Formal learning and organizational performance: the interplay of goal setting and flexible learning practices in attaining goal congruence

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Abstract
Purpose – Employee training and learning have transformed over the years. The movement from classroom training to the blended format represents the magnitude of this evolution. This has placed much attention on self-regulated learning. This study aimed to understand the individual and organizational mechanisms that sustain the formal learning process in organizations. It explored the goals the organizations and employees strive to achieve by investing in learning. Through this, the authors investigated how technology assistance makes learning more goal-oriented, despite the possibility of different goals for different stakeholders. They also examined how person-job fit can be achieved in employee training.

Design/methodology/approach – The study adopted a grounded theory-based inductive approach using a qualitative inquiry that used in-depth interviews of employees working in the Indian IT/ITES sector. This sector is knowledge-intensive and engages in constant skill development. A content analysis of the interview transcripts unraveled the most relevant themes from the participants’ discussion.

Findings – Individual learners use dimensions of self-regulated learning to set and achieve goals such as better performance and career development. On the other hand, organizations use learning support mechanisms such as better access and flexibility to direct employee learning behavior to achieve organizational goals. Focusing on goal congruence leads to better achievement of results. Goal congruence also implies good person-organization fit.

Originality/value – This research established how aligning individual and organizational mechanisms can help achieve training goals that ultimately contribute to organizational performance. The study differentiated itself by investigating training goal setting and goal achievement at two levels – organizational and individual – using a qualitative approach. It also showed how goal congruence is vital in improving organizational performance and how technology-enabled training practices rely on self-regulated learning and help achieve goal congruence.

Keywords Employee training, Learning and development, Flexible learning practices, Training goals, Individual goals, Organizational goals, Goal congruence, Organizational performance

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction
As researchers and practitioners try to figure out what the fifth industrial revolution has in store, one certainty is that new risks and opportunities may threaten the continuation and survival of current business models. Training employees who co-work with machines is an essential consideration of Industry 5.0 (Maddikunta et al., 2022). The strategic management approach embedded in the resource-based view advocates intellectual capital management, resulting in better structural, human and relational capital. Hence, reorganizing people management procedures and processes that support learning and development (L&D) is necessary. For an organization to gain from new information, it must offer ongoing chances for L&D integrating more modern procedures, organizational frameworks and partners who can meet employees’ learning requirements. While organizations have embraced the immense possibilities of technology to deliver training, employee learning preferences have also changed and therefore...
demand high attention (Mikołajczyk, 2022). Organizational support rendered to employee training will result in enhanced employee performance and a positive organizational image (Antonacopoulou, 2001; Hitka et al., 2010). Employee learning and amalgamation of employee knowledge help improve internal processes and performance. It also contributes to sustaining competitiveness (Kach et al., 2015). To survive in a highly uncertain environment, firms should constantly enhance, deepen and develop employee knowledge and reflect on current needs (Hitka and Balážová, 2015). Organizations ensure formal learning through employee training (Noe, 2020).

Employee training is an area that has transformed much over the past years, the striking aspects of which are the enhanced learning focus and the employee-driven learning approach (Dachner et al., 2021). This resulted from a pertinent demand to move from the largely prevalent traditional formats in which participants would get exposed to random spontaneous sessions. The drivers of transformation in organizational training and learning are open communication, high engagement and a creative atmosphere promoting learning and knowledge sharing (Connell, 2014). The newly evolved technology enables the training or learning function to address these. Literature on learning (Benson and Reinders, 2011; Kormos and Csizer, 2013) emphasizes that self-initiated, self-designed and self-monitored learning is decisive to human development. Learners are expected to take more initiative in their learning as resources, venues and learning spaces become more accessible (Toering et al., 2012). Learners must be able to use technology for learning because it provides important learning spaces and venues in the ecology of learning and allows for self-initiated learning experiences (Benson and Palaskas, 2006; Lai and Gù, 2011; Reinders and White, 2011). However, the results of research on the self-initiated use of technology for learning and its effectiveness have been mixed and require further investigation (Lai and Hwang, 2014). Self-directed learning (SDL) and self-regulated learning (SRL) are two concepts closely linked to learning. Broadly, SDL addresses both the learning environment and learner characteristics, while SRL is predominantly about the latter. However, both SDL and SRL entail active learner engagement and goal-directed behavior. In that sense, they may be considered the same. Therefore, many researchers have used the terms interchangeably (Loyens et al., 2008). Knowles (1975) describes SDL as a process in which individuals, with or without support, analyze their learning requirements, set objectives, identify materials and resources, choose instructional tactics and evaluate learning outcomes. Long (1990) refined this view by incorporating the psychological dimension, stating that SDL comprises self-generating activities to attain individual learning goals. Candy (1991) improvised the concept further by bringing in four highly interrelated aspects of SDL: (1) self-directed learning as a personal quality (i.e. personal autonomy); (2) self-directed learning as learners’ willingness and ability to manage their learning processes (i.e. self-management); (3) self-directed learning as people’s independent pursuit of learning opportunities outside of formal educational settings; and (4) learner control of instruction. The first and second dimensions are concerned with learning outcomes or subjective experience, whereas the third and fourth dimensions are concerned with learning strategies. Our research focused on self-management abilities in the autonomous and self-directed learning scenario as it is worth an inquiry.

In India, knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS) which include organizations in the information technology (IT) sector are significant employers of the labor force. Research in KIBS has confirmed the role of learning in fostering innovation that improves organizational performance (Bomm et al., 2022; Milbratz et al., 2020). Training in KIBS is characterized by employee autonomy, flexibility and technology to make training accessible (Wojtczuk-Turek, 2017). Today’s workforce is interested in staying relevant and values continuous learning opportunities (Naim and Lenka, 2018). Training strategy resulting in L&D contributes significantly to retaining employees who otherwise display a tendency of frequent job-hopping (Gupta, 2019).
Research indicates that learning interventions should include a variety of strategies that emphasize learners’ intrinsic motivation as well as their subject matter knowledge and abilities (Garrison, 1997). However, not many studies on this have been conducted in the recent past in the Indian KIBS in the transformed context. It is challenging to build generalizable models from which theories, forecasts, hypotheses and tests may be derived due to the diversity of knowledge workers’ abilities, career pathways, work settings and other factors. In addition, there are a variety of knowledge-based occupations, career pathways, individuals and tasks and obligations they undertake. According to Prasad et al. (2007), research on the classification of knowledge workers is scarce. It is difficult to do field research in the information technology sector due to its fragmentation, variety, specialization and compartmentalization, and because employment arrangements are not “one size fits all”. As a result, the inquiry into this issue must take a more holistic approach.

Entrance motivation and intention maintenance affect SDL readiness, according to Garrison (1997). Learners’ initial motivation to engage in SDL is based on their interest in specific learning goals (i.e. whether they meet their personal requirements and inclinations) and how likely they feel they are to achieve these goals given the information they already have about their knowledge, skills and the availability (or lack thereof) of organizational, philosophical and socioeconomic resources and hurdles. A flexible mindset to deal with uncertainty and complexity in technology interaction (Kop and Fournier, 2011), a proactive approach to actively seek opportunities to learn (Kormos and Csizer, 2013) and a mindset to pursue open-ended learning activities due to personal interests all influence entering motivation in self-directed use of technology for learning (Wong and Looi, 2012). In this setting, it would be beneficial to investigate the specific factors that influenced the learners’ ability to employ self-directed learning strategies using technology.

According to Lai (2013), ensuring that learners comprehend the logic behind the objective and selection of the learning activity will aid in maintaining their focus. A person’s drive to study independently considerably impacts the chance they will achieve their stated goals. This suggests that there is a need for research into the use of self-guided technology in promoting learning and self-regulation. Similarly, it is worthwhile to investigate how organizations and peers enhance one’s learning. Further, learning programs must address motivation and skill development to support self-directed technology use, and the factors facilitating these aspects require a detailed investigation. Our study was based on Zimmerman’s three-phase socio-cognitive model of self-regulation with a focus on motivation, knowledge and skill foundations for technology enabled learning. It centered on the numerous SRL mechanisms and their technological, strategic and practical benefits. We investigated the relationship between learner engagement and goal attainment.

It is already known that training has advantages for both individuals and organizations (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009). However, what is largely not explored is the nature of goals that the organizations and individual employees aim to achieve through training or formal learning. Goals form the basis for motivation and help improve performance (Stazyk et al., 2021). Organizations spend on training and employee development to improve performance, while individuals may anticipate better career opportunities by investing in training. Whether these two sets of goals are in the same direction needs to be explored.

It would be intriguing to understand more about the individual and organizational objectives that are envisaged to be achieved via participation in and facilitation of training sessions. With this consideration comes the P-O fit between a person and a company. Research on P-O fit is essential since, by definition, a person’s efforts to maintain P-O fit are the ideal manifestation of a drive to create firm-specific productive capacity, with a particular emphasis in the case of knowledge employees on the maintenance and development of technical skills. In the context of this study, “P-O fit” refers to knowledge workers’ judgments of how well their personal objectives for various elements of professional advancement
correspond with those of their employers. The self-assessment of P-O fit by professionals in the knowledge business is an example of a concept-matching process outlined by social cognition theory (Wingreen and Blanton, 2007). In addition, P-O fit should, in principle, be capable of capturing the entirety of professional development's nuance and complexity. In the context of a knowledge worker, P-O fitness refers to the worker's own assessment of what kind of learning and development are required to equip them with the most firm-specific human capital feasible. P-O fit has been extensively explored in the academic literature, but systemic challenges in its measurement and operation have hindered its theoretical development (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Kristof, 1996; Edwards, 1991). Individual variations in assessing P-O fit add another degree of complexity to the study of this phenomena (Cable and DeRue, 2002; Kristof, 1996; Prasad et al., 2007; Wingreen and Blanton, 2007). Owing to this, very few studies either operationalize P-O fit which indicates the richness and complexity of the phenomenon or expresses individual subjectivity (Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). In short, one purpose of this research was to suggest and produce an integrated, coherent system model that will support the P-O fit of knowledge professionals through the process of training and development. This model should be able to represent the complexity and subjectivity of the phenomena, as well as allow knowledge-based professionals to be differentiated according to the P-O fit viewpoints they take personally.

Expecting employees to spend extended periods away from work for skill improvement and training is not ideal. This is why practitioners view the increased use of technology to support flexible employee training as the solution. Researchers have found over time that technology-enabled learning plays a significant role in developing competencies (Yoon and Lim, 2010; Kondratova et al., 2017). The flexibility and accessibility offered by technology-aided training methods such as e-learning, m-learning and micro-learning cannot be paralleled by exclusively using traditional methods (Kimiloglu et al., 2017). Blended learning, which uses the strengths of traditional and modern methods, is gaining popularity (Bogdan et al., 2017). Nevertheless, such options require considerable decision-making from the organization and employees as discussed earlier (SRL). This gives rise to the possibility of employees focusing more on their own requirements and losing sight of the organizational requirements. Aligning the training goals of the organization and the individual will provide many benefits (P-O fit). Our research investigated how organizations utilize contemporary options to make L&D accessible and maximize its usefulness to the organization and the employees. We also explored the mechanisms that work at the individual and organizational levels to align the training goals. Specifically, we tried to address the following research questions through our study.

\textit{RQ1.} How has the transformation of employee training with an enhanced emphasis on SRL impacted individual and organizational goal achievement?

\textit{RQ2.} Are there interest differences between the organization and employees as far as employee training is concerned? If yes, how can such differences be reduced to achieve P-O fit?

Our study was conducted in environments where outcome evaluations are subject to noise and information about the transformation process is ambiguous. Investigations on training have grown more crucial as businesses move away from the industrial revolution’s routines and more toward teams, knowledge and skills (Rock and Jones, 2015). Yet, there is a lack of knowledge on the effectiveness of different organizational processes in organizations that do not use metrics, as well as whether or not certain training approaches are helpful for specific employee types. Hence, we adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research methods have the potential to track singular or unexpected events, provide rich descriptions of complex phenomena, provide extensive explanations for challenging occurrences, provide
those whose voices are rarely heard a chance and enable for the voicing of views that are normally overlooked (Sofaer, 1999).

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Employee training and learning

Adaptation to change is among the essential qualities of organizational survival (Salas et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2016). An organization’s learning practices provide robust support to such survival. How well the organization has adapted reflects in the enlargement of an organization’s collective knowledge base. Newer skills and working methods are individually and collectively learned and added to the cumulative organizational knowledge repository (Rollett, 2012). Training refers to the planned efforts by the organization that enable employees to learn and improve their job-related competencies (Noe, 2020). Thus, training is directed at individual learning that subsequently improves job performance. Labeled as strategic human resource development, training and other developmental interventions aim to achieve organizational objectives through utilizing personal knowledge and skills (Garavan et al., 2012). This perspective highlights the importance of meeting organizational goals while contributing to individual knowledge-building and skill utilization. Learning helps individuals thrive at work (Kleine et al., 2019). The most researched aspects of training and learning are training needs analysis, design, methods, characteristics of trainees, pre-training and post-training environments, evaluation and training for specific groups such as management development, leadership development and team training (Tannenbaum et al., 2010). More recent research centers around the contribution of training and development in sustainable human resource management (Macke and Genari, 2019) and technology-enabled personalized learning (Xie et al., 2019). Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) emphasized the importance of outcome and goal orientations in training. The models, methods and training tools are primarily focused on the individual level, while the contribution of training should be assessed at the macro-level organizational effectiveness (Kozlowski et al., 2000). This explains how both individual and organizational performance reflect the true impact of a company’s training initiatives.

Training creates learning opportunities, while actual learning depends on several factors such as motivation, self-efficacy and other contextual elements (Blanchard and Thacker, 2013). Directing the efforts toward creating a learning organization improves the transfer of training, contributing to performance improvements (Weldy, 2009). The most desirable outcome of training is learning, and that can lead to or influence organizational outcomes such as turnover intention (Bartlett and Kang, 2004), organization’s effectiveness and profitability (Aragón-Sánchez et al., 2003), innovative performance (Sung and Choi, 2014), employee commitment (Bulut and Culha, 2010) and engagement and employee performance (Eldor and Harper, 2016). Such outcomes indicate organizational performance, thus reaffirming the role of employee learning in organizational performance. Therefore, organizations tend to focus on training activities specifically focused on learning at three levels: individual, group and organizational (Jyothibabu et al., 2010; Aragon et al., 2014). While individual learning is reflected in work-related behavior, group-level learning is demonstrated through shared understanding and performance. Learning-oriented training has some essential characteristics: broad application, planned and long-term orientation, multi-skill orientation and team orientation (Aragón et al., 2014). At the individual level, general mental ability and learning impact employee performance (Tracey et al., 2007), and this performance contributes to organizational performance. The discussion this far tries to understand the role of training and learning in individual and organizational performance. The next section explores the various individual and organizational mechanisms that facilitate learning.
2.2 Access and flexibility in employee training: the role of self-regulation

Participation in training results from proper access to training and the training support provided (Bartlett, 2001). Perceived access to training has two dimensions: firstly, the extent to which employees think they have access to training opportunities to acquire the competencies to perform in their present jobs; secondly, the absence of constraints that prevent them from accessing such training. Bulut and Culha (2010) maintained that access to training refers to the employees’ perceptions about the probability of their attending training. It is independent of training selection criteria, application procedure and managerial support for training. Higher perceived access to training is more productive than mandating training topics and hours (Bartlett and Kang, 2004). When training is available and easy to access, employees make productive use of it, irrespective of the methods used. Gegenfurtner et al. (2016) studied the choice aspect in training – making training mandatory or voluntary – and found that providing autonomy and choice is linked positively to outcomes. Earlier studies in the area have made varying conclusions regarding this. While some researchers concluded that mandatory training ensured more training motivation and impact on performance, and employees perceived mandatory training to be of higher value (Baldwin et al., 1991; Rynes and Rosen, 1995), others found that voluntary training contributed more to the motivation to transfer (Mathieu et al., 1992). However, with changing times, organizations are bringing in better access and providing more choices by relying on technology-enabled learning. Learning enablers include formal and informal processes or structures that help acquire, share and use knowledge. The enablers of online learning are supportive organizational culture, trust fostered by appropriate structures and procedures, and appropriate tools and learning systems (Ardichvili, 2008). These ensure alignment of employee choices and organizational requirements. Organizations try to reap the benefits of this transformation in learning by incorporating it in training delivery and consumption.

Organizations invest in technology-enabled learning (learning management systems, e-learning, m-learning) for content development and delivery, or outsource training services. Training goals set by organizations should ideally lead to organizational goal achievement. From the individual perspective, the time invested in learning should result in better performance and career growth. Training assignment refers to whether formal training is assigned to employees through mandates (Tsai and Tai, 2003). Thus, training assignment amounts to training goal setting by the organization, and for best results, the organization must provide the necessary support through access and flexibility. Technology-enabled options provide a large amount of flexibility in learning which is cited as the biggest advantage (Choudhury and Pattnaik, 2020). However, such flexibility calls for self-regulation from the learner’s side. Specific performance standards associated with goals enhance self-regulation and proximal short-term goals result in enhanced self-regulation (Schunk, 2001). Performance uses goals as reference points, and therefore, self-regulation is influenced by goal setting (Koch and Nafziger, 2011). Hence, goal setting affects self-regulation and leads to performance. This confirms how learning enablers influence learners’ self-regulation while contributing to goal achievement. On delving deeper into training assignment and self-regulation in organizational training, we see how companies may opt for a combination of voluntary and mandatory training, indicating goal setting from both the individual and organizational sides.

Organizational support is essential to organizational learning (Barette et al., 2012). Such support includes development, training opportunities, flexible training methods, coaching and chances to apply what is learned. Perceived advantages of e-learning (convenience, customization, cost-effectiveness and outsourcing) in corporate training outweigh the disadvantages (lack of social interaction and lack of awareness). However, employees prefer blended learning rather than relying entirely on technology-driven training (Kimiloglu et al., 2017). This helps them make the best out of both traditional and technology-enabled methods.
This discussion leads us to the question of how or on what basis the employees exercise their choice in learning or volunteer to undertake training and how organizations guide such employee training choices. This is discussed in the following sections, thereby providing a broader perspective on the topic.

Technology-enabled learning allows flexibility and autonomy to pursue learning at the learners’ convenience and pace. Bell and Kozlowski (2002) discussed the balancing of control by the organization and learner flexibility, thus introducing the idea of adaptive guidance by extending the self-regulatory approach to training effectiveness. The process through which “learners personally activate and sustain cognitions, emotions, and actions that are consistently oriented towards the fulfilment of learning goals” is known as self-regulated learning (SRL) (Zimmerman and Schunk, 2011, p. 1). It is the extent to which learners actively engage in their metacognitive, motivational and behavioral learning processes. Learners purposefully use learning processes to attain their goals. SRL is important in understanding the connection between corporate training environment and training effectiveness in the learner-centric format, according to Lourenço and Ferreira (2019). They did warn, however, that too much of learner autonomy may be harmful. This is why, as mentioned in the next section, organizations apply control mechanisms to steer training activities while fostering self-learning. Goals are governing agents that aid in the implementation of SRL in work-related training. Planning, tracking, conceptual understanding, focus, learning methods, perseverance, goal setting, environmental structuring, help-seeking, motivation, emotion regulation and effort are the most important regulating processes (Sitzmann and Ely, 2011). Goal setting, context architecture, task planning, time management, help-seeking and self-evaluation were identified as SRL characteristics in online and mixed learning by Barnard et al. (2009). Toering et al. (2012) proposed planning, self-monitoring, evaluation, reflection, effort and self-efficacy as the SRL dimensions. Zimmerman (2002) discussed three phases in SRL: forethought, performance and self-reflection. While forethought happens before the actual learning process, the performance and self-reflection phases act out during and after the learning process respectively. There are sub-processes in each stage. Forethought (SRL-F) includes task analysis (goal setting, strategic planning) and self-motivation beliefs (self-efficacy, outcome expectations, intrinsic interest/value and learning goal orientation); the performance phase includes self-control and self-observation; and the self-reflection phase includes self-judgment and self-reaction. Fontana et al. (2015) came out with a list of sub-processes in SRL-F. They identified goal setting, strategic planning, self-efficacy and task interest/value as the important sub-processes in SRL-F. SRL-F is of particular interest in our research as it includes the goal-setting perspective and happens before learning begins. Recent research suggests a correlation between SRL-F and performance outcomes (Spoon et al., 2021). SRL-F is relevant for our study as well as it was designed to understand the differences between individuals and organizations in terms of interest or goals related to training in the context of better access and flexible training practices.

2.3 Goal setting in employee learning
An individual goal is what someone deliberately tries to achieve. The goal-setting theory proves that specific, ambitious, achievable goals lead to better performance. If the goals are jointly set by employees and supervisors, it leads to better productivity (Locke and Latham, 2019). In training, such goal setting would reflect in the employee training/learning plans assigned. Licht and Dweck (1984) proposed that individuals can have two goal orientations: learning and performance. Thoughtful consideration of goal orientation leads to more effective training initiatives (Medina, 2017). An employee with a performance goal orientation might be reluctant to attend training programs (Button et al., 1996). Learning goal orientation positively influences departmental performance (Porter and Latham, 2013). A learning goal
orientation also makes employees invest efforts in acquiring knowledge (Kwon and Kim, 2020). Another classification of goal orientations is mastery and performance (Elliot and McGregor, 2001). Mastery goals pertain to mastering or becoming exceptionally well-versed in a particular task. Performance goals imply demonstrating appropriate competence to others. A learning or mastery orientation is ideal for organizations, and interventions are designed accordingly. Enhanced performance orientation during training might hamper actual learning, especially for complex subject matters (Kozlowski et al., 2000). Though trainees display good performance during training, they may not transfer the learning due to superficial knowledge attainment. Mastery goals foster better learning of complex skills and encourage self-regulatory processes.

Goal setting is the foundation for explaining all kinds of work motivation (Lunenburg, 2011). Individuals assigned specific goals tend to perform better than others. Employees have career goals that help them make informed career decisions and choices (Gyansah and Guantai, 2018). Skill development and learning goal orientation contribute to career adaptability (Clements and Kamau, 2018; Savickas and Porfeli, 2012; Taber and Blankesteyn, 2015). Thus, career development is a result of learning-oriented training, and more research in this area will help strengthen the existing theories in the current context.

Crown and Rosse (1995) discussed goal structures: egocentric and group-centric individual and group goals. Group-centric individual and group goals improve group performance. It increases the commitment to maximize performance on the individual and group fronts. In such a setting, the pursuit of individual learning goals contributes to the organizational training goals. Farndale et al. (2014) examined how organizational and individual goals could be balanced to benefit both parties. Extending their idea to the training and learning context is to view a training or learning initiative as an opportunity for both the individuals and the organization to improve.

What is known is that training leads to positive individual and organizational outcomes. How or to what extent the training goals of the different players vary has not been explored. Using the goal-setting theory as a base, we intend to study the role of SRL-F, organizational support (better access and flexibility) in maximizing the training outcomes and the processes that support these relationships.

3. Research methods

The fundamental purpose of research is to amass new knowledge through quantitative and qualitative approaches (Lo et al., 2020). Generally, a quantitative approach is adopted for conducting a scientific investigation into social or human problems based on a theoretical framework of variables measured numerically and analyzed using statistical procedures to validate the theory’s generalizability. In contrast, qualitative research is a process that involves steps for understanding social or human issues by building a holistic picture with the help of words and insights from the perspective of informants based on inquiries conducted in a natural setting. Significant research in the training domain is based on the quantitative approach in their research design (Gall and Borg, 1989). Though quantitative research helps discover new knowledge on areas that can be objectively appraised, not all research-related queries can be measured with numbers and analyzed using statistical procedures and frame generalization about a theory.

Further, Creswell (1999) propagated that some problems can only be appraised subjectively, assessing the merit or worth of a thing. Further, many a time, researchers’ concerns need not have to be only the why of a process, thing or phenomenon but could also be how and what. Such type of research is subjective, and research questions can be addressed only by a qualitative research design (Edson, 1986). In our case, this study aimed to unearth the goals individuals and organizations try to achieve through training and what
processes help in this. Hence, the nature of the research questions set for the study supported a qualitative research design. One of the critical benefits of qualitative research, as characterized by Merriam (1998), is that it “helps us comprehend and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little harm to the natural environment as possible”. This further inspired us to adopt a qualitative approach. We have followed a grounded theory-based inductive approach for this work.

We studied training in IT/ITES (information technology/information technology enabled services) organizations having their operational units in India. The factor that motivated us to select this sector is its position as the top choice of the Indian workforce irrespective of gender (Economic Survey 2020-21). NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies), in reaction to the Union Budget 2021-22, noted that the IT/ITES sector has been a critical driver of growth and sees a possibility to accelerate this growth in the future. Skill development is a critical business priority for IT/ITES.

To provide researchers and practitioners with fresh perspectives, we investigated the modern corporate training procedures largely defined by the use of technology and learner flexibility. We received favorable responses from five organizations that we approached with a request for support in our research. They have well-established L&D practices and departments. One of the authors worked in the IT sector for many years, and her network helped us with easier access to the top echelons of organizations that are part of training and learning decision-making. In-depth interviews were conducted during February and early March 2020, before the pandemic struck. The interview method has the unique advantage of converting the responses into measurable, quantifiable elements. We adopted this approach because interview techniques help to contextualize the questions.

The strength of qualitative research lies in the quality of respondents selected for the inquiry (Kerlinger et al., 2000; Silverman, 2020). Except for two, all our respondents were in leadership roles and involved in matters related to training decisions. The junior employees were interviewed to gain insights into the experiences of employees of the new era. We shortlisted ten respondents from the list provided by the organizations. The average work experience of the respondents was 16 years. Five of the interviewed respondents had been with their current organization for over eight years. So, they could depict a more accurate account of the transformation in these organizations’ training and learning space. We had three female respondents, including two in leadership roles. One was assistant director in talent development; the other was a project manager. All our respondents have received professional education related to their area of expertise. Thirty-eight years was the average age of our respondents. Each interview lasted approximately 30 min. Overall, we spent over 600 min analyzing the responses on training initiatives. We began the interview process with the following opening questions.

Q1. What are the various processes that facilitate L&D in the organization? (This question gave us insights on what goals the organization aims to achieve through training.)

Q2. What aspects motivate employees to partake in L&D activities? (This question helped us understand what goals the individual employees aim to achieve through training.)

Q3. What are all the challenges faced with respect to L&D initiatives? (This question gave us insights on the strengths and weaknesses of the training practices followed at the individual and organizational levels.)

Apart from these, questions related to learning, access to learning and learning choices emerged during the interviews. An extended list of questions is attached in the Appendix. Most of the time, the face-to-face approach facilitated obtaining respondents’ insights on
training opportunities. Though we followed a structured approach primarily, there were occasions during which we probed for details to avoid cliched patterns in responses resulting in free-flowing conversations. We stopped each interview when no additional information was coming. The responses were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were complemented with rich descriptions in the field notes. This helped in ensuring consistency and reliability during the data analysis phase.

4. Data analysis
This work was part of a larger ongoing research project, and therefore we adopted the same codes that were used for one of our earlier studies (Madhavan et al., 2023). The data were processed with the help of QDA Miner. As coders, we occasionally had differences of opinion, but the final themes were derived from detailed discussions to achieve consensus.

There were two parts to the data analysis. In the first stage, a formal content analysis followed the informal content analysis to identify critical themes. The data were processed with the help of QDA Miner. As coders, we occasionally had disagreements, but the final themes were derived from detailed discussions to achieve consensus. In the second part, we included three active researchers from our business school who are not a part of the study to review and ratify our conclusions. This process helped us to identify errors or gaps in our reasoning. They further helped us to validate our data-driven findings. To reduce bias to a greater degree, we checked with the individuals who participated in the interviews to confirm whether our interpretations aligned with their assumptions. Corrections were incorporated wherever required based on consensus.

The respondents were broadly classified into the following three categories based on their learning role.

L&D Program Managers: They are primarily responsible for designing and delivering learning and professional development of the employees. Their competencies lie in helping people make the most out of their abilities and realize their full potential. Meanwhile they also maintain strong focus on catering to the organization’s needs. They work with business leaders and line managers to identify learning needs and design programs that match their requirements.

L&D Agents: They are people in roles that facilitate coaching and provide guidance to the team members, and they are the ones who lead teams and are supposed to inculcate the learning culture among team members. These are essentially line managers who play a crucial role in conducting appraisals and recommending development plans.

L&D Subscribers: They are the nominated trainees or those who utilize the organization’s learning initiatives. They acquire knowledge and skill from the learning initiatives and contribute to organizational goals.

5. Results
We adopted one of the most widely accepted techniques: keyword analysis. Table 1 lists out the primary themes and frequency that we identified. We also studied the comparative keyword occurrence across employee roles to augment this. The category-wise analysis resulted in tables with cross-tabulations. These helped us extract insights effortlessly from the rich data embedded in our interview transcripts. They act as primary indicators of themes derived from our study.

5.1 Primary themes and frequency
The most recurring theme was skill development/performance (72 times). This emphasized that training was viewed as something that helped in skill improvement, enhancing job
The next frequent theme was a closely related one (58 counts) — learning-viewing training as useful for the present and future. This demonstrated the utility value of training and the necessity of training investments. Another recurring theme was task interest/value (54) – an integral part of SRL-F. This theme

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Primary themes</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% codes</th>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>% cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Access to training</td>
<td>Training policy on amount and type of training</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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<td>Strategic Planning - individual's long-term goals, learning strategies, learning plans</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRL-forethought</td>
<td>Task interest value - the importance of learning, the utility of learning in future</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRL-forethought</td>
<td>Self-efficacy - confidence in abilities</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRL-forethought</td>
<td>Goal setting - personal goals</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational learning support</td>
<td>Time, resources, budget, tools adopted for training</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational learning support</td>
<td>Flexible training options - e-learning, online learning</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational learning support</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Internal/external training options provided to employees</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational learning support</td>
<td>Freedom and encouragement to apply new learning at the job</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational learning support</td>
<td>Appraisal system tied to learning of employees</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational learning support</td>
<td>Financial rewards and incentives for learning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational training assignment</td>
<td>Mandatory/Voluntary training</td>
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<td>4.4%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational training assignment</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual goal achievement</td>
<td>Learning - the long-term perspective of viewing training as useful for present and in the future, to make most out of training, willingness to invest the effort to training</td>
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<td>8.6%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual goal achievement</td>
<td>Skill development/Performance - helps in skill improvement, performance improvement, respect, prepares for promotion, network, stay up-to-date</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual goal achievement</td>
<td>Career - promotion, salary increase, future opportunities, meet career objectives</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational goal achievement</td>
<td>Continuous improvement makes happy employees, happy customers and successful organizations</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal congruence</td>
<td>Achieving organizational goals means achieving own goals; organizational and personal goals match</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Feedback from others about training</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Work commitments taking precedence</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note(s):** * The codebook to arrive at the primary themes is adopted from our prior work: Madhavan *et al.* (2023)

**Source(s):** Authors’ own work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flexible learning and goal congruence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Table 1.** Primary themes and frequency*
signifies the interest level or value attached to the learning experience. It highlights the role of 
SRL-F in making the learning initiative goal-directed. The emergence of these three themes 
implies that individual goal achievement is a priority and also that it motivates people to 
subscribe to learning initiatives offered by the organization.

Training policy on amount and type of training (53) and time, resources, budget and tools for 
training (53) are the themes that ranked next. While the themes mentioned earlier highlighted 
the individual’s role, the two themes mentioned above are about the organization’s role in goal 
achievement. These also relate to access and flexibility. A majority of the themes were 
mentioned in more than 7 out of 10 cases (Table 1: second column from the right).

In-depth analysis of the codes using a case-wise comparison technique indicated that 
financial rewards (5 cases) are the least motivating factors for attending a training program. 
This clarified that more than extrinsic rewards, intrinsic motivation to learn and the need to 
progress make people utilize organizational learning resources. This also brings to light an 
application of Vroom’s expectancy theory. Effort leads to performance. Performance leads to 
rewards that are deemed valuable. We have utilized cross-tabulation as a tool to compare 
various themes across categories.

5.2 Category-wise frequency
As indicated in Table 2, all themes were observed to be distributed across roles, except 
financial rewards and incentives for training that do not feature among the L&D subscribers. 
It could be assumed that it is not attractive to them. However, the other two categories (L&D 
agents and program managers who are involved in policymaking) mentioned it. The themes 
related to skill development/performance and learning-viewing training as valuable, trial to 
make the most out of training, willingness to invest effort appeared in high frequency in all 
three categories. The themes that depict time, resources, budget and tools used for training 
were emphasized mainly by L&D program managers and mentioned in multiple instances by 
the L&D agents.

The theme of achieving organizational goals through individual goals featured only once 
among the subscribers. It is probably because there exists a lack of understanding of the big 
picture while focusing on the self. Similar is the case with the theme of continuous 

improvement, happy employees, customers and successful organization, which hinted that 
they are not necessarily affected by the perspective of the organizational goal. These codes 
have higher frequency among the other respondent categories. This signaled the fact that the 
employees at the operational levels are unaware of the direction in which the organization is 
headed. Thus, we understood that goal congruence or the lack of it could affect the 
achievement of organizational goals.

The theme task interest/value featured most in the L&D program manager category. This 
may imply that training is scientifically designed and allotted with individual needs in mind. 
The same was expressed by the agents too. Policy and infrastructure-related codes feature 
more among the L&D program managers and agent roles.

5.3 Hierarchical cluster analysis
The hierarchical technique helps reduce data and divides a large volume of data into smaller 
clusters. Similar words are progressively grouped until a single large group is formed. The 
results of hierarchical cluster analysis for this study are presented using a dendrogram 
(Figure 1).

The various themes appear on the vertical axis. Branches are shown in the horizontal axis 
and indicate the clustering process. Our analysis resulted in a four-cluster solution 
represented by different colors. The one that does not get grouped with others is 
independently shown as a separate cluster.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Primary themes</th>
<th>Frequency count</th>
<th>L&amp;D program manager (row wise percentage)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>L&amp;D agent (row-wise percentage)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>L&amp;D subscriber (row-wise percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to training</td>
<td>Training policy on amount and type of training</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>45.30%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28.30%</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRL-forethought</td>
<td>Strategic planning - individual's long term goals, learning strategies, learning plans</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>52.80%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.30%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.30%</td>
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<td>SRL-forethought</td>
<td>Task interest value - the importance of learning, the utility of learning in future</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>30.20%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRL-forethought</td>
<td>Self-efficacy - confidence in abilities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.40%</td>
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<td>15.10%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRL-forethought</td>
<td>Goal setting - personal goals</td>
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<td>13.20%</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Time, resources, budget, tools adopted for training</td>
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<td>32.10%</td>
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<td>15.10%</td>
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<td>Flexible training options - e-learning, online learning</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>18.90%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20.80%</td>
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<td>17.00%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.20%</td>
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<td>3.80%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational learning support</td>
<td>Internal/External training options provided to employees</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35.80%</td>
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<td>11.30%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
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<td>Organizational learning support</td>
<td>Freedom and encouragement to apply new learning at the job</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>20.80%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.40%</td>
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<td>Organizational learning support</td>
<td>Appraisal system tied to learning of employees</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.30%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.80%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>17.00%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22.60%</td>
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(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Primary themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>L&amp;D program manager (row-wise percentage)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>L&amp;D agent (row-wise percentage)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>L&amp;D subscriber (row-wise percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual goal achievement</td>
<td>Learning - the long-term perspective of viewing training as useful for present and in the future, to make most out of training, willingness to invest the effort to training</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>41.50%</td>
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<td>28.30%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>39.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual goal achievement</td>
<td>Skill development/performance - helps in skill improvement, performance improvement, respect, prepares for promotion, network, stay up-to-date</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35.80%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>45.30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual goal achievement</td>
<td>Career - promotion, salary increase, future opportunities, meet career objectives</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20.80%</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>15.10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational goal achievement</td>
<td>Continuous improvement makes happy employees happy customers, and successful organizations</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>52.80%</td>
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<td>37.70%</td>
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<td>3.80%</td>
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<td>Goal congruence</td>
<td>Achieving org goals means achieving own goals, organizational, personal goals match</td>
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<td>9.40%</td>
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<td>Feedback from others</td>
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<td>1.90%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Work commitments taking precedence</td>
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<td>9.40%</td>
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<td>13.20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to training</td>
<td>Training policy on amount and type of training</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>45.30%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28.30%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source(s): Authors' own work
Training policy on amount and type of training

Flexible training options: e-learning, online training

Credits/badges/certification/hours

Career-promotion, salary increase, future opportunities, meet career objectives

Learner's perspective: training as useful now and in the future, trial to make most out of training, willingness to invest effort in training

Skill development/performance helps in skill improvement, performance improvement, respect, prepares for promotion, network, stay up to date

Mandatory/voluntary training

Work commitments taking precedence

Self-efficacy-confidence in abilities

Freedom and encouragement to apply new learning at work

Appraisal system tied to training

Strategic training goals, training strategies, training plans

Internal/external training options

Financial rewards and incentives for training

Task/int/value-imp of training, helps in future

Time, resources, budget, tools for training

Goal-setting - personal goals

Long-term professional development

Continuous improvement, happy employees and customers, successful organization, secure

Achieving organizational goals means achieving personal goals, organizational goals match personal goals

Feedback from others

Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 1. Hierarchical cluster analysis
The nature of themes in the first cluster indicates the organization’s role in training while prioritizing employee performance and growth. The second cluster is interpreted as the relation between self-efficacy to learn something and the confidence to try new things at the job. This confidence comes from support from the organization, where there is freedom to try new things at the job. New learning is encouraged by tying it with appraisals. The third cluster essentially talks about learning execution based on personal goals. Further, this establishes a strong connection between individual learning aspirations and organizational learning strategies devised. This, in turn, leads to meeting organizational goals. The fourth cluster includes an outlier - a least in frequency code independent of former clusters.

Conventionally, hierarchical cluster analysis is employed for identifying themes from a large and descriptive data set. The dendrogram denotes the sequences of various themes and keywords combined into clusters. Though this helps form homogenous groups, it need not accurately represent the proximity of words. Often, two themes or keywords are clustered into a single group due to the presence of a third keyword that connects them. The two keywords might not have solid relationships but are highly correlated to a third word that groups them into a single cluster. This may lead to a situation where two sets of crucial words blended into a cluster appear weakly connected, especially when a thick descriptive data set is used to interpret results (Peladeu and Stovall, 2005).

A proximity plot gives a more accurate overview of the association between words. It is a comprehensive list of words and items associated with a particular item and plots them graphically in decreasing order of proximity. The closer keywords will be displayed at the top. Further, these items are represented by the distance from the left edge of the plot. The more the association between words, the closer they will be indicated in the top order. Accordingly, we have mapped a plot to spot the relationship between variables.

5.4 Proximity plot
For measuring our theoretical construct, the theme - continuous training initiatives make happy employees, happy customers and successful organizations - was adopted as a criterion representing organizational goal achievement.

The proximity plot (Figure 2) showed that organizational goal achievement is closely associated with the theme time, resources, budgets and tools dedicated to training. Also, flexible training options, skill development, learning and appraisal system being tied to organizational learning help achieve organizational goals. Task interest/value and willingness to invest time in the learning program also contribute to organizational goals. In flexible training options, all participants mentioned technology-enabled training and learner choice. These enhance the effectiveness of organizational learning initiatives and help attain organizational goals. Employee perception that learning will be useful in work performance in the present and future helps improve the motivation to learn. Our analysis further reveals that financial rewards do not have much role in motivating people to attend training. However, learning strategies and learning support measures aid in matching organizational training goals with individual goals. The association strength or proximity of keywords is indicated in the proximity plot.

Greenhaus et al. (1995) discourse that individuals have well-defined career choices and decisions. When the skill level is below the requirements for achieving a specific career goal, the commitment displayed by individuals toward training is higher. This will result in constructive outcomes that aid in an individual’s career enrichment. Skill development being an attribute of proactive career behavior (Clements and Kamau, 2018), an individual with a well-defined career goal exhibits learning goal orientation as it aids career progress (Taber and Blankemeyer, 2015; Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). Since training can contribute significantly to career development, it can be considered a key theme linked to individual
**Source(s):** Authors' own work
goal achievement. So, the next proximity plot shows the themes that are close to career development.

The analysis indicates that a multiplicity of factors facilitates individual career development. A few examples include training assignment, SRL-F, corporate support for learning and open access to educational materials. As Figure 3 represents, when it comes to accomplishing one's own personal goals, a few of the most common themes are: task interest/value - the significance and perceived utility of learning in the future, skill development and credits/badges/certification/hours endorsed by organizations; learning - a long-term standpoint of observing training as useful for the present and future, to make the most of training, to invest the effort to training was most proximal.

One of the core ideas of our work was to identify whether there are different individual and organizational training goals, and, if yes, the elements that help ensure congruence between them. That is how the theme on goal congruence emerged (Figure 4). The plot indicates that the factors moderately proximate to goal congruence are time, resources and budget for training. Another one is self-efficacy and confidence in abilities which is an essential element of SRL-F. A robust appraisal system linked with learning also facilitates goal congruence. Flexible learning options help to sync individual as well as organizational learning goals. Skill development helps in career development. Credit and badges also motivate individuals to enroll themselves in training programs. Time, resources, budget and tools for training help synchronize individual and organizational learning goals. Thus, these are the themes closely linked to goal congruence.

5.5 Key themes that evolved out of our study

The objective of our study was to decipher the perceptions and mechanisms of employee training and learning that work out across levels. It helped us to understand how these lead to better results. In this section, we have listed the key findings by bringing the text data to life by way of using quotations. The use of quotations to demonstrate results is supported by interpretive epistemology (Eldh et al., 2020). Zijpp et al. (2016) recommended that qualitative findings can include “themes depicted through narratives signifying additional visualization of their findings.”

Heery et al. (2019) pointed out that verbatim quotes increase the confirmability of their findings, while Patton (2002) propounded the view that by using quotations, the perspectives of the informants are captured and that they are portrayed in their own words. The primary purpose of incorporating quotations and excerpts in a study would be to explain how the results and interpretation have evolved because of the data. In addition, Sandelowski (1994) said that citations are used to reinforce the researcher’s points, depict experience, evoke emotion and sometimes even elicit a response from the reader. Using descriptions and direct quotations, which serve as the foundation for qualitative reporting, the reader can immerse themselves in the presented situation (Patton, 2002). Though quotations are used to support and enrich our accrued findings, we have validated them by adopting a cross-checking mechanism as suggested by Malterud (2001). The pertinent narratives on the key themes that evolved out of our work are described below:

Our study has shown that individuals make informed choices and that organizations try to support, guide and channel these choices to benefit the stakeholders. The research also proved how individuals and organizations aimed to make the most out of the flexible training options and helped assess the opportunities and challenges of technology-enabled training. While individuals focus on how learning can help their current jobs and enhance career prospects, organizations try to make new learning contribute to the overall goals. It was clear that the organizations implement some control mechanisms such as insisting on a minimum number of hours, credits, badges and certifications. Though meeting these compulsory
Figure 3.
Proximity plot - individual goal achievement

Flexible learning and goal congruence

Source(s): Authors' own work
Figure 4. Proximity plot—organization—individual goal congruence

Proximity plot

Source(s): Authors’ own work
targets are essential for the L&D subscribers, the primary aim is skill development and career prospects. One L&D subscriber said: “We should upgrade our skills. We should develop ourselves by attending training.” Another one remarked: “You are ultimately trying to get better in (a particular) area.” A subscriber termed certifications as “another benefit” in addition to skill development. The L&D agents, who were essentially line managers in senior positions, were found to have organizational goals as the primary focus. The L&D program managers also had a similar perspective along with their focus on individual development. One of them disclosed that learning is encouraged “to give the organization the confidence that our people are the best concerning the various practices, the technologies and tools. So, proficiency, capability, competence concerning our business needs—that would be how I describe the importance of training programs”. Such narratives helped us in answering one of our research questions on whether there are interest differences between the organization and employees regarding employee training. As described in the earlier sections, it was evident that individual employees did not understand the needs the organizations aimed to achieve through training. Thus, we understood that goal congruence is essential in enhancing organizational performance. However, an orientation for the subscribers on the larger picture of the organizational strategy and goals could lead to better goal congruence. The lack of such orientation was evident in our interactions as the subscribers hardly mentioned it.

Yet another aspect that made itself clear was that extrinsic rewards in return for learning did not lead directly to training motivation. While the L&D program managers and agents discussed financial benefits, incentives and reimbursements to encourage learning, none of the subscribers mentioned it. This again proved to us a difference in goals. The subscribers seemed more inclined towards long-term outcomes such as skill improvement and associated career benefits. The newer options allowing learner autonomy were mentioned by all categories. One agent mentioned: “Every month they are publishing a calendar and everyone free can join that. It is a self-invitation, and your managers can also do that”. However, the L&D agents did reveal instances of lack of foresight on the part of the subscribers as, at times, they were unable to objectively assess future requirements both at the personal and organizational levels. This is where organizational guidance and managerial support play substantial roles. In this context, individual skill assessments, progress monitoring and recommendation of mandatory training were mentioned. One agent mentioned nominating his team members: “They think that it is going to be another boring session. Suddenly they get a customized session. Once they attend it they realize it is useful.”

Another agent said that his team does not realize the importance of soft skills training, and technical training is preferred when self-nomination is sought. He narrated: “Everybody thinks that learning technology is the most important part of it and soft skills are not very important. The requirement of soft skills is not known among the people”. He gave an example of his team members being unable to express themselves in meetings involving people from multiple regions and how he made training recommendations to tackle this. An L&D program manager described: “I would say there is a choice out there as to what they can take from a broad spectrum, but then there are a few things which are mandatory.” This inquiry helped reveal the logic behind many innovative practices adopted by today’s organizations such as m-learning, tie-ups with external online training vendors and self-paced learning, to name a few. There is an elevated position that SRL occupies in terms of goal achievement.

Interestingly, the program managers discussed the strategic planning of learning that includes having a learning goal, learning plans and learning strategies. This could be attributed to the fact that they are primarily responsible for carrying out skill assessments and executing the control measures in terms of employee learning. This reinforces the earlier point about the importance of giving a better orientation on organizational and individual requirements. They mentioned formal skill ratings and
subjective assessments by line managers to understand training needs. However, task interest/value is a dimension of SRL that both the L&D agents and subscribers did prioritize. One agent revealed:

“The idea is to make the people understand what the intent is.why at all do we need to go through this? I am doing a fine job, I am doing an excellent job, and at places, I have been exemplary and exceeded expectations, so why do I need the training? They need to polish themselves at certain regular intervals of time.that needs to seep in”. A subscriber remarked: “Everything is good, but the thing is your interest automatically goes into certain areas!”

The relevance of organizational support in learning is evident because all three groups spoke about the significance of time, resources, budget and tools for training, along with flexible training options. Similar is the case with access to training which essentially indicates a training policy on the amount and type of training. Thus, the research revealed an interplay of access to training, SRL-F and organizational learning support in individual and organizational learning goal achievement. This helped us gain insights on the explanation sought by our other research question on the role of the transformed L&D context in achieving individual and organizational goals. One L&D agent opined on the changed management outlook of learning: “Definitely there should be some kind of executive sponsorship to get training. Certain things we had to get the trainers from outside-there are money and budget involved. So now they have started sponsoring.” A program manager explained: “Till last year, the organization used to rely mostly on classroom training programs, but FY 2020 will see 60% of programs delivered through the virtual plat-form. They will still be instructor-led programs but will be done virtually and will have people from across the globe participating in those programs. While there will be a cost reduction, we can ensure more participation for virtual programs because we can include up to 60 people per session. There will be much collaboration between people of different cultures, which is also very important for an employee to learn”. Another remarked: “We encourage people to learn and the shift from a traditional classroom to digital learning started way back, but we got transformed last year.” An L&D agent interviewed stated the importance of SRL thus: “If I am accountable for my career, it is my responsibility that I am up to date with the changes in technology. I cannot wait for my organization to tell me or teach me because it will be too late by the time.” It is this logic that the organizations try to drive among the employees.

To summarize, the key themes that evolved helped us to identify themes that helped to attain individual and organizational goal congruence.

6. Discussion
Our study addressed the need for conducting research that consists of contextual and individual variables to enhance the training effectiveness models. Specifically, it examined the relationship between contextual antecedents, such as access to learning, flexible learning options, SRL-F and supervisory and organizational support, which, in turn, result in multiple aspects of learning effectiveness as suggested by Mathieu et al. (1992), Ford and Weissbein (1997), Cleary and Zimmerman (2004), Schmitz and Wiese (2006) and Sontag and Stoeger (2015). Our study helped garner support to the argument that continuous learning culture and organizational support facilitate attainment of individual and organizational goals. It helped validate the role of learning goal orientation on an individual’s career goal attainment (Stevens and Gist, 1997).

Our research also bolsters the findings from the previous studies that self-regulatory behavior does not develop spontaneously or get inherited from social settings, but requires systematic interventions (Zimmerman and Schunk, 2003). Such interventions could vary
from a blend of instruction on SRL (Kostons et al., 2012; Lourenco and Ferreira, 2019) to regular reminders (Sitzmann and Ely, 2010). It can be through a learning protocol introduced to people (Nückles et al., 2009; Hübner et al., 2010) or through organizational and peer support (Margaryan et al., 2013). Our study has highlighted that training assignments can help improve the participants’ overall motivation to attend and transfer the skills to the workplace, as highlighted by Kastenmüller et al. (2012). It also gives them guidance when they lack direction. This can also help in aligning the individual and organizational goals. Organizations commit many resources to improve employee capability. Such investments will yield adequate returns if the employees transfer learning (Hutchins et al., 2010) to their work settings. Previous studies have focused on factors such as supervisor and social support and training design, which lead to a higher rate of training transfer (Grossman and Salas, 2011; Homklin et al., 2014). Not much work has been carried out in the recent past to understand how SRL influences the transfer of training (Margaryan et al., 2013). The primary aspect discussed by extant literature was that only a small portion of learning imparted gets transferred to work (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Ford and Weissbein, 1997; Grossman and Salas, 2011). Our study helps recognize the role of SRL traits along with organizational support, to help gain congruence (and thus P-O fit) between individual career attainment and organizational goal achievement. This helps maximize results. Such a relationship has never been studied in the past.

Other findings from our study showcased that training contents help foster the SRL as witnessed in work conducted by Mih and Mih (2011) resulting in goal-setting strategies to help attain positive learning outcomes. Our study further acts as evidence for the view that the most parsimonious way to enhance SRL is by providing learners with options to plan their learning, as opined by Sitzmann and Johnson (2012). Thus, our study helps garner evidence that the interplay of SRL, organizational support and training design embedded in instructional principles of self-regulation helps achieve organizational and individual goal congruence.

The discussion above shows that there are many and significant implications for treatments designed to alter trainees’ self-regulation processes. Second, it implies that altering the nature of trainees’ goals may have the most impact. Also, learning frames were more successful than learning objectives since it was more difficult to get the right degree of goal proximity with the former. When combining training components into a successful intervention design, theoretical direction is unquestionably required. Second, we discovered that when trainees were given a goal-frame and material that was focused on learning rather than performance, their self-regulation activity increased. Yet, it is crucial to keep in mind that not all training circumstances demand a learning-centered approach. Certain well-known characteristics of the learning environment in this study (such as a challenging and dynamic task) indicate a setting that is favorable to a focus on learning rather than performance. There is a case to be made that as employment get more complicated and hectic, circumstances like these will more frequently occur and not be the exception when it comes to how people learn. Finally, we see that a systems approach to training is quite essential. Our research shows that the beneficial benefits of the learning objectives may be reduced if, for example, training designers aim to give learning objectives but instead construct a performance frame (or vice versa).

7. Contribution to theory
Learning requirements arise when organizational goals are revised. Joint goal setting helps improve the attainment of individual and organizational learning goals (Casey, 2005). In the contemporary training/learning setting characterized by technology-enabled flexibility, there is a chance that individuals decide on their learning choices without necessarily considering
organizational requirements and organizations prescribing individual learning goals without considering individual motivations. The ideal setting is when individual goal achievement contributes to organizational goal achievement. This happens when there is goal congruence. It ensures that effort expended in achieving one set of goals increases the effort put in to achieve the other set of goals. Goal congruence deals with person-organization goal similarity. It is the degree to which two parties jointly participate in achieving common goals (Samaddar et al., 2006). Goal congruence relates positively to attitude (Vancouver et al., 1994), job satisfaction and commitment, and negatively to the intention to quit (Vancouver and Schmitt, 1991). Individuals cooperate better when there are similarities and alignment of goals (Tjosvold, 1989; Messersmith et al., 2011). High goal congruence implies that the employees are agreeable to the organization’s direction (De Clercq et al., 2015; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Thus, goal congruence that emerged as a finding from our data analysis positively influences organizational performance (Hodari et al., 2017) and leads to trust within teams (Choi and Cho, 2019). Goal congruence ensures P-O fit, and it can be encouraged using support mechanisms like assigning training goals and giving better access to learning. Based on the above discussions, we have proposed a conceptual model (Figure 5) that adds to the existing body of knowledge combining the ideas of SRL and P-O fit in the transformed employee training context.

8. Contribution to practice and policy
Our research also has intriguing management ramifications, which we have not even touched on yet. Managers may develop interventions that affect employee perceptions by keeping in mind the importance of contextual elements like organizational support, flexibility and access to learning in achieving individual and organizational goals. A well-written policy or directive may spread the word about the company’s learning assistance resources, allowing employees to make better use of them. Managers may do more than just draft policies by including staff in talks prior to training sessions. To paint a more accurate image of training and the benefits of enrolling, this will assist. Beyond these, the organizations can, by way of directives, give overall guidance on the learning goals that it expects its employees to achieve.

Further, managers and trainers should work together to present a comprehensive training plan for each individual and establish a well-defined training goal. Managers can design special training modules that can be used to assess trainees’ goal orientation levels and modify them if required. A classic case can be the knowledge management system where
Flexible learning and goal congruence

employees are supposed to share learning experiences or a setting that encourages trainees to show signs of improvement. Such initiatives will help in fostering a continuous learning culture. The research also revealed that both trainees and the companies that employ them share a common shortcoming: an inability to perceive the larger picture. By greater shared understanding, both parties may strive toward the same objectives and maximize their individual influences.

9. Limitations of the study and future research directions

Our study is not free from limitations; the major one being that the result cannot be attributed to training efforts entirely as our study was not carried out in a controlled condition, and other factors would have influenced the opinion of respondents. The second limitation is related to the interview process as we have not adopted a longitudinal approach to gathering information, and respondents tend to provide socially accepted responses (Crowne and Marlowe, 1964). The elements that are considered for assessing goal congruence are based on respondents’ perceptions. Our study has incorporated SRL-F only at a single instance, resulting in participants responding retrospectively with opinions based on past experience. Hence, we could not explore the potential of Zimmerman's (2000) model.

The relationship between dimensions in the training domain is quite complex and requires further inquiry. Future studies should aim to replicate this study’s findings by incorporating sound design, participant sampling and experimental studies. Apart from the respondents’ views, future studies should have data on post-training behaviors to enhance generalizability. The construct of motivation remains an area of interest as do other individual and organizational predictors (Colquitt et al., 2000). Hence, there is scope for conducting studies that use several conceptualizations to examine motivation-related variables and goal congruence. The present study is retrospective, and a replication study can be construed relating the variables to the present and expected outcomes in the future. Self-regulation and goal orientation can be considered both as dispositional and situational constructs and invite future research.

The prospect of social-desirability bias entering into our study is also a significant drawback of our research, since some respondents may have answered questions in a way that pleased their supervisor and co-workers. It is possible to overreport “positive behavior” while underreporting “poor” or unwanted behavior. Our conclusions could be restricted given that the study concentrated on knowledge-based businesses in India. We agree that our findings might not be applicable to other industries; however, given the intense rivalry that Indian businesses in the KIBS region face from both local and foreign businesses, they must continually adapt and grow to be competitive. The competitiveness of other industries, such as manufacturing and services, may be comparable. Future research may broaden and corroborate our findings by using the method in various sectors. This will increase the generalizability of the theory and offer crucial insights because goal achievement and inventive performance are essential in most businesses.

Further organizational structure factors, such as strategy execution, the hierarchical configuration of power structures, communication and overall organizational responsibilities and rights, could be studied in future research given the importance of organizational structure in the development of goal attainment. Many administrative layers may hinder a company’s ability to learn new things and provide value (Sirmon et al., 2011).

10. Conclusion

Our study aimed to investigate the factors that offer learners the pedagogical justification for self-regulated use of technology for learning, the strategic basis for aligning technology
choices with learning objectives and processes, and the techniques for efficiently utilizing technological resources and tools to achieve goals. Our study suggests a model whose structure takes into account both the macro and micro levels of organizational structure. Our research paradigm considers both global and micro organizational factors (Martinkenaite and Breunig, 2016). More precisely, emphasizing organizational support as a precursor to learning allows us to contribute to the resource-based view, which emphasizes managerial support for personnel development, whereas employee learning orientation echoes and broadens the micro-foundations perspective. Moreover, employee learning focuses on improving organizational performance. According to the research, employee commitment and a willingness to learn are essential and helpful for achieving organizational goals. The achievement of organizational goals depends on the individual learning efforts of organization members, and researchers have urged for additional study on micro-antecedents (Yao and Chang, 2017). Employee self-regulation, per our study, is a micro-antecedent of goal achievement. Academics may get insight into the causes of goal achievement by considering learning-directed management practices and employee self-regulation. Our results are consistent with the idea that goal congruence is deeply rooted in members’ learning behaviors at all organizational levels and may be modified by organizational and individual characteristics (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). To summarize, this study contributes to existing knowledge by proposing a broader model of goal congruence in the training domain by including important organizational, contextual and individual factors, namely, access to learning, SRL-F, performance orientation and organizational support. Such models are pivotal as they act as theoretical bases for expanding the prevailing view on the training function to a more generalizable one. Future studies should expound on these interactions more meticulously.

References


(The Appendix follows overleaf)
Appendix

Interview schedule

*Interview questions for L&D agents and program managers main questions*

1. Demographic details: name, organization, designation, profile, years of service
2. What are the various processes that facilitate L&D in the organization?
3. What aspects motivate employees to partake in L&D activities?
4. What are all the challenges faced with respect to L&D initiatives?

*Probing questions (Indicative list*)

1. What parts of the training process do you handle?
2. Does your organization have voluntary and mandatory training?
3. On what basis does the organization invest in training?
4. How are training programs organized?
5. Does the organization rely on technology for training?
6. How do you keep track of employee training?
7. Is there a connection between the type of training and the motivation to attend?
8. Is absenteeism allowed? If yes, what are the most common reasons for absenteeism?
9. When are the trainees most interested or motivated to attend training? Why?
10. What kinds of training do employees tend to avoid if given a choice? Why?
11. Is there a link between the career stage and training preferences?
12. What types of training do you prefer to attend?
13. How does the organization assess training effectiveness?

*Interview questions for L&D subscribers main questions*

1. Demographic details: name, organization, designation, profile, years of service
2. What are the various processes that facilitate L&D in the organization?
3. What aspects motivate employees to partake in L&D activities?
4. What are all the challenges faced with respect to L&D initiatives?

*Probing questions (Indicative list*)

1. Do you get to attend training programs?
2. How do you get nominated for training?
3. Is training in your organization voluntary or mandatory?
4. Do you have options of technology-enabled training?
5. What is your purpose in attending a training?
6. What type of programs are you most interested to attend? Why?
7. What type of programs are you least interested in? Why?
(8) Does training actually improve your skill?
(9) Does training contribute to your career?
(10) When would you call a training initiative effective?

* The questions may have been phrased differently or omitted if the responses received from the participants for earlier questions already covered the respective topic partially or fully.

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