White paper

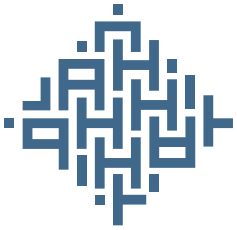
How to manage learning motivation

L&D success is (partly) in between the ears



With the STAP budget disappearing, the demand for effective L&D is all the more pressing. A critical condition for the success of L&D programmes is between the ears. This is because a person's self-image helps determine their motivation to participate in learning and development within an organisation. The question is whether you can also control this. Colleagues and management play a crucial role: a good example sets a good standard. But the organisation also needs to adapt.

Organisations put a lot of time, money and effort into learning and development (L&D), with varying degrees of success. Carefully designed programmes, unfortunately, cannot always be appreciated by all employees. Much depends on someone's 'learning and development orientation'. And that, in turn, is partly driven by how someone sees themselves, their self-image.



"Who am I?" and "What might I be?

The self-image is an implicit mental framework, a depiction or representation of how someone sees themselves: 'I am a this or that person'. It provides a sense of identity and psychological unity, thus offering grip and stability. The current self-image says something about how someone experiences themselves in the here and now: "What I am now!". There is also the potential self-image, which says something about how someone sees themselves in the future: "What I could be?". The latter, in particular, is essential in the context of L&D.

Dynamic vs. Static

People with a more dynamic self-image are at one end of the potential self-image spectrum. They have a so-called 'growth mindset' and see the possibility for themselves to change and improve over time; they value personal development. Combined with career insight (understanding the demands of a job or role and the changes therein), these types of employees will voluntarily participate in L&D activities and appreciate them more. Importantly, they also have an intrinsic motivation for task-oriented development: they do it from and for themselves.

On the other hand, there are people with a more static view of themselves, a 'fixed mindset', for whom change is less natural and sometimes even threatening: "I am who I am". If they have to learn something as part of their work, it is a source of anxiety and resistance, and they often compare themselves to colleagues' performance ("Can I do it?"). They are, therefore, less likely to participate in L&D programmes of their own accord, see it as a competition with colleagues, and generally have less appreciation for it than the group with a more dynamic image of themselves.

Two questions

Exaggeratedly, it is 'the difference between, "I can't do it, but would like to learn!" and "I can't and why should I?". The first group also has much more self-confidence to embark on a training or education programme and more belief in the good outcome ('I'm going to make it'), including that L&D contributes positively to their personal development.

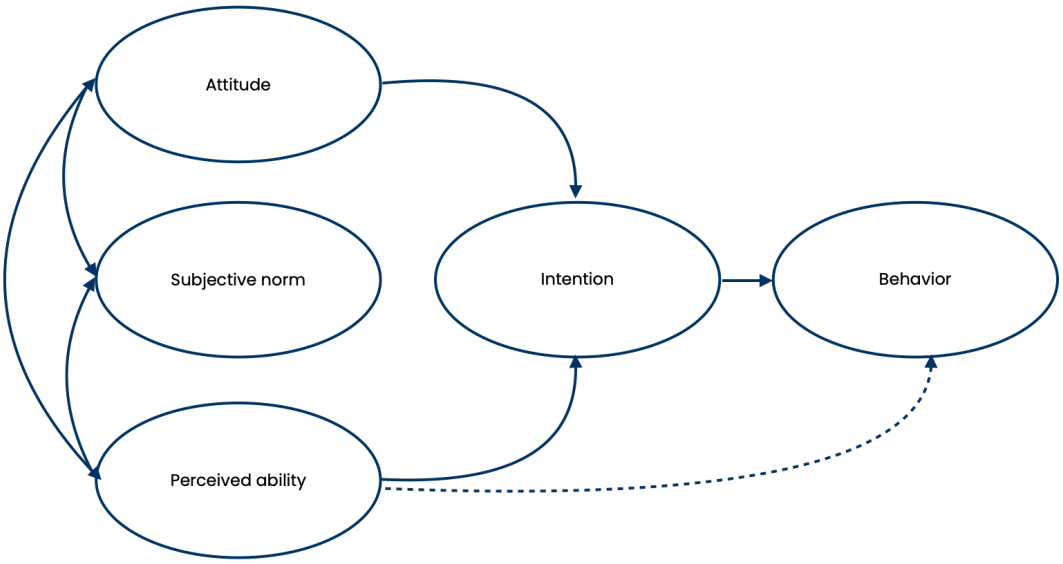
The two questions central to L&D than are: how do you identify which type of employee is more or less likely to participate in L&D, and how can you still encourage employees to develop further?

Behaviour as an indicator

First, behaviour is a good indicator of what type of self-image someone has and is a predictor of whether they are more or less likely to develop themselves. On average, people with a more dynamic vision of the future of themselves, on the whole, show more interest in training in general, in career development, in challenging (new) tasks, and are more open to feedback on what they do. These people will also be more inclined to persevere in content-challenging training courses and want to complete them successfully.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

The follow-up question is how to motivate the second group to participate more enthusiastically in L&D programmes. Essential to keep in mind is Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour (Theory of Planned Behaviour: TPB). This perhaps assumes somewhat one-sidedly that a person's intention is a good indicator of planned behaviour, but it does help understand the process.



TPB states that intention is the most critical predictor of planned behaviour, and that intention, in turn, follows from three factors: the importance a person attaches to the behaviour and its effect (attitude); how a person thinks those around him think about

that behaviour (subjective norms); and the estimated skill a person thinks he has and thinks he needs for a task (ability).

Attitude

A person's attitude or stance towards specific behaviour (behavioural beliefs) is determined by a) the value one attaches to that behaviour itself (desirability) and b) the value one attaches to the expected outcome of that behaviour. A person's attitude or disposition is embedded in their beliefs and thoughts or feelings about something. For example, someone who values self-development and challenging work is more likely to see pursuing and completing an education and the opportunity to improve their position as added value than someone who places little value on education.

Social pressure

Social pressure (subjective norms) also plays a role in behavioural intention. The group to which people belong imposes specific standards, which in turn are based on underlying beliefs (values). These differ from one group to another. The influence of peer pressure depends on a person's desire to conform. That desire to apply depends heavily on what someone thinks about how the group will value specific behaviour; someone will want to anticipate that. So, if the team or organisation in which one works places high value on formal and informal forms of learning, and one sees oneself as a valuable member of that team, one will be more likely to conform and participate.

Ability

Finally, a person's intention to behave is driven by his perceived competence. It is not just about a person's actual competence, i.e. what they know and can do, but more importantly, their assessment of whether they have the competence and self-confidence. So people who shout in advance that they cannot do something and think that a new task is too tricky are less likely to intend to undergo training.

Three buds of believe

You can use these three buds of belief to drive appreciation for L&D programmes. You have to make people believe it is useful, make people believe it is valued; and make

people believe they can do it. It is a nudge; changing the context of behaviour such that people subconsciously adapt in the desired direction.

Work content and context play an important role in this. Both can be used to steer the planned behaviour of employees gently.

The content of work

Work content is about someone's task and role. It depends on whether someone does assembly line work or is a manager, but what is important is that someone should have sufficient insight into what their job content is, how quality can be improved and, equally, how someone's job is changing now and in the future and what training needs (and requirements) are related to that.

So it is essential to give employees the proper career insight. With that knowledge, beliefs can tilt, and appreciation of L&D can be positively influenced.

The same goes for new challenges in one's job. More responsibility, (temporarily) different tasks or a new role all play into someone's need, appreciation, and intention to learn new skills.

The context of work

Even more critical, in my view, is the work context. The work context constitutes the set of social norms from the TPB model. It is the corporate culture in which employees and management work (together) and is, therefore, actually an organisational and management issue. The work context includes things like the organisational philosophy on learning and development, the importance of human resources, the space provided for personal growth, the type of leadership pursued, the way teams are organised, the appreciation of collegiality, et cetera.

A work context that values personal development sees people not as means of production but as capital, uses diversity as a strength, strengthens collegiality and pursues a type of leadership that supports employees, maintains task-oriented cooperation, and attaches importance to the development of new skills, will generally lead to a positive attitude towards L&D. Participation in L&D is then seen as something of value, valued accordingly by the organisation (normative influence).

Also part of the context is colleagues as role models and a manager who facilitates participation in L&D and recognises and values performance. Typically, this behaviour leads to viewing learning and development more positively and contributes to one's self-confidence. Feeling supported by colleagues and supervisors, knowing that making mistakes is not bad, seeing others do it too, and receiving positive feedback all contribute to a positive appreciation of L&D and the intention to develop further.

Conclusion: a good example follows well

How people see and experience themselves (self-image) and especially how they see the future version of themselves (mindset) largely determine their attitude towards L&D. Those who believe in and appreciate personal change over time will use L&D more readily, value it more and also tend to be more confident about embarking on and completing a learning journey.

In contrast, the group with a more static vision of its future self will be more reluctant, have less appreciation for learning and development, and lack the confidence to embark on a new adventure. However, you can encourage and guide this group's intention to participate in learning and development, for instance, by outlining the perspective of one's career, such as the expected development and changes in task and role and its (future) requirements.

Work context is even more critical; the organisation fosters a learning culture where colleagues lead by example. The manager and HR pursue an active L&D policy with room for personal development and improvement. We are then talking about strategic L&D in which the organisation must adapt to win over doubters and give employees the confidence to boost the average rating of L&D.

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