design factors consist of the *learning content, sequencing, and the principles of learning*. Finally, Work-environment Characteristics consist of *support* and the *opportunity of use*. According to Baldwin and Ford, these factors have both an indirect and a direct effect on the training transfer. They affect the training transfer directly through the outcomes that the person gets from the training. However, if for example the learning content is irrelevant, it affects the learner's motivation, thus further impacting how well they learn, maintain the skills, and transfer them to their current work. Hence, indirect relations also occur.

Cromwell and Kolb (2004) suggest three areas to focus based on Baldwin and Ford's (1988) training transfer model's Work-environment Characteristics. These areas are the organizational

climate, supervisor support, and peer support. Although HRD practitioners may not have a direct effect on these areas, they can work as facilitators and enablers in providing support for the learners (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004). According to Cromwell and Kolb (2004), a supportive organizational climate encourages the employees to use their skills and abilities which they have learned in the learning process. To create a supportive environment, the organization should emphasize the importance of development, provide the necessary resources for learning, follow-up on learning activities, and promote a supportive and encouraging attitude towards learning throughout the company. Lemmetty and Collin (2022) suggest that making learning a continuous part of work is a necessity for gaining and maintaining needed skills.

### **2.2.3 Supervisory support**

Another essential factor of supporting learning and training transfer is the support from supervisors (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Ellinger, 2005). Supervisory support may affect the learner's motivation to attend and acquire new skills, and to put the learned skills into use (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004). According to Campbell and Cheek (1989), supervisors can show support by helping the employees to assess their needs, define goals, establish instructional strategies, perform the training, and evaluate the training effectiveness. Ellinger's study (2005) suggests that supervisors can have a positive impact on informal workplace learning. Ellinger suggests that supervisors can work in creating informal learning opportunities or work as coaches and mentors. Moreover, supervisor's impact learning by supporting the learners, encouraging towards risk-taking, empowering knowledge sharing, giving positive feedback, and working as role models (Ellinger, 2005). Similarly, supervisors can also have a negative impact on learning, through unsupportive and disrespectful actions, micromanagement, and not valuing learning.

According to Carbonell et al. (2014), the variability of work boosts learning. Hence, leader's and supervisors can further support individual's learning by allocating them to new projects or enabling team rotation. Moreover, several research suggest that empowering coaching leadership impacts individual's learning positively (see e.g., Amy, 2008; Ellinger, 2005; Bond & Seneque, 2013). Amy (2008) explains coaching leadership as a process which aims to aid individuals in developing themselves. Supervisors can work as coaches and aid the person by

asking the right questions and helping them to find the right answers and new methods (Amy, 2008). Moreover, the supervisors can support in the learning process by facilitating it, aid in setting goals, reflecting, and evaluating success, and allowing for mistakes (Lemmetty et al. 2022).

#### **2.2.4 Peer support and upper management support**

Ceelen, et al. (2021) further emphasizes the work community's impact in enriching learning and learning experiences. According to Khandakar and Pagil (2019) learning at work is not gained only through learning activities. Rather, it requires collaboration, reflection, and discussion with colleagues. Khandakar and Pagil suggest that this discussion between employees helps combine formal and informal learning. Sharing knowledge, asking questions, and discussing with other people widens the individual's thinking (O'Connor & Lages, 2009). Through the interaction, the individual can learn from the other person, widen their own perspectives, or simply understand their own thinking better. Moreover, Lemmetty et al. (in Lemmetty & Collin, 2022) suggest that asking and receiving feedback from colleagues is also beneficial for learning. Thus, for the individuals to ask for such feedback, the work community should be sufficiently safe and enable interaction.

Furthermore, Cromwell and Kolb (2004), suggest that peer support also plays an important role in training transfer and putting new skills to practice. Peer support refers to the extent to which peers support each other in applying new skills to the job. It can mean collaboration in learning, cheering, and encouraging to learn and try new skills, exchanging information, and establishing a peer support network.

Finally, according to Lemmetty and Collin (2022), also the upper management or the board can have a significant impact on the effectivity of learning. Through open communication, support, and providing relevant learning opportunities, the board can positively impact individual's learning. Moreover, according to SHRD practices, the board is often responsible or highly involved in creating the organization's strategy (Garavan, 1991). SHRD theories suggests that learning and development should be well combined with the organizational strategy. Hence, the board also has an indirect relation to learning, as they define new directions

for the organization, which in return highlights new learning needs and demands, and the resources allocated onto them.

## **2.3 Design Thinking**

According to Best (2006), the word '*design*' refers to both the process of designing and the design itself. As workplace learning and HRD is a complex area and under constant changes, the process of design could potentially be applicable to answer these changes. This study aims to understand whether design processes and methods could be applicable into the field of HRD, hence the next section will focus more on design as a process, rather than a product. Moreover, throughout this research, Design thinking will be used as a lens through which the actions of HRD professionals are observed. Hence, to better comprehend whether design thinking could benefit organizations in supporting learning, a thorough understanding of what design thinking is, needs to be created. This section briefly defines design thinking, discusses what theories rely behind it, and presents some useful tools for design.

### **2.3.1 Design terminology and models**

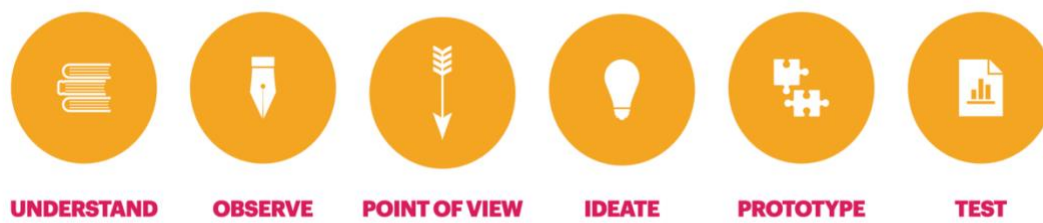
The terminology regarding design, design thinking, and design processes is often overlapping, and there is no simple definition agreed among researchers and practitioners (Best, 2006). Simon (1988) defines '*design*' as the change in the state of current conditions, into new and improved conditions. Moreover, Best (2006, p. 208) defines '*design processes*' as a "*series of events, actions and methods by which a procedure or a set of procedures are followed in order to achieve an intended purpose, goal or outcome.*" '*Design thinking*', according to Serrat (2017), refers to the measures that are taken when creating the design. It is a framework of thinking and utilizing methodologies to reach the design solution. Furthermore, many scientists and authors describe design thinking as a methodology of innovation, problem-solving, and idea-generation that focuses highly on user-needs (Brown, 2008; Serrat, 2017). Serrat (2017, p. 129) defines design thinking as: "... *a human-centered, prototype-driven process for the exploration of new ideas that can be applied to operations, products, services, strategies, and even management.*" The word '*human-centered*', refers to design methods that focus on the

user, their actions, and the environment they are in (ISO 9241-210, 2019). Human-centered methods aim to improve the conditions of the user's current state to become more efficient, applicable, accessible, and satisfying. The ISO standard 9241-210 (2019) emphasizes that a human-centered design process should be interactive and iterative and keep all stakeholders involved throughout the process.

Brown (2008) suggests design processes often start with a problem or an opportunity: a user is in a situation which someone is keen on improving. These problems are often challenging and do not have a right or wrong solution. Hence, they may be called '*wicked problems*', a term created in the 1960s by Horst Rittel (Buchanan, 1992). Wicked problems are unique challenges with no clear statement of what the problem is, nor a clear solution that is right or wrong but rather a sea of opportunities.

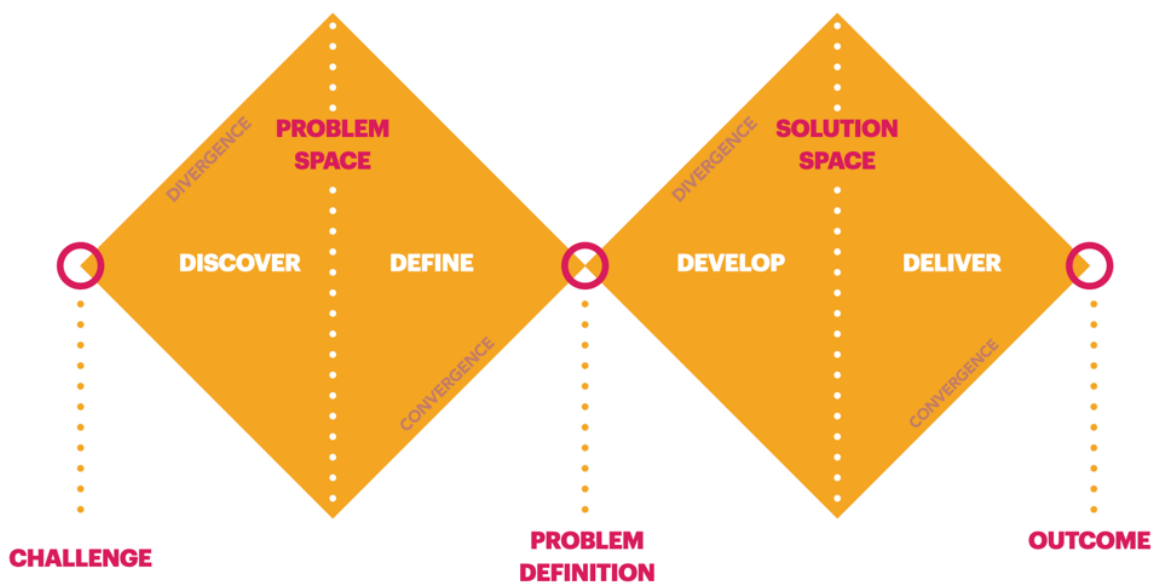
As the terminology regarding design differs, so do the methods, models, and processes. Researchers imply that there is no standard design model (Best, 2006; Clarkson & Eckert, 2005). They further suggest that design processes have plenty of similarities, yet they require modification according to the matter. For example, according to some researchers (see e.g., Brown, 2008; Serrat, 2017), design thinking divides into three phases: inspiration, ideation, and implementation. Other models have been suggested for example, by the Hasso Plattner Institut (Gerken, et al., 2022)(see figure 2.3.1). Their model comprises of six stages which are the following: understand, observe, point of view, ideate, prototype, and test. Moreover, the Design Council has created a design process model back in 2004, called the Double Diamond (Design Council, 2019a). The Double Diamond consists of four phases: Discover, Define, Develop, and Deliver. Each of the models begin with a problem or an idea and move onto delivery, highlighting the importance of user-centricity and iteration. Although each model consists of a set of phases, they do not suggest those stages to be static nor happen in a linear order (Best, 2006; Design Council, 2019a; Design Council, 2019b). Rather, the designer should move between the various stages flexibly. Although there are several design thinking models to consider, in order to maintain a narrow scope, this thesis utilizes the Double Diamond as a reference when talking about design thinking processes. The Double Diamond model will be presented in section 2.3.2.

**Figure 2.3.1** Example of Hasso Plattner Institut’s (Gerken et al., 2022, p.60) model The six phases of the Design Thinking process.



### 2.3.2 The Double Diamond model

**Figure 2.3.2.** Example of the Double Diamond design methodology. The image is combined from two sources: Design Council, 2019a and Soares et al., 2022.



The Double Diamond design methodology aims to visualize and describe the design process in a comprehensive way (Design Council, 2019a). Moreover, the Double Diamond model emphasizes four design principles, which are: “Put people first; Communicate visually and inclusively; Collaborate and co-create; and Iterate.” These principles help in making the design work effective and aids in achieving wanted objectives. The Double Diamond model utilizes both divergent and convergent thinking (Soares et al. 2022). Divergent thinking aims

to highlight all possibilities for a problem or a solution, whereas convergent thinking narrows all ideas into one problem or solution (Soares et al., 2022). The model divides onto two sections, or diamonds. These two diamonds are also called the Problem space and the Solution space. The Problem space focuses on creating an understanding of the challenge, and the Solution Space (Soares, et al. 2022) encourages to find novel ways to answer the problem defined in the first stage. The diamonds further divide onto four more sections which are “*Discover*” and “*Define*” within the Problem space, and “*Develop*” and “*Deliver*” within the Solution space (Design Council, 2019a; Design Council, 2019b).

## **Discover**

The first stage is called Discover. It encourages to empathize with the audience and gain understanding of their current state, wishes, and needs (Design Council, 2019a; Soares, et al. 2022). Brown (2008) suggests that often the inspiration to design is a user-problem, an opportunity in some market, or even both. According to Moreno de Oliveira, et al. (2022, in Soares, et al., p.61) The discovery phase focuses on understanding the users current state, environment, and what challenges they have. It is a stage of divergent thinking, where the designers aim to gain plenty of knowledge on the user (Soares, et al. 2022).

There are several methods and tools to empathize and gain understanding of the audience. For example, questionnaires (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004) interviews and interaction (Wilson, 2006; Design Council, 2019a; Diccico-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), personas (Pruitt & Grudin, 2003), service blueprints, and user scenarios and journeys (Moreno de Oliveira et al. 2022, in Soares et al.). Moreover, Wilson (2006) argues that it is beneficial to gather diverse information or gather it through diverse methods. In research terms, Wilson calls for utilizing triangulation. Wilson defines triangulation as an approach of collecting information through various methods and measures. For example, Observer Triangulation means that different people use the same observation method to a user and thus aim to gain differing insights from them. Research Method Triangulation on the other hand, refers to changing the method of gaining information, for example, by using questionnaires, observations, and interviews to collect both quantitative and qualitative data.

## **Define**



Moreno de Oliveira et al. (2022, in Soares et al., pp. 61) describe the define stage as a phase where: “...*the focus is on the convergence of ideas for the definition of priorities in relation to the problem.*” This stage aims to narrow down the focus as well as to better understand the findings and highlight the most relevant issues (Design Council, 2019b). The Design Council suggests the goal of the second phase is to create a “*design brief which clearly defines the challenge based on the insights.*”

There are several ways in which designers can define the problem. These stages may also depend on the methods utilized in the first phase. For example, transcribing and coding interviews to highlight reoccurring patterns or difficulties can be beneficial (Kowall & O’Connell, 2014). Moreover, utilizing researcher triangulation (Wilson, 2006), and comparing notes between the designers (Design Council, 2015a). Finally, utilizing tools and methods such as Focus groups, Assessment criteria, Journey mapping, and Drivers and hurdles (Design Council, 2015a).

## **Develop**

Moreno de Oliveira et al. (2022, in Soares et al., pp. 61) explain that in the development phase, the focus is on divergence, and on bringing up a multitude of ideas and solutions to answer the defined problem. The Develop stage is the first step of the Solution space (Soares, et al., 2022). It focuses on ideating, developing, testing, and refining possible solutions (Design Council, 2019b).

The Design Council suggests that in the Develop phase, the designers seek for inspiration and co-designs with different people (Design Council, 2019a). There are various ideation methods to utilize in this stage. One of the more popularly known method is brainstorming, where a group of people come up with new ideas, get inspired by others’ ideas, and try to build upon new ideas that have risen (Putman & Paulus, 2009). Other methods and tools are for example, Character profiles, Scenarios, Role-playing, and Service blueprints (Design Council, 2015b).

## **Deliver**

Finally, Moreno de Oliveira et al. (2022, in Soares et al., pp. 61) describe the last stage of the Double Diamond model as a place where the idea is put into practice, tested, and validated.

The Design Council suggests the last stage to involves testing the solutions, selecting a single solution, and preparing it for further implementation.

A common method utilized in the Deliver phase is prototyping. Best (2006, p. 209) defines prototypes as “*A physical or virtual model created to test ideas and designs, and to solicit user-feedback, from which a final product or a service will then be created.*” Other tools and methods include Evaluation and feedback loops, Phasing, and Final testing (Design Council, 2015c).

Although, the Double Diamond design process highlights these four stages, the Design Council (2019a) emphasizes that the process is flexible. Moreover, they imply that often new understanding arises in the later stages, which may bring the designers back to the first phase of the process.

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter describes which methods were used in the research and how the data was collected and analyzed. The first section explains the research approach and methods. The second section gives an overview of the case companies and how and why they were chosen. Thirdly, the data collection process is explained. The fourth section describes the data analysis. Finally, some presumptions for the research are explained.

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

The objective of this study was to recognize what challenges and opportunities the case companies have in designing and supporting learning and development. Another goal for the study was to gain understanding if design thinking could be applied onto HRD practices or whether it was already utilized. As presented in section 1.2, the research questions are:

- **RQ1:** What challenges and opportunities HRD teams have in designing and supporting learning and development?
- **RQ2:** Could design thinking be used to better design and support employee training?

The first research question aims to study the current state of HRD practices and gain understanding on what challenges the HRD teams are facing. The second research question aims to study how HRD teams currently view their processes and to examine whether design thinking could be applied into those activities. These questions aim to understand the current experiences of the case companies. Hence, this qualitative research utilized an interpretive epistemological perspective. An epistemological perspective provides a framework to collect, interpret, and describe the data, its sources, and their reliability (Tennis, 2008). Interpretive epistemology often focuses on qualitative data and open-ended and interpretive data-analysis methods (Merriam, 2009). It relies on the context and the role of interpretation and does not categorize answers into right or wrong.

## 3.2 Case Companies

The research consisted of eleven interviews with human resource development professionals from different organizations. The case companies were not selected randomly, nor were they chosen through explicit and strict criteria. As there is no register in which organisations' HRD activities are classified and explained, it would have been difficult to establish such criterion. Moreover, it was not within the scope nor the resources of this study to create such classification. Hence, the selection based on a few mild criteria, assumptions, and existing knowledge of the companies.

Firstly, the research targeted organizations that have mature human resource development activities. The goal was to find organizations that see learning and development both beneficial and necessary for the company, and that were relatively advanced in human resource development. The research aimed to gather a wide perspective on the HRD processes and challenges and inspect whether design thinking methods could be beneficial in the process. Thus, the objective was to interview organizations who already had some processes in place, some experience on learning and development, and who had experience in developing their own HRD actions. Furthermore, the research aimed to find organizations that had one or more people working on learning and development activities and that were based or had offices in Finland. The criteria were explained in the interview invitations, and further explained and elaborated when necessary.

Some contacted organizations were already familiar to me, as they were, or had previously been clients in my employer organization. With these organizations I already knew how they view learning and development, and what kind of experiences and successes they had. To ensure the selection did not consist of only companies I was already familiar with, I reached out to other organizations as well. I researched LinkedIn to find organizations that had given examples on how they develop their employees and how they had succeeded. Furthermore, I aimed to find companies that had posted something about learning and development several times, as this could imply, they had a continuous approach on learning and development. I used keywords such as "learning culture", "learning and development", "organizational learning". For those companies that seemed to fit the criterion, I further examined their company website, to see whether they had mentioned learning and development or given examples or promises on how they develop their employees. In addition to LinkedIn, I utilized my networks and

asked whether any companies came to mind that would fit the profile. One suggestion was to check the Best Place to Work -reports and investigate and find proof whether those organizations would fit the profile. Here I made the presumption that those organizations that did well in the Best Place to Work competition, would be relatively mature in employee development, and went on to further investigate this from their company website and social media. However, to remain critical, I aimed to validate whether the company really met the criteria through the research questions. As there was a possibility my assumptions or the organizations posts about learning did not meet reality. Hence, it was important to also have those companies whom I was already familiar with, as their maturity was better validated prior the study.

No other criteria were made, nor were the participants categorized in any way, as the goal was to collect a wide perspective on the researched topics. All participants and their employer organizations will remain anonymous, but some characteristics are presented below in Table 3.2. The case companies were different in many ways including their operating market, size, and organizational structure. The case companies were working in fields such as software services and consultancy, marketing and communication, retail, industrial services, financial services, insurance services, and social and health services. Some organizations had a more traditional organization structure with varying levels of hierarchy, others were lean and more flexible. No distinctions were made prior the data collection.

**Table 3.2:** *Information on the participant organizations*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Number of Employees</b>	<b>Number of people responsible for HRD</b>	<b>Role of the interviewee</b>
Participant 1	100-500	3	Chief HR Officer
Participant 2	500-1 000	1	HRD Manager
Participant 3	+10 000	40	L&D Project Manager
Participant 4	5 000 – 10 000	6	HRD Manager
Participant 5	1 000 – 5 000	3	Head of Learning & Culture
Participant 6	+10 000	6	Talent & Development Director
Participant 7	500 – 1 000	1	Strategic People Development

Participant 8	500 – 1 000	2	HR Manager
Participant 9	1 000 – 5 000	7	Leadership & Culture Development
Participant 10	1 000 – 5 000	8	HR Coach
Participant 11	500 – 1 000	1	Director of People Operations

### 3.3 Data Collection

The process began with finding suitable organizations, following to the design of the interview structure, sending invitations, interviewing, and finally, analyzing the data. The research consisted of 11 one-on-one interviews with the HRD professionals from the case companies. The interviews were held online and recorded using the Microsoft Teams software. Both I and all the participants had our camera on, which made it feel more natural. No major technical issues happened during the interviews. The qualitative data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. These interviews took from 1 hour to 1,5 hours, with the average time being 1 hour and 14 minutes. Using semi-structured interviews allowed for new questions to emerge throughout the process and to dive deeper into what the interviewees were saying. The interview structure consisted of 13 open-ended questions and 2 extra questions that were asked if there was time left, or the interviewee had not yet given concrete examples. The interview structure is available for viewing in the Appendices. A question relating to the company's HRD budget was removed after the first interview. The first participant mentioned that as learning and development consists of many areas, it is nearly impossible to give a precise number. Initially, the objective for asking the budget was to see whether it works as a distinctive factor and implies how much resources are allocated onto learning and development within the organizations.

Miller and Crabtree (1999) suggest that the basic research question should be clearly focused, to allow shared experiences within the participants. As the data-analysis and results imply, the participants had plenty of similarities in their answers, thus implying that the research question was sufficiently focused. Moreover, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) suggest that to reach good quality results, the interviewer should create a good connection with the interviewees. Before and during the interviews I aimed to give a positive and friendly image and create safety. In the beginning of each interview, we shortly discussed non-research-related matters,

lightening the mood. Moreover, the interviews were held in Finnish, as it was the primary language for each participant and hence allowed for better depth and clarity to both the questions and answers. At the end of each interview, the participants were asked about how the interview felt. No negative comments were given, in fact, most participants said they had enjoyed the questions and that it was nice to reflect on the subject. In addition to the interviews, the communication with the participants prior the interviews, was considered as research material. For example, one participant doubted, whether they fulfilled the criteria of being sufficiently mature in their HRD activities. This was considered when interviewing and analysing their results.

### **3.4 Data-analysis**

Due to the nature of this research, grounded theory was chosen as the data-analysis method. Grounded theory is a flexible approach that allows the theory and research questions to be revised and refined as the data is being collected and analyzed (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Grounded theory is especially suitable in studying complex areas where existing theory is limited or incomplete. As the goal of this research was to understand the challenges in L&D within organizations, and to recognize whether design thinking methods could be utilized in HRD activities, grounded theory was well-suited for this research as well.

Green, et al. (2007) suggest that the process of analyzing qualitative data consists of four steps: Data immersion, Coding, Categorizing, and Identifying themes. The data-analysis for this research followed these steps.

Data immersion is the stage where the researcher becomes deeply involved with the data (Green, et al., 2007). According to Green, et al., it allows the researcher to recognize emerging topics and themes early in the process, thus, it can make the data-analysis process better manageable. The data immersion began while conducting the interviews with the HRD professionals. It continued with reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and written notes. In case of uncertainty, the recordings were watched. This allowed to better understand what the interviewee was saying or how they said it. According to Green, et al. (2007),

understanding the tone or the participants, their hesitations or confidence, can be essential for the analysis.

After the data immersion, the data-analysis process continued onto the second step, coding. The coding was conducted with the Atlas.ti software. Green, et al. (2007, pp. 548) determine codes as “*descriptive labels that are applied to segments of the transcript.*” They allow the researcher to highlight informative blocks of the text and give them a tag or a code. This helps the researcher to sort out similarities and interesting observations and leave out unimportant information. Firstly, the interview transcripts were coded based on initial predetermined codes, that based on the research questions. Codes, such as ‘*Challenges*’, ‘*Ideation*’, and ‘*Understanding the Problem*’, were created before the coding process began. In addition, new codes were created as the process continued. For example, ‘*Budget*’, ‘*Learning on-the-job*’, and ‘*Agility*’ emerged during the coding process. Once all the interviews were coded, similar codes were merged, and unimportant or misleading codes were removed. Altogether, around 200 different codes were applied during the process.

Alongside and after coding the interviews, the codes were categorized to better comprehend how the interview data could be linked. The goal of categorizing is to create understanding the relation between data from the different interviews (Green, et al., 2007). Groups such as ‘*Strategy*’, ‘*Data collection*’, and ‘*Communication*’, among others were created. Different codes were put under these categories, to ease the further analysis. During categorization, the codes and code groups were re-analyzed, to see which findings were relevant regarding the research questions, and which not.

Finally, the fourth stage was the identification of themes. Green, et al. (2007) determine themes as explanations or interpretations of the data. Themes allow the researcher to link the collected data onto previous research. Regarding the first research question (“*What challenges and opportunities HRD teams have in designing and supporting sustainable learning practices?*”) three main themes were identified; strategy and planning, shared responsibility, and resources. The findings regarding the second research question (“*Could design thinking be used to better design and support employee training?*”) was divided onto six themes. These themes were the General process, Understanding the problem, Defining the problem, Ideation and finding solutions, Delivering and Continuous improvement.



Once the main themes were identified, the transcripts and codes were re-analyzed to recognize the most relevant information to be presented in the Results chapter (Chapter 4). During the data-analysis process, I recognized themes I had not yet researched or discussed in section 2, Background . Hence, after the analysis, I returned to read research and articles, to better understand and support the themes that had emerged from the interviews.

### **3.5 Presumptions**

In interpretive epistemic research, the results and findings are highly reliant on the interpreter and shaped by the context (Merriam, 2009). Thus, it is essential to discuss the effect the researcher may have before and during the collection, analysis, and presentation of the study.

Some presumptions were made before the research took on. The main hypothesis was that design thinking and its methodology, would be beneficial in conquering HRD teams' challenges regarding learning and development. The focus of the study was to view the data through 'design thinking lenses', and see whether it could be applied, if it already was applied, or if it would not suit the current processes of the HRD teams.

Furthermore, I as a researcher, conducted the study while working for a Finnish company within the HRD field. The company creates online learning content and services regarding work-life skills for organizations. Although, the research aimed to remain objective, it is crucial to note that my background within the organization may have impacted the study. For example, some of the case companies were organizations who had either been or were currently the employer company's clients.

Moreover, according to good research practices, Laine (2011) suggests prior knowledge should be recognized and stated in the research. I have prior knowledge and nearly four years of practical expertise within the HRD field, as I have been working with several Finnish companies in developing their employees. I have participated mostly in projects related to online learning, its implementation, communication, facilitation, and support. Moreover, I have studied design methods, tools, and processes in the university, and have been involved in several course projects where design and business are combined. However, the findings and

results of this research base on the collected data and mentioned research articles, papers, and other references – not on my previous experiences or previously read texts.

## **4. Results**

This chapter presents the empirical research results and answers the two research questions. The data related to the first research question (“*What challenges and opportunities HRD teams have in designing and supporting sustainable learning practices?*”) is presented in section 4.1. Findings related to the second research question (“*Could design thinking be used to better design and support employee training?*”) are presented in section 4.2.

All quotes presented in the following sections are gathered from the interviews and translated from Finnish to English. Some quotes have been shortened, and irrelevant information removed. I aimed to keep the tone of voice and the message within the translations to my best ability.

### **4.1 Challenges and opportunities in Human Resource Development**

This chapter describes the challenges and opportunities the HRD professionals sought to conquer. The most commonly occurring themes related to strategy and planning, sharing responsibility, and supporting learning. In addition, some general challenges are mentioned. Section 4.1.1 discusses challenges and opportunities related to strategy and planning. Section 4.1.2 describes issues regarding responsibility and how it is divided. Finally, section 4.1.3 explains supporting factors regarding workplace learning.

#### **4.1.1 Strategy and Planning**

Combining strategy and learning was seen essential in HRD activities among the participants. Various challenges in this process were explained by different participants. Several participants stated that as the world is complex and there are plenty of possibilities in which the employees could develop, one of the main challenges is to clarify the most essential needs for the business.

*“Well, challenge is a strong word. It’s probably that there are so much we could develop. How can we find the right things for the business? How can we find those activities that bring the most value?” P9*

The participants raised questions such as which developmental activities bring the biggest value for the company, the team, and the employees? How to find the most relevant HRD activities for the company? What does the company need? And what are the goals for learning and development? Moreover, some participants viewed it the other way round; asking themselves how to decide what to leave out. Participant 10 also emphasized that perhaps it is not a challenge, but rather an area that requires serious thinking.

In addition to recognizing the strategically relevant development areas, most participants mentioned that employees have difficulties in finding time for learning and development. Both operative and strategic skills are needed, and they require continuous development. Operative skills are often seen as necessities, thus there often is time allocated in them, or the employee is obliged to find time as otherwise they may not be able to continue working. However, Participant 10 further emphasized the dilemma with arranging time for strategic skill development, as it is often less tangible and urgent. Other participants shared similar experiences. Compulsory certificates and courses, along with the work itself, take plenty of time. Thus, there may not be enough time for self-development or strategic development, although it can be as important to the company and its’ individuals. As the employees’ time was seen as a challenge, the HRD professionals felt that they need to provide relevant materials, on the right time, and with a low threshold. Thus, even if the HRD team aims to answer the majority of relevant learning needs, they need to consider how to communicate them to the audience. Moreover, they need to consider whether they are providing the right kind of learning possibilities or at the right time.

Finally, as there are plenty of ways in which the employees and the company could develop, a challenge for many participants was to find ways in matching the individual needs and the company’s strategic needs. Whether the goal is to help the employee advance in their career or simply create relevance and enthusiasm towards learning, matching the company’s needs with the individuals’ needs was seen beneficial but challenging. Moreover, several participants mentioned that learning and development is often seen secondary or that it is disconnected from the employees’ work. As companies want and need to develop their knowledge and skills,

this indeed is a challenge. However, the participants were posing questions that perhaps providing relevant learning possibilities, in the right form, in the right time, and supporting the learners, could make learning a regular part of work.

Other topics that were seen challenging but beneficial regarding learning and development, were recognizing skill gaps and reskilling, and improving employee experience, employer brand, and employee attraction. Finally, some participants emphasized the board's effect on how learning and development are seen within the organization. A few participants suggested that inconsistent support and communication from the higher level, had a negative effect on the whole company's learning and development. Several participants mentioned the benefits the board has on learning and development which we will discuss later in section 4.1.2.

Plenty of other challenges were mentioned during the interviews – some more industry-related, company-specific, or relating to the present day or situation of the market. However, most participants mentioned money, budget, and financials as constraining factors regarding learning and development. Many participants mentioned that aiming for cost-efficient learning and development solutions is crucial. As individuals' developmental needs vary, it can be difficult to find scalable and cost-efficient solutions for L&D.

Moreover, budget constraints may cause inequalities between employees, as not all supervisors or sectors are willing or able to spend on learning and development. Although all participants said that every employee has the chance to learn and take part in learning programs, they may not all have equal chances in participating in them. For example, Participants 3 and 6 mentioned that the white-collar and blue-collar employees have different opportunities – the latter having fewer. As the companies want to enable equal opportunities for everyone to learn, those opportunities may lose their cost-efficiency, if they need to personalize the trainings to different audiences or organize the same training many times.

#### **4.1.2 Decentralized Responsibility**

Most interviewees believed that the HRD department does not function alone, but needs other employees to succeed. They suggested that HRD cannot know exactly what the employees need regarding learning and development. *"I don't bring any additional value, if I go to a team*

*and act smart and tell them what they need. I don't even know what they need.*" Participant 2 states. Furthermore, many of the interviewees believed that they do not need to take ownership of the employees' developmental needs, as the responsibility of learning lies mostly on the individual and their supervisor. Learning and development activities base on decentralized responsibility. However, the participants had different methods on taking advantage of the shared responsibility. The case companies applied different roles for the individual, team members, supervisors, the HRD team, and the higher management. These roles were somewhat flexible and shifted according to the situation.

### **Individuals' and Supervisors' Role**

Some participants believed that the individual plays the most important role, as they are the one who should recognize their needs and wishes, communicate them clearly, and aim to find solutions in a self-directed manner. Participant 11 suggested that the individual characteristics allow the responsibility to shift towards them:

*"We have rather driven people, they're self-directed and take ownership of their own development. This means that if we notice that something should be developed, they often start working towards it by themselves."*

When the individual has more responsibility, HRD's role shifts into more of an enabler of learning. HRD supports the individual, tries to offer them learning opportunities with a low threshold, and encourage them to take part in learning conventions. However, Participant 11 mentioned that there is a risk that not all individuals feel comfortable in bringing their needs and wishes forward. Thus, some individuals may have less possibilities or support in their individual learning journey. Furthermore, Participant 3 mentioned that individuals may have different learning opportunities due to their position or role. For example, they have noticed some inequality between their experts and the personnel working in stores. Those employees who do shiftwork have less autonomy on when and where to learn, and may not have access to the necessary tools, such as a computer. In these situations, the participant emphasizes the supervisor's role in removing barriers and enabling learning possibilities, such as tools or a time and place to learn. Thus, the responsibility does not divide only between the individual and the HRD department, but other employees as well. Some participants suggested that learning and development rely on the interaction between the individual and their supervisor.

The supervisor makes sure that the individual knows what possibilities they have regarding learning. They further elaborate that the supervisor needs to proactively ask feedback and discuss whether the current practices are wanted, needed, or liked, and what could be improved. Participant 10 agreed and said that HRD does not stand and function alone, but it needs individuals, and especially supervisors to make things work. They state that it is inevitable to build a common understanding with the supervisors on what needs to happen and how it will happen. Participant 10 sees HRD as a link between the company's strategic goals and the individuals' development. And furthermore, that the supervisors are the ones who communicate, encourage, and guide the learning process.

Participant 10 further elaborated the shared responsibility with the T-shaped expertise. The supervisors and individuals should discuss together how to deepen their substance knowledge and which areas to focus on. Their dialogue should focus on the deep discipline skills. Whereas the HRD should enable the development of cross-discipline expertise and widen the individuals' knowledge (see figure 2.3.1). The interviewee underlines the impact of open discussion and that it happens throughout the organization and exceeds job positions. The individuals should discuss together and with their supervisors, the supervisors should communicate rising themes to the HRD function, whereas the HRD function connects with the board and the employees to better understand which themes are arising, and how to best widen the cross-discipline skills.

Furthermore, Participant 3 stated that in their organization, the supervisor makes the decision whether the individuals developmental needs are within the organization's interest. Thus, they want to make sure their supervisors are qualified and sufficiently trained for having development discussions and influencing their team's learning and development. According to Participant 3, the supervisor works as a link between the individuals and the organization. They have the dialogue with their team members about their developmental needs, and communicate them forward to the HRD function, or try to find solutions from existing learning materials. However, the interviewee mentioned that this may also cause inequality because not all supervisors seem to bring their team's or individuals' needs forward. Furthermore, not all supervisors perhaps see or understand the underlying talent and growth possibilities that the individuals have. Thus, they are not as likely to suggest those individuals to talent programs. Moreover, Participant 2 mentioned that the supervisor also has an important role in understanding which developmental needs are individual, and which are things the whole team

could benefit from. Thus, their role is to think whether some training could be scaled to a larger group.

### **Organizational and team roles**

According to the participants, the company's interest is to enable learning and development and maintain sufficient skill levels. For example, Participant 9 emphasized the company's or the HRD's role is ensuring that their employee's skills are up to date, and in developing suitable practices, or finding new learning partners. Participant 2 further elaborated that although the responsibility is decentralized, the HRD's role is to ensure everyone plays by the same rules and guidelines. In addition, Participant 7 said that the responsibility cannot and does not rely on the HRD personnel. The HRD's role is to provide possibilities but the employees' must play their part and participate in those opportunities as they see best. *"My job is to provide learning opportunities, and make the employee's learn."* Participant 7 states.

In addition to the supervisor, the individual, and the HRD personnel, team members also play a significant role in their colleagues' learning. They help their colleagues, give peer support, and encourage to learn and to recognize the ability to learn. For example, Participant 3 described that in their organization, every new employee is assigned a colleague to spar with, someone who supports in the beginning. However, they stated that the success of sparring depends highly on the individuals' tendency to ask for help or give support.

Finally, the responsibility of communicating about the learning possibilities was also decentralized. For example, Participant 10 mentioned that they had organized a course for their experts which had not received many participants, although after the first round had been held there were many who would have wanted to participate. After reflecting on the reasons, they realized that perhaps they had not communicated about it clearly, nor early enough. The Participant suggested that having someone from internal communication could help spread the word more efficiently. Furthermore, the participant said that supervisors also have an important role in communicating about the various learning possibilities. In addition, the Participants mentioned that the board can also show a good example and communicate about how learning and development impacts the organization and its benefits.



### **4.1.3 Learning Support**

As learning becomes more self-directed, it requires more support. For example, Participant 3 suggested that efficient learning and development requires more than simply providing trainings.

*“The training may only be a kick-off to a larger change. Hence, we need to consider the change thoroughly – it requires more support in our everyday practices. If you can return to your old habits while you work, the change doesn’t happen. Thus, the learning material alone doesn’t often impact much.”(P3)*

The participants mentioned several actions they took within the organization. In this study, the supporting factors are roughly divided into four categories: company level support, training support, supervisory support, and individual and group support.

#### **Company level support**

Regarding company level support, allocating resources, such as time and money towards learning was seen as an essential factor. Participant 11 suggested that the most obvious supporting factor is having someone take ownership of the learning and development. It allows organizations to provide and manage learning and make it more efficient. Furthermore, it allows the companies to create and set the needed guidelines, rules, and practices. This was seen as a necessity, especially in a highly self-directed and learner-controlled environment. From an individual’s perspective, all participant organizations explained they allow their employees to use some working hours on formal learning activities, and that the company may even give financial support for external training. For example, Participant 11 explained they require a form to be filled when applying for financial learning support. They saw it as a tool for validating the decision, and to help the individual consider whether this is useful for them, and how might it help their team as well.

Moreover, several participants suggested that a certain company culture and the company's values also work to support individual's learning. Aspects such as communication, encouragement, celebration, and the company’s values were seen to have a positive impact on individual’s learning. Communication worked mostly as a tool for encouragement and transparency, both through digital mediums and in-person interaction. The participants

explained they actively communicate what learning possibilities they provide, what benefits they bring, where to find them, or how to apply for them. Moreover, it was seen as a tool for encouraging the employees to learn, take ownership of their learning, and celebrate achievements.

### **Training support**

The most common training support factor was having a digital learning environment. The participant companies had variance in whether they had their own digital platform, or whether they were using service providers' learning platforms accordingly. The goal was to have a place that allows easy access to learning that is not bound to time nor place. The participants explained the learning environment supports both self-directed learning, and formal training. Moreover, the case companies said it is important to have different kinds of learning possibilities available. In addition to digital learning possibilities, they mentioned they provide hybrid and live training as well. Different learning opportunities, such as sparring, mentoring, collaborative learning, formal training, self-directed learning, and webinars were utilized within the case companies. Further emphasis was on the significance of understanding the audience's possibilities in learning. For example, Participant 10 explained that those employees who are working in retail shops are not able to take up a long time from their workday. Hence, they have provided micro learning opportunities, and organize training days, to help them find the time for learning. Finally, the participants mentioned that often learning requires some guidance and support, or "*babysitting*" as Participant 3 framed it. For example, Participant 1 mentioned that although their mentoring program relies heavily on the mentors and actors, they have aimed to support the learning process. For example, they provide initial training for the mentors, they create a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, they have group coaching throughout the process, intermediate tasks, and a closing meeting. The participant mentioned that the mentoring program has been improved throughout the years, based on the feedback they have been given, and new ideas and tools have been implemented.

### **Supervisory support**

Supervisory support was extensively discussed within the interviews. Their role was seen significant in recognizing learning needs, providing time, place, and tools for learning, supporting the learners throughout a learning process and making learning visible. Several

participants mentioned they have aimed to support their supervisors through teaching them about coaching leadership.

*“ We’ve implemented coaching leadership practices, so that our supervisors are better able to support learning in their everyday tasks.” (P10)*

Moreover, the participants suggested that it is scalable to focus efforts on the supervisors, and a good way to divide the responsibility of learning and learning support.

*“ A lot of our internal efforts focus on the team leads, we see it as a rather scalable way – the learning streams onto the teams.” (P11)*

Several of the participant organizations mentioned development discussions or other one-on-one meetings as a way to support individual’s learning. These development discussions work to combine the learning opportunities provided by the organization, and the individual goals and needs. Participant 1 further mentioned that some departments succeed better in utilizing this to support learning than others. Participant 3 agreed that it is highly dependant on the individual and the supervisor, their skills and abilities and the openness of the conversation. Hence, the organizations saw that providing support to the supervisors was crucial, to enable equal opportunities for individuals. Participant 1 gave an example on how they support their supervisors, as follows:

*“So we’ve created a support material for the supervisors; ask these things, do this, prepare like this.” (P1)*

### **Individual and group support**

Finally, the case companies discussed how employees can support each other’s learning. For example, providing mentoring opportunities or arranging sparring partners, to guide in certain tasks such as leadership or a new position. Allowing the employees to discuss together and share thoughts or ask questions, they can learn from each other and deepen their own thinking. Hence, it was seen important to provide these opportunities. Participant 4

*“We have these sparring sessions at least once a week... ...where the employees have an opportunity to ask, discuss, and bring up challenges. We’ve increased the amount of these short and specific training opportunities, which we often record. Then we can upload the*

*recording so that the employees can later find and seek for information in a self-directed manner.” (P4)*

Participant 7 further emphasized the employees’ motivation and the team’s impact in supporting the learning process. They gave an example of learning a new programming language and emphasized that they need to find a person who is motivated to learn, or motivate a person to learn the new skill. Moreover, they need to arrange the learning so that the learner has support from their surroundings, their team, and possibly even a mentor. Participant 7 further discussed about motivation, and how the organization also has an impact on improving the motivation to learn. They explained it as follows:

*” Well of course it is about that the people who are participating are motivated, that has a huge impact. Basically that we do meaningful things, things that people have hoped for, and thus they are motivated to learn.” (P7)*

## **4.2 How design thinking could be applied onto HRD practices**

This chapter presents how design thinking was seen within the participant organizations’ HRD activities. The first section summarizes how the case companies saw the process of designing learning and development activities. Section 4.2.2 presents what methods the participants used to understand their audience and their challenges and opportunities. Section 4.2.3 describes how they sought focus for their work. Section 4.2.4 explains how they ideated, created, or found solutions for their challenges. The last two sections describe how these solutions were prototyped and tested and what role feedback has. Due to the nature and extent of this thesis, the discussion on how to launch and deliver the solutions to a larger audience has been deliberately left out.

### **4.2.1 General overview of the Human Resource Development processes**

When asking the participants to describe how they go about learning and development, the processes were rather similar, with few exceptions. Each participant started with a problem or a developmental need and built on from there onto delivery. A few participants mentioned that

as they have decentralized the responsibility, they are not always involved in the process, rather the individuals, teams, and supervisors finish the projects themselves. However, all participants were able to give examples of projects they were involved or explain how the individuals usually work. Participant 6 compared the whole process onto launching a new strategy or change leadership “*you start by building awareness and understanding, then you call to action, follow the results, and finally celebrate the milestones*”.

The explanations contained plenty of similarities, such as combining the company’s strategy and the individual developmental needs. However, the participants had different stages where these aspects became involved. Some interviewees explained the process in a simple way; you recognize a need, find a solution, and deliver. Others had more stages in the process, for example ideation and prototyping, or validation and follow up. In the figure below (Figure 4.2.1), you’ll see the most common stages that were presented in the interviews; Understanding a challenge, Clarifying the problem, ideation and finding solutions, delivery, and follow up. The most common steps suit the previously presented Double Diamond model (see 2.3.2) well.

**Figure 4.2.1:** The most common stages of the HRD design process by the participants.

PARTICIPANT	UNDERSTANDING A CHALLENGE	CLARIFYING THE PROBLEM	IDEATION AND FINDING SOLUTIONS	DELIVERY	FOLLOW UP
1	X	X	X	X	
2	X	X	X	X	
3	X	X	X	X	X
4	X	X	X	X	X
5	X	X	X	X	X
6	X	X	X	X	
7	X	X	X	X	
8	X	X	X	X	
9	X	X	X	X	X
10	X	X	X	X	
11	X	X	X	X	

Most interviewees explained that the process starts when they recognize a challenge or a developmental need. This knowledge comes from various data sources or by observing the market and the changes in the world. It may come from the HRD, from an individual or a team. For example, Participant 3 mentioned that most often their customers – the employees,

recognize a challenge first, and only then ask for assistance or solutions from the HRD department. Some interviewees mentioned that they approach L&D from the strategy; the organization first sets the strategic developmental goals and skill gaps. Once the strategic needs have been set, they proceed to recognizing individual or departmental learning needs. Participant 2 demonstrated that during the strategy creation process, they create a skill map that highlights those skills the company wishes to develop. Then the individual developmental needs are discussed together with the individual and their supervisor. The supervisor uses the skill map as a framework. It helps to combine the individual needs and the strategic objectives and guide the person to the right training. Participant 2 further mentioned that most often nobody contacts the HRD department, as they already have the tools they need. Thus, the individual and the supervisor recognize a need for development and find the solutions.

*“Well the process changes a lot. Now that we have decentralized the responsibilities, I don’t even hear from all that’s happening. They are able to make decisions by themselves, as almost every function has their own coach who either coaches or buys trainings.”*

In cases where the HRD function was more involved, they proceeded onto clarifying the problem or ideating for solutions. The clarification stage was beneficial if the problem needed to be understood more thoroughly. Moreover, the participants explained that during this stage, they aimed to better combine the company’s strategic learning objectives with the individual’s challenges. During this stage Participant 3 mentioned they further investigate their employees’ current state, skills, and knowledge of the matter. This helps them to design learning content that better answers the learners’ needs. The clarification stage was also beneficial for clarifying the learning objectives or creating a common understanding of why we need to develop in this area. Moreover, several participants described that the combining of individual needs and wishes and the organizational objectives takes place in this clarification stage. Once the organization has a clear picture of the higher-level objectives, and the individual needs, they can better recognize what are the themes that require action or have the biggest impact.

Once the learning problem was sufficiently clear, most interviewees mentioned they proceed to an ideation stage. In this stage they either aimed to find existing solutions within or outside the organization, or they began to create new solutions. Several participants mentioned that they utilize their networks and benchmark for solutions from other organizations. Some interviewees also implied that they aim to participate the employees as well. Not all participants

discussed about creating ideas, but rather building and validating concepts with the right stakeholders. Another method was to create prototypes or pilot groups to test some of the suggested solutions. However, prototyping was not commonly mentioned during the interviews – only three interviewees mentioned prototyping when giving an open explanation of the process.

The final stages that were mentioned in the interviews was delivering the solution and follow up. Only a few interviewees continued to discuss what happens after the service or training has been launched. These participants gave examples on how they follow the process and measure the objectives they had set. One interviewee mentioned that often these HRD activities work in a continuous manner, that new objectives and learning needs arise during the learning process.

*“At some level, we try to analyze the effectiveness of our trainings, summarize the feedback and thus recognize new development areas and needs.” ( P5)*

Only a few participants mentioned they gather feedback and analyze the effectivity or objectives of the HRD activities. However, in the later stages of the interviews, all participants gave examples on what they do after the delivery. These findings are presented in section 4.2.6.

Moreover, some participants mentioned additional steps that either supported the one’s presented in figure 4.2.1 or replaced some of those steps. For example, in the Problem space, some participants started by receiving an order from a certain employee department, or with a finished organization strategy. These steps happened before the deep dive onto understanding the problem. Furthermore, within the solution space of the double diamond, the participants described their steps differently. Some discussed about co-creation and conceptualizing. Others wanted to validate an idea before developing it further, others took the idea into further development and only then validated the product. These steps are included within the “Ideation and finding solutions” or the “Deliver” columns in the figure 4.2.1.

## 4.2.2 Understanding Challenges

On a general level, each participant organization saw that understanding the problem and the goal was essential for successful HRD. Moreover, learning and development was not seen only as a mean to answer certain needs or challenges, but rather seeing growth potential in the company and in its' individuals. Although the participants had many similar methods to understand the audience and the environment – some variances were seen in the theory and methods. Three apparent areas regarding the understanding of challenges and opportunities were present in the interviews: strategy, data, and discussions.

### Strategic objectives as guidelines

Each participant highlighted the importance of understanding the field they are operating in. All but one interviewee mentioned that their developmental needs rely heavily on the company's strategy and strategic objectives. One participant explained that their biggest challenges regarding L&D, relates to the rapidly changing world and recognizing the future-development possibilities. The participants explained various methods they use to better understand strategic objectives. Participant 1 mentioned that their HRD team follows the current trends, media, and discussions on what is happening in the world. Their aim is to recognize new areas to focus. For example, they mentioned that during the spring 2021, they recognized that the media was talking about hybrid work models. Thus, they understood a new area where to focus on. Participant 6 also mentioned that following trends and research gives them ideas and inspiration for developing their HRD activities. Participant 9 further elaborated that following trends gives insight on what is happening in the HRD and talent field. It allows them to find new practices to try out.

*“Well, we must constantly follow what is happening outside the organization, what is happening in the talent market. But also what is generally happening in the HRD field, what kind of development, best practices, and such.” P9*

In addition to following trends and research, Participant 8 mentioned that the board also has a significant role in observing the field, recognizing, and reacting to changes, and bringing relevant ideas to discussion. If the strategy is constructed with the board, they should be aware of the current market, its trends, and possible changes. Moreover, Participant 2 implied that the board impacts the bigger picture of the developmental needs. They conduct a Skill Map which



consists of the chosen strategic focus areas. This Skill Map works as a framework for the employees and supervisors and highlights the most relevant development areas to focus on.

Participant 6 mentioned that although HRD must focus on what is happening in their field, they should also consider what is happening in the customers' field. By understanding the customers' field and demands, they can recognize new development areas within the company. Participant 8 further mentioned that especially those working with the clients must fulfill some qualifications and update skills yearly to prove they are eligible to work in certain tasks. Although certain positions require more obligatory training, most companies do have some trainings every employee must do. For example, a code of conduct, GDPR rules or such. Thus, these areas are also strategic focus points, as they are necessities for the company to operate. Moreover, they may change due to new regulations or changes in the customers' field.

### **Collecting employee data**

In addition to the upper-level developmental needs and opportunities, the employees' situation and opinions also have an impact on learning and development. Each participating organization had some methods in finding out what their employees' needs and wishes are regarding L&D. In addition, the company's clients and customers shed light on which areas the organization needs to develop. Moreover, some companies also mentioned they follow national-level statistics and compare that onto their employees' data. Hence, they can recognize where they are lacking talent, skills, or wellbeing.

All but two participants mentioned they use some sort of questionnaires in understanding their employees' situation and wishes. It is however possible, that also the two remaining participants utilized questionnaires, but they did not mention it in the interview. The participants utilized different questionnaires, such as employee wellbeing, employee satisfaction, needs assessments, employee engagement, stress-related questionnaires, 360 reviews, and general employee surveys. The case companies emphasized the various data they get from asking different questions. For example, Participant 8 mentioned that they changed their general employee surveys to focus on what their employees find meaningful. The reasoning for this was to collect new data, find new input, and ease the survey fatigue by asking new questions. Participant 4 also mentioned that they aim to follow the current trends and statistics seen on a national level. For example, they compare the rate of sick leaves nationally

onto statistics within their organization. Thus, they recognize where they stand on the national level, and can establish goals on where they want to be.

Although employee questionnaires seemed to be the most used method for understanding the employees' situation, other methods were used as well. Four participants mentioned that customer feedback is a great indicator on where the employees need to develop. Participant 4 mentioned that the customers' feedback works as an indicator for the employees to understand where they need to develop. After the individuals recognize their own developmental needs, they can then communicate it forward.

A few participants also mentioned they interview their employees when trying to understand their challenges. For example, participant 7 mentioned that after their organizational renewal process, they started interviewing their employees to understand what this means in their everyday activities – what new skills do they feel they need for succeeding. Participant 8 said they used interviews for understanding the present situation and find out how the employees feel the organization positions themselves in the market, and where they should be heading. Participant 1 also highlighted the importance of asking and listening to their employees. Aiming to understand which things could help them succeed even better in their everyday tasks. Moreover, they said that the customer feedback works as a great indicator on whether they have moved forward or should focus even more on certain development areas.

*“The most important thing is to meet our people, ask and listen, and be present accordingly. And of course, to understand the field and the everyday life of working with our customers. Then we can better think of what could help our employees. I feel that the most important thing is to help them succeed in their work through learning and development. And I am always so proud when I hear someone has succeeded or a customer has given good feedback.” P1*

In addition to surveys and interviews, generally asking for employee or customer feedback can highlight defects or areas where the HRD department should focus more. Participant 4 further mentioned the importance of listening to those employees who are leaving the company, as their reasons for leaving may suggest how the company could improve. Moreover, Participant 5 suggested the feedback gotten from current training programs works as a great indicator on where to focus on next. As they analyze the effectiveness of current training programs, they

recognize new developmental areas or some areas where the effectiveness did not reach a sufficient level.

In addition to talent attrition, talent attraction can work as a great indicator on development challenges. Observing the talent market highlights which skills are more available, and which skills are hard to find. For example, Participant 5 mentioned that as it is difficult to compete in the market for technological talent, they have started reskilling programs – they aim to create the talent they are missing. Although this process has proved time-consuming, they see it as a responsible action and increasing their employer brand. However, during the interview, this was still an ongoing project. Thus, the participant could not mention whether the results were promising or not.

### **Interactions within the organization**

In addition to strategy and data collection methods, most participants mentioned the importance of open discussion. For these participants, creating an atmosphere where anyone can bring up individual needs, team difficulties, or even ideas for organizational growth, was seen essential. For example, Participant 9 mentioned that one of the biggest challenges is allocating resources to the right developmental activities. Thus, they emphasized the importance of having open and active discussion with their employees.

*“We need to make smart choices on what we are doing. It all starts with good collaboration and continuous dialogue with the employees...You need to really understand the business both on a strategic level, but also on a tactic and operative level.” P9*

Different ways of opening the discussions were seen within the participant organizations. A few of the participants mentioned that HR business partners often work as a link between the employees and the HRD function. For example, Participant 5 mentioned that HR business partners bring up new focus points from the employees. Moreover, the HR business partners explain and justify the development areas, to enable the needed changes. Furthermore, Participant 10 mentioned that it is important that the HR business partners discuss together as well, as this allows them to understand what challenges are companywide. Participant 3 further elaborated that often the employees and supervisors do not first contact the HRD function about their needs and wishes. For example, supervisors may see or hear development needs, they

communicate these needs to their HR business partners, who then bring it up on the HRD's table.

Compared to HR business partners, often supervisors have more contact with the individuals and teams, thus they can observe the talent, their skills or the lack of it. Most participant companies had some sort of yearly development discussions between the individuals and their supervisors. This enables for them to dive deeper into the individuals' mindset, wishes, needs, and career opportunities. Participant 2 mentioned that development discussions are often the basis for individual growth. It works as a structuring factor for the individual and their supervisor, and it also sheds light on where the individual would like to grow on their career. *"From the individual's perspective, this learning and development relies heavily on the development discussions with their supervisor."* Participant 2 stated. Participant 9 mentioned that the development discussions also work as a supporting factor for the individual. It is a place where the individual and the supervisor can create personal goals, discuss how to achieve them, and evaluate performance on the previous objectives.

Some participant companies aimed to have these discussions more often than once a year. For example, Participant 6 mentioned that they had rebranded the development discussions into growth dialogues. The goal of this rebranding was to change the mindset that learning and development is not something that happens nor is examined only once a year, but rather a continuous process.

*"We've started to discuss strongly about a continuous learning culture and its methods... It [Development discussions] cannot happen only once a year – this goal setting, planning, and evaluation – rather it needs to happen throughout the year. Now we recommend to have this dialogue four times a year" P6*

Finally, some participants also suggested that having open discussions with people outside their organizations is crucial. As previously mentioned, following trends and media is inevitable for understanding the world and the field. For example, Participant 1 mentioned that collaborating with different schools and universities can highlight new development areas. Moreover, Participant 4 mentioned that networking with other HR professionals on Facebook, for example, can be useful when trying to find new perspectives and tips for their work.

### **4.2.3 Defining and Clarifying the problem**

Once the organizations had gathered understanding from their field, and created some strategic objectives, most interviewees mentioned they proceeded to analyze the data. The core purpose was to understand why something needs to be developed, which themes are most crucial, and to set goals for development. Participant 2 mentioned that *“We cannot get everything we want; thus, we need to find focus... ..we don’t have the time nor the money, it is not efficient to give everything to everyone.”* Several participants agreed that it is crucial to focus on those things that have a positive impact on achieving strategic objectives. Clarifying the problem can be challenging, as big companies have different roles and positions, where different needs occur. Participant 9 agreed and stated that it is not too hard to recognize the development challenges, as they arise from the business objectives and data. They implied the harder task is to better understand the problem on a concrete level.

*“In the end, it is not too hard to recognize the bigger challenges. Perhaps the bigger challenge is to understand the problem on a sufficiently concrete level, so that you can tailor the solution to the right problem.” P9*

Moreover, employees may have varying expectations for their employer or their career. L&D should take all these factors into consideration yet find the most relevant actions with the biggest positive impact. Participant 7 further emphasized that most employees probably believe that their area of expertise is the one that needs most focusing. Cost-efficiency and budgets may decrease if the HRD does not clarify and create focus. However, each employee should have sufficient learning possibilities available. Participant 3 mentioned that it is important to be transparent and communicate how the data is analyzed and utilized. Even with those developmental needs that do not proceed to implementation. Transparency adds trust and makes the employees feel that their voices are heard – even though their developmental needs would not be acted upon.

### **Participation and data-analysis during the clarification process**

To better understand the employees’ situation the participants mentioned they had dived deeper into the collected data. For example, some developmental needs arise from several sources, thus they are likely bigger issues that need to be taken into consideration. Participant 3 said that *“It [referring to collected data] is almost like a vote – if a hundred people say this needs*

*to be developed, that is what they want us to focus on”*. However, many participants mentioned that there are always areas that require further discussion to create better understanding. Most participants mentioned that during the clarification process, they aimed to participate the stakeholders for example by interviewing them, having workshops, or simply by discussing with them. Some participants mentioned that although they see the value of employee participation in the learning design process, it can be time consuming and difficult. However, a few participants suggested that even though finding the right problems and solutions may take time, it is likely worth the trouble. Answering the right needs with the right methods brings better value and thus becomes more cost-efficient. Participant 4 pondered about participation and said, *“We should think efficiently – not everyone needs to participate, but we should still get a wide-enough perspective on the subject.”*

Different HR managers, talent managers, HR business partners, and the HR team in general were often the ones to take ownership in the data analysis and clarification. In addition, several interviewees mentioned that the board impacts and helps them in combining the needs and strategic objectives. Often the higher management teams manage the budget allocation, thus they may have opinions on how to budget the process further – which development needs are crucial, which most cost-efficient, and if there even is any money to allocate. However, Participant 1 mentioned that the board trusts the HRD team’s vision and expertise. Hence, often the projects they present to the board go through into further development and implementation. Thus, involving the board works as a first validation before taking actions forward and merely highlights if something seems extremely irrelevant.

In addition to the board and the HR team, other employees were also often involved in the clarification. Participant 4 mentioned that the decision of who are involved depends on the needs or the area. For example, if it is an issue regarding collaboration and co-operation, they aim to involve those who relate to that specific need or who have reported it as a challenge. Moreover, they mentioned that no matter the people who are involved in the clarification process, they aimed to always keep the client close. Meaning that whoever had asked for them to dive deeper into a challenge was also involved in the further design and implementation. If the need came from a larger audience rather than a supervisor or an HR business partner, they did not involve everyone but rather found a few project owners or employee ambassadors. If there was not a specific client who had requested for training, the HRD team aimed to understand who the audience was – who were they creating this for – and finally, involved

those people in the process. Furthermore, a few participants also mentioned cases where they involved the company's end-customers as well.

Finally, a few participants mentioned that it was not always the HRD team who clarified the problem, but rather the problems were clarified between the employee and their supervisor, or the HR business partner. Thus, when those needs came into the HRD teams' table, they were already quite well understood.

### **Experience and expertise**

In addition to data analysis and discussions, several participants mentioned they also trust in their own HRD teams' experience and expertise. Participant 3 said that at times they simply make a "*well-knowledged guess*" on which development areas should they focus. Other interviewees mentioned that this intuition or expertise has been gained from previous experience and knowledge from the field, or from their organization. For example, participant 6 mentioned that to gain understanding they follow the research field and read relevant articles and books. Participant 1 mentioned that as they maintain a good understanding of their employees, they can rely on their own judgement and intuition at times. Thus, to make a knowledgeable guess, the HRD team needed to have a good understanding of the field and the audience, which required data collection and interaction within and outside the organization.

### **Tools for clarification**

During the interviews, some participants mentioned they utilize different tools in the clarification process. Most participants mentioned that it is inevitable to reason the topics they want to implement, clarify why they want to implement them, and set clear goals. Once they created clear objectives and understanding, it was easier to measure the success. For example, Participant 3 mentioned that, "*we need to invest in setting clear goals because then it is easier to understand how we have succeeded.*" A few interviewees mentioned they had previously used competence matrices, to clarify the skill gaps and development areas. However, they mentioned that as a tool, the competence matrix is rather stiff and difficult to work with. Thus, they had tried to find new solutions. The participants mentioned technical tools such as learning management systems (LMS) which enable observing the talent pool within the organization more efficiently. Participant 6 mentioned they had switched from the matrix and were now

trying to use stories and the company culture to better describe the needed development areas and create common understanding. For example, by describing the employee value proposition and customer value proposition, they further clarified which skills were needed and made it a communal thing. This worked as a supporting factor for the supervisors and the employees, in their discussions about learning needs. For example, once the supervisors better understood the strategic objectives, they were able to compare those skills with the skills their team members had, and thus recognize which skill areas they were lacking in. In addition, Participant 3 mentioned they used the SMART-tool (see e.g., Atlassian, 2021) for clarifying goals. The word SMART stands for *Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound*. Thus, when setting learning and development goals, they aimed to follow the guidelines of the SMART tool.

#### **4.2.4 Ideating and Finding solutions**

Once the problem was understood well-enough, most case companies moved onto the solution stage. It is good to remember, that the design process does not work strictly in a linear order. Rather it is a balance between the different stages; ideas may come up already during the initial stages, and more understanding of the audience and their situation is gathered throughout the process. For example, several participants mentioned that during the ideation stage, the objectives were further clarified. Participant 2 mentioned that it can be difficult to find solutions for learning and development, as there are many solutions available, and many more to be created and developed. They said, *“It is easy to say that you already possess these skills, but you should focus on developing these skills. However, finding or proposing the solutions is not easy.”* Participant 9 further elaborated that they need to make smart decisions as they do not have infinite resources.

Many interviewees saw the benefits of involving employees in the ideation and creation process, especially the ones' who they were creating solutions for. Participant 2 mentioned that as they had decentralized the responsibility, it was rarely the HRD teams' job to find the solutions, rather the supervisors, teams, and individuals themselves tried to find suitable solutions for their needs.



Many participants mentioned that once they began to find and create solutions, they started by clarifying the goals and objectives, others had mentioned clarifying objectives at the end of the problem stages. Clarifying the objectives eased the decision-making process between different solutions and ideas. Participant 10 mentioned that they aim to set objectives, decide who the audience is – if yet not decided – and choose the medium; how the learning materials and teaching are distributed. A few of the interviewees mentioned that to clarify the goal, they revised the data, and reminded themselves of the strategic objectives. Moreover, another participant mentioned that they often started to read research papers and articles on the focus areas, in order to understand the framework they were expected to operate in.

The interviewees had two routes to solve the problem – either they found ready-made solutions that fit their needs, or they created solutions by themselves. The decision between the two methods was mostly made on the available resources: time, money, and knowledge or expertise on the subject.

### **Finding External Learning and Development Solutions**

Each interviewee mentioned that they provided both internal and external trainers and training for their employees. Several participants mentioned that when they began to ideate for new solutions to a challenge, they often aimed to utilize their networks, for example by connecting with other HRD professionals and service providers. Networking allowed them to ask and hear how others had solved similar challenges. It also highlighted potential pitfalls. *“It is extremely good to benchmark because then you also hear what you should definitely not do”*, said Participant 5, who mentioned that they aimed to participate in various HRD events and follow LinkedIn to gain new ideas.

Furthermore, many of the interviewees said that if they do not have the knowledge or expertise required for creating a solution, they turned to L&D service providers and other collaboration partners. These service providers may have ready-made solutions, they may have the missing knowledge to co-create the solution, or they may simply help in ideation. Participant 4 mentioned that especially when they were creating a larger L&D project, they aimed to find some perspectives outside the organization. Moreover, larger projects often required more resources and time, thus having knowledgeable experts outside the organization, eased the pressure from the HRD teams. However, Participant 1 emphasized being careful and picky

with external trainers and courses, as they wanted to be certain the person or content met their demands and understood the audience and their needs. Thus, observing the service provider market and viewing various proposals was often needed. Depending on the organization, the case companies issued a public procurement process, or simply discussed with different partners and chose the best ones. Participant 3 mentioned that before choosing, they often started to design ideas with a few service providers to see how the collaboration took off.

### **Creating Internal Learning and Development Solutions**

In addition to benchmarking and finding ready-made solutions externally, the interviewees also described how they design solutions internally. Participant 3 mentioned that they had designed several L&D projects, thus, they often had some materials, methods, or concepts they could reuse in new projects. The participant emphasized that even with existing solutions, they needed to localize or personalize them for the new audience; *“Our different organizations have their own identity, so we must always tailor the solutions, make it sound like them and work for them, but often there’s some synergy found with existing solutions.”* With individual development needs, Participant 2 emphasized the supervisors’ role. The supervisors should know what solutions other team members have. Thus, they do not always have to find or create new solutions, but they can suggest taking the same course. Moreover, with individual needs, the solution is not always to take a course or try to learn new skills by reading. Several participants mentioned that they use team rotation as a tool for learning new skills. For example, if an individual working in sales, would like to know more about business analytics, they might be allocated to another team or a project, where they could learn from their colleagues while doing.

Most of the participants mentioned that when creating completely new solutions, they gathered a project team and aimed to participate the employees. Participant 3 emphasized the importance of a diverse project team when ideating and creating solutions. Having diverse knowledge is a benefit; someone may have pedagogical expertise, others may represent the audience better, and someone can be an expert in coaching and teaching. Participant 6 mentioned that their HRD team consists of people who have previously worked in other roles at the company. Thus, the HRD team already has some knowledge on the employees’ everyday tasks. The project team and the team members’ roles may differ depending on the need. Participant 3 saw that

often the HRD's role was to generate ideas, propositions, and examples, but that the client or the end-user should be heard during the process.

#### **4.2.5 Testing the solutions**

After the ideation phase, when the solutions began to unravel, some case companies tested the ideas or concepts. Most participants mentioned that they preferred to test the solutions with a smaller group, before scaling them to a wider audience. Participant 1 emphasized that piloting helps to avoid bigger failures and risks. Most participants also discussed about agility and trial and error. *"If you never try anything new, you will never get anything new"* said Participant 10. However, the participants had different thoughts on how their employees react to testing. Some said their employees are rather critical and prefer solutions that are well finalized. Others mentioned that their employees value the experimental attitude that their HRD team has, and that they are very open to try new things. These participants mentioned that it was crucial to be transparent of what they had learned from failing experiments, as this built trust. An agile approach showed for example in asking feedback, designing piece by piece, and being courageous with new experiments. However, the interviewees also emphasized the cost-efficiency aspect. Thus, simply validating the concepts with the board, the supervisors or the audience was seen beneficial and more cost-efficient.

#### **Piloting, conceptualizing, testing, and validation of solutions**

Majority of the interviewees sought to find ways to validate or test their ideas, before scaling them to the larger audience. This testing stage allowed them to further improve their ideas and understand which things worked, what could be left out, or whether they should even continue to further implementation. Especially with external trainers, the interviewees wanted to validate their decisions with the employees. Participant 3 emphasized the supervisors' role in validating the ideas, as they represent their team. Participant 5 mentioned that they aimed to first validate the initial ideas, and only then proceed to deciding whether they would create the materials themselves or ask for an external service provider. Other participants aimed to start testing early. Through experimentation, they verified whether the solution was worth implementing. In these situations, they followed the feedback and activity rates to justify the decision.

Moreover, some mentioned they interviewed the participants and remained open to discuss further improvements. One participant also mentioned the importance of interviewing those who did not participate. This allowed them to better understand why someone did not get interested or involved in the training. Thus it helped them to better improve the solution or forget about it.

As an example, one participant mentioned they were testing new ways of working and the function of the office, to better understand their employees' needs and wishes in a hybrid work model. The participant emphasized that the HRD team had their hypotheses and expectations of how to improve their office environment, but before making significant changes they wanted to validate their hypotheses. Thus, they took on a few teams to the pilot program, and started testing and designing with them. This allowed them to understand the challenges better and to recognize new challenges the HRD team had not thought of.

Collecting the individuals or teams for a pilot program, was sought in a few ways. Participant 9 mentioned that choosing the sample depended on what they wanted to experiment or how. It was either a random selection of people, a group of people working in certain positions or roles, or they simply asked who was eager to join the program. Asking for people who were interested, enabled to find a motivated group who were likely to give constructive feedback more extensively. However, there is a risk of designing the program for already motivated people and forgetting that not all future participants are as internally motivated. On the contrary, with larger pilot programs, it may be beneficial to have internally motivated people piloting. For example, Participant 5 gave an example of a reskilling program that they were obliged to produce. The first two implementations of this reskilling program were seen as pilots, as they were still trying to establish the best practices. These programs took several months and required determination from the participants. Thus, they made an internal recruiting process, to find the candidates.

Another method before scaling and testing solutions, was a so called "Train the trainer" method. Participant 6 mentioned that they often started with a small group and taught them the new methods. Once the program was finished and further improvements had been made, the initial group would begin to localize and further implement the solutions in their own teams or areas. Moreover, several participants mentioned they aimed to focus a lot of their HRD efforts onto the supervisors. This allowed the supervisors to become aware of the various learning

possibilities within the organization and understand their roles in managing learning. Thus, they were more eager to take on the responsibility of their team members' learning and could guide them more efficiently.

#### **4.2.6 Continuous Improvement in Learning and Development**

Learning and development is not something that happens once, but a continuous journey. All interviewees gave examples on the ways they delivered solutions and measured their success. Several participants discussed the idea of continuous improvement. They wanted to stay in motion, aimed to improve, and to follow the feedback and statistics continuously. In fact, all the participants said they gather feedback to ensure whether the learning and development activities had succeeded or not. Several participants emphasized the importance of gathering the feedback throughout the program and reacting to the feedback while the learning process was still ongoing. Some participants suggested to measure the success based on their objectives. A few participants suggested to ask the employees whether an L&D program had helped them succeed in their job; *“Does this help me in my own job? That is the main criteria – it needs to serve my everyday life.”*, said Participant 2. However, Participant 5 highlighted that the effectivity of a training program may be difficult to measure. Moreover, several participants also pondered that analyzing and reflecting takes time. Some participants suggested that although the goal is to ask for feedback, analyze it, and react to it, not every employee or team has the time for this. For example, supervisors' may not have the time nor the skills to reflect with their team members. Hence, it may decrease their chances and effectivity in improving their practices.

Observing the success of a learning program was also measured by comparing one learning convention to another. A few participants mentioned this as an easy way of recognizing whether something was liked or disliked. These participants mentioned they often ask their employees to evaluate a course on a scale, for example from one to five. This allowed them to set a numeric goal on the success of a course, and compare the results easily between several courses. Another way to analyze the success of a learning program was to analyze its activity rates and compare them to another program, especially with online learning materials. Some participants explained they analyze how many have started courses, how have they progressed

and how many have completed courses. The participants explained that if the number of people that had started a course was low, it could suggest the course was not seen relevant. Moreover, if people had not progressed to complete the course, it may have suggested there was some issues with the course, that the method of learning did not support the learner enough, or that the learner lost interest along the way. Participant 2 further highlighted that the problem may also be within the audience or the organization, not the course or the service provider. *“It takes two to tango, the problem is not always in the coach. It might as well be that the learners have been forced to participate, which then causes the problem”*, they explained.

Finally, some participants suggested that gathering feedback could highlight new development areas the organization should focus on. Furthermore, the feedback from previous learning programs may be utilized in other learning programs, as it may suggest methods that work well, or that could be forgotten. Participant 9 also emphasized the importance of looking back at those processes that have become more standardized. They explained that they had recently gathered extensive feedback on their development discussion process, and recognized areas which were outdated and not relevant anymore.

## 5. Conclusions

The goal of this study was to recognize what challenges and opportunities HRD professionals have regarding learning and development. Another objective was to view the current HRD practices from a design thinking perspective. The research aimed to gain understanding whether design thinking could be applied onto HRD practices, or whether HRD professionals were already discussing and utilizing design thinking methods. Section 5.1 presents the empirical research results and discusses their relation to prior studies and research. Following the discussion, section 5.2 will shortly present practical implications and suggestions. Finally, section 5.3 will conclude this research and present the limitations, evaluation, and suggestions for future research.

### 5.1 Discussion

This section will present the empirical findings (Chapter 4) and discuss their relation to the literature review (Chapter 2). As introduced in section 1.2, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What challenges and opportunities HRD teams have in designing and supporting learning and development?
- **RQ2:** Could design thinking be used to better design and support employee training?

All case companies view learning and development as a beneficial and necessary aspect of working. Generally, it is seen as a positive force taking the organization forward, both in an economic and humane manner. The case companies see that HRD is beneficial for the employer brand, as it helps to make the employees more committed and wellbeing. In addition, it may also help in attracting and signing new talents. Moreover, HRD activities help to manage the stress of a complex and changing work life. Developing current talent and creating a continuous and sustainable learning culture makes the workforce more adaptive and thus, more welcoming to the fluctuations of the work life. Finally, learning and development is seen to empower competitive advantage in the market the case companies are operating in, as well as the talent market.

### **5.1.1 Challenges and opportunities HRD teams have regarding sustainable learning practices**

Although HRD is beneficial for organizations, common pitfalls and challenges occur. Among the case companies, the most common challenges and opportunities they want to conquer are related to the responsibility of learning and supporting learning. In addition, learning on the job seems to ignite interest within the participants. Some aspects of learning while doing are hence present within the following discussion. Moreover, the case companies highlight the importance of combining strategic objectives with individual needs. This strategic perspective is further examined in section 5.1.2 as I believe design thinking could help in creating solutions that answer both strategic and individual needs.

#### **Shared responsibility**

According to (Lemmetty & Collin, 2022) the responsibility for learning does not lie on a single individual, a group, nor the organization. Rather the responsibility is shared among the different stakeholders. The case companies show an aspiration for sharing the responsibility for learning, so that it would not rely only on the HRD team. The participant organizations have different perspectives on how or how much of the responsibility is shared. Although the andragogical framework (Knowles et al., 2020) suggests that the individual has the responsibility for their learning, they may not be able to foster workplace learning if the workplace does not provide sufficient learning opportunities. Thus, workplace learning cannot rely only on the individual. Moreover, there are often other roles – such as middle management and supervisors – between the individual and the HRD team. They too can take responsibility of supporting and encouraging learning. Finally, to foster a sustainable learning culture, teams and individuals on a higher hierarchical level need to be involved as well. And as learning is not only about what is happening inside an individual, but also how they interact within the environment, team, and community (Lemmetty & Collin, 2022) organizations should consider the impact within and outside the company.

The level of decentralized responsibility depends on the organization's practices, possibilities, resources, organizational structure, and perhaps even on the general characteristics of the employees. Once sufficient practices are in place, and the organization offers accessible and relevant ways to learn and develop, they are better able to push the responsibility of L&D to the employees. Organizations that have a less hierarchical structure, may face less difficulties



with decentralizing the responsibility, as the employees and teams are already more self-directed. Thus, individual characteristics may also play a role in how successfully the responsibility for learning can be distributed.

### **Supporting workplace learning**

Both informal and formal learning, as well as learning while doing, require support. The simplest supporting factor is to have at least one person taking ownership about learning and how it is managed inside the organization. However, often it requires more effort than thinking, planning, and doing, as learning is not only about what happens inside an individual's mind, but it relates to the surrounding environment, communities, and societies. Moreover the case companies are keen on developing their actions to better support learning on-the-job. Billett (2020) argues that even informal learning can be planned, designed, and supported. However, most organizations do not yet have standard practices or a clear idea how. Some implications of learning while doing were presented in the interviews. For example, team rotation, project allocation, promotions, and switching roles seem to foster learning while doing. Generally, the case companies had several ways of supporting learning and learners in different situations. These could be divided into areas of personal support, communicational support, and technological support and learning possibilities.

Personal support happens often between the employee and their supervisor, yet sometimes a HR coach, HR business partner or the HRD team can assist. Development discussions are a great way to reflect on the past and the current, as well as guide focus onto the future. As Orvis and Leffler (2011) suggest, recognizing individual characteristics helps to apply better suited support methods. In one-on-one discussions, such as development discussions, the supervisor can better recognize the individual's characteristics and determine what kind of support could benefit the individual best. Utilizing the early support model or solution-oriented techniques are ways in which the participant organizations aim to support individuals in recognizing developmental paths. The results suggest that the case companies see development discussions as one of the key ways of supporting learning. However, generally, these development discussions are held once or twice a year. Roughly, this would mean that the user is given support for learning once or twice a year, maybe for an hour or two. Learning support requires more, than an hour this spring, and another next fall. This system could still work but it would likely require other practices that support learning, where the development discussion focuses

more on individual coaching or such. Hence, some participant organizations have moved onto a more continuous manner – growth dialogues. The argument is that if the organization provides time for reflection and goal setting only few times a year, they should not expect learning to take place throughout the year. The more agile solution is to foster a continuous learning dialogue where the individual has several opportunities to reflect on their skills and development and set new goals or change direction if needed.

As it is the supervisors who mostly give out personal support, the process is highly reliant on the supervisors, their commitment, and skills. Thus, the case companies emphasize the importance of developing their supervisor's. They see it as a way of scaling the development of a learning culture. Regarding the support for learning, skills such as coaching leadership and giving feedback were seen beneficial and necessary for supervisors. Moreover, the HRD professionals saw that their job is to support the supervisor's in supporting their team members' learning. This means providing materials and structure for the development discussions, guiding them on what to ask or how, and teaching them the needed skills. In case there are no supervisors or middle management, or they fail to support their team members, the HRD teams take a bigger role in supporting individuals. They help individuals, teams, or supervisor's in finding learning materials or combining individual development goals with organizational objectives.

Communicational and technological support methods relate to the internal communication and systems and platforms. The case companies aim to foster a sustainable learning culture and encourage learning. Here, the board and the higher management may have an important role, as studies show that the board impacts the learning environment and generation of a common vision (Wallo et al., 2021) significantly. Additionally, the HRD professionals emphasize the importance of communicating organizational development objectives, as well as role-related development goals. Moreover, communicating the responsibilities and how the development is measured should support the learners. Finally, the case companies emphasize the benefits of celebrating results and achieved objectives, whilst similarly allowing mistakes and seeing them as opportunities to learn.

Another essential aspect of learning support is to provide sufficient and relevant learning opportunities and communicate about them, where to find them or how to apply for learning. Variability in the learning content, the learning methods, and how they are conducted helps the

individuals. For example, providing learning opportunities for both self-directed learning and collaborative learning. In addition to providing the more traditional class-room training, it is beneficial to consider online learning and blended learning possibilities. Most case companies provide an online learning platform, or several, for their employees, to help foster self-directed learning. The HRD professionals also believe that learning management systems and talent management system support them in their work. These systems allow the HRD teams to better recognize skill gaps, find a talent, and analyze feedback and activity rates. However, the support does not end in simply providing learning opportunities. Most often, the learning process needs additional support, unless it is built in the training. For example, providing shared discussion sessions, peer support can support the learners. Moreover, providing time for reflection and feedback, and questions and reminders throughout the course helps the learner stay motivated and makes the learning more transparent. Finally, the learners are supported by providing time and money for training, regarding the needs and resources.

### **5.1.2 How design thinking fits the current HRD processes**

Another goal for this study was to recognize whether design thinking methods could be applied into HRD activities. Moreover, I aimed to gather understanding whether design thinking is already utilized in current HRD practices. This section presents how design thinking already is visible within the case companies and where it could be further applied. Some participants clearly explained that they are utilizing a design perspective, whereas others did not mention design at all. However all case companies' actions seemed similar to design and design thinking methods. Hence, we can assume design is well applicable to HRD practitioners work.

Moreover, some designerly aspects are already visible in research on HRD practices. Garavan (1991) defined the nine key characteristics of strategic HRD practices (see table 5.1.2). For example, emphasis on understanding the area, culture, and situation of the employees and the organization is seen in both design thinking and SHRD practices. Moreover, the SHRD characteristics highlight the importance of evaluation and gathering new knowledge on what works and what needs to be changed. The case companies share a similar view that HRD is an area which requires customization and comprehension of the audience; *“There is no general recipe [for HRD]”*, stated Participant 2. Similarly, design thinking relies heavily on user-

centricity and understanding the audience or the customers (ISO 9241-210, 2019). Thus, the case companies share a similar perspective for their HRD activities which further suggests that design thinking could be applied onto HRD activities. Moreover, applying design thinking does not suggest a one-size-fits-all solution, but rather works in making the process more systematic. Some participants even mention they are already aiming to implement design thinking into their practices and processes.

**Table 5.1.2** *Key characteristics of strategic HRD practices, defined by Garavan (cited from Tseng & McLean, 2008)*

1. *“Integration with organizational missions and goals;*
2. *Top management support;*
3. *Environmental scanning;*
4. *HRD plans and policies;*
5. *Line manager commitment and involvement;*
6. *Existence of complementary HRM activities;*
7. *Expanded trainer role;*
8. *Recognition of culture, and*
9. *Emphasis on evaluation”*

### **Understanding and Clarifying the Problem**

Understanding the challenges and opportunities is where the design for learning and development begins. The case companies have plenty of ways to gather knowledge on their audience and the environment they are operating in. In research terms, they are utilizing triangulation, which is beneficial for gathering a broader perspective on the matter at hand (Wilson, 2006). The case companies gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Often, they also have several people analyzing the results, for example supervisors or the HR team. The case companies views differ on whether they approach the challenges and opportunities from top to bottom or the other way round. Some participants say they start from the higher-level objectives, such as organizational goals, strategies, challenges, and opportunities. Others mention they first start from collecting the user data, and only then move onto the higher level. Again, there is no right or wrong way to do it, and it could also work simultaneously. The important revelation here, is that combining the individual’s needs and the organization’s strategic objectives is crucial.

Depending on the approach, the case companies move onto further clarifying the objectives or analyzing the data. Understanding the root causes for challenges helps them in providing relevant solutions. For example, although data suggests that the employees are struggling with not enough sleep, a simple course on improving sleep might not help. By analyzing the data they could recognize that workloads are heavy and stress-levels are high. Thus the solution might be elsewhere than teaching about sleeping habits. Moreover, this clarification stage often includes stern dialogue between the higher organizational objectives and the employees' needs and wishes. Combining strategy and practice is seen vital for the learning to gain significant impact for the company, and its individuals. Here, applying design thinking methods may prove useful.

### **Finding and Testing Solutions**

After problem clarification, the design thinking process continues onto finding and creating solutions, as do the case companies. An important step mentioned by the participants was setting clear objectives, or a clear problem definition – just as in the Double Diamond model. Most case companies use benchmarking and utilize their networks to find new ideas for solutions. Training service providers also play an important role either in finding suitable existing solutions, creating new solutions, or helping in the ideation process. Depending on the theme of the challenge and the company's resources, they either proceed to creating the solutions themselves or continuing with an external trainer or service provider. For example, if the organization has limited amount of time and resources to put on the creation, they are more likely to buy the training elsewhere. Moreover, if the topic at hand is an area where the HRD department, nor other employees, do not have much knowledge, it is more plausible to continue with external trainers. However, internal development themes, relating to the company's product or service are mostly conducted by the organization. In these cases, the case companies highlight two factors: keeping the customer in mind and having a diverse team designing the training. Understanding who they are designing the training for and keeping them involved in the process helps to reach sufficient results. Moreover, having people from diverse background improves the outcome, as some may have more knowledge in the topic, while others have more knowledge in teaching and pedagogy.

While the design thinking process is already well seen in the current processes of the case companies, many did not test the solutions or utilize prototyping in their practices. The case

companies aim to validate their ideas in some ways, yet they do not always see the need for testing. The testing phase may take up too much time and resources, thus being an inefficient step in the process, although, the goal for prototyping is to refine the idea and ensure the final solution meets the user needs (Best, 2006). The case companies seem to rely on gaining sufficient assurance on the work that happens prior and after the launch of a new training. However, the participants mention that especially with external trainers, it is crucial to understand whether the solution fits the organization and the developmental need. This allows to avoid unprofitable investments. In these situations, the HRD team may involve supervisors, employees, or the board in the decision making, or perhaps create a short piloting program.

The case companies discuss about trial and error and allowing for mistakes and failures. The participants further mention they rely on their own expertise and sometimes simply make a well-knowledged guess. However, making a good guess requires knowledge on the audience and expertise, thus their prior actions on understanding their audience and environment cannot be left unnoted. Perhaps the need for a testing phase depends on what is being tested and how involved the employees have been earlier in the process. In addition, what happens after the launch of a new training: whether any feedback is gathered and acted upon.

### **Continuation**

The case companies see feedback as an important aspect of HRD activities. It is used to understand how well they have succeeded, what was good, what should be left out, and occasionally, it suggests where to go next. The results found in section 4.2.1, suggest that only a few participants saw gathering feedback as part of the whole learning design process. This could imply that the case companies do not recognize the follow up as part of the process. However, all participants emphasize the importance of feedback and follow up. Moreover, they gave examples on how they proceed with these actions. Thus, there is also a possibility that they answered a different question, and their answers referred to activities that take place before the delivery.

The case companies have significant measures to gather feedback and they aim to measure the effectiveness of their actions. However, they did not yet have plenty of examples on how they utilize the knowledge they gather after delivery. Design thinking suggests to aim for continuous improvement (Brown, 2008; Serrat, 2017). To better apply the design thinking methods to

HRD activities, perhaps more focus should be led on how to improve the services or trainings once they are delivered.

## **5.2 Practical Implications**

Based on the results and conclusions of this study, this section gives a few practical examples on how to conquer common challenges in HRD. Moreover, it suggests how to apply design thinking onto learning and design.

### **Sharing responsibility**

If the goal is to give more responsibility to the individuals, the organization should have sufficient opportunities and practices in place. Moreover, the organization should be able to communicate about the learning possibilities, so that an employee knows where to find training or how to apply for it. For example, by providing plenty of opportunities for learning and development, with a low threshold, can ease the burden of HRD teams. Especially, if these materials are online and available for self-studying, the HRD team does not need to be involved in the teaching or facilitation of learning. Communicating about the learning opportunities and making them accessible, calls for the individuals to make judgements themselves on what training is relevant for them. However, it is important to communicate who has responsibility over what.

### **Learning support**

Learning requires support, even if your goal is to make it self-directed. Provide support for the learners prior, throughout, and after the learning process. In relation to decentralizing the responsibility of learning, it could be beneficial to consider who is responsible for providing support for learning. Focus on providing sufficient and relevant learning opportunities. Utilizing design thinking methods may help in understanding which themes or learning methods are most relevant and effective. Consider how the learner is supported in understanding their learning goals and needs or matching them with the organization's strategic objectives. Aim to understand how the learner is supported throughout the learning process.

Simply providing a course may not be enough. Methods such as collaborative learning, reflection, and reminders may help during the learning process. After a course has been taken, provide time for reflection on goals, achievements, successes, and failures – and communicate these results with the learners. It may also be beneficial to share these insights with the whole organization, as it may inspire others to learn as well.

## **Design thinking**

Design thinking could help make the HRD process more systematic and make learning more transparent and effective. The design process should be applied flexibly and understand that the phases are not linear or require a certain order. Rather the process is a dialogue between the various stages.

Firstly, aim to understand the audience better; try to recognize their challenges, their needs and wishes, and opportunities for growth. The basis for learning and development come from within the organization, it's employees and organizational objectives. However, a wider perspective can broaden the learning horizon. The world is complex and constantly changing, thus observing the market, learning trends and research is beneficial. The second step is to combine the individual observations with the organizational learning objectives. Creating common understanding and clarifying the objectives gives a strong foundation for the learning outcomes.

Thirdly, consider the resources and knowledge within the company. If there are sufficient resources and expertise inside the organization, it may be beneficial to create the training inside the organization. Otherwise, looking for answers and ideas outside the company may be more plausible. The solution may even be a mix of external and internal training. Either way, keeping the end-users in mind, and acquiring a diverse team to design the training is beneficial.

In case the training is designed within the company, co-designing with the employees may be beneficial, as it ensures the training answers their needs better. If the topic, time, and resources allow, it may be beneficial to generate a prototype to test with the audience. In case of external training or services, consider creating a pilot program to test it out. If this is not possible, consider involving the employees in the decision-making process.



Finally, focus on what happens after the training. How well were the objectives met, and what feedback is received. This knowledge can be utilized in improving the training or it may be of use in future trainings. Moreover, it may suggest new development areas, and thus empower continuous learning. Being transparent and celebrating achievements, as well as recognizing failures helps making learning and development more visible.

### **5.3 Limitations, Evaluation, and Further Research**

This section focuses on the limitations of the study, evaluating the study, and suggests directions for future research.

#### **5.3.1 Limitations**

One of the most evident limitations of the study is that although the research aimed to understand how HRD actions could become more learner-centric via design thinking methods, it did not study the employees' perspective. Rather the study focused on the HRD professionals' experiences and descriptions of how they function, fail, and succeed. Hence, the study does not validate whether the employees share the same experience with the HRD teams. However, the participants gave examples on how they follow feedback and measure their own success and learning, which suggests that their observations and experiences could be trusted. Furthermore, the case companies' maturity on HRD actions was not tested, although it was seen as a criterion for participating in the study. The evaluation whether the company met the criteria was done by the HRD professional and the researcher. It was based on the HRD professionals' own opinions as well as materials, texts, and posts the organization had shared online. Thus, the research once again relied on the voices and experiences of the participants. However, only one participant hesitated whether their organization met the criterion, and this was considered when analyzing the results.

The number of participants could be argued as another limitation. However, the amount of qualitative data gathered from the interviews seemed rich and sufficient. Moreover, the data collected based on explanations of experiences and practices, from varying fields and companies. Thus, the results cannot be generalized onto the whole field of HRD. Moreover,

regarding methodology, the research had low triangulation as the empirical research based only on interviews and there was only one researcher. Perhaps richer results could have been gained through higher triangulation. However, the study aimed to recognize whether design thinking could be applied into HRD practices, not measure how successfully it would work. Hence, the results merely suggest a new approach, rather than give a definite direction on where HRD should move onto.

Finally, during the data analysis process, new areas of focus were recognized, which could have been studied more. For example, more information could have been gathered on how the HRD companies support learning, or how they enable learning on-the-job. As these were areas that arose from the data as common objectives for many of the participants, it could have been interesting to see what solutions the participants had already sought.

### **5.3.2 Evaluation and Research Ethics**

This research followed the basic principles and guidelines for research. The research participants were treated with respect and dignity, their rights were protected and clearly stated, and they had the possibility to withdraw from the research at any given moment. The research promised to keep the participants as well as their organizations anonymous. Thus, only relevant information, such as, the size of the company, or the job position of the interviewee were stated. All interviewees received information about the topic of the research in the interview invitation, as well as, in the beginning of the interviews. The attendance was voluntary, and all participants were guided on how to proceed in case they wish to withdraw themselves or a statement from the research. Moreover, they were asked for permission in recording the interviews and it was explained how the recordings and transcripts would be utilized afterwards. Finally, the methods for data collection and analysis, were selected based on academic objectivity and reliability.

According to Whitemore, et al. (2001), research evaluation bases on four primary criteria; credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity. Credibility refers to explaining the data in a credible way. Authenticity refers to recognizing differences relating to the context of the participants. Criticality refers to whether the research presents evidence of sufficient criticality and integrity refers to the validity of the study and how it is presented.

Regarding credibility, the interviews allowed the participants to express themselves freely, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. Research authenticity was maintained while conducting the interviews and the research analysis. The interviewees were asked to further explain their experiences and thoughts when necessary. The quotes presented in this research are translations from the original transcripts. They have been translated to the best of the researcher's ability, and they aimed to maintain the tone of voice and utilize similar expressions. For further clarification, the original quotes can be viewed in the appendices. Criticality of the research is expressed through the discussion between the empirical data and the literature review. In addition, the study limitations have been explained to further describe the criticality of the study. Finally, the research clearly defines which topics are derived from the literature, which from the empirical data, and which relate to the researcher's own thinking. This aims to clarify the integrity of the research.

### **5.3.3 Further Research**

This study suggests that design thinking and its methods could be applied into HRD practices. However, this research does not validate whether design thinking is beneficial for HRD or how these design practices could be utilized in learning and development. Hence, further research should be conducted on how design thinking works in practice, whether it is successful, and which tools could be utilized. Moreover, this research bases on the actions and experiences of the HRD function, thus more information on the employees' perspective should be added in future research projects.

In addition to design thinking, more research should be conducted on how the responsibility of learning is divided within organizations. Future research could suggest in which situations it is beneficial to decentralize the responsibility of learning. Perhaps organizations that are highly self-directed, are better able to empower self-directed learning. However, as most of the case companies were keen on dividing responsibility, future research could suggest how the responsibility could be divided within a highly hierarchical organization as well. It would be interesting to find out what are the prerequisites for decentralizing the responsibility of learning, and whether there are any downfalls or barriers.

Finally, factors related to supporting learning should be studied more extensively. Although design thinking could help recognizing the right needs and learning opportunities, HRD should also consider how they answer these developmental needs. A general supporting factor could be the way a training is conducted, whether it is online, interactive, collaborative, self-studied. All these things affect the way learning should be supported. Thus, future research could suggest how different learning conventions are supported, and how the supporting role is divided between the different stakeholders.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A – Interview Questions

The following questions were utilized in the interviews. The questions are in Finnish, as it was the language in which all the interviews were held.

### Muista mainita alkuun:

- Oma esittely, pääaine, kiinnostus aiheeseen, tutkimus tehdään Aalto yliopistoon informaatioverkostojen pääaineeseen, aiheena HRD-käytänteet
- Tietoja käsitellään luottamuksellisesti, tutkimuksessa ei käy ilmi mistä organisaatiosta tai keneltä tiedot on kerätty.
- Osallistuminen on täysin vapaaehtoista eli tutkimuksesta voi missä tahansa vaiheessa vetäytyä
- Sopiiko, että haastattelu nauhoitetaan?

### Yleisiä kysymyksiä:

- Lyhyt esittely itsestäsi:
  - o **Kuka olet, mikä on roolisi** – kuvaile omia työtehtäviäsi?
  - o Missä firmassa olet töissä? Mikä toimiala? **Paljonko henkilöstöä?**
  - o **Kuinka suuri HRD-tiimi teillä on?** Mistä kaikesta sinä vastaat tiimissä?

### Yleiset HRD-kysymykset

- Mikä on HRD:n rooli sinun mielestäsi?
  - o HRD:n tavoite? (1.6.)
- Minkälaisia tavoitteita teillä on HRD:n kannalta?
- Mitkä asiat koet suurimmiksi haasteiksi omassa työssäsi? Entä yleisesti teidän yrityksenne HRD-työssä?

### Osaamisen johtaminen

- **Miten oppiminen näkyy teidän organisaatiossanne? Entä yrityksen strategiassa?**
  - o Miten teillä puhutaan oppimisesta?

- Miten oppimista tuetaan teillä?
- Mitkä ovat suurimpia kipupisteitä oppimisen suhteen?
  - Miten teillä tarjotaan aikaa oppimiselle?
- Minkälaisia kehitysohjelmiä teillä on?
  - Teettekö itse oppimissisältöjä vai ostatteko palveluita muualta?
  - Keitä teillä kehitetään?
- Miten lähestytte kehitystavoitteita ja lähdette luomaan niihin ratkaisuja?
  - Onko teillä jokin prosessi/malli, jota noudatatte?
  - Keitä osallistuu kehitysprosessiin ja sen suunnitteluun?
  - Minkälaisia rajoittavia tekijöitä teillä on tässä? Mistä ne tulevat? (esim. Johtoryhmä, budjetti jne.)

### **Prosessi:**

- Miten tunnistatte kehitystarpeita?
  - (Millä tavoin selvitätte henkilöstön haasteita ja mahdollisuuksia?)
  - Keiltä kaikilta kysytte näitä?
- Miten teette päätöksiä mihin haasteisiin keskitytään? Mitä lähetään kehittämään?
  - (ketä osallistuu tähän prosessiin)
- Millä tavoin pyritte löytämään ja luomaan ratkaisuja?
  - Ketä osallistuu tähän prosessiin?
- Miten testaatte ratkaisuja? Miten “prototyyppi”?
  - (voiko esim. Pilotoida jotain – onko pitkäjänteisiä ostoja/suunnitelmia vai voiko agiilisti kokeilla) Onko kenties pienempiä testiryhmiä ennen kuin laajennetaan jne.
- Miten keräätte palautetta?
  - (reaktiivinen vai proaktiivinen) kuinka usein?
  - Miten palautteeseen reagoidaan? (kuopataan vai kehitetään?)
- Miten ylläpidätte kehitysohjelmiä ja jatkuvaa kehitystä?
  - Miten ja kuinka usein keräätte palautetta työstänne ja kehitysohjelmissa?

### **Esimerkit jos aikaa:**

- Kuvaile jokin onnistunut kehitysprojekti:

- Mitä kehititte ja miksi?
- Miten suunnittelu eteni? Keitä osallistui?
- Miten veitte läpi?
- Miksi uskot, että juuri tämä onnistui? Mitä opitte tästä?
- Kuvaile jokin epäonnistunut kehitysprojekti:
  - Mitä kehititte ja miksi?
  - Miten suunnittelu eteni? Keitä osallistui?
  - Miten veitte läpi?
  - Miksi uskot, että tämä epäonnistui? Mitä opitte?

### **Lopuksi**

- Miltä tämä haastattelu tuntui?
- Mikä olisi yksi oivallus, jonka haluaisi jakaa muille HRD-ammattilaisille?

## Appendix B – Original Finnish Quotes

### 4.1.1

*“No, en mä tiedä. Haaste on sinänsä aika vahva sana, että jotenkin, että varmaan se on tietysti aina se, että on iso tehtäväkenttä ja on paljon asioita mille voisi tehdä jotain ja mitä voisi kehittää. Miten osaa löytää ne liiketoiminnan kannalta oikeet asiat? Ne asiat, jotka siinä hetkessä tuottaa eniten arvoa liiketoiminnalle.” (P9)*

### 4.1.2

*“Mä en anna mitään lisäarvoa jos mä meen johonkin, johonkin tässä organisaatiossa... ..ja rupeen viisastelemaan mitä ne tarvitsee. Mä en voi edes tietää mitä ne tarvitsee.” (P2)*

*“Mut meil on myös ehkä aika poikkeuksellisii semmosii Driven tyyppejä, tosi semmosii itseohjautuvia ja just sellasii jotka ottaa omistajuutta siit omasta kehityksestä. Joka tarkoittaa et jos huomataan et nyt täs täytyis kehittyä tai tähän tarvitaan osaamista, ni meil on aika omatoimisii tyyppejä jotka sit ehkä ite rupee perehtymään aiheeseen.” (P11)*

*”Mä olen se, jonka työtehtävä tämä on, mutta mun tehtävä on saada näitä muita tekemään.” (P7)*

### 4.1.3

*“Et se valmennus on ehkä vaa alkusysäys jollekki muutokselle, nii pitää se muutoksen kokonaisuus ottaa huomioon, siel pitää olla kaikkee muutaki tukee siel arjessa, et jos siel arjessa ikään ku päästään palaamaan vähän niinku vanhaan, nii, nii sit se muutos ei toteudu, niin yksittäisillä valmennuspäivillä ihan oikeesti saavuteta ihan hirveesti” (P3)*

*”No sit me ollaan viety valmentavaa otetta eteenpäin, mikä tarkoittaa sitä, että esihenkilöillä olis parempi kyky tukea sitä oppimista myös arjessa.” (P10)*

*“Paljon tää meidän sisäinen effortti keskittyy meidän tiimiliideihin, mut me ajatellaan et se on semmonen aika skaalautuva tapa – et ne opit sit valuu myös niihin tiimeihin” (P11)*

*“Mut sit on tehty ihan esihenkilöille semmonen tukimateriaali, että kysy näitä, tee näin, näin valmistaudut.” (P1)*

*“Et me ollaan just lisätty näitä meidän esihenkilöitten sparraushetkiä vähintään kerran viikossa... ..ja siellä on mahdollisuus kysyä, keskustella, tuoda haasteita esiin. Eli me ollaan valtavasti lisätty tällaisia lyhytaikaisia täsmäkoulutuksia, joita myös niinkun webinaariksi tallennetaan. Ja ne on sit meidän oppimisalustalla saatavilla, et sieltä löytyis itseohjautuvasti myös apua.” (P4)*

*”No se on tietyst siis se, että tyypit jotka siihen osallistuu on motivoituneita siihen hommaan, sillä on iso merkitys. Tavallaan tehdään mielekkäitä juttuja, asioita joita ihmiset toivoo, että tapahtuu, ja ne on niitä motivoituneita edistään sitä oppimista.” (P7)*

#### **4.2.1**

*“Et ensin meidän pitää build awareness, understanding, sit tulee call to action, sit tulee follow the results, ja lopulta celebrate the milestones.” (P6)*

*“No se vaihtelee tosi paljon. Nyt kun meil on semmonen hajautettu malli, niin monesta asiasta mä en ees kuule. Ne pystyy ihan siellä tekemään päätöksiä, ku melkeen jokasessa toiminnossa on joku valmentajan rooli, joka joko valmentaa itse tai sitten ostaa valmennusta.” (P2)*

*”Et jonkin verran yritetään tehdä semmost koulutuksen vaikuttavuuden analysointia ja niitä palautteita toki summailla ja sieltä saada sit tietenkin kehitysaiheita ja -tarpeita, lisätarpeita kans esille.” (P5)*

#### **4.2.2**

*“Täytyyhän sitten koko ajan seurata mitä yrityksen ulkopuolella tapahtuu, et mitä tuolla talent-markkinassa tapahtuu. Mut sit tietysti mitä tässä HRD-kentässä kaiken kaikkiaan tapahtuu, minkälaista kehitystä, mitä on parhaita käytänteitä, täntyyppisiä asioita.” (P9)*

*“Mutta tärkein on se, että tapaa meidän ihmisiä ja kyselee ja kuuntelee ja on mukana mahdollisuuksien mukaan. Ja tietysti tuntee sitä toimialaa ja sitä asiakastyön arkee. Ja sit mieltii että mikä auttais heitä onnistumaan siellä arjessa. Se on musta ehkä tärkeintä, et me autetaan heitä onnistumaan sen osaamisen kehittämisen kautta niissä heidän asiakastöissä. Ja sit kun kuulee että joku on onnistunu tai asiakas on antanu hyvää palautetta, niin mä oon aina tosi ylpee.” (P1)*

*“Pitää tehdä fiksuja valintoja sen suhteen et mitä tekee. Tietysti se lähtee siitä hyvästä yhteistyöstä liiketoiminnan kanssa. Sen vuoropuhelun pitää olla jatkuvaa... ..Sun pitää ymmärtää sitä strategisella tasolla, mutta myös sillä taktisella ja aika operatiivisellakin tasolla sitä liiketoiminnan arkea.” (P9)*

*“Yksilön näkövinkkelistä perustuu aika pitkälle kehityskeskusteluihin esihenkilöiden kanssa.”*  
(P2)

*“Elikkä me ollaan alettu nyt puhumaan vahvasti jatkuvan oppimisen kulttuurista ja jatkuvan oppimisen metodeista. ...Et se [kehityskeskustelu] ei voi tapahtua enää kerran vuodessa – tämmösten suunnitelmien tekeminen ja niiden arviointi – vaan se pitää tapahtua jatkuvasti vuoden aikana. Nyt me ollaan lähetty siitä, et me toivotaan, et se tapahtuisi neljä kertaa vuodessa.”* (P6)

### 4.2.3

*“Et et tota, me ei voida kaikkea ottaa haltuun mitä vaan maan ja taivaan väliltä löytyy. Että sitä fokusta pitäis löytää... ...ei oo aikaa eikä rahaa, se ei oo tehokasta tarjota kaikille kaikkea.”* (P2)

*“Ei se ehkä sit loppujen lopuks niin vaikeeta oo tunnistaa mitkä on ne isot asiat mitkä sieltä nousee esiin. Ehkä sit se haaste on tavallaan ymmärtää se ongelma riittävän konkreettisella tasolla, et sä osaat sit ne ratkaisut tavallaan räätälöidä siihen tarpeeseen.”* (P9)

*“Et jos, jos niinku sata ihmist toivoo jotain nii sit se on vähän jo äänestys. Että he on toivonu tällaseen fokusta.”* (P3)

*”Se tehokkuusajattelu myös sitten, et ei oo kaikkien ei oo tarve olla mukana kaikessa mutta mahdollisimman kattavan mielipiteen saaminen.”* (P4)

*“Valistunut arvaus”* (P3)

*”Siihen, tavoitteen kirkastukseen pitää panostaa jotta sit me nähään niinku lopussa helpommin et miten me ollaan onnistuttu.”* (P3)

### 4.2.4

*“On helppo sanoa, et tätä pitäisi olla ja tätä sulla on ja nyt pitäis jotain tehdä. Mutta keinojen löytäminen ei oo helppoa.”* (P2)

*“Benchmarkkaus on ihan äärimmäisen hyvä keino, koska siinä kuulee myös sit niitä sudenkuoppia ja niitä, niitä niinkun... Älä tee näin -osastoo.”* (P5)

*“Näil meidän yrityksillä on jotenki aina sellanen oma identiteetti. Et kyl aina pitää vähä räätälöidä ja saada sitä heiän kielelle ja heiän tavalle mut et jotain synergiaetua niis usein on.” (P3)*

#### **4.2.5**

*“Jos ei kokeile mitään uutta ni ei voi myöskään saada mitään uutta.” (P10)*

#### **4.2.6**

*“Auttaako tää asia nyt mun omassa työssäni? Se on mun mielestä se pääkriteeri, et sen pitää palvella sitä arkeani. (P2)*

*“It takes two to tango, ei se oo aina niin et se vika on siinä valmetajassa. Se voi olla yhtä lailla siinä ryhmässä ja ja et ihmisiä on niinku ikään kuin pakotettu johonki valmennukseen.” (P2)*

#### **5.1.2**

*“Et semmosta yleisreseptiä [HRD:lle] ei ole olemassa.” (P2)*