



Supporting Employee Development in a Small Company – Luin Oy

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ABSTRACT

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Employee development has become a hot topic within job search and employee wellbeing. Potential employees are expecting developmental opportunities and companies are trying to offer them to employees to keep them satisfied and engaged. Small companies do however fall into a trap with limited resources available for human resources and employee development, with available sources often going to other areas to keep the business running.

This thesis was commissioned by Luin Oy, a small company operating in both business-to-business and business-to-consumer markets selling homeware goods. They were looking for ways in which they could support their employees' development with limited resources, which prompted the objective and purpose of this thesis. The objective of this thesis was to help the commissioner to find ways in which they can support their employees' development with their limited resources. The purpose was to create guidelines on how a small company can support their employees' development and this way enhance their wellbeing and motivation.

Research was conducted to obtain information from professionals in the field on what would be the best ways to approach employee development with a small company with limited resources, and the results were analyzed using thematic analysis to find similarities in the different perspectives and experiences. Research showed that there was a need for a systematic plan and that most of the development is likely to occur at work.

Based on the conducted research and literature findings, it was recommended to create an employee development journey. The employee development journey described the recommended development cycle of the employees. This provided the commissioner with a step-by-step guide on how to proceed with employee development and what factors to take into consideration.

Key words: employee development, human resource management, wellbeing, employee development plan

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	5
1.1	Thesis topic.....	6
1.2	Commissioning company	6
1.3	Thesis objective, purpose, and research questions	7
1.4	Working methods and data	8
1.5	Thesis process	9
2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	10
2.1	Employee wellbeing	10
2.2	Employee engagement	10
2.3	Employee development.....	11
2.3.1	Formal education.....	11
2.3.2	Assessment.....	12
2.3.3	Job experiences	13
2.3.4	Interpersonal relationships	14
2.3.5	The need for employee development	14
2.4	Motivation.....	16
2.4.1	Self-determination theory	17
2.4.2	Theory of need	21
2.5	Learning	23
2.5.1	Adult learning theory.....	23
2.5.2	70-20-10 learning model.....	25
3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS.....	27
3.1	Research objectives.....	27
3.2	Research design	27
3.3	Sampling	29
3.4	Validity, reliability, and limitations.....	29
3.5	Data analysis.....	30
3.5.1	Analysis summary	36
3.5.2	SWOT analysis.....	37
4	EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY	40
4.1	Assessment	40
4.2	Individual development plan.....	42
4.3	Development actions.....	44
4.3.1	Development through work experience	45
4.3.2	Development through working with others.....	45
4.3.3	Development through formal learning.....	46

4.4 Supporting the development	47
4.5 For managers.....	48
5 DISCUSSION	51
REFERENCES	53
APPENDICES.....	58
Appendix 1. Information about conducted interviews.....	58
Appendix 2. Thematic analysis demonstrated	59
Appendix 3. Employee development plan.....	62

1 INTRODUCTION

Employees are what keep the organisation running. That makes them the most important asset of the organisation, and the most important asset should be valued (Arzeni 2013, 3). This is why organisations should take care of their employees and show them that they are considered an important part of the organisation. Taking care of employees' wellbeing and making sure they feel appreciated is the way to do this.

Wellbeing is a broad topic that covers various different areas. According to Viitala (2007, 212) employee wellbeing covers four different topics of health, know-how, physical, and psychical working environment. An interesting job, a supportive community, and the possibility to develop and learn new are considered important things in one's life. These can be achieved with good employee wellbeing and that will positively affect employee's ability to work efficiently, to be able to learn, and develop themselves. (Viitala 2007, 212.)

Thus, employee development is also connected to wellbeing, and they affect each other. Investing in employee wellbeing also benefits the organisation in various ways, as employees are likely to become more engaged and committed to the organisation if they are offered development opportunities and they see themselves valued by the organisation (Lee & Bruvold 2010, 992).

For a small company, resources are often limited, and there is only so much that can be done. The purpose of this thesis is to create guidelines on how a small but growing company can support their employees' development and this way enhance their wellbeing as well. The objective is to find out ways for the commissioner to support their employees' development, the objective is reached with recommendations for the commissioner on what actions can aid in this matter.

1.1 Thesis topic

The topic for this thesis is supporting employee development in a small company. The commissioner was looking for a thesis worker to conduct research in the field of work wellbeing and the topic of employee development was determined to be the most important topic for the commissioner. They wished to have research done on how they could support their employees' development and that way ensure their motivation towards the company and their work. The focus will be on ways in which the company can support the employees with limited resources since there is limited time and money that can be invested in this.

The topic of the thesis is significant for the commissioner as they are a growing small company, with employees with their tasks, but with no one fully focused on their employees' wellbeing. They recognise that with a small company, the focus is more on sales, marketing, and other aspects and that a huge focus on human resources is not the priority they can afford to have with current resources. However, as employees are an important asset in every company, it is deemed important to try and find ways to support their development even with limited resources.

The lack of resources, and thus lack of focus on the employees, can be common for small companies to face the issue of how to care for their employees' development in this area. While it is important for the employees to feel good and content with their work and how their career is developing, it's also important for the organization to have motivated employees, so they can maximise their productivity and effectiveness and thus the organization will thrive as a whole.

1.2 Commissioning company

Luin Living is a small Finnish company established in 2015 operating in business-to-business and business-to-consumer markets (Luodes 2022). The idea originated in 2013 with two old friends who saw the need for a perfect towel. The company was formed from the love for family and spending time at home, that one should first and foremost enjoy spending time at home. The goal of Luin

Living is to enhance one's everyday life with even small things and ideas. Over the years the company has expanded to different homeware products from towels to bedding and home décor. (Luin Living n/d.)

The vision for Luin Oy has always been to be a global brand and the goal for the future is to grow internationally and establish a place in the retail market especially. Luin Oy currently has retailers in over 25 countries. Around 80 percent of their sales currently come from Finland, but the goal is to succeed abroad so that the Finnish market would only cover 20 percent of the sales. Luin Oy has a webshop that ships to Europe, as well as webshops in Japan and the USA, but the two latter are operated by importers.

The company started with two founders with the first employee joining the team rather quickly. Within the last year, the company has grown with five new employees, making the total staff number eight. Their office is located in the same space as their brand store, which can be found in the centre of Tampere. The employees are offered a hybrid working model, as some of the employees work remotely from a different city altogether. The working language of Luin Oy is English, as they have two international employees. (Luodes 2022.)

Luin Oy offers their employees healthcare services, team activity days, and has a set plan with weekly and biweekly meetings with teams where they cover their status and workload. They have development discussions in place but lack a system of how they can support employees' development while taking into consideration their personality and personal strengths as well. The company would benefit from having a plan on how to act when someone joins the company and what actions they should take to support their development and growth. Being able to support employees in this way would add to their wellbeing. (Luodes 2022.)

1.3 Thesis objective, purpose, and research questions

The objective of the thesis is to help the commissioner to find out ways to support their employees' development with limited resources and this way increase their

wellbeing as well as their motivation. The purpose of this thesis is to create guidelines for a small but growing company on how to support their employees' wellbeing through employee development. A research question within this could be formed into:

“How to support employees' development in a small company?”

Followed by the sub-questions that can help frame the thesis and support the process of answering the primary research question:

“What steps should the company take to support employee development?”

“How can employees' motivation be enhanced within employee development?”

“How can the staff take into consideration each other's personalities and strengths?”

The research questions are aimed to be answered in the thesis and will be considered as a guide throughout the process of writing the thesis.

1.4 Working methods and data

The research conducted in this thesis is qualitative, as it aims to gather data that is expressed in words and not numerically. Qualitative research is used to understand thoughts and experiences, and this is what the research is aiming to do (Hammersley 2012, 12). The chosen data collection method is interviews. A variety of professionals in the field are interviewed about their experiences with employee development and how a small company could best support their employees' development with limited resources. As it was the commissioner's wish to find out more general information on how they could support the development of their employees, instead of doing internal research within the company, this was deemed the most suitable research method.

Interviews are determined as the best way of data gathering because it allows the information to be documented in the interviewees' own words and can make

room for conversation that was not planned (Saldana 2011, 32). For this research, it is important that the interviewees can express their opinions clearly and bring their perspectives to light. According to Saldana (2011, 4) qualitative research is conducted within various different fields, business being one of them, which is also a fitting choice for this research. As with any research, there can be challenges, and communication can be one of them. People who come from different sides and obtain different views regarding the world we live in can make communication challenging. However, a well-planned interview approach done with effort and great planning can provide valuable data and with this in mind, the interviews are expected to produce great results. (Qu & Dumay 2011, 239.)

1.5 Thesis process

The first chapter introduces the reader to the thesis with an overview, walking the reader through the planning process from the thesis topic to the research objectives and purpose of the thesis, as well as introducing the commissioning company. The second chapter covers theory regarding employee development and related theories and models, providing the reader with a deeper understanding of the topic. The third chapter is about the research and the data analysis. This is followed by the fourth chapter, which provides the recommendations and actions for the commissioner to take in a form of an employee development journey. This is then followed by conclusions.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will introduce the reader to the theoretical framework of the thesis. It covers relevant concepts and theories related to employee development and affecting areas. Concepts such as employee wellbeing, employee development, and motivation will be covered. The theoretical framework will also introduce theories and models like adult learning theory and 70-20-10 learning model alongside motivation theory to support the development.

2.1 Employee wellbeing

According to Riitta Viitala (2007, 212) employee wellbeing is constructed of four cornerstones, health, know-how, physical, and psychical working environment. Having an interesting job, a supportive work community and a possibility to develop yourself and learn new are considered important assets in life. Employee wellbeing is needed for the employees to be able to work efficiently, to be able to learn, and develop themselves. (Viitala 2007, 212.)

Employee wellbeing needs to be on a good level, otherwise a good employee development plan won't matter because employees won't utilise the development opportunities to the best of their abilities. On the other hand, with bad employee development, employees' wellbeing will suffer as they won't be able to learn and develop themselves as they wish. It could also hinder their efficiency, as a lack of development opportunities can make an employee not trust themselves and feel nervous. (Viitala, 2007, 212.)

2.2 Employee engagement

Bob Kelleher (2013) defined employee engagement as a "mutual commitment between an organization and an employee, in which the organization helps the employee meet his or her potential and the employee helps the organization meet

its goals". Engagement that is well executed is about recognising that the business is like a society, where the people work for a common goal that will benefit the economy as well as the people in it. An organisation that is highly engaged should then also provide development opportunities for the employee, and this way show their commitment. This in return will likely motivate the employee to stay in the organisation and be more committed to the organisation. (Kelleher 2013.)

2.3 Employee development

Wali Rahman and Zekeriya Nas (2013, 566) define employee development as a collaborative effort, where the employee and employer consistently work towards enriching employees' attitudes, knowledge, experiences, skills, and abilities as well as to try and improve their overall effectiveness. Success is achieved when the development satisfies both the employee as a growing individual and the organization. (Rahman & Nas 2013, 566.)

There are different approaches to employee development and Raymond Noe, John Hollenback, Barry Gerhart, and Patrick Wright (2010, 260) claim the different approaches to be divided into four different categories that are:

- i. formal education,
- ii. assessment,
- iii. job experiences, and
- iv. interpersonal relationships.

These categories include different ways of supporting employees and their development and can offer development opportunities if utilized correctly.

2.3.1 Formal education

Formal education is a way for the organisation to support their employees' development either at the workplace or then outside of the office. Formal education

can be anything from workshops to online courses, from internal staff to outsourced consultants. Big organisations might have their own learning facilities, but there are also independent institutions offering opportunities on specific topics. While this kind of formal education often might require a bigger budget, there are also free courses within different platforms that can be utilised. (Noe et al. 2010, 261.)

2.3.2 Assessment

Noe et al. (2010, 261) define assessment as “collecting information and providing feedback to employees about their behaviour, communication style, or skill”. It is another way of developing employees and a way to identify the strengths, weaknesses, and potential of an employee. An important factor in assessment is sharing with the employee. Unless results and information are shared with the employee, the assessment will not support their development. Assessment includes and is followed by suggestions on how to utilize or work with recognised strengths and weaknesses. (Noe et al. 2010, 262.)

There is a variety of ways an organisation can utilize assessment. According to Noe et al. (2010, 262) organizations with sophisticated development systems utilize psychological tests to measure employees’ skills, personality types, and communication styles. It can also be useful to utilize peers and managers in assessing an employee, to get a well-rounded result. One way to measure employees’ traits is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The assessment is meant to help identify different aspects of the individual, that will give information on the employees’ preferences and tendencies regarding communication, motivation, teamwork, work styles, and even leadership of others. (Noe et al. 2010, 262-264.)

Assessment can also take place at an assessment centre, where outsourced professionals will evaluate employees on different exercises. These exercises can be anything from interviews and leaderless group discussions to role-plays. The goal is to assess the employees’ different strengths, weaknesses, and behavioural traits. Noe. et al. (2010, 264-265) point out that assessment centres are usually good for predicting performance, salary level, and career advancement.

They are considered beneficial for development based on the data the participants receive about themselves. (Noe et al. 2010, 264-265.)

Benchmarks is another method used in assessment, but it focuses more on managers' use of skill regarding their success in managing. Performance appraisal is a method that measures employees' performance and can be useful for development under certain circumstances. 360-degree feedback is considered a new trending method in performance appraisal, where the employee gets their performance evaluated by their peers, supervisor, and other stakeholders. However, development and learning should be kept away from performance appraisal. To make sure that the focus is on employees' learning and development instead of just how well they are performing with their tasks, these methods should be considered carefully. (Noe et al. 2010, 264-265.)

2.3.3 Job experiences

Job experience as an approach for employee development is the most connected to the development of the actual job, as it focuses on the combination of relationships, problems, demands, and tasks of the job of an employee. When job experiences are used for employee development, it is assumed that the development is most likely to happen if the employee's skills and experience do not match the required skills of the employee's job. The success of job experience as a development method is also dependent on how the employee views it. If the employee views the method as a positive source of stress, it will challenge and stimulate their learning, but if it's viewed as a negative source of stress, the employee might suffer too much stress. Thus, organisations should aim to offer job experiences that are most likely to stimulate their learning positively. (Noe et al. 2010, 268.)

Job enlargement is a method used to enhance job experience. It means that new responsibilities and challenges will be added to the employee's current job. This enables the employee to attain new skills and learn more within the company. It also makes the job more interesting. Job rotation is also a method used to enhance job experience. Instead of enlarging one's current position with new tasks, the employee rotates to different titles and different areas in the organization.

While the job rotation can bring in new skills and interests, it also possesses a risk of employees feeling less satisfied and motivated, due to the lack of stability and time to develop specialized skills. (Noe et al. 2010, 268-269.)

2.3.4 Interpersonal relationships

Interpersonal relationships are also an approach to use in employee development. Employees can develop skills and learn by interacting with experienced organization members. Mentoring is one of the two ways in which relationships can be used for employee development. Noe et al. (2010, 272) define a mentor as someone experienced, productive, and senior to the one seeking a mentor. Mentoring relationships often develop informally and according to research, there are certain characteristics within the employees who are likely to seek and attract a mentor: emotional stability, ability to adapt their behaviour to the situation, and high need for power and achievement. (Noe et al. 2010, 272.)

Coaching is considered the second way of utilizing relationships in employee development. A coach can be someone working with the employee to motivate and help them develop a skill. The coach is also there for the employee to give reinforcement and feedback. Both of these interpersonal relationship methods require time and resources to be utilized, but they can offer great support for the employee. (Noe et al. 2010, 273.)

2.3.5 The need for employee development

Regarding the responsibility of employee development, there are a lot of differing opinions. According to Rahman and Nas (2013, 567), the responsibility of development has gone through a shift, where the responsibility is more on the individual, rather than the organisation. This is because employees change jobs and organizations more often than before, and this can make organizations reluctant to invest in employees who might not be committed (Rahman & Nas 2013, 567). Linda Brenner (2016) also points out that nowadays the responsibility isn't expected to be on managers, but employees need to be in charge of their learning

and development. Viitala (2007, 212) however says that it's a combination of both parties' responsibility and commitment.

On the other hand, according to David Hosmer (2015, 3) employees are likely to look for companies that are supportive of the employees' development. While it is a relevant point to consider how much an organisation should invest in its employees, when the risk of turnover is higher nowadays than before, it needs to be recognised that employees are likely to stay in an organisation if they feel appreciated and supported.

Employee development is necessary for organizations, just as it is necessary for the employees, as with a good employee development plan the employees' skills and abilities will improve and thus provide the organization with more productive and skilled employees (Rahman & Nas 2013, 567). According to research conducted by Chay Hoon Lee and Norman Bruvold (2010, 992) employees are reported to be more satisfied, engaged, and committed to the organisation, if the organisation provides opportunities for development within their skills and competency. By showing that the organisation is committed to its employees, it in turn decreases the chances of dissatisfaction and the employees leaving the organisation (Lee & Bruvold, 2010, 992; Davis 2015, 28), For a small company, like the commissioner, it is necessary to implement employee development actions to avoid facing costs later on due to employee turnover. Bob Kelleher (2013) seconds this by saying that if the organisation helps employees by offering learning opportunities to develop their skills, their engagement will be increased. Employees also become prosocially motivated when they are offered developmental opportunities by their organisation (Kuvaas & Dysnik, 2009, 217).

Todd Maurer and Michael Lippstreu (2008, 339) point out that according to their study there are differences in how employees might react to employer's acts of support in learning and development. If the employee is learning-oriented, they likely feel more committed to a company that supports development. It is common, if not necessary in today's workplace to have a learning and development-oriented culture, as it is more and more critical to ensure the organization's and the employees' effectiveness through learning and development. This does not

mean that providing support for employees' learning and development will guarantee committed employees, but it is likely to influence employees' positive response and this way their wellbeing too. (Maurer & Lippstreu 2008, 339-340.)

2.4 Motivation

According to American Psychology Association (n/d), motivation is defined as the driving force behind human behaviour on a conscious and unconscious level. Motivation can be achieved from external or internal factors. Extrinsic motivation is made of external rewards which can be offered to the employee. These rewards can include bonuses, holidays, or material perks, like a company car or a phone. Extrinsic motivators are used when it is assumed that the employee will not get enough intrinsic motivation from the job. (Hodson 2014, 28.)

Intrinsic motivation comes from internal rewards, such as the feeling of satisfaction or pleasure. A job that provides the employee with these kinds of intrinsic rewards will find satisfaction from a job well done or a job that they find meaningful (Hodson 2014, 28). According to Martha Finney (2008, 4) the best incentive for employees' motivation is not an extrinsic reward, but simply being heard, and having their contributions recognised as well as valued as individuals.

According to Bryson and White (2019, 750) small companies that have minimal investment, or none at all, for formal human resource management are likely to have highly motivated employees. However, they point out that if human resource management practices are adopted it is likely for the motivation to decline on some level. It is proposed that in the work motivation framework small companies are offering better opportunities for autonomous or intrinsic motivation. Small companies are often described to also have informal employer-employee relationships, that can play part in keeping employees autonomous and intrinsically motivated. At least this relationship seems to be valued by both the employer and the employee, and people might not be so inclined to move toward a more structured human resource management. (Bryson & White 2019, 752-753.)

Based on their research Bryson and White (2019, 754) conclude that small company employment “benefits in terms of intrinsic rewards in the form of job autonomy and freedom from external controls”. Intrinsically motivated people would likely be more eager for developmental opportunities. This would be out of a desire to enhance their work efforts and be more engaged and involved within the organization. (Bryson & White 2019, 752-754.)

Below two different motivational theories will be introduced. Both can be utilized with employee development, as employees need to be self-determined to develop, and knowing how the employees are motivated will help the management in providing the right kind of help to employees to maximise their motivation (Joyce 2005, 458).

2.4.1 Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) was developed by Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci (2017, 3) and it is a psychological theory that focuses on conditions that either benefit or hinder the development and flourishing of humans. The SDT is focused on three different needs that describe satisfactions that are necessary for the sufficient development of humans. The first need of three in SDT is autonomy. In this case, it means the need to be able to adjust their experiences and action by themselves. The actions should be aligned with one’s own authentic interests and values, as this will result in high engagement behaviour. The second need in SDT is competence, and it refers to the basic need to feel mastery in something. It can be hard to attain, as too challenging tasks, and negative feedback can waver the feeling of competence. Comparison and criticism can also affect competence negatively. The third basic need is relatedness. One feels relatedness if they feel heard and cared for. Feel like they belong to the group and can bring something to add value. (Ryan & Deci 2017, 9-11)

All three needs can be taken into consideration when thinking of employee development. Individuals need to be interested in their own development and the ways the development is taking place. They also need to feel competent about their work and the way of development needs to be encouraging. This way their

self-motivation grows, and their wellbeing can also increase. Small companies generally tend to expect their employees to be self-determined and try to encourage it.

If the three needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied, they create sustainable motivation. It is also referred to as autonomous motivation, as it is derived from one's self and occurs willingly. Thus, companies who take action towards supporting the satisfaction of these three needs are likely to gain productivity through creating autonomous motivation. Adapting the company to support these three needs will make the employee value the work itself more, over extrinsic motivators. On the contrary, if the company exercises a controlling work environment, it is likely to decrease the feeling of autonomy, competence, and relatedness of the employees, leading to introjected motivation and relying on external motivators. (Stone, Deci & Ryan 2009, 77-78.)

Introjected regulation happens when the employee has partially accepted the external workplace rules but does not fully accept them deep down. An example of introjected regulation is when an employee is working just to avoid guilt or to feel like a good person. However, promoting the feeling of autonomy, competence, and relatedness eases integrated regulation, which happens when the employee accepts and internalizes work rules and procedures and integrates them into their sense of self. Employees who have integrated motivation accept their workplace's goals, values, and structures, and thus regard their work as meaningful. Whereas intrinsically motivated people work for passion and interest, integrated regulation happens when people approve of the importance of their work, even if they do not find it interesting. They both are however associated with engagement at work as well as psychological wellbeing. Ideally, autonomously motivated employees are also intrinsically interested in their work and are integrated into the workplace values and structures. (Stone et al. 2009, 78.)

According to Stone et al. (2009, 79-84) research suggests six different ways in which a company can help embed the fulfillment of the three needs in the workplace to maximise the autonomous work motivation:

- i. Asking open questions and including employees in problem-solving,
- ii. Actively listening and acknowledging employees' perspectives,
- iii. Offering choices within structure including the clarification of responsibilities,
- iv. Providing sincere and positive feedback, acknowledging initiative and factual, non-judgemental feedback about problems,
- v. Minimising coercive controls like rewards and comparisons with others, and
- vi. Developing talent and sharing knowledge to enhance competence and autonomy.

Asking open questions and including employees in problem-solving is a very effective way to involve employees and open up communication. Asking open questions from employees invites them to explore their perspectives on a problem and offer the manager their view, without having any blame or label on the questions. This provides a supportive dialogue, which is necessary for building autonomous motivation. It is important to stick to open questions that do not have the tone of blame or label or give the impression of the manager being the expert. These kinds of questions can lead to an employee getting resentful or angry and projecting these into their answers. (Stone et al. 2009, 79-80.)

Actively listening and acknowledging employees' perspectives is what should follow the open questions. It involves acknowledging the employee's perspective of an opinion unambiguously. Employees tend to develop more trust in the management if they receive more autonomy support. Reflective listening, as in mirroring the emotional content of what is conveyed, is also considered a great listening method. However, statements of affirmation are considered especially critical to active listening. This way the employee knows that they are heard, and their efforts recognised. (Stone et al. 2009, 80-81.)

Offering choices within structure including the clarification of responsibilities should be a clear continuum of open questions and active listening. The idea is to offer a selection of possible actions to solve the problem that has been presented. Providing the employee with the ability to choose from different options will provide them with autonomy and a feeling of power. (Stone et al. 2009, 81.)

Providing sincere and positive feedback, acknowledging initiative, and factual, but non-judgemental feedback about problems can support employee's competence and autonomy. Praise that recognises employee's proactive manner and initiative supports employee's competence and autonomy. Whereas praise that is solely focused on compliance tends to come off as controlling, which will feel de-motivating. It is also important to provide negative feedback but to keep it non-judgemental and try to avoid criticism. Showing interest in the employee's perspective about the feedback and including open questions and active listening to it will offer a chance for the employee to learn from the experience. (Stone et al. 2009, 82.)

Minimising coercive controls like rewards and comparisons with others through SDT aims to minimise the importance of extrinsic motivation as a motivational strategy. A study shows that competition-based compensation is not motivational, even though some managers might still think so. This can lead to low-quality motivation in productivity, happiness, and workplace behaviour. Instead, the focus should be on organisational productivity, wellbeing, and personal satisfaction. (Stone et al. 2009, 82-83.)

Developing talent and sharing knowledge to enhance competence and autonomy is considered a possibility to utilize for employees. While educational and development opportunities might be seen as external rewards, there is still a possibility to enhance autonomous motivation through them. If managers use educational opportunities as external motivation, employees are likely to feel controlled. However, if educational opportunities are offered as a chance to develop personally and professionally, they will create positive motivational effects. Making employees aware of the possibilities will help them achieve these core psychological needs and produce these positive motivational effects, too. These opportunities should be used to provide employees support for their autonomy, using them to manipulate employees will not end well. (Stone et al. 2009, 83-34.)

Integrating these principles into the organisation can provide the organisation with great productivity, creativity, as well as employee wellbeing. However, it is not an easy task to implement these principles in the organisation. It requires

managers to possibly unlearn many existing strategies and practices they have learned and challenge their own beliefs about human motivation. Providing employees with a chance to gain autonomy, competence, and relatedness will make them want to develop themselves. (Stone et al. 2009, 87.)

Providing the employees with a chance to become more self-determined and autonomously motivated supports employees' development at the same time. While the management provides them with chances to learn from their actions and with possibilities to develop their talent to enhance their autonomy and competence in self-determination, they also support their development at the same time. As Vii-tala (2007, 212) said, the responsibility for employee development lies on both the employee and the employer, it is wise to try and enhance employees' self-determination, so that they will want to utilize the development opportunities provided to them. Pauline Joyce (2005, 458) says that employees need to be self-motivated to develop. SDT and utilizing these six principles will provide the company with methods on how that can support employees' self-determination.

2.4.2 Theory of need

David McClelland (1987) developed the needs-based model of motivation, where he explained how people have three different types of needs that in combination form the individual's drive and explanation behind their motivation (Robertson 2009, 135). The three different needs are achievement motivation, power motivation, and affiliation motivation. All of us have three different needs, but the dominant need varies and thus people with different needs are motivated differently. (McClelland cited in Robertson 2009, 135.)

Achievement motivation, also known as n-ach, means that the people who have this as their dominant need are motivated by achievement. N-ach people are typically motivated by solving challenging tasks and problems. They require feedback, as it makes them feel accomplished. The feedback should be fair and in balance, informing the person what they did right and what they did wrong, as n-ach people typically are eager to develop and want to know how they can do that.

N-ach people tend to work best on their own, as their high achievement motivation can show as a weakness by demanding too much from their teams since they are so goal-orientated. (Robertson 2009, 135.; Mindtools n/d.)

People who are power motivated, also known as n-pow people, have a high need for power. It can show a need for high status and influence over others. N-pow people can also project their needs on themselves or onto others. N-pow people tend to work best when they are in charge, or with clear goal-oriented tasks since they enjoy competition. Their motivation could also be utilized in negotiations or tasks where they need to convince someone of something. When providing feedback to n-pow people, it should be direct. (Robertson 2009, 135-136.; Mindtools n/d.) Noe et al. (2010, 272) also mentioned that mentoring is something that people with a high need for power and achievement are typically likely to look for, so managers recognising the employee's individuality and how they are motivated, will help in finding the correct ways of development for them.

Alternatively, affiliation motivated people, the n-affil people, need interaction with others and need their approval. They get their drive from the feeling of belonging and the need to be liked. This is why they enjoy working in group settings, so it might be useful to try and include them in a group or pair setting for optimal motivation. N-affil people typically avoid risks, so such tasks should be considered to be directed to someone else. N-affil people appreciate personal feedback, and typically like to stay out of the spotlight. (Robertson 2009, 135-136.; Mindtools n/d.)

McClelland's motivation theory shows how people have different needs and thus are motivated differently. This theory can be utilized in employee assessments and everyday life in general. Assessing the employee will provide the manager with information about the employees' personality and skills and how they handle things. With the information the manager learns about the employees during the assessment and over time, they can better understand them and how they are best motivated, and that way figure out which actions are especially important to them regarding their motivation. By getting to know their employees managers should be able to utilize McClelland's theory well.

2.5 Learning

Dictionary (n/d) defines learning as the process of acquiring knowledge or skill. Erik van Vulpen (n/d) describes learning as acquiring knowledge, skills, or attitudes in the form of experience, studying, or teaching. Rahman and Nas (2013, 566) described employee development as the employee and employer working together towards improving the employee's knowledge and skills. Based on this, it is safe to say that development involves learning (van Vulpen n/d). For this reason, it is considered important to understand how to operate when adults are the ones learning. It is also important to understand how learning can happen effectively in the workplace.

Below an adult learning theory and a learning model will be introduced. They will provide information on how learning can be effective with adults, and in the workplace. By utilizing these theories and understanding how learning happens in this setting, management can offer employees a more meaningful and effective development experience.

2.5.1 Adult learning theory

Adult learning theory, also known as andragogy, was developed by Malcolm Knowles in 1967. The model provides a setting in which learning can happen while physically and psychologically respecting learning adults and involving them in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of their progress. Andragogy is based on four main assumptions:

- i. learning is self-directed,
- ii. learning utilizes gained life experience,
- iii. adults are ready to learn when it's relevant to their current roles, and
- iv. the learning is problem-oriented (Knowles cited in Merriam & Bierema 2014, 48.)

When a person matures, their self-concept evolves toward a self-directing human being instead of a dependent personality. Adults having a more independent self-concept means that they are more likely to be self-directing and thus can also plan their learning. This means that the adult is likely to expect their environment to be comfortable and geared towards adults, there to exist respect and trust, as well as collaboration. (Merriam & Bierema 2014, 49.)

As an adult, they have gained experience and can utilize that for learning. Andragogy assumes that adults have gained different experiences over their lifetime that will provide them with resources they can utilize in their learning. The experience makes each person unique and is important to an individual's identity. It is deemed important for an adult to take control of their learning and become independent learners. Life experience can harm learning too, by the adult feeling like their past experiences are enough for them and they see no need to learn something new. Life experience can be utilized in the adults learning for example through discussion, problem-based learning, case studies, and field experiences. (Merriam & Bierema 2014, 49-51.)

The readiness of an adult to learn is similar to the developmental tasks of their role. An adult's readiness to learn is connected to developmental tasks and social roles, implying that social roles of adulthood create a need for the adult to learn. More common than learning in a formal setting is learning in an informal setting. This means occurring through everyday life, which can be harder to capture. It has been studied, that personal development can be a strong motivating factor within the readiness to learn. (Merriam & Bierema 2014, 51-53.)

An adult is more focused on current problems and solving them, instead of subject-oriented learning. Andragogy's fourth assumption is related to the above-mentioned three, by assuming that the adult is eager and motivated to learn when the problem is on-hand and current. Whereas as children we were learning subjectively about topics that were not necessarily current, adults prefer to learn about current topics they can solve and apply their knowledge immediately. It is typically the preferred way of learning by adults due to it being more engaging. (Merriam & Bierema 2014, 53-54.)

Andragogy can be utilized in employee development by taking into consideration how adults tend to prefer learning and sustain their motivation. Including them in the process of planning, providing them a safe environment, and preferring informal development methods where employees can utilize their learning on current problems are ways in which the management can support the employees' development to be efficient.

2.5.2 70-20-10 learning model

The 70-20-10 methodology was implemented after a study conducted by Center for Creative Leadership, by Morgan McCall, Michael M. Lombardo, and Robert W. Eichinger (Pun n/d). The learning model is an approach that was developed to help organizations perform better. The name of the model entails the emphasis on different approaches to learning. 70 percent of learning happens through experience and experiment at the job e.g., challenging tasks, job rotation, and job enlargement. 20 percent of learning happens through working with others e.g., coaching, mentoring, teamwork, and feedback. And the remaining 10 percent happens through formal learning e.g., courses and workshops. (702010 Institute n/d.)

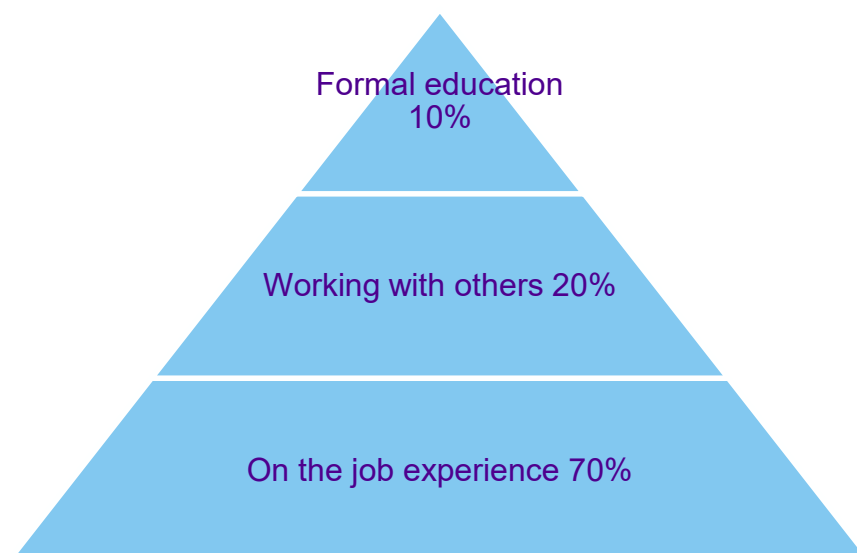


FIGURE 1. 70-20-10 learning model. (See 702010 Institute n/d)

While the percentages are not exact as they can, and will, change case to case, it is a good indicator that only a small amount of learning and development happens through formal education. The model showcases that most of the development happens by learning from work experience and others. This model gives small companies with limited resources an insight into the possibilities to offer developmental opportunities with a low budget, and it can even increase the employees' performance, providing the company with more efficiency and productivity.

Traditionally learning and development department has stayed in the 10 percent category of formal education, with hints of the 20 percent category with more formal mentoring and coaching programs. If done well, these can be successful ways to increase the performance of employees. However, according to Joe Arets, Charles Jennings, and Vivian Heijnen (2016) if employees learn and obtain skills where and when they should be used, it is more likely to yield good results. (Arets et al. 2016.)

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

The following chapter will go through the research process, starting from the research objectives and the research design process, as well as the validity, reliability, and limitations of the research. The chapter will also cover the gathered data from the research in the form of an analysis.

3.1 Research objectives

As the objective of this thesis was to find ways for the commissioner to support their employees' development with limited resources as a small, growing company, the research objective was to find out the perspectives of the professionals about employee development in small companies with limited resources and their experiences and opinions about the topic. The research should have also given insight into possible actions that professionals have taken themselves with companies in similar situations, or what they would have recommended. The research would have helped understand where the limited resources should be allocated and how the employees could best benefit from those available resources. The research looked at the problem from a human resource professional's point of view and brought a specialist's viewpoint on what is relevant.

3.2 Research design

The research data were collected with a qualitative method. For one, the research project is relatively small, so it makes sense to utilize the qualitative research method more. As the research was looking for the participants' perspectives and experiences, it also makes sense to utilize qualitative research rather than quantitative, where the data is often numerical. The goal was to hear from the professionals without any restrictions from the author. (Hammersley 2012, 10-12.)

The data were collected in the form of interviews. The interviews were conducted with an unstructured interview style, as this allowed the participants to share their

knowledge and perspectives freely with minimal questions from the author. The goal was to obtain information from the participants without leading them, as the aim was to collect their perspectives on the topic. This allowed the participant to answer questions freely and gave the interviewer a possibility to then ask more detailed questions if it felt necessary. (Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti & McKinney 2012, 194.)

The interviews were conducted via the internet, though in real-time and face-to-face. These types of internet interviews are very similar to traditional face-to-face interviews and provide great spontaneity in a form of immediate responses just like face-to-face interviews (Gubrium et al. 2012, 179.) Internet interviews were determined a fitting option instead of face-to-face interviews, as it removes the need for a shared location between the interviewer and interviewee.

The chosen platform for the interviews was Microsoft Teams, as that is a platform all the interviewees chose as their preferred option. Gubrium et al. (2012, 180) warn that interviews on a conferencing software can cause misunderstanding with communication and lead to overlapping discussions as well as brief responses, making it hard for the researcher to respond or to clarify questions. However, as the interviews were done one-on-one, and most people have familiarized themselves with Microsoft Teams and other online communication platforms in the past few years due to the increased remote working amid the global pandemic, it was not a great concern in this research.

Analysing the collected interview data happened through thematic analysis, in which the author looked for similarities, the themes, from the gathered data and provide an analysis of it. The following steps were followed to conclude an effective analysis:

- i. familiarizing oneself with the set of data,
- ii. coding,
- iii. generating initial themes,
- iv. developing and reviewing themes,
- v. refining, defining, and naming the themes, and
- vi. writing the analysis. (Braun & Clarke 2022, 35-229.)

3.3 Sampling

Participants in the research were chosen by judgemental sampling, meaning that the author selected the participants she thought to be suitable and able to answer the research questions and provide relevant information to the author. The author looked for companies offering human resource management services and consulting that could be fitting for the topic of the thesis and research. Then she looked for suitable employees for the research as participants. The author then contacted the candidates by e-mail and agreed to an interview with the individuals who replied to the e-mail expressing their interest in participation. The diversity of this sampling technique depended on the researcher's choices. It was determined the most suitable option as the goal was to interview professionals in a certain field. (Saunders et al. 2008, 236-237.)

3.4 Validity, reliability, and limitations

With qualitative research, there is no set number of participants that would be considered a good sample size, as it is defined in various different ways by different people (Gubrium et al. 2012, 244). Thus, it was challenging to determine what the right sample size would be for this research, and how to obtain it in time to keep up with the schedule of the thesis. 24 people were contacted regarding participation in the thesis, of which 13 responded. One person felt like they were not the right person to participate in the research and therefore declined. The remaining 12 showed interest in participation. However, three people could not be interviewed due to overlapping schedules. This lowered the number of participants to nine. The lack of responses could affect the reliability, as the higher number of participants would have provided more information and a more reliable result would have been obtained. Judgemental selection could also affect the validity if the author has not selected the right people.

It is important to identify the purpose of the research to the participants and to offer transparency during the research process (Gubrium et al. 2012, 184). This was done by informing the participants about the topic of the research and how the research was conducted. Participants were also made aware of the possibility

to stay anonymous or have their names appear in the research alongside their employer and have been able to choose whichever way they prefer.

It is good to note that the interview process was conducted in Finnish, from contacting the interviewees, to conducting the interviews, the communication between the researcher and participants happened in Finnish. This was due to the participants having their contact information in Finnish, and the researcher also being Finnish by the native tongue. For this reason, the interviews were then translated to English by the author with careful consideration. However, it is good to remember that there is still always a risk for the meaning of the message to be lost in translation.

3.5 Data analysis

Nine professionals were interviewed for this research, out of which one preferred to remain anonymous. For the rest of the participants, along with their employers and the interview information, see Appendix 1. The goal was to obtain the information they considered relevant based on their perspective and experiences. The chosen analysis method was thematic analysis, and the findings of the research are presented below as identified themes, followed by a summary of the analysis as well as a SWOT analysis. The analysis process is demonstrated in Appendix 2.

Open communication

The first recognised theme from the research is the need for clear and open communication. All the participants found communication to be a very important factor in employee development, but it was also recognised that it can often be a strength within a small company, due to low hierarchy. Contrary to that, it was also recognised that while a small company has fewer people to communicate to, it is still extremely important to make it systematic and organised. If small companies rely on their communication to work due to their small size, they can run a risk of someone feeling like they are being treated unfairly if they feel they aren't informed properly and enough. Tiina Alho (2022) pointed out:

“When doing employee surveys, there’s always someone who brings up communication and how it should be improved more.”

With regards to an employee development plan, communication was also deemed important in the interaction with other people. It is important for the employees to know what things are being done to support the development, and why, as well as what actions are being taken. It is important to communicate this clearly because it can be hard to recognise simple everyday actions that are aiding the development. Ensuring clear communication of even the smallest actions taken towards development will help employees to also recognise those moments and give them a feeling of success and development.

A common theme among participants regarding communication was also the interactive communication between employees and management, which was deemed commonly to be agile within small companies. People need to feel like they are included and listened to because for development to occur people need to be willing to commit to it. As Finney (2008, 4) said, the best incentive for a person to be intrinsically motivated is to feel like they are heard and cared for. If employees feel like their thoughts and input don’t matter, they can feel dissatisfied which can affect their performance in the long run (Juneja n/d).

By having an open communication culture, it is also easier for the employees to open up about their needs and desires. The importance of organisational culture was also brought up, by pointing out the importance to have an emphasis on continuous development. The study by Maurer and Lippstreu (2008, 339-340) agrees with this, concluding that learning and development-oriented organisational culture is rather a must in today’s workplace to increase not only the possibility of employees’ engagement and wellbeing, but effectiveness as well.

Commitment

The second theme, commitment, refers to the commitment that is required for development to be successful. This commitment is needed from everyone, but especially from managers in terms of their commitment to leadership in the development process. Most participants brought up the importance of leadership and how it can be a challenge if not done right. Maritta Joki (2022) said:

“A small company should be managed like a big one. Even 10 people can already bring a lot of different opinions to the table, which will affect the work. Leadership is a key when thinking about the employee experience, and how equal and fair treatment is ensured and felt by everyone.”

The right kind of leadership needs to be applied in each setting. A small company with a low hierarchy often means that the employees are expected to be self-determined. However, this doesn't mean that they do not need leadership. Alho (2022) pointed out that leadership can become a challenge if organisation is not led correctly. An organisation needs to be led by encouraging self-determination so that employees will be more self-determined as well. Vivien Forner, Michael Jones, Yoke Berry and Joakim Eidenfalk (2020, 82) agree with this, as their study found that leading self-determined people requires the leaders to provide the employees with opportunities to enhance their autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Alho also mentioned how self-determination does not diminish the need for leadership but rather changes its focus. With self-determined employees the leadership should be focused on enabling everyday life and removing obstacles, the manager should be in a more of a coaching position for the employee. For this reason, management should try to apply the six principles Stone et al. (2009, 79-84) brought up, which provide management with ways how they can support their employees' autonomous motivation more.

A common topic within the research was also the importance to commit to the developmental actions and changes it might bring. This requires a willingness from the employer, but it also requires a willingness from the employees. Like Viitala (2007, 212) said, the responsibility for employee development is a combination of both the employer's and employee's commitment and willingness to take responsibility. Pirjo Misenko (2022) agreed by saying:

“An employee also has a responsibility and willingness in their own development, not just the employer.”

Achievable actions

The third theme is achievable actions. This theme was most present in all the interviews and refers to the methods a small company should use for their employees' development, and how most of them are very achievable, even for a small company with a limited budget. Noe et al. (2010, 261-272) listed four different approaches to employee development: formal education, assessment, job experience, and interpersonal relationships. The research found that the connecting factors between all best options for employee development in a small company with limited resources were ease to access and low budget. Mentoring, coaching, and different senior-junior relationships were considered effective yet very budget-friendly options on top of different on-the-job experiences like job rotation and job enlargement.

Most participants also agreed that personality tests can be a very useful tool for identifying an individual's skills and personality traits. However, many pointed out that they should not be solely relied on, but used as support with open communication, and that the best way to know the employees is to talk to them and invest time in that. Paula Jaakkola (2022) said:

“Different tests can be a great help if they are used correctly as a base for the conversation. However, you shouldn't compartmentalize too much based on the test results or make assumptions. If used correctly, they can even give the employee new information on something they haven't realized about themselves.”

Noe et al. (2010, 262) mentioned the use of personality tests as an effective way to measure employees' traits and tendencies to learn about their skills and personalities, which does agree with the participants' views as well. Misenko (2022) pointed out that very rarely are people at their best in testing situations, so different personality tests or assessments should be taken into consideration with caution.

It was also agreed that most of the learning happens within the workplace and through experience and learning from others. Formal education in a form of courses, literature, or seminars is only a very small part. This claim is supported

by the 70-20-10 learning model, according to which 70 percent of learning happens through work experience, 20 percent through working with others, and 10 percent through formal education (702010 Institute, n/d).

Different work rotations, job enlargements, or working in pairs to learn new skills were deemed as great ways to gain new skills in the workplace. Adults also often prefer learning current things on-hand, which enforces the claim of work experience to be a great development method (Merriam & Bierema 2014, 53-54). This supports the general finding of the research that a lot can be done with a small budget if time and commitment are invested into the development opportunities by the company.

Following through

A common theme within the research was also the need to follow through. This theme refers to the need to keep the conversations up and running, and what it takes to keep the development going. This is related to the previous themes of communication and achievable actions, but it was deemed important to mention it on its own as its importance was highlighted many times.

One of the main takeaways from the research is the frequent need for active follow-ups regarding the development. Development discussions were considered an obvious action for the company to have. Hanna Puura (2022), said:

“Small companies might often have development discussion process in place, but they are executed only once or twice a year, which is too seldom.”

Several participants mentioned short weekly or biweekly sit-downs with employees to be an easy and effective way to follow up on the development process. This is also one way to make it very clear to the employees that development opportunities are important in the company.

Misenko (2022) pointed out that it can become quite expensive to invest in employees if they end up leaving for another job. This is why it is also important to follow up on the development of the employees frequently to ensure that progress is happening and that employees feel like their development is taken seriously.

Employees will feel more satisfied and engaged with seeing that they are cared for (Kelleher 2013).

Clear goals

The theme of clear goals refers to the need to have clarity in the goals and vision of the development. Employees need to be made aware of the goals of the company and they have to be aware of what is expected and needed from them too. Setting clear goals is important from the strategic point of view of the company, a clear vision and goals will make it easier to integrate into business models.

It's also necessary to recognise relevant skills to which the company can offer development. A small company has limited resources and the kind of skills they are helping employees develop should be useful for the company in one way or another. This divided respondents, with some pointing out how employees are the essence of the company and they should be put first and their needs and wants regarding development supported, whereas some argued that the priority should be with the company and how the desired development areas should be very useful to the company at that time.

Most found that employees are the company's best asset and should be appreciated and cared for. Sergio Arzeni (2013, 3) agrees and highlights the employees' importance in small and medium-sized enterprises especially. However, a company needs to make a decision on what development opportunities they want and can support. Minna Valonen (2022) points out that a possible way to support employees' development regarding a skill that is not relevant to the company at that moment is to offer a set amount of their working time to develop that skill. It can be considered a kind of employment benefit.

One challenge a company might face with the development process due to lack of clarity is that the development is not anyone's responsibility and this way won't receive enough attention to see results (Alho 2022). This is connected to the need for the management to commit to the development process, to make sure that there are the right people, who are given enough time to make sure that the development process can be kept up and running.

3.5.1 Analysis summary

The research provided great insight into professionals' views and opinions on employee development, what they consider important and what they think are the important things regarding employee development in small companies, all the way from affecting factors to concrete methods and actions. Many of the themes can be connected, but that is how business often works. If one thing doesn't work well, it affects other aspects as well.

The research provided answers to the research questions by offering different ways in which a small company can support its employees' development. The research introduced different on-the-job methods like job enlargement, job rotations, and working together as sufficient ways to develop. Working with other people through mentoring, coaching, and interaction, in general, was also deemed a great way in which development can occur. The findings of the research also support the statements made in the theoretical framework about possible approaches to employee development. The importance of other aspects of the business was greatly highlighted, bringing attention to the need for clear communication even in a small company, and to the ways a small company should be led and managed.

On top of the achievable actions that were discovered from the research, a common suggestion for the development of employees was also to hire outsourced help. An experienced professional might even be more cost-effective than trying to handle it all alone without the experience. There is a choice to hire someone part-time, just for a project, or a few times a month. Depending on the scale of the development project, it might be worth looking into, even with limited resources.

Enhancing employees' motivation within employee development was determined possible by providing the employees with a feeling of being listened to. It was determined important to give the employees the right kind of support that would enhance their autonomy and competence, as this would lead to autonomous motivation. Research also showed that the staff can take into consideration each

other's personalities and strengths by utilizing personality tests and assessments. This way they can identify their own, as well as everyone else's, skills and tendencies regarding their personality. However, a simple everyday conversation will also give a lot of information about the other person. Learning about the employees' tendencies will also provide the management with information that they can use to enhance their motivation.

The research was able to answer the research questions as seen above. A clear takeaway is that employee development is a very desired attribute that potential employees expect their employer to offer nowadays. And for this reason, the employer needs to find adequate ways to keep the employee happy and engaged with the company. As Henna Kauppinen (2022) said:

“When the employee is well, the company is well.”

3.5.2 SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis offers a chance to see the current state and this way provides a starting point from which to start developing the new plan. The SWOT analysis is based on literature findings, the interview with the commissioner, and the information gathered in the research. As the commissioner did not want to conduct internal research, but an outsourced one regarding professionals' experience and perspectives, the analysis is from a point of view of a general small company, with the information that has been available from the commissioner. The name of the analysis comes from an acronym based on the words strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. (Kenton 2021.)

Strengths

Strengths are internal factors the company possesses. What Luin Oy as a small company possesses as strength is its open company culture and trust within each other, as the commissioner mentioned. Finney (2008, 4) considers this as a big strength as well in terms of intrinsic motivation, as employees feel like their opinions are heard and they feel safe expressing them. This was also considered a common strength for small companies to have according to the author's research.

Other strengths would include the ability to make changes quickly and adapt to needed changes. As Luodes (2022) said, the commissioner has quite a low hierarchy, it was discovered in the research that a small company, often with a low hierarchy is quite agile and capable of making changes rather quickly, as there is no need to go through a lot of bureaucracy with many higher-ups.

Weaknesses

Weaknesses are internal factors the company has. The clearest current weakness Luin Oy seems to have is a lack of resources and thus a lack of structure when it comes to employee development. It was deemed a common challenge within the research for small companies to have an interest in development actions, but no clear plan, which can cause more confusion and aimless wandering. Lack of development plans can also cause dissatisfaction in employees, who often nowadays do expect their employers to offer development opportunities. This can in return lead to employees not being engaged and effective, or even changing jobs. (Hosmer 2015, 3.)

Opportunities

Opportunities are external factors the company could exploit. For a small company within employee development, there are many opportunities they could exploit. Many platforms and websites offer various free courses and information for development purposes, as well as possibilities for networking, which can then be utilized with mentoring and coaching. There are also companies offering outsourced help for small companies regarding employee development with different services and rates, which can be helpful in certain situations. Small companies also have a great opportunity to utilize their people, once they find the correct way in which to utilize them. Being an employer as a small company can be a great selling point for future employees, with great growth opportunities, as well as a chance to get a say in how things work, as the hierarchy is often lower.

Threats

Threats are external factors that can possibly harm or threaten the company. The most common threat any company might have within employee development is the new trend of changing jobs relatively often. Misenko (2022) pointed out the recent change in employees' lifecycle with a single employer. David Pollit and

Rachel Brown (2008, 30) agreed that today's young workforce is not afraid to change jobs if they are not happy with their situation at their job, unlike years ago when it was normal to stay in one job, or company, for years. Misenko (2022) also brought up the point of bigger companies having an impression of a safer workplace with more resources to offer to their employees, compared to small companies.

4 EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

This chapter provides the commissioner with steps they should take to enhance and support their employees' development. The research questions were answered in the previous chapter, and in this chapter the theoretical framework will be combined with the conducted research to bring adequate recommendations and guidelines for the commissioner.

Employee development journey refers to the continuous journey employee is on regarding their development. From the starting point of assessment and creating the individual development plan suitable for the employee to identify the correct development actions. The journey continues with implementing the plan and getting consistent support from the management in the form of different check-ins to make sure the development is progressing. The journey is a continuous development cycle, as assessment should be repeated at certain intervals, and this way new goals are identified and then developed again. The length of the plan depends on the employee and the goals they have, but with changing development goals it is a cycle that keeps going throughout the employee's time at the company.

4.1 Assessment

The assessment was determined as one of the ways in which the company can develop its employees according to Noe et al. (2010, 261). Assessment can begin at the hiring stage of the employee life cycle, but also continue when the person starts working at the company. Assessment is something the employee can do by themselves, but it can also be done by the manager.

Employee self-assessment is about recognising their strengths and weaknesses to gain an understanding of where they want to go and what things they want to develop and what things they might consider good ways to get there. Self-assessment can be done continuously, by following one's own progress at work and recording what things one has learned and what they found difficult.

If the employee is having a hard time with self-assessment, they can be encouraged to keep a journal about their experience at work. Being able to understand what motivates oneself and what one likes doing-especially can help in finding one's own interests and best ways to work efficiently, and to learn to know oneself more. Examples of journaling ideas to use in the journal if the employee is struggling to think about their interests:

- i. What has made you feel highly motivated?
- ii. When have you felt unmotivated?
- iii. When have you felt like you want to learn more?

Following self-assessment is the assessment done by, or with the manager. The author's research confirmed that the best way to get to know employees is to talk to them and listen to how they feel about their skills and what they think about their tasks. According to Merriam and Bierema (2014, 49), adults like to be included in the planning of their learning process and are capable of doing the planning themselves, so the process should be done in collaboration together. However, including an assessment tool such as a personality, motivation, or a strength test will provide the manager with information about the employee. It is advised not to solely rely on the test results, but they can be used alongside the assessment and discussion of the employee's development wishes and opportunities. Thus, the importance of talking to the employee at this stage is very high.

While self-assessment and assessment with one's manager will bring the employee, and the manager, a lot of information, there is more that can be done. Assessing the team can provide the employees with wider knowledge about their co-workers and how they act in different situations, and why. This will also happen over time, with natural interactions at work, but for anyone wanting to get more out of their colleagues, a team assessment can be useful.

After conducting their assessments and having some level of knowledge about their skills and behaviour styles, the team should come together for a second round. A different or even the same kind of behavioural test as in self-assessment can be utilized here. After the test has been completed by everyone, the team

should come together and go over the results of each person together. This session will provide everyone with a more in-depth understanding of their colleagues and how they might act in different situations. It can also provide employees with new information about themselves, which they haven't realized before. Just like with self-assessment, it is important to remember that tests shouldn't be relied on too much, which is why the conversation afterward is very important to determine if the results are true, or if they seem very unlikely to the person. This can enhance teamwork, self-awareness, conflicts, and make managing employees all that more efficient since employees should now be more aware of their co-workers' personalities and how they operate and think.

While the tests can provide information the employee has not even realized about themselves, they can also be not 100 percent accurate. The reliability of different tests should be considered, as there are a variety of different kind of tests out there. Some of the most recognised tests include The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, The Big 5 Personality test, and the DISC assessment (van Thiel 2022; Indeed 2022). The internet does offer a variety of more affordable or even free options, but reliability should always be considered. It should also be noted that managers need to be able to utilize the information correctly, to make effective use out of the assessment process. There is also the option for outsourced help in this, to ensure effective results.

4.2 Individual development plan

Employee development plans are typically created with the desire to support employees' growth personally, and professionally. According to Simon Beusaert, Mien Segers, Janine van der Rijt, and Wim Gijsselaers (2011, 236) employee development plan is a tool that can be used to document information about the employee's competencies and skills, and future skills they would like to develop. Beusaert et al. (2011, 236) identified four attributes to describe it, saying it:

- i. gives an overview of the employee's skills and competencies they have worked out previously, and competencies the employee wishes to develop in the future,

- ii. ought to be constructed by the employee themselves, provided with help from the manager,
- iii. can be used as a base for conversation with a supervisor, who is expected to provide the employee feedback, and
- iv. serves as a tool for decision-making, utilized in planning an individual training program.

Employee development plans can be used for different things, like developmental purposes or performance purposes. Developmental purposes focus on developing the employee and their learning, whereas performance purposes focus on evaluating the employee and presenting themselves (Beck, Livne & Bear 2005, 224). As this thesis is focusing on developmental purposes, the plan is focused on developing the employee and learning. (Beausaert et al. 2011, 237.)

Alongside the assessment, the first thing that should be done when an employee joins the company is to create an individual development plan. This means a more thorough look into what the employee already knows how to do, what they would like to do, and how they would like to develop it. It also includes recognising the correct methods which the employee can use to indeed develop themselves and improve their skill.

The employee development plan utilizes the information that has come up during assessment, and often these two steps take place at the same time. The plan can be a physical paper or a document online, but some kind of documentation is recommended. The goal of the plan is to address three main questions: “Where am I going?”, “How am I going to get there?”, and “Which step should I take next?” (Beausaert et al. 2011, 251). Based on that, in the employee’s development plan (Appendix 1.) should be found at least:

- i. Current goals and aspirations for the employee’s development?
- ii. What skills/experience etc. need to be achieved to reach these goals?
- iii. How can the company support the employee in reaching these goals?
- iv. Steps that have been agreed to be taken towards reaching these goals, and
- v. Date for the follow-up discussion to see if things need to be adjusted.

After going over the goals and what skills the employee needs to obtain to achieve these goals, it is time to think about how they can indeed be obtained. This will vary based on the skill that the employee desires to develop, and recommended options will be covered in the next part. While different options for employee development will be covered next, it is ultimately the manager's and employee's place to come to a conclusion on which ways are determined best for developing the desired skills. It is also important to schedule a follow-up discussion, but this will also be covered later on.

4.3 Development actions

The next step is to integrate the development of the employee into their working life according to the development plan. The 70-20-10 learning model (n/d), and the conducted research by the author both showed that most of the learning and development happens through work experience, as well as through working with others, while only a small portion of it happens through formal learning. Merriam and Bierema (2014, 51-54) also pointed out how adults commonly learn in informal settings and are motivated to learn on hand. The following development methods offer a variety of possibilities that should be discussed between the employee and the manager and determined which ones are considered the best for each setting.

By offering these options to the employee, and letting them have a say in the development, the management is taking into consideration how the employee prefers to learn, as well as contributing to fulfilling the three psychological needs to maximise the autonomous motivation of the employee (Stone et al. 2009, 77-78). However, it is crucial to think about what development needs and desires are relevant and feasible for the company to support. While thinking about employees' development and the eagerness to support the employees is great, it is necessary to recognise that not everything can be done.

4.3.1 Development through work experience

As most of the learning happens on the job, the commissioner should utilize different job experience opportunities, which are typically low budget options, and thus fitting for a small company to integrate into their everyday life. Job enlargement can be utilized by introducing new tasks to the employee's current position, offering them a chance to work on their desired development skills alongside their normal tasks. To take a step further, job rotation can offer more challenges by giving the employee a completely new title and set of tasks to focus on. This can be utilized when the company is growing and thinking about hiring new people for a new position, it might be wise to look into the existing staff to see if anyone would be interested in the new tasks.

To keep the employee motivated the tasks should be challenging enough but still stimulate feelings of success to motivate employees to work on them. By offering employees a chance to solve problems by asking them open questions and giving the floor to them, employees will be able to gain more autonomy and competence and this way develop their autonomous motivation while developing their skills as well (Stone et al. 2009, 77-78).

4.3.2 Development through working with others

While most of the learning and development happens through work experience, social learning can offer a lot of opportunities as well. Learning from other people is often the second-best way to learn and develop new skills. Mentoring, coaching, and networking are great ways for employees to learn from other people.

The manager should utilize mentoring for the employees, and help this method come to life by exploiting their contacts and networks to find their employees suitable mentors. The employees should also be encouraged to look for mentorship in their own communities or contacts. Platforms like LinkedIn should also be utilized for this, as the platform offers a chance for great networking and has many people eager to mentor people in their career journey.

It is recommended to utilize employees within the workplace. Identifying everyone's current skills and development needs provides the manager with a list of skills already in the company and with a list of skills employees want to develop. The manager can pair two employees to work together, where one can teach the other a skill they already possess and the other desires to learn. The author's research deemed working within teams and pairs a great way for employees to develop. It can also be utilized to motivate the employees if the right people are paired together.

4.3.3 Development through formal learning

Formal learning is considered a possible way of learning, even in small companies. When identifying the desired skills the employee wants to develop the manager and employee should look into possible free formal education material. With the help of the internet, there is a broad selection of different websites and people providing information on multiple topics for free. It is worth looking for these possibilities if the budget won't allow for a paid course and workshop participation.

It is also recommended to think about offering a possible employment benefit to employees, where they can use a certain amount of time of their working hours to develop their skills. This can be utilized especially in situations when the skill the employee wants to develop isn't relevant to the company, but the company still wants to give the employee a chance to develop this skill somewhere other than in their own time. This way the employer still supports the employee's development, even if it is not a relevant skill the employee could easily develop in other ways with the employer's resources at the job or other ways. This employee benefit could of course be utilized to develop any skill, by giving the employees a chance to decide how to spend the given time developing themselves.

4.4 Supporting the development

According to Beusaert et al (2011, 238) support is necessary for the employee's development. The support should however be non-controlling and value the employee's perspective and offer different possibilities during the development, this way providing the employee with a feeling of autonomy and competence and thus enhancing their autonomous motivation (Stone et al. 2009, 78). It also shows the employee that the development is valued by the company and they want to make sure the employees are happy with their development.

Feedback is an essential part of employee development, which is why it should be included in the plan throughout the working life. Providing the employee with valuable feedback that is both encouraging and constructive will give the employee a chance to learn for the future. This way the employee can also learn to recognise more things about themselves they may have not been aware of before. By offering feedback on the employee's tasks and performance, rather than on the person, one maximises the effect on the employee's autonomy and competence, this way also aiding the development of their autonomous motivation. Feedback as part of the employee's everyday life will also help them see the everyday actions that contribute to employee development, which was determined important in the author's research. (Beusaert et al 2011, 253.)

The author's research also showed the need for organised communication, which is why it should be made sure to offer each employee the same development opportunities, including support. Different ways in which the development process should be kept up to date are presented next, as well as what each session should include. These sessions should also be scheduled to everyone's calendar to make sure that they are held and not forgotten.

Development discussions are the biggest session, often held annually or biannually. This should be used for discussing the goals and objectives the employee wants to reach and what skills need to be obtained to achieve this. The session should cover the employee's future goals and desires, to see if some things have changed or new goals have come up. Going over and updating the individual development plan accordingly is part of development discussions.

It should be made clear that a development discussion should be kept away from performance appraisal discussions, as development is not something that should be reviewed the same way as performance at the job. Development needs to be kept as something employees are encouraged to do, not something they have to do (Antonacopoulou 2000, 502). This is why it is also important to highlight the importance of giving the floor to the employee and make sure their views and perspectives about the development are listened to, as adults prefer to be included in the process of planning and have a say about their development (Merriam & Bierema 2014, 49).

Quarterly check-ups are the second biggest session to have with the employees. Here the individual development plan should be reviewed, and any possible adjustments and changes made based on how the development process is going and if any adjustments are needed. It is a chance for the manager to make sure that the employee feels like progress is happening with the development and a chance for the employee to address any possible changes they might be thinking of regarding the development plan.

1-to-1 discussions were considered very important everyday life check-ups within the author's research. This refers to a quick chat between the manager and the employee, for example for 10 minutes, where the current feelings are shared and there is a chance to see how the employee is doing with their development in their everyday life. Depending on other communication, 1-to-1 discussions should be held weekly or biweekly, to ensure consistent interaction.

4.5 For managers

Managers have a big responsibility in making employee development happen and ensuring it is effective and motivating to employees. By applying the above-mentioned actions to their operation, the company should have a great foundation for employee development. However, there are a few more things that should be paid attention to, from the manager's point of view.

First and foremost, the company should make sure that the management is educated on the suitable leadership styles and how they should manage their employees. As the author's research showed, for self-determined employees, management should focus on ensuring their everyday life is as smooth as possible and remove any obstacles they might face. The employees might not require a stereotypical supervisor, and the management might not have the time for it either. Management should however encourage the autonomy and independence of the employees, and make sure that they have the correct role in the leadership of their employees. According to the author's research, it could be managing the employees in the form of coaching.

This means that they need reinforcement and feedback (Noe et al. 2010, 273). The six ways for the company to support their employees Stone et al. (2009, 79-84) found in their study can be connected to leadership, as they encourage the employee to think and bring forward their perspectives, as well as providing the employee with sincere positive feedback, and constructive feedback when it is not positive, to offer them a chance to learn and grow. Providing employees with a variety of options they can choose from regarding their tasks and development opportunities supports their autonomy and competence. This will also result in the employees feeling appreciative that they are included in the planning process, which is important when talking about adults in learning environments. (Stone et al. 2009, 79-84.; Merriam & Bierema 2014, 49.)

It is important to encourage learning and development in the employees' everyday life, to enforce a learning-oriented organisational culture. This should be done by implementing and encouraging employees to do these above-mentioned actions. It should also be clearly communicated to the employees what is being done, so that even the small everyday actions that do enhance the development, are recognised. This way employees are also likely to open up with their own suggestions, and since according to the research the employees are what makes the company run, they should be listened to.

Investing time in getting to know the employees was also determined to be one of the important aspects of the research. While management can learn about their

employees with assessments, personality tests, and such, the most valuable information is gained by spending time with them, talking to them, and letting them talk. This is why management should make sure that they also use the time to interact with their employees outside of the mentioned employee development activities, especially since there is a hybrid working model in place. It is a continuous task, but necessary to get to know the employees and learn what they are interested in and how they are motivated as individuals.

5 DISCUSSION

The main objective of the thesis was to find out how a small company could support its employees' development with limited resources. Based on the literature review and the conducted research where a variety of professionals were interviewed, the commissioner was provided with different steps they could take to support their employees' development, even with limited resources.

The research question for the thesis was "How can a small company support their employees' development?" and this was answered by creating an employee development journey. The employee development journey in Chapter 4 provides the commissioner with a step-by-step guide to creating a personal development journey for the employee, and actions that should be taken. The thesis answers the research question, and also covers the sub-questions.

This thesis provides the commissioner with a foundation which they can build on as the company grows and the budget expands as well. It provides actions and a schedule that they can follow to keep up with their employees' development and suggestions on the development methods. Implementing these steps also helps the commissioner to enhance their employees' self-determination and autonomous motivation and helps them to learn how their employees do get motivated.

While the author believes that this thesis and research will provide the commissioner with valuable information they can implement to their business and improve their employee development, and despite the research objective being met, the research could have been more thorough and possibly provided something valuable that it does not have now. By conducting semi-structured interviews instead of unstructured ones, there is a possibility that more detailed information could have been attained from the participants. This could have resulted in more information that could have been utilized in the thesis.

While the author's research did give indications that coaching would be a fitting leadership style for the commissioner, it would be recommended to conduct further research on management and leadership styles fitting for the commissioner. The research could provide the commissioner with more management information and provide useful data that could be utilized for employee development. As leadership was not the main focus of this research but was brought up as an important aspect, it could be beneficial to conduct further research on this topic and find out what kind of leadership style works best for the commissioner, the employees, and their needs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Information about conducted interviews

Date	Name	Employer	Title	Interview length
25.4.2022.	Maritta Joki	Mentoritas	Founder, Consultant	46:45
25.4.2022.	Minna Valonen	CC Valonen	Founder, Consultant	29:24
25.4.2022.	Anonymous			33:27
26.4.2022.	Henna Kauppinen	Eilakaisla	Area Manager	18:40
26.4.2022.	Hanna Kivimäki	Tietoakseli	HR-Specialist	28:51
27.4.2022.	Hanna Puura	Arctic HR	People Operations consultant	28:55
28.4.2022.	Paula Jaakkola	Florecon	Consultant	44:44
2.5.2022.	Tiina Alho	Integrata	Human Resource Development	41:09
3.5.2022.	Pirjo Misenko	Barona	Service Director	31:06

Appendix 2. Thematic analysis demonstrated

Themes	Initial themes	Codes
Open communication	Awareness	Awareness of what employees think
		Open culture in feedback on both sides
		Values are known by everyone
	Interaction	Including employees
		Continuous interaction
		Communication is fast
	Gestures	Information is available to everyone
		Include employees in different things
		Clear communication
		Transparency
Commitment	Leadership	Supervisors support
		Support employee's own career
		Supervisor's role
		Leadership style
		Management is committed to development
	Responsibility	Development is not planned
		Employee's responsibility
		Development is not on anyone's responsibility

	Interest	Willingness to development
		Both sides are interested in development
		Time is not allocated for development
Achievable actions	Experience	Job rotation
		Job description is easy to adjust
		Learning on the job
	Other people	Mentoring
		Coaching
		Interaction with people
		Open conversation
	Individuality	Personality tests
		Responsibility
		Employment benefit
	Outside the organisation	Webinars
		Outsourced help
		Formal training

Following through	Discussion	1-to-1
		Development discussion
		Coherency
		Organised
	Frequency	Weekly / biweekly chats
		Frequency
		Short conversations
		Regular
Clear goals	Clarity	Vision and goals clear
		Know what you can afford
		Anticipate for the future
		Employees know what is expected of them
	Focus	Know where you are going
		Big picture in mind
		What to focus on
		See the business value
		Recognise current and optimal state

Appendix 3. Employee development plan



Employee development plan

Employee: _____

Date: _____

Manager: _____

Follow-up date: _____

Goals and objectives of the employee:

What skills/experience needs to be achieved to reach these goals?

What kind of support can the company offer to the employee to reach these goals?

Steps that have been agreed to be taken towards reaching these goals:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Signature: _____

Employee

Manager