Laurea University of Applied Sciences

Supporting Employees' Self-Directed
Learning in Design Consulting
– Case Gofore

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Innovative Digital Services
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Working life is constantly changing due to digitalisation and the changing expectations of employees. With career development becoming increasingly prominent, ensuring professional development is particularly important to attract and retain the top talent. As digital and hybrid working become more common, self-direction is also becoming more prevalent, especially in knowledge work. This change requires better self-directed learning, which also requires support for the employees.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how to support employees' self-directed learning in the workplace. The questions guiding the development task for this thesis are: what are the challenges and needs experienced by the employees in self-directed professional development in the workplace and how can self-directed learning in the workplace be better supported with processes and tools? To achieve this, the knowledge base aims to comprehend the significance of self-directed learning and strategies for supporting it in the workplace. The knowledge base introduces the themes of self-determination, self-directed learning in the digital age, intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm, coaching and coaching leadership, and employee experience. It demonstrates that employees need a wide range of support from their workplace, supervisors and coaches to support self-directed professional development in the workplace.

The thesis was conducted as a research-based development project in the design business area of Gofore. It adopted a service design approach, framework, methods and tools such as interviews, workshops, journey maps, concepting, prototyping and testing. These methods were used to understand the needs of employees and to develop the process and tools to support self-directed learning.

The research-based development project identified needs to improve the current self-directed professional development process, support and tools, including the need for more mentoring and coaching, peer learning, career stories and clearer development paths. It also highlighted the need for a consistent format for professional development plans, sharing them and better learning opportunities in projects. Obstacles to professional development included lack of clarity about time usage and themes, and the absence of a fellow designer in projects. The outputs were the development of a professional development journey map and a professional development plan canvas. These streamline the professional development process and address the challenges identified, as well as promote proactive career development and knowledge sharing.

The knowledge base and research conducted in the research-based development project complement each other by offering diverse insights into the challenges and opportunities surrounding employees' professional development. This research-based development project focused on the design consultancy but sought to ensure the generalisability of the concrete tools, resulting in the adoption of the professional development plan canvas throughout the company. The results may be of wider value to organisations in the same sector and can serve as inspiration for development work also in other sectors.

Keywords: self-directed learning, employee experience, self-determination, professional development, service design, design consulting

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Työntekijöiden itseohjautuvan oppimisen tukeminen muotoilun konsultoinnissa

– Case Gofore

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Työelämä on jatkuvassa muutoksessa digitalisaation ja työntekijöiden muuttuvien odotusten myötä. Urakehityksen ollessa yhä tärkeämpää, on ammatillisen kehittymisen varmistaminen erityisen keskeistä parhaiden osaajien houkuttelemiseksi ja säilyttämiseksi. Etä- ja hybridityön yleistyessä myös itseohjautuvuus on erityisesti tietotyössä yhä yleisempää. Tämä muutos edellyttää parempaa itseohjautuvaa oppimista, mihin työntekijät tarvitsevat myös tukea.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on tarkastella miten tukea työntekijöiden itseohjautuvaa oppimista työpaikalla. Tämän opinnäytetyön kehittämistehtävää ohjaavat kysymykset ovat: millaisia haasteita ja tarpeita työntekijät kokevat itseohjautuvassa ammatillisessa kehittymisessä työpaikalla ja miten itseohjautuvaa oppimista työpaikalla voidaan tukea paremmin prosesseilla ja työkaluilla? Tätä varten tietoperustassa pyritään ymmärtämään itseohjautuvan oppimisen merkitys ja strategiat sen tukemiseksi työpaikoilla. Tietoperustassa keskitytään itseohjautuvuuteen, itseohjautuvaan oppimiseen digitaalisella aikakaudella, sisäiseen motivaatioon ja innostukseen, valmentamiseen ja valmentavaan johtamiseen sekä työntekijäkokemukseen. Tietoperusta kuvaa, että työntekijät tarvitsevat itseohjautuvaan ammatilliseen kehittymiseen monipuolista tukea työpaikaltaan, esihenkilöiltä ja valmentajilta.

Opinnäytetyö toteutettiin tutkimukseen perustuvana kehitysprojektina Goforen muotoilun liiketoiminta-alueella. Siinä käytettiin palvelumuotoilun lähestymistapaa, viitekehystä, menetelmiä ja työkaluja, kuten haastatteluja, työpajoja, journey mappia, konseptointia, prototypointia ja testausta. Menetelmien avulla pyrittiin ymmärtämään työntekijöiden tarpeita ja kehittämään itseohjautuvaa oppimista tukevaa prosessia ja työkaluja.

Kehitysprojektissa havaittiin tarpeita nykyisen prosessin, tukitoimien ja työkalujen kehittämiselle, kuten tarve vahvemmalle mentoroinnille ja valmennukselle, vertaisoppimiselle, uratarinoille ja selkeämmille kehityspoluille. Lisäksi esiin nousi tarve paremmille oppimismahdollisuuksille projekteissa sekä ammatillisen kehittymisen suunnitelmien yhdenmukaiselle formaatille että niiden jakamiselle. Ammatillisen kehittymisen esteitä olivat epäselvyys ajankäytöstä ja aiheista sekä muotoilijakollegan puuttuminen projekteista. Tutkimuksen tuloksena kehitettiin ammatillisen kehittymisen palvelupolku ja ammatillisen kehittymissuunnitelman canvas, sujuvoittamaan prosessia ja vastaamaan tunnistettuihin haasteisiin sekä edistämään ennakoivaa urakehitystä ja tiedon jakamista.

Tietoperusta ja tapaustutkimus täydentävät toisiaan tarjoamalla erilaisia näkemyksiä työntekijöiden ammatilliseen kehittymiseen liittyvistä haasteista ja mahdollisuuksista. Tässä kehitysprojektissa keskityttiin muotoilun konsultointiin, mutta konkreettisten työkalujen yleistettävyys pyrittiin varmistamaan ja ammatillisen kehittymissuunnitelman canvas onkin otettu käyttöön koko yrityksessä. Tuloksista voi olla laajempaa hyötyä samalla alalla toimiville organisaatioille, ja ne voivat toimia inspiraationa kehitystyölle myös muilla aloilla.

Asiasanat: itseohjautuva oppiminen, työntekijäkokemus, itseohjautuvuus, ammatillinen

kehittyminen, palvelumuotoilu, muotoilun konsultointi

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1 Introduction

Working life is undergoing the biggest transformation since the industrial revolution (Martela & Jarenko 2017, 22). Social scientists have determined that we are currently living in the era of the fourth industrial revolution, in which the dependencies between time and place of work and the employment relationship are dissolving. (Savaspuro 2019b.) In the contemporary world of work, traditional norms no longer hold true. Change is a constant companion as organizations streamline their structures and intensify their operational efficiency. (Carlsson & Forssell 2017, 13–15.)

The evolving workplace has also reshaped employees' expectations, emphasizing purpose and development over traditional job satisfaction. Employees now seek ongoing coaching from managers for personal and professional growth, replacing traditional performance reviews with continuous, strengths-focused dialogues. This shift marks employees as active stakeholders prioritizing their development within the workplace. (Bridger & Gannaway 2021, 1–2.) In the current work environment, employees play the role of consumers, with job opportunities serving as the products. Employers must now persuade individuals to select their organization as the preferred workplace. (Nadin 2017, 7.) Critically skilled employees remain with employers capable of fulfilling their career ambitions and offering meaningful work along with opportunities for growth and development (Kapoor 2023, 11).

In this dynamic environment, sustaining motivation among employees requires more than competitive salaries, bonuses, and career advancement promises. The new world of work has given rise to two novel motivators: the sense of purpose in one's job and the balance between work and leisure. An informed organization's commitment to nurturing employees' lasting motivation and vitality produces tangible results: it attracts more enthusiastic talent and experiences lower attrition rates. When employees derive contentment from their work and embrace the organization's goals, the organization retains a robust competitive edge in terms of human resources. (Carlsson & Forssell 2017, 13–15.) According to the TYÖ2030 report by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, the emergence of a new generation of workers and the impacts of the pandemic have led to increased demands on employers. The success of organizational and workplace development efforts is crucial for the sustainability and renewal of the entire welfare society. (Alasoini et al. 2024, 3.)

Frequent job changes are prevalent, with skilled professionals actively pursuing new challenges and diverse experiences. Instead of acting as a career's end, the modern workplace should foster an individual's sense of personal growth and development. (Carlsson & Forssell 2017, 13–15.) According to Gallup (2023, 7G) currently 51% of employed individuals are either

actively or passively seeking new opportunities in the job market. Employees expect a company to be driven by people first, not money. For younger generations in particular, meaningful work, company culture, flexibility, fairness, and equality are more important. (Savaspuro 2019a, 40). Professional development is actually more important to today's employees than job satisfaction (Gallup 2019, 2–3). Organizations are increasingly integrating the concept of the learning organization, where the focus is on collective learning and skill development to realize organizational goals. (Rana, Ardichvili & Polesello 2016, 485–486.) To keep pace with change and to retain and attract the top talent, organisations need to focus particularly on the employee experience and employee growth and development. Employee-centred approach can be used in both self-directed or more hierarchically managed companies. One approach for change is employee experience design, with employee experience planning an increasingly important role in retaining and attracting the top talent (Eklund 2021, 46).

The number of self-directed organisations has also grown so much in recent years that we can even talk about a self-direction revolution, with Finland being one of the least-hierarchical countries in the world (Martela & Jarenko 2017, 11–18, Martela 2023). In the past, self-direction was considered a rare way of working in pioneering organisations. Since the COVID era and the rise of remote and hybrid work, self-directed work has surged. (Eskola 2021.)

In the midst of this rapidly changing landscape, traditional management approaches fall short. Organizations must transition from command-and-control practices to a model where managers offer support, fostering employee adaptability in the face of rapid change. This shift is crucial for igniting innovation and commitment, emphasizing the need for organizations to redefine their leadership strategies. (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019.) This change has greatly impacted and accelerated the pace of change in working life. The change in working life also requires a new kind of leadership and new ways of organizing, to ensure that the employees are not left on their own (Savaspuro 2019a, 13).

This transition in employees' expectations lays the foundation for cultivating employee experience within organizations, fostering professional growth and development to attract and retain top talent. Continuing to develop new forms of leadership and organizational structures that promote autonomy is also crucial in ensuring the fulfilment of the employees' needs.

1.1 Purpose and development questions

A research-based development project was carried out for the case company Gofore's Design business area, employing service design approach. The case company Gofore values its employees' self-directed skill development and aims to promote continuous professional growth, facilitating the adoption of the latest technologies and fostering expertise in new

areas. The company is interested in further exploring and enhancing support for self-directed professional development. (Gofore, 2021.) The need for the company was to explore and develop support for self-directed professional development to enhance skill development and continuous professional growth.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the development task *"How to support employees' self-directed learning in the workplace"*. To achieve this, the knowledge base aims to comprehend the significance of self-directed learning and strategies for supporting it in the workplace. The development project delves into the challenges and needs of the employees on the topic and develops the current process and tools supporting self-directed learning for both employees and the company.

The questions guiding the development task for this thesis are:

1) What are the challenges and needs experienced by the employees in self-directed professional development in the workplace?

2) How can self-directed learning in the workplace be better supported with processes and tools?

As a final note, the author is an employee of the case company in the Design business area and worked there during the research-based development project. This close affiliation may offer unique perspectives but requires careful consideration to maintain objectivity and integrity in the thesis process.

1.2   Case company Gofore

A research-based development project was carried out for the case company Gofore, employing service design approach. The company's strategy is to build a more equitable digital society and developing sustainable solutions for intelligent industry by leveraging its expertise in technology, business and design. The organisation works with both public and private sectors to deliver initiatives that have a positive impact on society and the environment. The organisation is divided into different business areas, each with its own area of expertise, in order to meet the diverse needs of its customers. One of the business areas is Design, where over a 100 professionals work in various roles from UX to Service Design. Most designers in the company are senior-level professionals with higher education degrees and extensive work experience in the field. This background impacts the types of developmental needs they have. (Gofore 2022, Gofore 2023b.)

This research-based development project was conducted within Design business area and the results were utilized across the company in co-operation with People operations (Gofore, 2023a). The selection of this business area was driven by the desire to further enhance

professional development in Design business area. This business area was also considered a suitable size for this development project. In this report, the DeepL translator has been used to support the fluent translation of the text, as the author is not a native English speaker.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the context, background, objectives, the questions guiding the development task, key concepts, the case company, and outlines the thesis structure.

Chapter two establishes the theoretical foundation for the research-based development. It begins by presenting the fundamental concepts of self-determination and self-organizing teams as a basis for self-directed learning in the digital age. The review then delves into intrinsic motivation and fostering enthusiasm to enable self-directed learning, followed by discussions on leading self-directed learning. To support these concepts, coaching, coaching leadership, and positive psychology are introduced. Subsequently, employee experience is addressed, concluding the chapter with the synthesis of the knowledge base. This section compares theories of self-directed learning and employee experience, highlighting aspects from both the perspective of employees and organizations.

In the third chapter, the empirical aspect of the research-based development project is addressed, focusing on its development process, service design framework, and methodologies. It introduces the developmental case and provides a detailed description of the research-based development project.

The fourth chapter continues with the research-based development project 's outcomes, where the questions guiding the development project are answered. The fifth chapter presents the thesis conclusions and discussion.

2 Self-directed learning in the workplace and employee experience

In recent years, employee experience has played an increasingly important role in the debate on employers' ability to attract the top talent (Eklund 2021, 46). Professional development is more important to today's employees than job satisfaction. Employees want purpose and meaning in their work, to be known for what makes them unique. Relations are important and especially with a manager who can coach them to the next level in their career and expertise. (Gallup 2019, 2–3.) Especially in highly competitive sectors, it is important to attract the top talent, retain existing employees and continuously improve their skills.

An increasing number of organizations are integrating the concept of the learning organization, which emphasizes collective learning and skill development to achieve organizational goals. This strategy has been linked to beneficial outcomes including employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, productivity, and financial performance (Rana et al. 2016, 485–486.) It's crucial to consider employees' perceptions of work, management, and organizational culture, emphasizing building on their strengths and supporting professional development (Eklund 2021, 46–47). Martela, Hakanen, Hoang, and Vuori (2021, 4) conducted a study that revealed a positive correlation between the experience of self-direction and job satisfaction, and a negative correlation with job fatigue among employed Finns. Freedom to make choices about one's own work is therefore clearly linked to well-being at work. Employees who experience self-direction also perceive their work as more meaningful and are less likely to change jobs.

What is the process of professional development for employees in a self-directed environment, and how does this environment shape their learning experiences? In self-directed learning, learners independently manage their educational journey by determining their needs, establishing goals, locating resources, and evaluating their results. It can be utilized in both self-directed and other environments. Self-directed learning emphasizes learners' responsibility and autonomy in decision-making about what and how to learn, with or without external assistance. (Curran, Gustafson, Simmons, Lannon, Wang, Garmsiri, Fleet & Wetsch 2019, 76-77.) The question therefore is, can we draw parallels between the meaningfulness of freedom of self-direction and self-directed learning.

In the following chapters, the thesis delves into theories on self-directedness and self-directed teams, self-directed learning in the digital age, intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm enabling self-directed learning, leading self-directed learning, coaching, coaching leadership, and positive psychology, employee experience, and a synthesis of the knowledge base.

2.1   Key concepts

This chapter provides a brief overview of the key concepts that form the foundation of this thesis. Understanding these concepts is essential, as they are at the core of the knowledge base of this thesis. Each of these concepts will be examined in greater depth in the following chapters.

Self-determination

According to the self-determination theory, self-determination is the capacity to act independently, driven by the fundamental human needs for autonomy, competence, and social relatedness. (Savaspuro 2020, 104.)

Self-directed learning (SDL)

Self-directed learning involves individuals taking responsibility for their educational process by recognizing their learning needs, establishing goals, sourcing materials, choosing effective strategies, and assessing their learning outcomes, with or without external help. (Curran et al. 2019, 76-77).

Instrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation is the motivation that stems from within oneself, rather than from external factors such as rewards, punishments, or commands (Martela 2014, 45–47, Martela 2015). Intrinsic motivation is driven by interest, enjoyment, curiosity, and personal growth (Launonen, kostamo & Marttinen 2017, 37). Intrinsic motivation is the most enduring and potent form of motivation, according to the self-determination theory (Martela 2014, 31).

Coaching

Coaching is a method of facilitating learning and development through a partnership between a coach and a client, aiming to help the client achieve their personal and professional potential by providing support, challenge, feedback, and guidance (Finnish Coaching Association 2023).

Employee experience

Employee experience is the way employees perceive and feel about their interactions with their employer (Tucker 2020, 186). Developing better employee experience involves creating a work environment that focuses on culture, technology, and physical aspects to encourage employee involvement (Morgan, 2017, 8–9).

2.2 Self-determination and self-organizing teams

In the current working life, a quickly emerging concept known as self-direction has garnered significant attention. This concept involves empowering employees with the autonomy and authority to lead themselves, make self-reliant decisions, shape their work environment, and function with minimal external guidance. This phenomenon is intricately connected with heightened levels of general well-being and job contentment. Likewise, motivation and workplace satisfaction witness a discernible upsurge. (Eskola 2021.) Large corporations often yearn for self-determination, hoping that individuals will become self-motivated and take personal responsibility. This would reduce the burden of bureaucracy and decisions accumulating at the managerial level, encouraging staff to confidently present their ideas. Especially in knowledge and expertise-based work, self-governance is increasingly required, with digitalization further amplifying this need. Nevertheless, many organizations and

researchers discuss self-determination in a different context, referring to team self-organizing. (Hyrkäs 2018.)

The concept of self-determination often describes a person's ability to operate autonomously, free from outside guidance or control. Self-determination is an old concept: the self-determination theory began to emerge in the 1970s in motivation research and was later developed in particular by Deci and Ryan (2000a, 2000b). According to self-determination theory, motivation stemming from within oneself is the most enduring and potent driving force, far more significant than external motivators such as commands, requests, and rewards. This necessitates the realization of three factors: Autonomy, belonging, and competence. Savaspuro urges contemplating remote work through the lens of these three factors. (Savaspuro 2020, 104.)

According to Savaspuro (2020, 103), if successful, self-determination means the freedom to take responsibility and make independent decisions. It includes the autonomy to choose when and where to work independently and builds a sense of competence and responsibility for one's own tasks. Successful autonomy is characterised by a clear vision and direction, transparent decision-making processes and collaboration with others, ultimately leading to commitment and motivation in the workplace. However, autonomy should not be confused with isolation or boundlessness, nor does it imply a lack of purpose or leadership. Instead, autonomy operates within hierarchical structures and encourages collaboration, communication and transparency in decision-making processes. A more detailed description of self-determination can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Self-determination list (Adapted from Savaspuro 2020, 103).

What is self-determination if it succeeds?	What is self-determination not?
• The freedom to take and bear responsibility. • Freedom to make independent decisions as far as budget, resources, other people & your own work allow. • Freedom to decide when and where to work independently as far as possible. • Increased autonomy and sense of competence in your own work. • Responsibility for the quantity, timing and quality of your own work. • Clarity of vision and direction. • Clarity and transparency of structures and decision-making mechanisms. • Collaboration. • Engaging. • Motivating. • Work-engaging.	• Doing it alone or being left alone. • Limitlessness. • A lack of purpose. • Lack of leadership. • Lack of vision. • Lack of clarity about direction, expectations or goals. • Lack of clarity about what belongs on your desk and what doesn't. • Irresponsibility or working without accountability for results, quality targets or other metrics. • Lack of hierarchy or structure. • Playing solo. • Withholding information or lack of communication.

In the English language, there are distinct terms for individual self-determination (self-determination and self-direction) and team self-organizing (self-organizing and self-governance), whereas in Finnish, only one term (itseohjautuvuus) has been used. The distinction between these two terms should, however, be recognized. At the individual level, self-determination often refers to self-determination theory, positing that individuals become self-motivated when they receive positive reinforcement for their competence, autonomy, and sense of belonging. With these elements in place, motivation naturally arises, leading individuals to work eagerly, determinedly, and responsibly. (Hyrkäs 2018.) The definitions of self-direction, community oriented organizing and self-organizing can be found in Table 2.

According to Martela in an interview by Eskola (2021), it is not that simple to determine the prevalence of self-determination in Finnish working life, because the amount of autonomy of the employee varies in different models. There is no single model of self-direction. Full self-direction, where there are no front-line workers or managers at all, is rare. From an international perspective, Finnish working life is less hierarchical than in many other countries. Managers and subordinates in Finland can more easily express their own views and disagree. (Eskola 2021.)

Table 2: Definitions of self-direction, community oriented organizing and self-organizing (Adapted from Martela et al. 2021, 15).

	Self-direction	Community oriented organizing	Self-organizing
Target	Individual	Team	Organisation
Definition	Ability to act independently without external guidance & control	Ability of the team to work autonomously without external guidance & control	A way of organising that radically reduces hierarchy and managerial power
The opposite	Top-down management	A leader-led team	Hierarchical organisation

A team is self-organizing when it can decide on its projects and their execution relatively independently. Many software companies employing agile methodologies like Lean, Agile, or Scrum strive for varying degrees of team self-governance. These methodologies provide clear boundaries within which teams can make decisions, and light reporting keeps the organization informed about team activities. Experiments such as Zappos' and Spotify's ventures into holacracy management and Supercell's team-based game development model represent team self-governance. (Hyrkäs 2018.)

According to Martela (2023) a leader can use the four key practices of minimalist leadership. The first practice is to establish a clear shared vision and to work on engaging everyone in the discussions. Secondly, employees must be taught to think like a CEO and make decisions

taking into account what is most important for the company. To be accountable for their decisions. And third, control must be replaced by trust, even when employees make choices you don't agree with. The fourth is to balance freedom with boundaries. Leadership should not be lost; managers are still responsible for strategic decisions and setting boundaries. The best leaders understand that the less employees need them, the more they can succeed.

Self-direction is an endeavor to redistribute power and responsibility within an organization. However, it often occurs that power does not flow in the same proportion or pace as responsibility. The full potential of individuals cannot be harnessed if the responsibility imposed upon them does not enhance their authority. This undermines the crucial sense of autonomy essential for work engagement and exacerbates anxiety. The ultimate goal should not be the dismantling of hierarchy or the elimination of supervisors but rather ensuring that actions align with the company's objectives. In fact, leadership in self-directed organizations demands greater depth and quality. In this context, leadership underscores the profound understanding of subordinates to provide individualized support to self-directed individuals. (Savaspuro 2019a, 32–33.) Self-direction is not, therefore, a flawless solution to the challenges of modern work life.

What has led to the adoption of self-determination as the prevailing ethos in today's work environment? Martela and Jarenko (2017, 19–25) identify three reasons for the rise of self-direction. The first reason is the unprecedented rate of change occurring worldwide. In order to keep pace with this rapid evolution, individuals are required to make quick decisions and effectively manage conflicts, both within their own work and with others. Secondly, job roles have undergone significant transformation. The ongoing revolution in the workplace means that many positions are becoming increasingly replaceable. Lastly, advancements in technology have revolutionized how teams operate. With the aid of technology, teams are now able to self-organize and function autonomously, leading to a notable shift towards self-organizing teams.

The expectations of employees have risen, with a greater emphasis on seeking freedom, trust, decision-making capabilities, autonomy, and competent leadership from their employers. In organizational management, culture and people are now more critical than financial incentives. Company values should align with employees' values, and employers are expected to show genuine interest in employees beyond their roles. For younger generations, motivators such as meaningful work, a positive company culture, equality, flexibility, and fairness often surpass monetary compensation. A culture based on trust, freedom, and an optimal balance of responsibility and authority may be the key to retaining top talent in the workplace. (Savaspuro 2019a, 40.) This raises the question of how digitization and the widespread adoption of remote work have influenced self-determination and self-directed learning in workplaces.

In the past, self-determination was seen as a limited way of working for pioneering companies and sectors. However, the COVID era has marked a major change. Remote working has become increasingly self-directed with less control. (Eskola 2021.) After COVID era working from the office during normal working hours is no longer the norm. The change has been fast as many companies have adapted to virtual ways of working and hybrid work. The working arrangements can be mapped on two axes: place and time (Figure 1). Many companies previously exhibited limited adaptability along both vectors. However, considering the realization that employees are capable of functioning everywhere and at any hour, these firms are progressively transitioning their operational structures toward enhanced flexibility. (Gratton 2022. 12.)
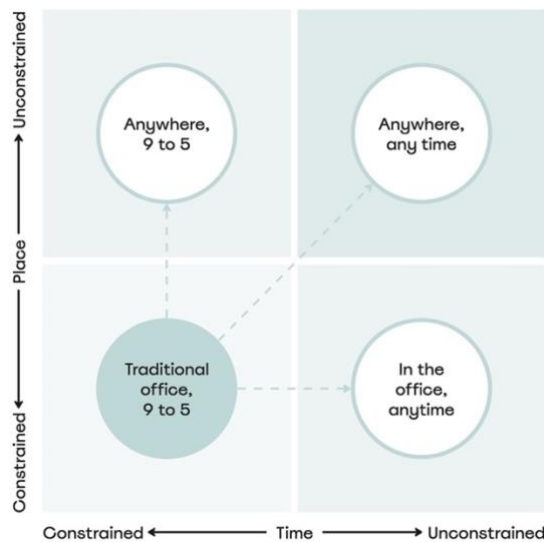

Figure 1: Work arrangements in place and time (Adapted from Gratton 2022, 12).

Self-determination is essentially self-management, often within a community. Thus, remote work emphasizes the need for self-determination even more. Self-determination does not take away the need for leadership; indeed, a self-directed community requires more leadership than a traditional one. An employee needs clear goals and boundary conditions to be self-directed in a work community. Managers must also support their team members in remote working. At the same time, the remote worker is a leader of themself a large part of the time. They need to manage their time, prioritise, organise and ask for help. (Savaspuro 2020, 102–105.) The rise of virtual and remote work and digitalisation has led to the rise of self-determination and self-organised teams in organisations. Concurrently learning at work is shifting towards self-directed learning.

2.3   Self-directed learning in the digital age

Self-directed learning (SDL) has been a central perspective in examining adult learning for several decades (Hyuneung 2008, 1). The concept of Self-Directed Learning, with roots tracing back to John Dewey's emphasis on the learner's experience, is rooted in the humanist philosophy of Carl Rogers as early as 1969. It was further developed by educators like Allan Tough and Malcolm Knowles within the field of adult education. It emphasizes the freedom and responsibility of individual learners to construct their own learning experiences, rejecting excessively teacher-centered approaches. (Garrison 2003, 161–162.) The widely accepted definition of self-directed learning describes it as a process where individuals take control of their learning by identifying needs, setting goals, finding resources, selecting strategies, and evaluating outcomes, with or without help. It centers on the learner's responsibility and authority over what and how they learn. (Curran et al. 2019, 76-77.) It can be concluded that self-directed learning is a significant perspective in the research and practice of adult learning. SDL emphasizes individual responsibility and control over one's own learning, which can provide effective learning outcomes for adult learners.

Skill development in the workplace is connected to autonomy, implying varying degrees of self-determination (Bratton 2005, 113). According to Eklund (2021, 68-70), the prerequisites for learning are purposefulness, necessity, building knowledge on previous knowledge and being able to practice what one has learned. Research indicates that significant reasons for self-directed learning in the workplace include preparation for job tasks, addressing work-related challenges and issues, learning for personal responsibilities, skill development in specific areas, and interest in particular subjects (Sisley 2013, 17).

Motivation for adult learning is significantly influenced by the relevance of the acquired knowledge, information, and skills for personal development, work, and success, as well as their immediate applicability (Grönfors, 2010, 24). In a study by Lemmetty & Colin (2020, 56–64) in the IT sector, self-directed learning was found to be a compulsory obligation for some, while others felt it was relevant to their creativity and enthusiasm, thus triggering motivation. SDL was also seen as flexible, fast and strongly linked to work.

Unlike in traditional forms of education, self-directed learning usually revolves around specific challenges, goals, or desires. According to a study, knowledge workers engage in self-directed learning due to its efficiency and alignment with their learning styles (Sisley 2013, 14). Workplace skill development is often connected to different levels of self-determination, highlighting the importance of self-directed learning.

Based on the major themes identified in their study, Curran et al. (2019, 87–88) have introduced an enhanced conceptual model of self-directed learning for continuing professional education. The updated model considers the essential concepts of Hiemstra and

Brockett's (2012, 157–159) Person Process Context model (PPC) illustrated in figure 2. Within the PPC model, Person refers to the individual's characteristics, Process"encompasses teaching and learning techniques, and Context includes environmental and sociopolitical aspects, such as organizational policies. The PPC model suggests that the most favorable conditions for effective self-directed learning exist when there is a balance among the person, process, and context factors. (Curran et al. 2019, 87–88). For the employer, influencing all three aspects becomes beneficial when aiming for employees to self-directedly learn when professionally developing their skills.
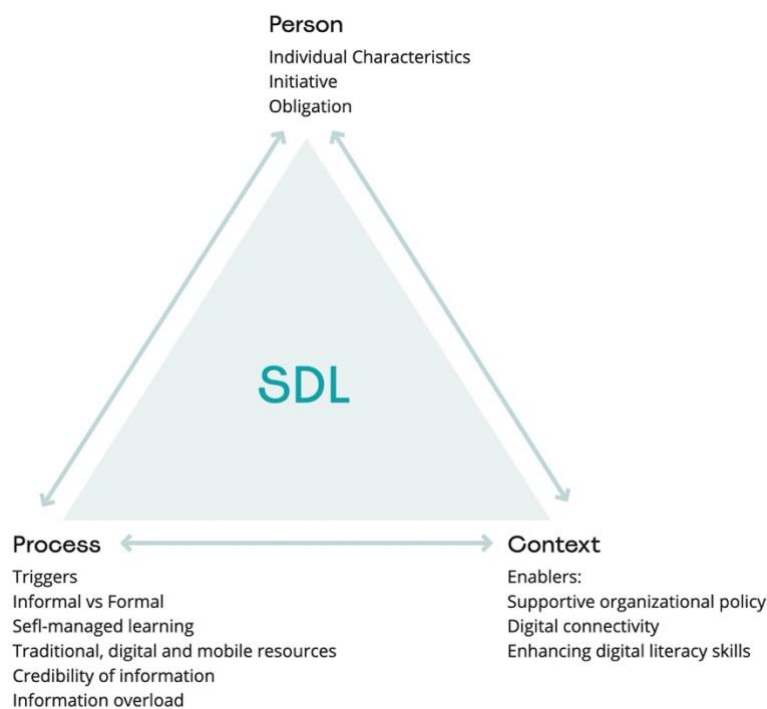

Figure 2: Updated Person Process Context Model reflecting self-directed learning and digital technologic factors (Adapted from Curran et al. 2019, 87).

Learning is usually associated with sitting in a classroom and listening, but this is not the case in working life. We are constantly learning and developing the skills we need for our jobs, especially those we spend the most time on. (Eklund 2021, 67.) The workplace provides various methods to develop one's skills, such as secondments, job rotations, projects, mentoring, and induction. Additionally, there are external methods of development outside the workplace, including study visits, self-learning, and training courses. (Österberg 2014, 149–154.) The digital age has also brought learning content to learners and offers learning opportunities through gamification and online communities. Learners can choose their learning environment, pace, and content. Skills acquired through online courses can even lead to self-employment (Varamäki 2019).

Most learning in working life happens alongside work without us realising it. Nevertheless, it requires conscious effort, reflection, and focus. Reflection helps you to learn from your own actions so that you don't have to repeat the same mistakes in the future. Feedback and praise from others and from yourself also reinforce learning. Experiences can also be shared with colleagues and clients to learn a vast amount from people in many different roles. While reflection and development of one's own work is everyone's responsibility, the organisation must create the structures and guidelines that enable the development of competences in the context of work. Training and other forms of competence development should be an integral part of the job. (Eklund 2021, 37–39.) Learning in a self-organized team also offers not only flexibility in the way work is done but and allows you to develop with others, perhaps more flexibly than in traditional hierarchical organisations. The role of leadership is then emphasised in enabling, coaching and sparring learning. (Hiila, Tukiainen & Hakola 2019, 137–138.)

Rana et al. (2016, 478) identify five key practices that promote self-directed learning within organizations. Essential practices for fostering self-directed learning in organizations include establishing and communicating a unified vision among employees, promoting collaboration and teamwork, and empowering employees through participatory work methods. Additionally, facilitating continuous learning opportunities and integrating relevant technologies are crucial components.

With the increasing emphasis on self-direction and initiative in professional jobs, employees are expected to take charge of their own competence development. While self-directed competence development is expected, challenges like heavy workloads, shifting goals, and limited motivation may hinder this process. The demands of daily work often leave employees with little time for long-term skill development. To overcome these challenges, employees need more guidance, support, and dedicated time for learning. Establishing a mutual understanding of competence development responsibilities and available support is crucial for fostering an effective approach. (Eklund 2021, 77–82.) Kapoor (2023, 11-14) indicates that a platform that encourages a culture of shared accountability for performance among employee can facilitate continuous learning and skill enhancement in the workplace. As seen in Figure 3, it includes eight strategies that can cultivate self-directed learning. Creating a broad collection of resources courses aligned with each role can facilitate professional development efforts. Through an accessible online portal, employees can enhance their skills, fostering continuous learning, to maintain attrition levels and improve engagement.
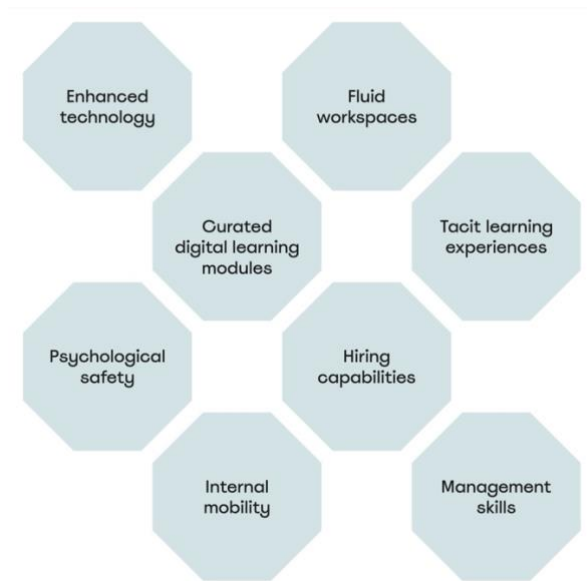
Figure 3: New avenues of learning in organizations (Adapted from Kapoor 2023, 12).

Organizations should help individuals develop SDL goals aligned with the organization's vision, support collaborative learning initiatives, empower employees with resources and recognition, and encourage continuous learning through experimentation and rewards. Additionally, utilizing workplace technologies, and online discussion forums can facilitate open communication, collaboration, and individual learning. (Rana et al. 2016, 485–486.) To achieve targeted competence development, a personal development plan serves as a useful tool. It is important for the development plan to be adaptable to the employee's individual needs and preferences, reflecting development in their current role, as well as their long-term career aspirations. (Österberg 2014, 149–154.) Ideally, organizational objectives can be linked to employees' personal objectives. Well-designed and motivating objectives motivate employees to develop their competences. (Eklund 2021, 30–31.) Employees might exhibit resistance towards change and learning when they perceive these approaches as potential challenges to their current roles or responsibilities. (Bratton 2005, 115). Therefore, engaging in coaching leadership and collaboratively creating a personal professional development plan based on the employee's motivations and goals with the supervisor can be considered beneficial.

2.4 Intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm enabling self-directed learning

How does an employee then become motivated for self-directed learning in the workplace? This is where intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm come to play. Human beings are active by nature, moving towards what interests them and not just reacting passively to the demands of the environment. People have both intrinsic and external sources of motivation, and the latter undermine the former. The pursuit of external goals does not increase our well-being,

but intrinsically motivated goals are associated with better well-being. (Martela 2014, 45–47.) Intrinsically motivated people do something when they find the activity interesting and enjoyable (Launonen et al. 2017, 37). An intrinsically motivated person is inspired to do something for its own sake, regardless of external rewards (Martela 2015). They act because the action leads to a certain end result, i.e. an external reward (Launonen et al. 2017, 37). Every job has both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Martela 2015). It's just a matter of which one you have more of.

According to Martela (2014, 31) in the theory of self-determination developed by Deci & Ryan (2000a, 2000b), there are three sources of intrinsic motivation and happiness: autonomy, competense and relatedness. Autonomy refers to a person's experience of freedom to decide what to do. They feel free to fulfil themselves and do things that interest them. Competense is the individual's experience of knowing what they are doing, getting things done and developing their abilities. Relatedness arises when an individual feels cared for and cares about other people and feels connected to people close to them. Moreover, doing good to others has been found to have an independent effect on the psychological well-being and meaningfulness people experience. (Martela 2014, 49–50.) The link between self-direction and intrinsic motivation is evident. However, autonomy needs to be accompanied by competence and relatedness.

Deci, Olafsen & Ryan (2017) have later developed a self-determination theory of work motivation shown in Figure 4. The theory suggests that employees' autonomous motivation enhances both high-quality performance and overall wellness. Each policy and practice within an organization has the potential to either support or hinder the fulfillment of basic psychological needs. Enhancing the workplace context is likely to positively influence dependent variables. For instance, leadership can significantly affect employees' performance and well-being, mediated through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs and the fostering of autonomous motivation.
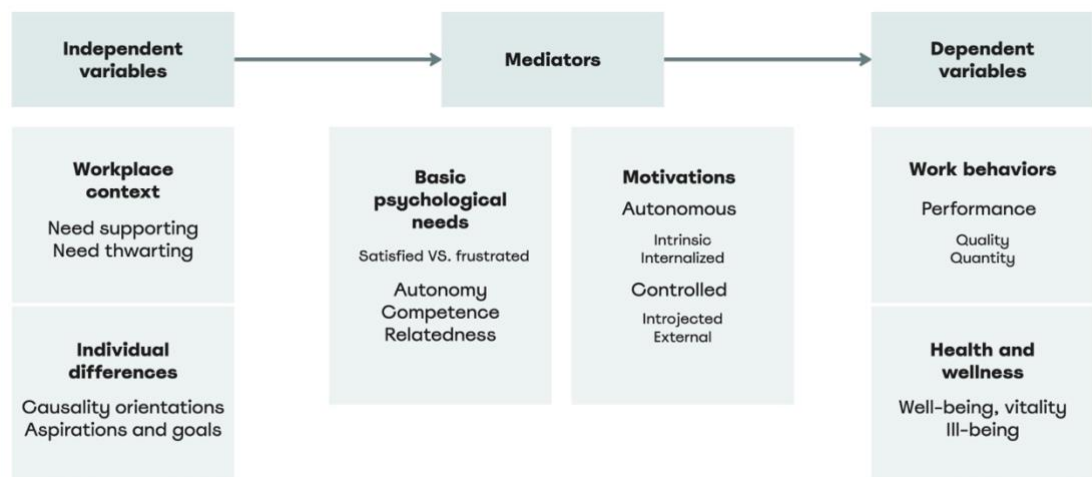
Figure 4: The basic self-determination theory model in the workplace (Adapted from Deci et al. 2017).

Abundant work resources and abundant personal resources lead to job satisfaction. Especially when work demands are high, resources play an important role in job satisfaction. (Launonen et al. 2017, 47.) High job satisfaction has positive effects on employees' mental health, their perception of their own health, their ability to work and high productivity. Research shows that employees with high job satisfaction are not only proactive, willing to work hard and stay with the organization. They also want to learn and develop, and their work does not put a strain on their health or cause problems in balancing work and leisure time. (Launonen et al. 2017, 48.) Thus, job satisfaction can also be considered significant contributor to for self-directed learning and employee skills development. A study by Launonen and Ruotsalainen (2017, 124–125) showed that to foster lasting enthusiasm and strong motivation at work, it is essential to create a supportive atmosphere and framework. This culture should encourage employees to use their strengths, develop their own work, and feel like meaningful members of the community. By promoting job ownership and a solution-oriented mindset, employees are empowered to continuously improve their work. Together, these factors contribute to a motivated and engaged workforce. This also requires an understanding of the importance of autonomy for people's motivation (Launonen & Ruotsalainen 2017, 128).

Mäkkeli & Kostamo (2017, 165-166) examine the discourse on enthusiasm and the management of enthusiasm from the perspective of employees. In the study, enthusiasm for one's work was considered important. Just doing the job well is not enough, but one must also be enthusiastic about the work. Enthusiasm was described as a good feeling that gives you energy and is a very positive experience. It was recognized that enthusiasm contributed positively to well-being, feelings of meaningfulness and enjoyment, and overall effectiveness.

Enthusiasm is most supported by the opportunity to learn new things, sufficiently challenging and varied work tasks and a good working team. Routine is a hindrance to enthusiasm, while clear objectives contribute to it. (Mäkkeli & Kostamo 2017, 170-172.) Learning new things at work can therefore also boost enthusiasm and in turn increase well-being and effectiveness.

2.5   Coaching and coaching leadership

Coaching has several definitions. Coaching can be described as the targeted utilization of skills to enhance individual performance within an organization, achieved through the provision of strong support and challenge. (Hawkins & Smith 2006, 19–22). Coaching, as defined by the International Coach Federation Finland (2023), is a collaborative process encompassing stimulating and innovative interactions, with the aim of encouraging clients to realize their full personal and professional potential. According to the Finnish Coaching Association (2023), coaching involves discovering and utilizing one's own resources.

Coaching helps the coached individual focus their thinking and actions, achieve their goals, and plan action strategies. It results in well-considered decisions, reflective learning, and profound development. A coach assists the individual in personal and professional growth, harnessing their existing and untapped potential. In this way, the coached individual achieves and even surpasses their goals, contributing to the overall success of their organization. According to Finnish Coaching Association (2023), companies whose employees collaborate with coaches experience significant improvements on both an individual level (enhanced collaboration, increased commitment and job satisfaction, reduced conflicts, improved self-leadership, and more effective utilization of strengths, skills, and resources) and an organizational level (increased productivity, quality, and results, improved customer satisfaction, greater team efficiency, and strengthened organizational commitment).

Different forms of coaching include Business coaching, Life coaching, Brain-based coaching, Solution-focused coaching, Leadership coaching, and Change coaching. (Finnish Coaching Association 2023.) There is also a wide range of professions in work-related adult learning facilitators from coaches to mentors, organizational consultants, and their supervisors (Hawkins & Smith 2006, 19–22). A facilitator of learning, a manager or leader can also benefit from the skillset of a coach. The theories behind coaching are based on the latest brain research, positive psychology, social constructionism, common factors research, self-determination theory and attribution theory (Ruutu & Salmimies 2015, 23). In this chapter, the primary focus will be on coaching in the workplace and coaching leadership to facilitate self-directed learning.

A coach does not give direct instructions or advice to the person being coached but uses questions instead to help the person to find their own solutions. The aim is professional growth, the ability to reflect on your own work, clarify your work goals and develop ways to

achieve them. The coach supports the ability to face change and to cope with stressful situations. (Ruutu & Salmimies 2015, 16.) A professional coach is genuinely interested in the ideas and opinions of the person being coached and responds to them with positive curiosity, asking probing questions. The coach is patient, tries to calmly receive even strong emotional expressions without getting involved. (Ruutu & Salmimies 2015, 23.)

Research conducted by Jones, Woods & Guillaume (2016, 3, 25–27) revealed that workplace coaching demonstrated positive impacts on organizational outcomes, skills enhancement, effectiveness, and individual development. Coaching conducted by internal coaches was found in the study to be more effective than using an external coach. The quality of interaction between the coach and person being coached impacts the success of the coaching process. The choice between an internal and an external coach ultimately depends on the needs of the individuals being coached and the internal coaches' capacity to perform in an authentic coaching role. In many organizations, both internal and external coaches are utilized to achieve a more comprehensive benefit. (Carlsson & Forssell 2017, 33.)
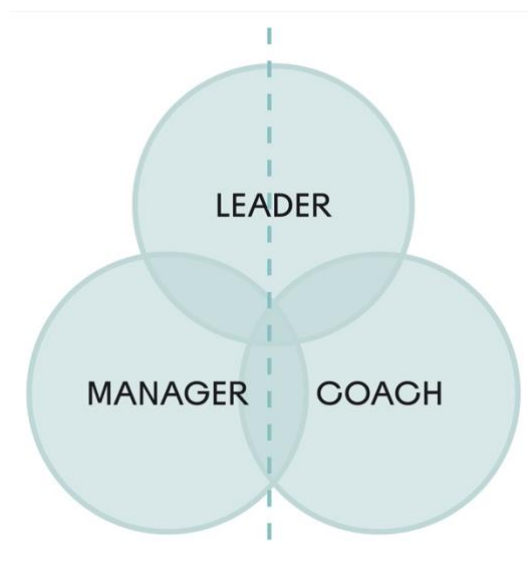

Figure 5: The three core roles of a supervisor by Downey 2003 (Adapted from Carlsson & Forssell 2017, 40).

Managers are shifting away from traditional practices towards a coaching model. This transformation reflects a fundamental change where managers provide support and guidance, fostering adaptability in employees for increased innovation and commitment. This shift towards coaching is essential in cultivating a learning culture, requiring managers at all levels to develop and deploy coaching skills. (Ibarra & Scoular 2019.) In Finland, there's a growing recognition of the advantages that come with equipping managers with coaching skills. Employees tend to highly appreciate the significant value of receiving positive feedback and motivation from their supervisors. Furthermore, they value the authentic desire of their

managers to support and develop them over the long term in their professional journey. Coaching can be considered as one of the skills that managers can acquire, alongside their leadership and management skills as shown in Figure 5. Of course, this doesn't rule out the use of other coaches. However, a supervisor who incorporates coaching into their role plays a unique and crucial part in the daily lives of their team members, making them particularly suitable for coaching from the standpoint of everyday work. (Carlsson & Forssell 2017, 34.)

Effective coaching within an organization, led by managers, cultivates a learning culture. It involves ongoing support, questioning, and facilitation of development. However, leaders accustomed to directive methods may resist this approach due to its perceived softness and the challenge to their authority. (Ibarra & Scoular 2019.) A supervisor or a manager can utilize coaching leadership techniques in different situations, such as recurring supervisor-subordinate discussions like development meetings, onboarding new employees, and mentoring sessions. A coaching leader can also hold regular coaching meetings with employees, focusing on specific topics such as skill development or progress toward developmental goals. Everyday interactions, such as team meetings and informal one-on-one conversations, also provide excellent opportunities to apply coaching skills. (Carlsson & Forssell 2017, 43–45.)

Ibarra & Scoular propose a coaching matrix (Figure 6) for managers to enhance their understanding. Directive coaching, akin to mentoring, involves telling and sharing expertise, but may limit the coached person's energy and motivation. Laissez-faire (quadrant 2) suggests hands-off management when the team is self-sufficient. Nondirective coaching (quadrant 3) focuses on the power of listening attentively and asking thought-provoking questions to guide individuals towards uncovering insights. The ideal is situational coaching (quadrant 4), balancing directive and nondirective styles as needed, a skill all managers in a learning organization should master. To enhance nondirective coaching skills, utilizing the GROW model is recommended. GROW consists of Goal, Reality, Options, and Will steps. While conceptually simple, practicing it demands a shift in leadership perspective and value, requiring thoughtful consideration of your role. (Ibarra & Scoular 2019.)
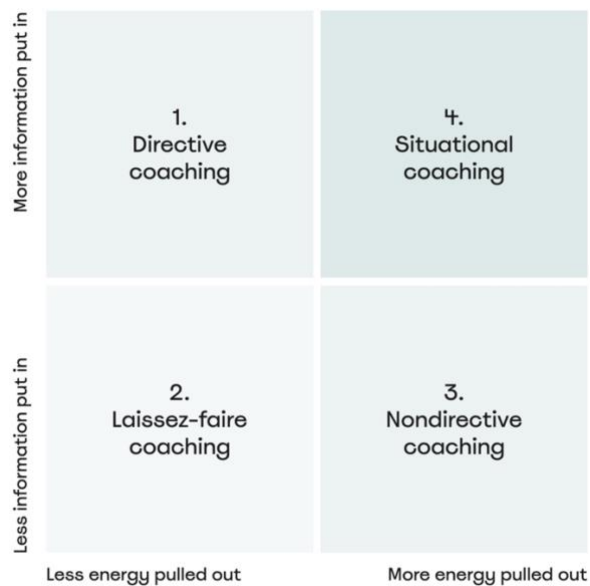
Figure 6: Styles of coaching leadership (Adapted from Ibarra & Scoular, 2019).

Positive psychology provides one theoretical and practical foundation for many coaching approaches and techniques. It seeks to identify strengths and enhance both individual and community well-being, extending its focus to cognitive and behavioral phenomena across various settings (Martela 2014, 18). It encompasses various aspects, including well-being, strengths, positive emotions, emotional intelligence, resilience, coping, happiness, wisdom, creativity, mental health, and organizational thriving, making it well-suited for work coaching. Positive psychology operates at three levels: individual well-being, leading a good life, and contributing to the broader social context. This approach can cultivate hopefulness, positive emotions, character strengths, and a sense of purpose, fostering creativity, open-mindedness, and resilience. Positive emotions in the workplace enhance productivity by promoting employee well-being, countering negativity, and reducing stress. (Ruutu & Salmimies 2015, 26-27).

Researchers in positive psychology have developed various assessments, such as the VIA Survey of Character Strengths, which help individuals identify their specific strengths. Character strengths, rooted in the concept of virtue dating back to Aristotle's time, have gained significance in addressing the persistent issue of mental well-being despite external improvements in people's lives. The VIA (Values in Action) project has identified 24 virtues, further categorized into six core virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, fairness, and spirituality (Lipponen 2014, 63–70). Leveraging character strengths is closely linked to happiness and life satisfaction. Operating within one's core strengths fosters feelings of authenticity and aligns with one's true self. Notably, emotional strengths exhibit a stronger association with happiness experiences compared to thinking strengths. Among these

strengths, hopefulness, enthusiasm, gratitude, curiosity, and love emerge as the most influential predictors of life satisfaction. Furthermore, the ability to experience gratitude has been shown to alleviate anxiety, particularly among individuals dealing with physical illnesses. Additionally, character strengths like bravery, kindness, and humor are positively correlated with increased life satisfaction in individuals facing physical health challenges (Lipponen 2014, 75).

2.6   Employee experience

Employee experience can be understood as the blending of employee expectations, requirements, and preferences with the organizational framework, as illustrated in Figure 7. A more comprehensive interpretation of employee experience involves the deliberate creation of an organizational environment that entices employees to eagerly participate. This is achieved by focusing on the cultural, technological, and physical dimensions of the workplace (Morgan 2017, 8–9.) Bridger & Gannaway (2021, 11) argue that a common factor in many definitions is that experiences make you feel something. In one company Bridger & Gannaway work with, EX is simply defined as being all about enabling their people to have more good days at work. It can be simplified as the sum of the employee's feelings in the interaction between them and the employer (Tucker 2020, 183).
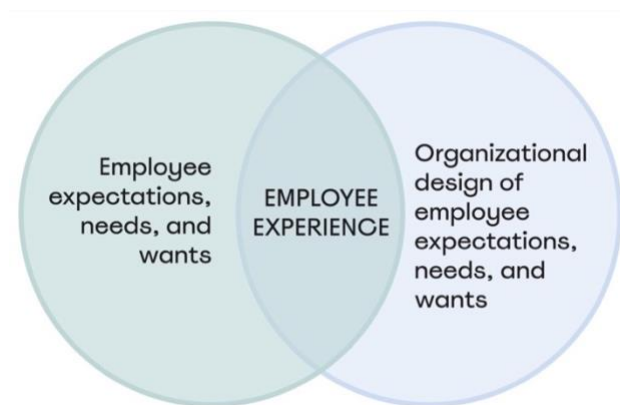

Figure 7: Employee experience (Adapted from Morgan 2017, 7).

Another term commonly used is employee engagement. It can be defined as a profound commitment, passion, and vigor that fosters an enduring dedication to tasks, frequently surpassing expectations and involving proactive efforts. (Holbeche & Matthews, 2012, 7–8.) It represents a mindset connected to work, characterized by a sense of vitality, satisfaction, eagerness, absorption, and commitment (Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter, 2011, 5). In its optimal state, it can be equated to "flow," an immersive and content psychological condition where individuals are engrossed in their work, losing track of time. (Holbeche & Matthews, 2012, 7–8.) Employee engagement is grounded in the ongoing interaction between the organization

and its employees, rooted in foundational workplace ideals like employee commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship. (Holbeche & Matthews, 2012, 11.) A study showed that group interventions can effectively enhance employee engagement, allowing employees to interact with colleagues, develop personal relationships and work skills, and voice opinions, which increases job resources like social support and decision-making influence, leading to positive outcomes (Knight, Patterson & Dawson 2017, 792–821). Academic research concurs that employee engagement encompasses a vibrant and fulfilling mindset, characterized by a deep sense of organizational belonging and opportunities for self-expression in the workplace (Bakker, et al 2011, 5). An argument can be made that employee engagement predominantly adopts an organization-centric perspective, while employee experience places a greater emphasis on the employee's perspective.

According to Bridger and Gannaway (2021, 9), it is imperative that we gain insights into how employees perceive their interactions with the organization and actively involve them in the process of designing solutions to cultivate exceptional workplace environments. Presumptions about what drives engagement or what defines an outstanding experience for employees are inherently limited. Hence, Bridger and Gannaway (2021, 9) advocate for the application of a design thinking approach to shape a compelling employee experience (EX). Tucker (2020, 183) argues that as the customer or user experience refers to how people feel about their interactions with a product or a service, employee experience refers to how the employee feels about their interactions with the employer.

It's important to note that employee experience and employee engagement are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they can complement each other, and indeed, they should. (Morgan 2017, 6.) The simultaneous consideration of both employee experience and employee engagement is critical to the creation of workplaces that entice individuals to join and offer their best contributions (Bridger & Gannaway, 2021, 9). Employee experience has the potential to ignite engaged employees, particularly through its influence on shaping the cultural, technological, and physical dimensions of the organization (Morgan, 2017, 6). In theory, a positive employee experience can lead to heightened employee engagement, a proposition supported by findings from the APQC study. The most successful employers in fostering employee engagement have ensured that HR staff, business leaders, and managers receive training on the concept of employee experience. Moreover, they have effectively integrated key employee experience methodologies into their practices. (Tucker 2020, 184.)

By enhancing and intentionally shaping our employee experience, we can make substantial contributions to the cultivation of an engaged workforce. This, in turn, produces benefits not only for our employees but also extends to our customers and partners (Bridger & Gannaway, 2021, 9). Investing in sustainable motivation and energy among employees is visible and produces results. Individuals are more eager to join such an organization, and turnover is less

frequent. When employees find satisfaction in their work and embrace the organization's goals as their own, the organization's competitiveness in terms of human resources remains robust. (Carlsson & Forssell 2017, 15.)

2.7   Synthesis of knowledge base

In today's workplace, prioritising professional development initiatives is a key element in talent acquisition and retention strategies. This focus on strategy arises from the prevailing trend among today's employees to prioritise career development over job satisfaction. (Eklund 2021, Gallup 2019, Martela et al. 2021.) Self-direction has become more common in the digital hybrid work environment especially with knowledge workers, demanding also increased self-directed learning from employees (Eskola 2021, Martela & Jarenko 2017). Nonetheless, for effective self-directed learning, employees need support from their workplace, supervisor, and potentially from a coach. Using internal coaches is in fact proven to be more effective, but the choice between internal and external coaches depends on the situation. (Gratton 2022, Hiila et al. 2019, Savaspuro 2019a & 2020.)

Effective self-directed learning requires purposefulness, building on existing knowledge, and opportunities to practice new skills. It is motivated by various factors, including the need to prepare for job tasks, tackle work-related challenges, and pursue personal interests. Notably, high job satisfaction can also be seen to contribute to self-directed learning. Reflection, feedback, praise and sharing experiences can improve learning. Self-directed learning should therefore be supported by structures and guidelines from the organisation that enable professional development. The demands of the job can also make self-directed learning difficult, and goals and a professional development plan agreed with the employer can serve as a useful tool. (Bratton 2005, Grönfors 2010, Eklund 2021, Sisley 2013, Österberg 2014.)

Coaching, whether provided by an external, internal or coaching supervisor, can help with self-directed learning and professional development planning. It is therefore useful to have coaching skills in the toolbox of the supervisor. (Carlsson & Forssell 2017, Finnish Coaching Association 2023, Hawkins & Smith 2006, Ruutu & Salmimies 2015, Ibarra & Scoular 2019, Jones et al. 2016.) Additionally, insights from positive psychology theories emphasize the significance of identifying and leveraging employees' strengths, providing positive feedback, and fostering motivation (Martela 2014, Ruutu & Salmimies 2015). Intrinsic motivation enables effective self-directed learning in the workplace (Launonen et al. 2017, Martela 2014 & 2015). Enthusiasm also increases motivation and enhances learning, while learning something new in turn increases enthusiasm for the work (Mäkkeli & Kostamo 2017).

Self-directed learning and employee experience are distinct yet interconnected concepts within the context of self-directed professional development in the workplace (Table 3). While self-directed learning fosters innovation and personal development, a positive

employee experience is instrumental in driving higher retention rates, improved productivity, and enhancing the organization's competitive edge. Both concepts share commonalities in their emphasis on personal and professional growth, measurement of progress, and identification of barriers and challenges. Integrating self-directed learning into employee experience can result in a workforce that feels more empowered and engaged, ultimately benefiting both the individual and the organization. (Bratton 2005, Curran et al. 2019, Bridger & Gannaway 2021, Eklund 2021, Garrison 2003, Hyuneung 2008, Morgan 2017, Sisley 2013, Tucker 2020.)

Table 3: Comparison between self-directed learning and employee experience

Topic	Self-directed learning (SDL) (Bratton 2005, Curran et al. 2019, Eklund 2021, Garrison 2003, Hyuneung 2008, Sisley 2013)	Employee experience (Bridger & Gannaway 2021, Morgan 2017, Tucker 2020)
Definition	The individual's self-managed learning journey, where they are accountable for directing their own learning process.	The overall journey and perception of an employee throughout their tenure in an organization, encompassing various aspects.
Key focus	Skill acquisition, knowledge enhancement, and personal development.	The holistic experience of an employee, including engagement, satisfaction, well-being, and interactions within the workplace.
Outcomes	Personal and professional growth, increased competencies, and adaptability.	Enhanced job satisfaction, increased employee engagement, and overall well-being, which can contribute to SDL.
Measurement	Assessment of individual learning progress, self-assessment, and skill acquisition.	Employee surveys, feedback, performance metrics, and retention rates, among other measures.
Impact on organization	Self-directed learning can drive innovation by enabling employees to acquire new skills and knowledge.	The benefits of a positive employee experience include increased retention rates, boosted productivity, and a more competitive organizational environment.
Challenges	Motivation, self-discipline, and finding appropriate resources for learning.	Employee experience can be affected by work stress, organizational culture, lack of recognition, and limited growth opportunities.

Overall, professional development in the workplace using self-directed learning can be an effective way for improving the employee experience and even employee engagement. Employee experience can mutually be improved by enabling employees to develop their professional competence. It can therefore be considered that there is a two-way impact.

3　Development process and methods

This development project adopts a research-centric methodology, characterized by a systematic, analytical, and critical approach to implementation. Integrating theoretical insights with practical solution-building, this method strives to uncover new insights within the application context. Doing so ensures that the resulting solution isn't just theoretically strong but also relevant and feasible within real-world contexts. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2014, 17-21.) According to Ojasalo et al. (2014, 71), service design stands as one of the methodologies grounded in research orientation and was selected for the approach and framework in this development project.

Modern service-dominant logic emphasizes that all business is a service, designed to support the customer's value creation. (Ojasalo, et al. 2014, 72.) In Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), economic exchanges are interpreted as services, involving the utilization of specialized knowledge and skills through a variety of actions and processes to fulfill the needs of others or oneself (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 5-11). Service design is a rapidly spreading approach to development as organizations move towards a customer-centric approach to value. Service design refers to the application of processes and methods to service development. This methodology can be utilized in the formulation of a company's strategy, the design of its business models, the streamlining of its processes, the improvement of its service environment, and the management of its customer contacts. (Ojasalo, et al. 2014, 71.) In this research-based development project, the emphasis was on enhancing services provided to employees, viewing their needs and experiences with a customer-centric approach. Service design and agile culture of experimentation are strongly embedded within the case organization, with the targeted design business area centering around the utilization of service design and design thinking. Hence, within the organization, service design emerges as a natural and recommended approach to development projects.

The intention of service design is to construct viable solutions that meet the needs of the future, facilitated by a well-supervised process. The key characteristics are user-centeredness and stakeholder involvement to achieve deep and empathetic understanding. A wide range of methods and extensive data collection are used to gain this understanding.

(Ojasalo, et al. 2014, 72.) Service design is often used to create new customer-oriented business models or service concepts. In particular, the process and methods of service design are increasingly being used to design digital services and user interfaces. (Ojasalo, et al. 2014, 73.) In this research-based development project, employee experience and employee-centricity are intertwined through the use of service design. It was crucial to involve all stakeholders to gain thorough insights into employee needs to develop a service concept introducing a new process and digital tools for self-directed learning within the case company. From this standpoint, employing service design as a research-oriented methodology and framework is grounded choice for this development project.

Chapter 3.1 describes the service design framework and Double Diamond design process model used in this development project, chapter 3.2 introduces the research-based development project and chapter 3.3 gives an overview of the process. The next chapters cover the phases of the development process from chapter 3.4 discover, 3.5 define, 3.6 develop to closing with chapter 3.7 deliver.

3.1   Service design framework and design process model

There isn't a universally accepted definition of service design. It's a dynamic, cross-disciplinary approach that merges methods and tools from diverse disciplines, including the innovation of new services and the improvement of current ones (Van Oosterom et al. 2010, 28-34). The guiding principles of service design are user-centered, collaborative, iterative, sequential, authentic, concrete, and holistic approach (Stickdorn, Lawrence, Hormess & Schneider 2018, 27). As outlined by Ojasalo et al. (2015, 71–72), service design finds its foundation in customer-centric approach to value creation, and this approach can be applied to all levels of development work.

Service design can be understood as a mindset, a process, a methodology, an interdisciplinary language, and a management approach. Service Design as a way of thinking approach puts the customer at the center, sees products as characters in a service relationship, proposes research rather than quick conclusions, prototyping rather than endless discussions and brings insights to the next iteration. Service design is pragmatic in its approach and relies on co-planning and practicality, seeking a balance between technological possibilities, human needs, and business relevance. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 21.) How can this approach be implemented in the practical design of services, considering its full complexity?

Penin (2018,150–153) introduces five basic principles to address the problem. The first principle is that service design is people-centered, or as more often used, user-centered. The key to user-centricity is to know your users and keep their needs as the starting point throughout the design process. The second principle is that it depends on participation and codesign, involving users through sustained engagement and constant dialogue. Principle

three focuses on service design being communicated through service narratives, such as visualization of stories like journey maps. The fourth core principle is including the material side of service design using artifacts or touchpoints enabling the experience in a service journey. The fifth and last principle is that service design is holistic, using a systemic approach. This helps tackle key challenges in designing services in a consistent way regardless of the channels used.

Iterativity and early user feedback, prototyping and rapid experimentation are essential to the service design process. Service design is often only seen as a set of tools and methods, different models and post-it notes. Service design used merely as a toolbox loses its impact and may no longer make sense. As a collaborative design, service design tools create a set of boundary objects to create understanding across professional boundaries. As a management approach service design brings to development not only an iterative approach but also a more human-centered approach, more qualitative research methods and rapid iterative prototyping. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 21.) Utilizing prototypes helps in risk reduction while conserving valuable resources and time. The service designer faces the task of creating prototypes that integrate various aspects of the service, incorporating business, financial, and organizational modeling. (Penin 2018, 318.)

There are several different models and frameworks for the service design process. They may consist of several different steps, but they share a common logic and mindset. Regardless of the model, all processes are similar in their main steps. The service design process starts with the creation of a customer understanding, followed by the generation and testing of ideas. (Björklund & Keipi 2019, 22.) Some service design process models are Stefan Moritz's Service Lifecycle Management model from 2012, Stanford d.school's Design Thinking Process from early 2000s, IDEO's Design Thinking Process and the Double Diamond model by British Design Council. According to Ojasalo, et al (2014, 74) service design process models have in common extensive data gathering, collaborative ideation, the creation of different models (e.g. prototypes) and rapid testing, analysis and redefinition based on learning. Its steps are usually repeated over and over again and quickly. The ideation phase is also only initiated after in-depth customer insight has been gained. (Ojasalo, et al. 2014, 74.)

For this research-based development project, the Double Diamond model (Design Council 2007, 6) was selected due to its clarity, and widespread adoption across various industries (Figure 8). Additionally, the Double Diamond model effectively highlights the divergent and convergent aspects of the design process. Divergent thinking seeks to explore opportunities through expansive thinking and information gathering, while convergent thinking aims to make decisions by refining and prioritizing ideas gathered during divergent thinking. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 85.) The double diamond approach is broken down into four specific steps: discover, define, develop and produce. The first step of the model, the discovery

phase, is to identify the problem and the needs that need to be addressed through design. Then define the context of the solution and acquire a rich repository of knowledge to support the design. The second diamond in the process introduces the final two stages: develop and deliver. It is only in these stages that work on the solution begins, utilizing multidisciplinary strategies, prototyping, and testing until the new service or product is ready to be delivered. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 89.)

Ojasalo et al. (2015, 75) also identifies four stages in the process: Explore and Understand, Anticipate and Ideate, Model and Evaluate, and Conceptualize and Influence. The process model is iterative, with the possibility to revisit and refine previous stages at any point before reaching a final resolution or outcome. Continuous engagement, human-centered thinking, and leadership conducive to the process enable its progression (Design Council, 2023). It is essential to consider what kind of information is needed in the four service design process phases and what is the appropriate method for doing so. A number of methods can be utilized in several steps of the process.
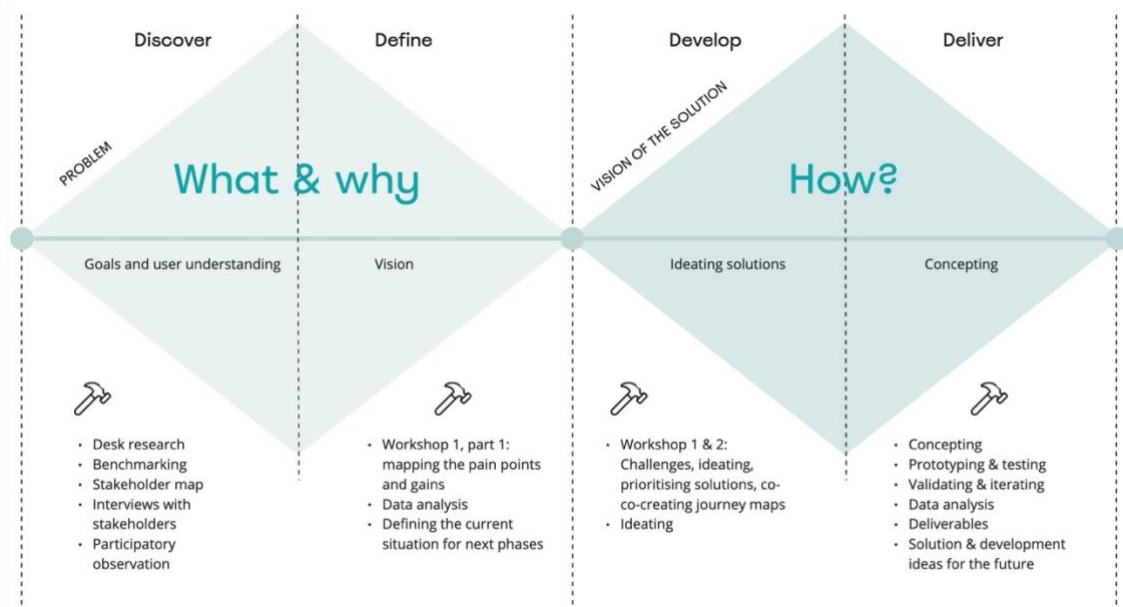

Figure 8: Structure of the development project using the double diamond framework (Adapted from Design Council 2007, 6).

Many methods and tools can be utilized for implementing service design. Methods are specific ways of approaching something, describing how to do things, such as contextual interviews. Tools are concrete models, representing what we use, often based on templates such as Service Blueprint. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 36.) During the project, several methods and tools were used appropriate to the phases (Figure 8). The methods were selected according to the

information needed for the questions guiding the development task. Participant observation was also used as one of the research methods in this work. Used methods and phases are explained in chapter 3.3 Overview of the process and the structure of the research-based development process can be found in Table 4.

3.2   Introducing the research-based development project

This research-based development project was carried out for case company Gofore in Design business area from 2020 to 2023, employing service design approach. The focus of this thesis is to understand how to provide employees with self-directed tools and processes to support their professional growth in the workplace. It also answers the two questions guiding the development task: *"What are the challenges and needs experienced by the employees in self-directed professional development in the workplace?"* and *"How can self-directed learning in the workplace be better supported with processes and tools?"*. The selected approach is a single research-based development project, facilitating an in-depth exploration from the perspective of Gofore's Design business area. This research-based development project encompasses insights gathered from designers, supervisors, and people development professionals within Gofore. Continuous learning is crucial in Gofore's domain of IT consultancy. Developing the skills of employees plays an important role in managing customer retention and attracting and retaining employees.

The basis of this development project arises from the need to improve processes and tools for professional development within Gofore. The organizational culture of the case company is oriented towards fostering values such as equality, transparency, and collaboration. The aim is to create an environment where mutual respect, trust, and inclusivity are prioritized, thereby enabling individuals to contribute meaningfully to the organization. (Gofore, 2021.) Gofore has adopted various strategies to support self-directed learning among its employees. Through collaborative efforts guided by principles of open-mindedness, individual self-reflection, and self-management, employees are encouraged to take ownership of their development journey with the assistance of supervisors and coaches (Gofore, 2022b). Given the context of Gofore's commitment to fostering a culture of empowerment and continuous growth, self-directed learning emerges as a significant aspect of professional development within the organization. There always however remains room for further development.

The professional development framework equips employees with guidance and resources for self-directed learning, comprising three key elements: defining developmental goals and pathways, integrating learning into daily tasks, and regularly evaluating and acknowledging progress. Much of the learning occurs organically through hands-on experience in client projects, a common practice for consultants. Furthermore, Gofore offers internal courses and

materials, supplemented by external resources and peer learning opportunities. (Gofore, 2022b.)

3.3   Overview of the process

The aims and objectives of this development project were specified through discussions with Gofore. This case project spanned over a period of two years, as the process progressed alongside other work obligations. In addition to the report and prototyping originally specified, the project also resulted in a published tool for the use of employees. The case project used the Double Diamond design process model (Design Council 2007, 6).

A research-based development project begins with identifying the need for development, continues with selecting appropriate approaches and methods, and concludes with assessing both the results and the overall process (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 24). Table 4 below shows the methods used during the research-based development process, broken down by phase. The methods were selected according to the information needed for the questions guiding the development task. Service design is characterized by the diverse and versatile use of various methods (Ojasalo et al., 2014, 76). The phases of the Double Diamond design methodology, which include discover, define, develop and deliver, are also displayed in the table below (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 89).

Table 4: The structure of the research-based development process

Phase	Method	Participants/ target group	Objective	Outcome
Discover	Desk research	Target: Gofore	Understanding the project's starting points, mapping existing guidelines, and tools.	Comprehending the guidelines and tools alongside an initial idea of potential shortcomings.
	Benchmarking	-	Understanding of the overall range of professional development plans.	Initial ideas of possible professional plan tool and skill visualisation.
	Stakeholder map	Target: Gofore	Understanding how strongly stakeholders impact the development journey of a designer.	Mapping of stakeholders needed in interviews, workshops and testing.
	Interviews with stakeholders	7 people: Head of Businesses, People development, Designers, Supervisors,	Deeper understanding on current processes and tools used in design, other business units and group functions.	Knowledge on the different processes and tools used within the company. Comparing different practices and learning on proven good practices.

		Product owner of internal digital tool		
	Participatory observation	Gofore	Understanding on current practices from an employee perspective.	Mapping the practical implementation of current practices and understanding potential challenges.
Define	Co-creative workshop 1, part 1	9 people from group people development operations, Supervisor, design resourcing, design sales, design head of business and designers.	Mapping the pain points and gains.	Validation of the pain points and gains of the designers.
	Data analysis: Affinity diagram and triangulation	-	Defining the current situation by analysing the data from discover phase using affinity diagram and triangulation methods.	Summary of the findings of the discover phase and a preliminary plan of the develop phase workshops.
Develop	Co-creative workshop 1, part 2	9 people from group people development operations, Supervisor, design resourcing, design sales, design head of business and designers.	Prioritize and reframe problems into challenges, ideate the solutions.	Defining the problems to be solved from the different roles' perspectives, collecting ideas for solutions. These were analysed as a basis for the second workshop.
	Co-creative workshop 2 including journey mapping	9 people from group people development operations, Supervisor, design resourcing, design sales, design head of business and designers.	Prioritize solutions, decide what to execute on. Co-creating journey maps from the perspective of several roles as a basis for future journey map.	Prioritised solution ideas and decisions on what to execute and how to make solutions actionable. First drafts of journey maps from different role perspectives as a basis for development.
	Ideating: the professional development plan for internal tool	-	Making the first visualization of ideas on the plan to be used in internal tool if possible	Wireframe of a MVP solution as a proposal to be implemented in an internal tool

Deliver	Concepting: the journey map	-	Making the first draft of a journey map of all roles.	First draft of the combined journey map to be tested.
	Concepting: the professional development plan canvas	-	Making the first draft of a professional development plan.	First draft of the professional development plan canvas to be tested.
	Validating & iterating: the journey map	Over 100 designers, their Supervisors, and Head of Business and the People development team.	Getting feedback from the journey map to develop it further.	Comments on the journey map from multiple perspectives. Designer's needs in professional development.
	Prototyping and testing: the professional development plan canvas, first version	2 designers	Getting feedback to the first version to design it further.	Comments and development ideas on the professional development plan. Insights on what parts were easy and hard to understand when making the plan together.
	Concepting: the professional development plan canvas, second version	-	Designing the second version of the professional development plan based on the first test results.	Second version ready for the second testing.
	Validating & iterating: the professional developmen plan canvas, second version	Over 100 designers, Supervisors, Head of Business, and People development team.	Getting feedback to finalize the professional development plan.	Got the feedback needed to make the final version of the professional development plan.
	Data analysis: Analysing the final results from the develop and deliver phases	-	Final analysis of all the data collected in earlier phases using affinity diagram, qualitative data synthesis and triangulation methods.	Results from data to be used in the final versions of the journey map, professional development plan canvas and project report.
	Concepting: Final Journey map	Gofore	The development of the journey map based on the test results.	The journey map was shared in an intranet page about the project.
	Concepting: Professional development plan canvas	Gofore	The development of the professional development plan based	Sharing the tool in intranet professional development pages and in Miro tool.

			on the second test results	
	Concepting: Project report with key findings and insights	Gofore	Sharing the insights from the development project to all.	A page in intranet about the project with all the data and documents was shared.

3.4   Discover

The initial part of the service design process always emphasizes the acquisition of a deep understanding of the customer and the operating environment. This is usually the most time-consuming step and should be done carefully, as the whole development process is largely based on understanding customer situations, needs, behavior, values, etc. (Ojasalo, et al. 2014, 74.)

As a starting point of this development project were the identified development needs in the design business area, which were presented to designers by the management. (Gofore 2020). These development needs were worked on in a co-creative workshop with the employees from the Design business area. One of the decided prioritized three focus points on the workshop was growing in our roles as designers and to make and test a prototype of a professional development plan tool. The development needs and workshop materials were the basis for the discover phase and desk research.

The author of this thesis was chosen to be responsible for the development project and was supported by three designers, who assisted and contributed during the process. The team of designers were involved in workshop planning, facilitation and analysis of the information from the workshops. The team of designers also supported the design and testing of the journey map. In addition to this, the team of designers carried out development tasks that arose outside the scope of the thesis author's project. As the project progressed, it was decided to select the development project also as the author's thesis topic and concurrently the design team was no longer involved. The author was otherwise solely responsible for the the development project, discovery, designing, testing, analysing data and creating the deliverables. It is mentioned under project methods when the design team has been involved.

3.4.1   Desk research

Desk research is the starting point for a project, where existing secondary data is used. This helps to frame the questions guiding the development task more precisely and choose the methods used. (Stickdorn et al.2018, 119.) Desk research was made by gathering all internal info materials from guidelines to templates about professional development from the intranet and people development business area. The survey data, which was the initial basis for the

development need, was included and studied in more detail. Desk research materials were collected and mapped into Miro collaboration tool. Miro collaboration tool functioned as a research wall, serving as a comprehensive overview of data collected through various methods (Stickdorn 2018, 111). This visual representation allowed for a holistic understanding of the diverse data sources employed in the research-based development project, aiding in the synthesis and analysis of the findings.
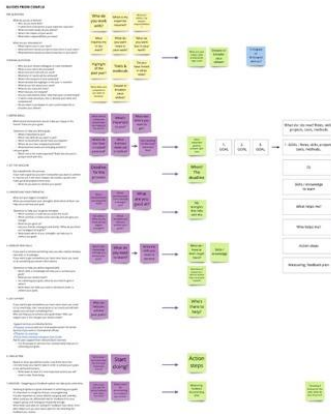

Figure 9: Desk research analysis from internal materials.

Desk research examined the comprehensive guidelines on the intranet and the canvas used for professional development workshops. The intranet instructions were divided into sections: pre-questions, thinking questions, define goals, set the deadline, understand your strengths, develop new skills, get support, take action and measure (Gofore 2021). My personal development path canvas includes: My learning goals, my history, current situation, my ways of learning, sprints and my learning dreams. In addition, several employees shared their own professional development plans, which took various forms from PowerPoint presentations to short notes. Similarities in content were sought between these guidelines and templates and they were compiled into one coherent list. In addition, the guidelines were searched for any items that could be filled in by the employee themselves and used in future professional development plans. The aim was to simplify the process for the employee by finding simple prompts for creating their own plan. A part of this work of analysing the guidelines can be seen in Figure 9. Please note that the material in the picture is not detailed, as the original material is confidential. The information from this phase serves as the basis for the first draft of the professional development plan in a later phase.

3.4.2 Benchmarking

In this development project, the goal was to develop concrete tools for employees, so one method chosen was to benchmark various tools to identify different solutions. Professional development plans, skill visualisations and role descriptions were researched to gather

relevant examples of possible tools. All of these tools were identified by the case company at the beginning of the project as possible tools that could result from this project. A wide range of visualizations were collected in order to get an understanding of the overall range of professional development plans. Benchmarking materials were collected into Miro collaboration tool as can be seen in Figure 10 and the data was mapped and analyzed.
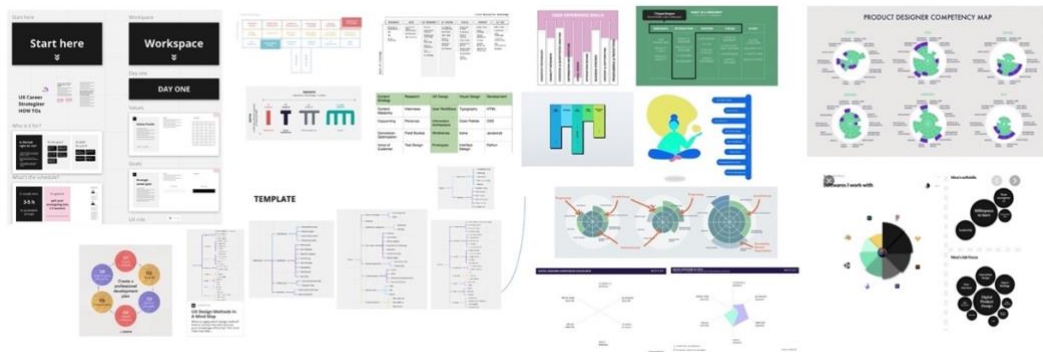

Figure 10: Example of benchmarking results gathered in Miro tool

Analysis of the benchmarking data revealed that the professional development plan templates ranged from documents with tables to pdf templates. Common elements included the definition of objectives, actions, skills, timeframe and feedback. Some plans included more detailed KPIs, identification of strengths and weaknesses and self-assessment. Coaching questions were rare. Skill visualisations varied from comb shaped experts to different circles, mind-maps and radar charts. Designer role descriptions were mostly in text format on web pages and open job descriptions. These benchmarked tools provided more potential content for designing a professional development plan. They also brought new ideas for different formats for plans as well as skill visualisations and role descriptions for the develop phase.

3.4.3   Stakeholder map

Stakeholder map visualizes the groups associated with the service. When stakeholders are presented in this way, the links between them can be seen and analyzed. Groups can be categorized according to their importance or clustered according to common interests. (Van Oosterom et al. 2010, 150.) A simple strategy to demonstrate a stakeholder map is to use three circles that denote diverse stakeholder groups or the magnitude of impact these stakeholders hold. (Stickdorn et al.2018, 59.)

In this project the stakeholders were organized by the level of impact the stakeholders have to the designer's journey and clustered by their common interests as can be seen in Figure 11. Please note that the material in the picture is not detailed, as the original material is confidential. The stakeholders identified included designers in the middle as a starting point, and closest to them their supervisors, Head of Business, design resourcing team, design sales,

people development. Further out in the circle are other Heads of Business, internal tool product owner, unit management, other sales and resourcing.
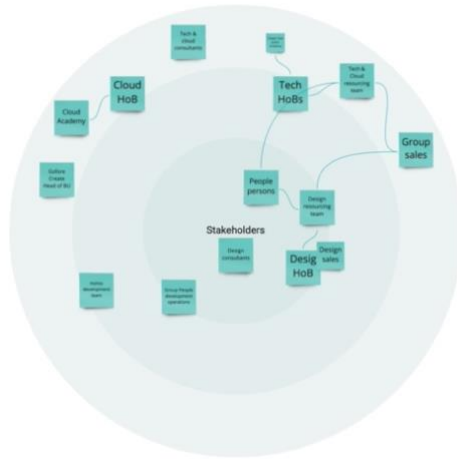

Figure 11: Stakeholder map for designers' professional development process

The stakeholder map helped to recognize the key roles that contribute to the designer's professional development. It was crucial to find the most important roles to participate in the workshops by using the stakeholder map. The stakeholder map also helped identify the roles needed for the interviews. The stakeholder map shows the connection between group functions and business unit specific functions, and the collaboration between business unit functions.

3.4.4   Interviews with stakeholders

Designers tend to use qualitative rather than quantitative research methods. For example, surveys are prone to biased data, so it's better to use prevalidated surveys. (Penin 2018, 213–214.) The aim of qualitative research is to discover new and even surprising things and phenomena (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2003, 151-152). Personal interviews are a great approach for designers to collect qualitative data. Empathy and active listening are essential when doing an interview. (Penin 2018, 213–214.) Interviewing holds value in various scenarios, such as uncovering new opportunities when the design is yet to be conceptualized, refining design hypotheses with initial ideas in mind, and redesigning and relaunching existing products or services with a history in the market. (Portigal 2013, 6.)

Qualitative interviews are commonly categorized in modern literature as unstructured, semi-structured, and structured. (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006, 314.) Semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative research, whether conducted individually or in groups. Typically, they are performed once per individual or group and can span from 30 minutes to several hours. This format enables interviewers to explore social and personal aspects in

depth. (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006, 315.) The use of semi-structured interviews allows researchers to maintain a balance of flexibility and consistency when investigating particular concepts. While certain topics are predetermined, the interview format allows for fluid discussion, enabling participants to freely contribute additional insights beyond the planned topics. Researchers can also pose supplementary questions for clarification or to delve deeper into specific areas of interest. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, 39.)

Contextual interviews are employed with appropriate stakeholders to enhance understanding of them and to reveal formal and informal networks and hidden agendas of specific actors or to understand experiences. It is helpful to perform these interviews in the situational context and to ask the interviewees to demonstrate details of the concrete experience in question with concrete examples. In-depth interviews are carried out with stakeholders or external experts to understand their expectations, experiences, products, services, operations, processes, and a person's attitude, problems, needs, ideas, or environment. These interviews are often conducted in a semi-structured way. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 121–122.)
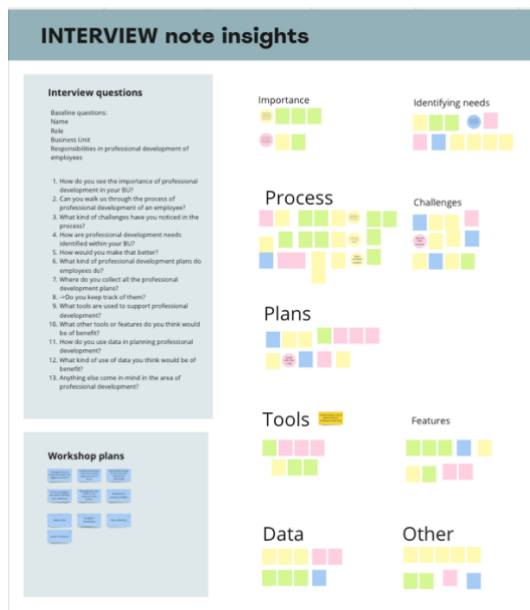
Figure 12: Interview notes and results

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with roles identified in the stakeholder map to gain an understanding of the scope of the work being done in other business units and group functions on the topic. The aim was to better understand the professional development processes that had been used, particularly from a management perspective. The interview questions were prepared in advance and can be found in Appendix 1. During the interview process, additional follow-up questions were also posed to the participants to further explore their responses. The phrasing of the questions was intentionally left open-ended to encourage candid and comprehensive answers.

The roles identified for interviews were group people operations, two head of businesses, designers supervisors and internal digital tools development team. The seven interviews were conducted virtually over Teams and lasted from 30 to 60 minutes. Recordings were made of these interviews, and these recordings were utilized to enhance the notes taken during the interviews. According to Portigal (2013, 117) documenting interviews serves as a comprehensive record, capturing detailed insights and takeaways while aiding in processing and remembering key information. While note-taking is valuable, it may miss certain details or mishear words. Recording audio or video ensures the capture of all interview details. (Portigal 2013, 117.) The notes were collected into Miro collaboration tool. The key insights from these interviews were mapped using affinity diagram method that can be seen in Figure 12. Please note that the material in the picture is not detailed, as the original material is confidential. The results were clustered into themes on designers' professional development process and it's challenges, importance and identifying needs, the professional development plan, tools and their features, data and other.

3.4.5 Participatory observation

Observation is a recommended method in research and development. Observing people in their actual environments provides valuable insights into their behavior. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 42.) Observation is particularly useful in situations where obtaining information through alternative methods is challenging. Its application extends to witnessing phenomena in real environments, providing invaluable insights into real-world dynamics. In addition, observation facilitates the collection of diverse and nuanced data, enriching the scale and depth of the information collected. The immersive nature of observation makes it a powerful tool for shedding light on complex aspects of the phenomena under study, thus increasing the comprehensiveness and validity of the research results. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 93-94.)

Participatory observation was used in this case, as the author primarily works in the case company. According to Ojasalo et al. (2014, 16) in participatory observation the observer actively engages in the activities of the subject being studied. Through observation, researchers can gain a more accurate understanding of human behavior, uncovering nuanced differences between what individuals claim to do and how they truly behave in practice (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 125). Participatory observations occurred during various stages of the self-development plan creation process, ranging from reading instructions to filling out the current canvas and engaging in discussions with one's immediate supervisor. Participatory observations extended to conversations with other employees about their development plans, often documented in various distinct files.

The role of an observer, workshop facilitator, and interviewer, includes guiding discussions that can influence their dynamics, both intentionally and unintentionally. These actions can

impact the topics discussed and the overall atmosphere. Recognizing and reflecting on these influences is essential for maintaining the research's integrity and validity.

3.5 Define

The define phase involves analyzing and aligning needs to establish the objectives of the development project. This phase also reviews the context for the product or service development, assesses the feasibility of proposed solutions. By taking these factors into account, designers define the next phases of the project that addresses the initial problem identified. (Design Council 2007, 14-16.)

The Discover phase provided a wide range of data on the current state of the process and tools for self-directed professional development for designers. During this define phase the key results from the collected data were analysed, potential development options were identified, and the plan for the next development phase was prepared. The pain points and gains of designers were also mapped and validated in the first stage of co-creative workshop 1 explained in more detail later in chapter 3.6.1.

This chapter describes the data analysis methods used during the development project and how defining the current situation was done before moving on to the next phase.

3.5.1 Data analysis during the development project

The stages of the qualitative research process may overlap, for example, the collection and analysis of data may take place partly at the same time (Hirsjärvi et al. 2003, 59.) Qualitative data analysis should ideally run alongside data collection, aiding in the development of emerging insights into the questions guiding the development task, thereby informing both sampling and inquiry. This iterative approach continues until saturation is reached, indicating that data collection has yielded no new categories or themes. (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006, 317-318.) The handling of research data necessitates both analysis, which breaks larger units into smaller ones, and synthesis, which combines multiple units into something novel. This iterative process comprises the informal processing of experiential data and the rigorous analysis of documented data. (Portigal 2013, 136.) Qualitative content analysis, notably document analysis, was selected for data examination. Document analysis is suitable for various written materials and facilitates the extraction of meaningful results from extensive textual data (Ojasalo et al., 2014, 136). Data analysis was carried out during the development project, focusing in particular on the define and deliver phases. The techniques used were affinity diagram, qualitative data synthesis and triangulation. This chapter describes the data analysis techniques in more detail.

In this research-based development project, affinity diagrams served as the most widely used technique for identifying commonalities and categorizing the data into emerging themes. This technique was used to analyse almost all the data from different research methods used in this research-based development project. Affinity diagram is an essential design tool used to organize and synthesize a large volume of information gathered during the research phase of a project. By categorizing data and drawing connections, it aids in transitioning from analysis to synthesis, bridging the gap between defining challenges and ideating solutions. (Dam & Siang 2020.) One example of an affinity diagram can be seen in figure 13. The journey map synthesis also utilized affinity diagram in the define and develop phases of the development project. The journey maps from different roles collected from the second workshop were combined using the results gathered by with affinity diagram.

Figure 13:Affinity diagram for data analysis

Sticky notes can be created from each interview to summarize key points. During the accumulation of these notes, groupings can be formed, possibly based on existing categories. This process may lead to the development of a collective, enhanced perspective, going beyond mere findings. (Portigal 2013, 140–141.) Affinity diagram enables researchers to cluster and bundle related ideas, concepts, and facts, fostering a deeper understanding of complex issues and informing subsequent design decisions. By visually grouping data into meaningful categories, the affinity diagram helps identify patterns, themes, and connections within the data, facilitating the generation of insights and ultimately driving the design process forward. (Dam & Siang 2020.)

Triangulation allows data collected through a number of different methods to provide more accurate results to inform future design decisions (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 107). Triangulation was used in particular to analyse the diverse material from the discover phase, but also in the final deliver phase of the project to give a more solid foundation to the results.

3.5.2   Defining the current situation

The current situation was defined by analysing the data from discover phase. The discover phase of the research involved conducting desk research, which entailed reviewing existing

literature and materials. This process aimed to understand how self-directed professional development is practiced, the support services available, and the tools used. Through desk research, various resources were identified, including templates provided by the organization and personalized development plans created by employees. This also revealed the titles of the professional development plan, which can be used to design the first draft.

In addition to desk research, benchmarking activities helped identify benchmarked templates for professional development plans and detailed descriptions of the roles of designers. Stakeholder interviews provided further insights into current practices, support services, and tools. These interviews enriched the data obtained from desk research and benchmarking. Participatory observation was also conducted to gain firsthand insights into how guidelines are understood, services and tools are used, and development plans are formulated. This method provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by designers and the awareness of knowledge on the topic among designers.

The data gathered from these various sources were synthesized using affinity diagrams and triangulation techniques. These analytical tools helped identify recurring themes and patterns across the data. Through synthesis, a comprehensive understanding of self-directed professional development within the organizational context was achieved. This served as a basis for identifying the potential development options in next phases, and the plan for the next development phase.

The plan for the next phase included defining the information to be retrieved from the workshops, defining the participants in the workshops and deciding to use the journey map and prototype the professional development plan. Based on the preliminary data, the process of self-directed professional development of the designer is influenced by several different roles, from which it is desired to collect more detailed information about their contribution and perspective on the process. For example, the role of resourcing in supporting professional development is important, as learning in projects was identified as one of the most common ways of learning. Resource persons can therefore influence the project match and the opportunities to develop in projects according to plans and aspirations.

The purpose of the workshops in develop phase was to enrich the initial data on the current situation, identify challenges, identify solutions and prioritise them. In addition, journey maps from multiple roles were to be co-created, which could then be synthesised into a single comprehensive journey map of the professional development journey of a designer. The plan of the develop phase and tasks were collected on the Miro board and on a kanban board supporting project management in this development project.

The Kanban board is an agile project management tool that allows you to visualise the workflow. Kanban board was originally developed for lean manufacturing but is now widely

used in agile software and service development. The tool consists of clear columns in which task cards are structured. Columns are clear, such as to do, in progress and complete. In addition, the 49anban board allows the use of a work in progress limit, which determines the maximum number of cards that can be worked on simultaneously in one column. This is to prevent the workflow from becoming blocked up. Often the board also has a separate backlog of pending task cards for workflow. A Kanban board can be either physical or digital. (Rehkopf 2022.) In this development project digital Kanban board in the Miro tool was used.

3.6 Develop

In the develop phase, the knowledge and understanding gained in the discovery phase is used to ideate new solutions as openly as possible. This phase typically features creativity and collaborative efforts using ideation workshops, design games and other methods, typically involving a wide range of stakeholders. These workshops can include creating customer journey maps and engaging people in reflecting on the present and brainstorming on specific future scenarios. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 75.) Two co-creative workshops were facilitated to gain insight from selected stakeholders and designers expanding the results through collaboration.

The essential element of service design is experimental design, with an emphasis on visualization and prototyping. The aim is to make ideas and the concepts developed by visualizing them and building concrete prototypes. Visualizations and prototypes illustrate abstract services, facilitate discussion, and allow rapid testing of various solutions. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 72.) At this stage, the emphasis is on rapid modelling of the service to be developed. This will help to quickly establish whether the service being developed is functional and desirable and to change direction at an early stage if necessary. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 76.)

The develop phase included two workshops and the ideation of the professional development tool wireframe. Second of the workshops also included journey mapping.

3.6.1 Co-creative workshop 1

Co-creation has a long tradition in design dating back to the 1960s. Co-creation workshops are a key part of the design process, bringing together multiple stakeholders. Service design projects are often complex, so workshops include people from a wide range of stakeholders, both inside and outside the organization. Workshops are opportunities for different stakeholders to co-create new ideas based on cross-disciplinary knowledge and expertise and to build trust between stakeholders. Workshops are often followed by further development sessions, prototyping and testing. (Penin 2018, 240–242.) In this research-based development project, workshops were chosen as a methodology due to their capacity for enriching

outcomes through collaborative work. The method aimed to engage people in the process. It is particularly suitable for a project involving designers, allowing for diverse voices in development across various roles. Individuals from different roles from people development operations to sales and resourcing and designers from all levels and sites bring a better understanding of their work requirements and needs to the collaborative effort.

Several stakeholders were identified in the Discover phase, whose cooperation in the process is crucial. The stakeholder map helped to recognize the key roles to participate in the co-creative workshops. The first workshop aimed to bring together the stakeholders with designers to develop a common approach. Simultaneously, the different stakeholders' understanding of each other's needs, challenges and opportunities increased. Nine people from the identified stakeholder roles (people development operations, supervisors, design resourcing responsible, design sales responsible, design head of business) and designers from multiple fields of design (e.g. service design and UX/UI design), levels (from junior to senior) and sites) participated in the workshop.

The workshops were conducted virtually via Teams, and the Miro tool was used as a collaboration platform during the workshop. The author had the support of the design team in planning, facilitating and analysing the data from both two workshops. The structure of the workshops was based on the Lightning decision jam model by AJ & Smart (2020) which is an easy and fast way to solve complex problems quickly. It was easy to adapt a base that the facilitator was familiar with and had already been found to work, into a slightly longer base for two workshops to meet the needs of this development project. Lightning decision jam model has 8 steps: 1) Start with things that are working, 2) Capture all the problems, 3) Prioritize problems, 4) Reframe the problems as standardized challenges, 5) Ideate without discussion, 6) Prioritize solutions, 7) Decide what to execute on, 8) Make solutions actionable. The first workshop followed the existing framework and included the first six steps. In the second workshop step seven was included, with the addition of journey map co-creation.
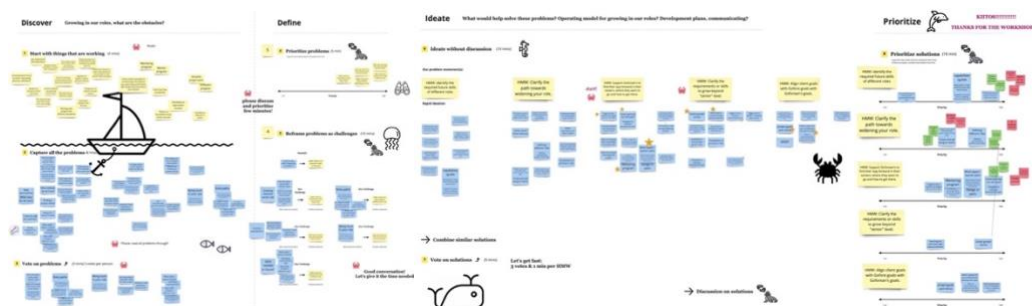
Figure 14: The results from the first workshop

The first workshop's model board and results are shown in Figure 14. At the beginning you can see the discover section, where you start with things that are working, then continue to

capture all the problems. Once these are done, the next step is to prioritize the problems through voting. This section was decided to be done before the next prioritisation of problems, departing from the original model, as many of the problems were related to the same topics and could therefore be condensed into only five challenges in the reframe section. Then rapid ideation was introduced, which was carried out as an individual task without discussion with others. However, everyone saw each other's ideas in Miro. This was followed by prioritising the solutions through voting and then continuing with a discussion of the solutions. Finally, each how might we challenge was given its own prioritisation line, on which the solutions to the challenge were placed in a collaborative discussion.

The top five challenges identified were how might we clarify the requirements or skills to grow beyond "senior" level, how might we support Goforean's to find their way forward in their careers; where they want to go and how to get there, how might we clarify the path towards widening your role, how might we align client goals with Gofore goals with Goforean's goals and HMW identify the required future skills of different roles. These identified challenges and the prioritisation of ideas for their solutions are shown in both figure 14 from the workshop and figure 15, where the author and the design team analysed the data from the workshop.

The first workshop results were processed between the workshops to identify the solution ideas already under way in the case company and the solution ideas that are interconnected. This can be seen in figure 15. The questions who, how and why were asked to identify the roles responsible for undertaking these tasks that are related to the solution ideas, how they might be implemented and what the core need underneath these solution ideas might be like the possibility to learn or strategic selling.
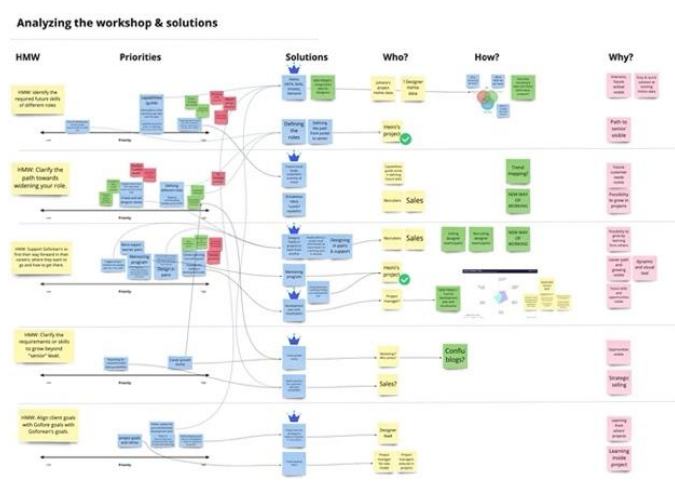
Figure 15: Analyzing the results from the first workshop

The author and the design team used the information from the workshop to identify existing solutions in the company, who in the company is responsible for the solutions, what is needed to support the solution and link the challenges to underlying needs such as learning opportunities or strategic selling. As some of the challenges and their solutions had been identified as already under development in the company, these were excluded from the prioritisation phase of the second workshop. This narrowing down was necessary at this point, as it was not worth starting to work on something that was already underway elsewhere in the company or wasting the time of the participants in the workshops.

3.6.2   Co-creative workshop 2

The second workshop was attended by the same nine people as the first and was conducted virtually using the same tools. The workshop included co-creating journey maps and step seven (decide what to execute on) from the Light decision jam model and discussion (AJ & Smart 2020). Journey maps can be co-created with participants who have solid knowledge of the topic to be defined. These outcomes should be used as a starting point of designing the journey as they are often assumption-based and biased. Participants in this workshop can be either from a shared perspective or from different perspectives. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 126.) In this research-based development project, journey mapping was chosen as a tool to visualize shared understanding and to outline the complex process involving multiple stakeholders, support actions, and tools from various perspectives. Stakeholders from multiple roles were selected and they formed journey maps in three groups: designers, people development & supervisors and resourcing & sales. Each role influences the designer's professional development in its own way and sees only part of the aspects that influence the development path. For example, resourcing influences how well each designer gets into a project that suits them best. Since learning in project work is one of the biggest ways of learning within the company, the project match has a big impact on the professional development process.
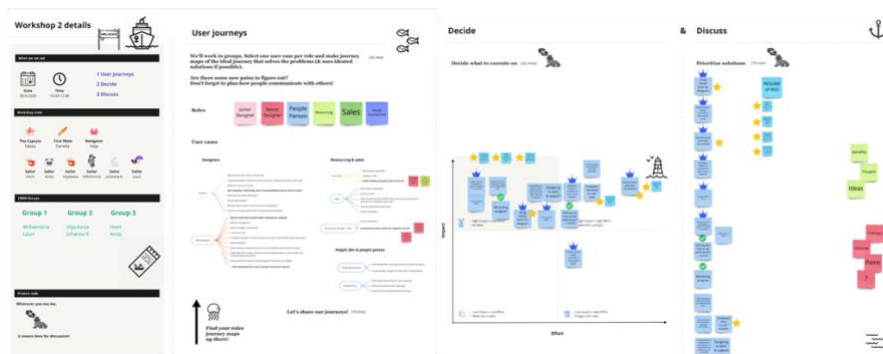
Figure 16: Prioritizing the solution ideas in the second workshop.

At the beginning of the workshop, the insights from the previous workshop were shared to the participants. This was followed by the co-creation of user journeys. Figure 16 shows the structure and tasks of the second workshop. Figure 17 shows each group's own output from the journey map task. Firstly the participants worked in small groups, into which they were divided using the Teams tool. The first group was designers, the second people development and supervisors and the third resourcing and sales. They all worked on the same Miro platform writing role-specific user cases.

The groups then selected one user case per role and used this to create a journey map that solves the problem. The use cases were Senior designer: "Wants to grow horizontally (widen competences, skillsets)", a supervisor: "Conversations about projects and resourcing" and resourcing: "Understanding of peoples skills & interests". The aim of the exercise was to discover the path of a designer's professional development from the perspectives of the different roles and how they contribute to it. The groups were given a ready-made journey map template on which they filled in phases, touch points and more detailed actions taken by the various roles. In addition to these, the groups added the solutions suggested at the bottom of the touch points, if they were appropriate for that point. This was supported by giving the solutions to the groups use that had been ideated on the first workshop. Once the groups had produced their joyrney maps, they presented them to the other groups in a joint Teams meeting. The workshop was then continued together by using the impact-effort scale to decide which of the proposed solutions from the first workshop should be implemented. Most of the solution ideas were on the high impact area of the scale. Three solution ideas were then voted to continue. These were using data from an internal tool for designers, development plan with visualisation and development journey map visualization. Finally, there was a free discussion about the workshop and decided solutions.

Figure 17: Journey maps in the second workshop

An analysis of the workshop followed shortly after the workshop. The author and the design team gathered to review the workshop outputs and continued making decided solutions actionable. Step eight (make solutions actionable) from the Light decision jam model was used in this meeting (AJ & Smart 2020). Three solutions decided for development on the basis of the workshops results on prioritizing solutions were using data from an internal tool for designers, development plan with visualisation and development journey map visualisation. In

relation to the first development action decided, Gofore has an internal tool for consultant's CV's, projects, skills and other important functions. The solution for using the data from that tool was implemented as part of another internal development project within the case company and is thus excluded from this development project. Next steps were planned in the make solutions actionable part of the Light decision jam model (AJ & Smart 2020). A project kanban board was also created to track progress of the projects planned steps.

3.6.3 Ideating the professional development plan for internal tool

The first draft of the professional development canvas was a wireframe that was based on the guidelines and materials used within the company. At this point the possibility of adding the canvas as a simple MVP version to the internal information system was considered.

The first wireframe (Figure 18) included the sections: What do I do now, Goal, Deadline, Skills, What helps me, Who helps me, Action steps, Measuring and feedback plan. The wireframe took under consideration the information found in the internal information system, including skill and role information used in the company. The idea was to implement the professional development plan to the internal tool linking all the data to existing employee information and to be transparent to all employees and roles.

Figure 18: First wireframes of the professional development plan

This proposal was presented to the people development team and to the internal tool product owner. However, implementing this feature was not a current priority at this stage of the product's development. Therefore, it was decided to develop the professional development

plan with a different tool at this stage. This opened up new possibilities for the implementation of visuals and features.

3.7 Deliver

The service design process concludes with the final conceptualization of the service and its implementation (Ojasalo, et al. 2014, 76). Implemation is the step beyond prototyping, to production and rollout. It often requires diverse skills, including change management and software development. When designing for lasting behavioral change in organizations, service artifacts might include concept pitches, service blueprints, and physical or digital documents. Human interaction is a key component in most service delivery. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 271–275.) Prototyping is a crucial part of the service design process, which is used to learn and make decisions. As you create prototypes, prototyping helps the decision-making process move iteratively towards the final product or service. They teach you what works, what doesn't and where you can make improvements. Prototyping is a tool that helps creative thinking by materializing new narratives that don't yet exist. (Penin 2018, 285.)

This phase included the concepting, prototyping, testing, validating and iterating of the professional development plan canvas and journey map. These methods guided the concrete deliverables towards implementation in an iterative way. Visualization and prototyping was used to synthesize the results collected and to validate the outcomes. The professional development journey map was concepted that included multiple stakeholder roles swim lanes based on co-creative workshop results. This journey map was then validated and iterated. A professional development plan canvas was also concepted, prototyped and tested, validated and iterated.

At the end of the phase, the deliverables were made available to the case company and its employees. These include a final report with action steps and future recommendations, a process description using a journey map and a concrete tool the professional development plan canvas. The findings and deliverables of this development project are presented in this chapter.

3.7.1 Concepting the professional development journey map

A customer journey map describes the stages of the service experienced by the customer from the beginning to the end. Customer journey mapping adds a new dimension to the development of a company's processes by putting the customer experience at the heart of the development process. It consists of service sessions and touchpoints (such as service environment, people, objects, and activities). (Ojasalo, et al. 2014, 73-74.) The customer in this development project was the employee and the journey a personal development journey in the case company. Journey map synthesis was employed to integrate the journey maps

created in the workshop from perspectives of various roles. This method aligns with established practices in service design and UX research, where multiple journey maps are combined to create a comprehensive understanding of the user experience. By analyzing and merging the individual journey maps, common stages and touchpoints could be identified, leading to a more holistic view of the service process.

Each group's journey map from the workshop highlighted different aspects of the designer's professional development path. The phases of the designers' path provided a good basis for structuring a common path. Designers' joyrney maps phase mapping opportunities included touchpoints Finding out what are the current project possibilities and finding out about other people's skills and career paths, getting inspired. Phase focusing included touchpoints mentoring or coaching and development plan. Phase acting included touchpoints communicating interests, orientation towards new role and acting in the new role. Phase refocusing included touchpoints reflection and knowledge sharing and tocusing towards new interests.

The resourcing and sales group's journey map included touchpoints project, offer, projectization, deciding the candidates and availability of candidates. The people development and supervisor's groups journey map included three phases. Phase previous project or new employee included touchpoints understanding current state and clarifying project wishes. The phase resourcing included touchpoints resourcing decision and beginning of project. The phase in project included touchpoints constant process and preparing for completion. The information from all the different paths was combined into a single map, where the different roles have their own swim lanes. This map was then commented by the author and design team and finalized together for testing.

Figure 19: Professional development journey map for testing

The synthesised journey map concept shows the touchpoints of different stakeholders in their own lanes and their current and potential solutions in the bottom lanes with the comments shown in figure 19. The professional development journey of a Gofore designer is divided into four sections: mapping possibilities, focusing, acting and revaluation. During these sections, the designer will make use of a range of stakeholders, materials and tools. The map includes dedicated swim lanes for the following stakeholders: the designer, supervisor, peer designer, people development, resourcing and sales / key account team. In addition to the above mentioned solution ideas have their own swim lane. On the bottom of the journey map, there is room for the comments.

3.7.2   Validating and iterating the Professional development journey map

The professional development journey map of a designer was presented at Design business area meeting on 26.11.2020 where the development project and journey map were introduced to the designers, their supervisors and head of business. The journey map and test questions were released for commenting for all designers, their supervisors, head of business and the stakeholders included in the development project. In addition to the open comments shon in figure 20, it was possible to comment on the journey folder using hearts to mark the most important parts.

Asynchronous data collection can be used in qualitative data collection using online or other tools for example when the material is sensitive, for participant comfort, convenience or anonymity. Asynchronous interviews offer participants time to make sense of the material that may be difficult to understand. Time commitment of the participant also needs to be taken into consideration. (Spencer, Rademaker, Williams & Loubier 2021, 328–329.) In this test the data collection method was asynchronous, as more than 100 employees could not be expected to participate at the same time. Therefore, ten days were allowed for testing and commenting in Miro tool, so that everyone who wanted to participate could do so alongside their work.
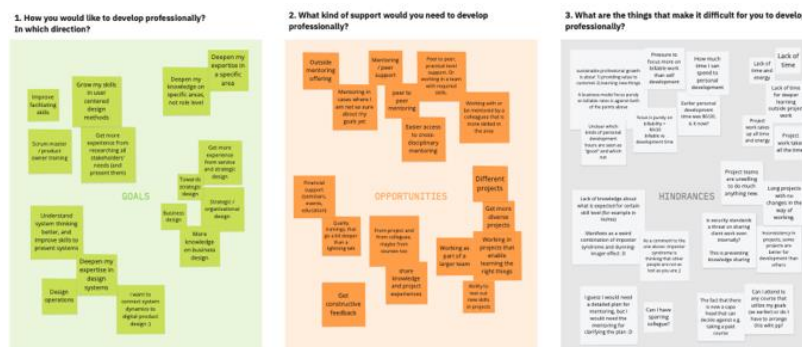
Figure 20: Results from the validation at Design bi-weekly 26.11.2020

These validation results were analyzed affinity diagram and gathered for developing insights. The analysis revealed key outcomes including challenges in aligning requirements and experience levels, organic growth within extended projects, a desire for diverse designer teams, confusion around role/title clarity, ambiguity regarding career progression, and the need for shared understanding on role/title, emphasizing structured career growth paths. Professional growth typically unfolds naturally within long-term projects, promoting skill recognition by clients and a preference for diverse team collaborations. There's was also confusion surrounding roles like "senior" and "lead" designer, questioning their relevance within the company's structure, necessitating clarity on their distinctions and expectations. Individuals also expressed uncertainty about career progression post attaining senior designer status, underscoring the need for shared understandings and clearer career growth paths. These insights emphasize the necessity for structured career pathways, clearer roles, and enhanced learning opportunities, highlighting the importance of refined career development frameworks.

In addition to commenting on the professional development journey, designers were asked about their personal development goals by answering these 3 questions:

1. How would you like to develop professionally in which direction?
2. What kind of support would you need to develop professionally?
3. What are the things that make it difficult for you to develop professionally?

The responses to the first question on professional development aspirations reveal a clear trend towards specialized skill enhancement and a strategic approach to professional growth. Participants expressed a desire to deepen their expertise in specific areas rather than broadening their knowledge at a role level. This collective desire for specialized growth underscores the importance of targeted skill development aligned with individual career ambitions.

Participants expressed a clear need for multifaceted support in their professional development. This included a strong desire for peer-level assistance and mentoring, both internally and externally, especially when uncertain about their goals. They also emphasized the importance of engaging in diverse projects, seeking quality training opportunities that offer deeper insights, and working within larger teams to foster collaborative learning environments. Overall, there's a distinct emphasis on collaborative learning, mentorship, and diversified project experiences for their professional growth.

Participants' responses to the query about the challenges hindering their professional development revealed multifaceted obstacles. These included time constraints due to heavy workloads and a predominant focus on billable hours over personal growth, lengthy and unchanging projects that limited learning opportunities, and uncertainties surrounding

expectations for skill levels. Additionally, psychological barriers such as impostor syndrome and organizational structures inhibiting mentoring and support were highlighted. These insights underscore the necessity for a structured and supportive environment that facilitates professional development.

The professional development journey map was instrumental in uncovering valuable insights regarding the needs and challenges faced by designers in their career growth, on which question guiding the development task one focused on. It described the identified challenges and needs of employees, which allowed the co-design of a self-directed learning process. The visualisation of the process provided valuable feedback from the designers, as all the different stakeholders and stages were captured. As a description of the process, it also aided in understanding the different stages of the process, supporting services, tools and other ways to move forward in the process of self-directed professional development. A clear process shared with employees can help not only people development responsibles but also employees to understand how to proceed in the process of self-directed learning and get support in case of challenging situations. As such, it also contributed to answering the second question guiding the development task, how self-directed learning in the workplace can be better supported by processes and tools. The following key findings emerged from the test results.

Mentoring and coaching for goal clarification

Participants highlighted the need for mentoring and coaching support when clarifying their development goals and determining the necessary steps to achieve them. They identified various sources, including Supervisors, peer designers, mentors, and coaches, as potential guides in this process. Mentoring relationships were also seen as instrumental in shaping the professional development plan and providing ongoing guidance and support throughout the development process.

Peer feedback and increased peer learning on project related development goals

Peer designer feedback was considered essential for shaping project related professional development goals. Participants recognized the value of input from colleagues in refining their objectives and ensuring alignment with project requirements. The test results also revealed a strong need to enhance peer learning within project teams. In consultancy work, there is considerable variation between projects, in terms of whether the designer is working as part of a team of designers, a multi-professional team or alone. As such, the opportunity for peer learning varies from project to project. Participants expressed a desire for increased opportunities to learn from their peers, emphasizing the benefits of knowledge exchange, collaboration, and shared learning experiences.

Career growth stories

Participants emphasized the significance of career growth stories in inspiring and motivating their own professional journeys. Learning from the experiences of others provided valuable insights and guidance for their own development paths.

Professional development lifecycle

The professional development journey map shed light on the lifecycle of professional development, highlighting the different stages and milestones involved. This understanding allowed designers to navigate their growth journey more effectively and anticipate the challenges and opportunities associated with each stage. The research also indicated a lack of clarity regarding how professional growth directly affects getting senior designer titles. Participants expressed a need for better understanding and recognition of the relationship between professional development and progression to senior roles.

3.7.3   Concepting the professional development plan canvas

Once it was clear that the professional development plan could not be implemented as part of an internal system, another digital platform needed to be found. The existing digital tools in use in the company were mapped and the first prototype was decided to be implemented in the Miro tool. The tool is used by most designers and also people in other roles within the company. The first prototype also allows to test the suitability of the tool for the creation of a professional development plan.

Based on the parts of the wireframe already made and the different templates found through benchmarking, the concepting of a new prototype began. The first prototype design partly shown in figure 21 included sections for a table of contents, tools to help you, where are you now, what are your goals, short and long term goal setting, skill radar, skills to improve & your time and energy budget, action steps & KPI's to my goal, who and what can help you and back cover.
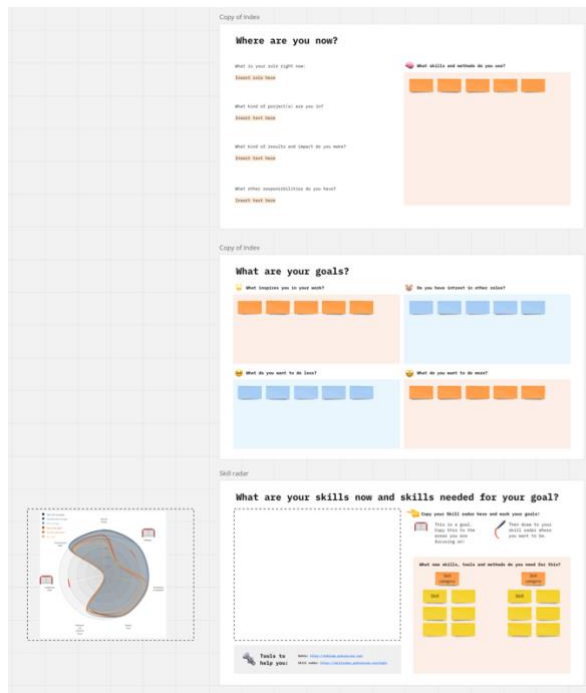
Figure 21: Professional development plan canvas, part of the first concept in Miro.

The change from internal tool to Miro opened up new opportunities for visalisating the different sections and using more creative ways for making a professional development plan. For example, the questions in where are you now section were widened to have more coaching questions for the employee to think about without using a coach. The skill and energy budget were also visualized as a total energy of 100% and bars that fill up your time and energy when you do professional development tasks, as time is always limited. The main content of the plan remained the same, although greater freedom in its implementation allowed it to be extended.

3.7.4   Prototyping and testing the professional development plan canvas

Combining interviews with observation helps gather rich, useful information very quickly while reducing self-reporting errors. This approach enables the simultaneous questioning and observation of users, as understanding the reasons behind their actions can be just as crucial as knowing what they do or how they do it. (Goodwin 2009, 189.) Test interviews including observation were conducted for the first prototype of the professional development canvas. Two designers participated to test the usability of the canvas and if it does help designers in various development needs and if they have any suggestions to make it better. Test notes from this can be seen in figure 22. The participants used the prototype in Miro tool and the author observed their activities in Miro while they filled their own professional development plan. The technique of talking out loud was used with participants continuously sharing their

thoughts and feelings about the prototype. The author then asked follow-up questions to gain more information.
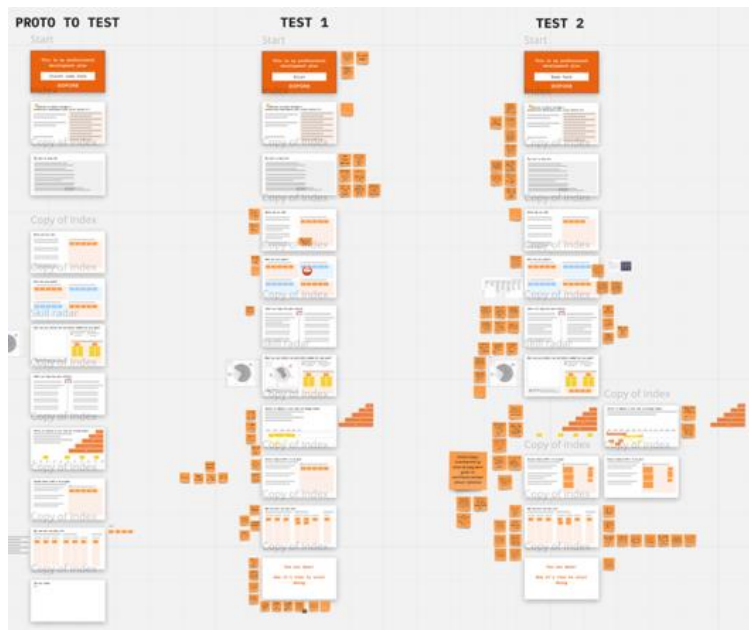
Figure 22: Testing the first prototype

The results indicated that Miro was a good tool for making a professional development plan, as it is a familiar tool and gives freedom to the user to use the tool as they please and add other notes, templates and documents to the same Miro board. The canvas was initially considered to be quite extensive and it was felt that it would take at least an hour to complete, as the questions in it and one's own development need to be reflected on with time. In addition to doing it alone, it was felt that one's own supervisor or colleague would be a suitable sparring partner if the direction of one's own development was not clear. The coaching questions were felt to spark insights, even though there was no prior idea of a personal development plan.

Some of the information on tools and links to support personal professional development provided at the beginning were familiar, but some had not been used. The current guidance on the intranet was perceived as laborious. The section was considered useful. The following sections on the present situation and goals provided insights. Simultaneously, they were considered somewhat challenging to answer and the scope of the answers was pondered aloud. Short term goals seemed to be quite easy for the participants to fill out, but the long term goals were left unfilled. Mapping out skills by utilizing another internal tool and bringing from it a visualisation into the canvas was found to be somewhat challenging. Individual skills

were however written down ono notes. The skills section was identified as one area for further development.

The skill and energy budget section reminded of consultant allocation percentage, so a timeline was suggested instead with a possibility to add skills and tasks to it. Action steps and KPI's section seemed a bit laborious to fill in during the test, although the metrics were considered potentially useful. The who and what can help you section seemed to have too many columns to fill in. For this, it was requested to have ready-made role cards to help choose the people who can help to achieve the development goal, give feedback and share the canvas with. The test results made it easy to start iterating on the next version of canvas.

3.7.5 Validating and iterating the professional development canvas

Based on the initial test results obtained from the first prototype, a second prototype was iterated (Figure 23). The Professional Development Plan Canvas was refined for clarity and segmented into various sections, which were further enhanced and clarified based on user feedback. The second prototype of the professional development plan canvas contains the following sections: Naming your plan, Welcome, Index, Tools to help you, Where are you now, Where do you want to be, Goal 1 and 2 (including: Short and long term goal setting, action steps, metrics, who can help), Plan (calendar view), Notes and Share.
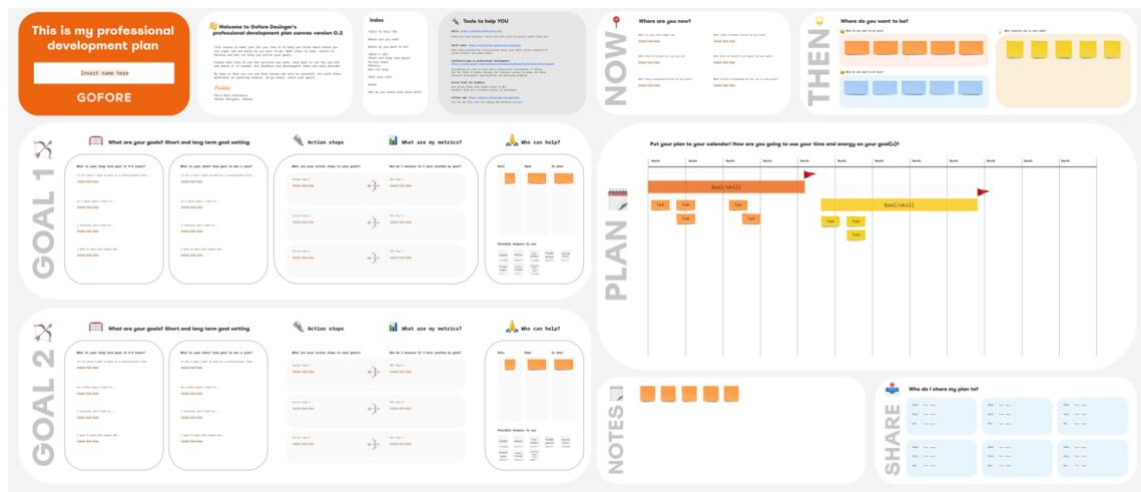
Figure 23: Professional development plan canvas, second prototype for testing

This canvas was tested for over 100 designers, supervisors, head of business, and people development. Asynchronous data collection was used in this test. Testing and commenting was done in Miro tool, so that everyone who wanted to participate could do so when they had time to do so. The test was open for two weeks with the canvas and the test questions provided in Appendix 2. The answers to the test questions were collected in Miro seen in Figure 24.
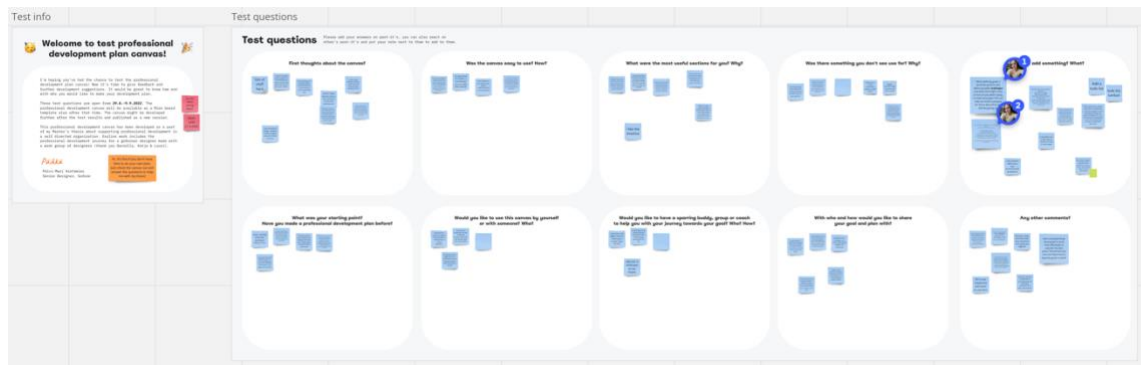
Figure 24: Professional development plan canvas test questions

Data from the test suggested that the canvas was at first glance extensive and useful as well as easy to use in the Miro tool. The most useful sections were the timeline, action steps and who can help. Suggestions for additions included kanban, tips if you get stuck, inspiration and areas of expertise, coaching tools, more specific questions about where you want to be and identifying potential challenges in advance. Some had previously made a professional development plan using Gofore's tools, some using other tools, some with coaches and some not at all. There was interest in using Canvas both alone and with a sparring partner, sparring partner or goup. There was a desire to share one's own plan with a potential sparring partner as well as with one's own Supervisor. Other comments on the canvas included the timeline and how to put plans into practice after the plan has been made, how short and long-term goals are aligned and the good basis of the Miro tool, which is customizable according to your needs. Based on the results, small refinements were made to the canvas to finalize it for use by all employees.

The professional development plan canvas was evaluated as an effective tool for planning self-development. The test results provided valuable insights into the usability and preferences of designers. These results also help to answer the second question guiding the development task, how can self-directed learning in the workplace be better supported with processes and tools. The professional development plan canvas is by nature a tool designed to support self-directed learning. One quote from the test data captures the results well: "A great way to support us in thinking about where we are and where we want to go in our careers". The following key findings were derived.

Utilization of various planning tools

Participants reported having previously used multiple tools, such as PowerPoint or notes, for creating development plans. However, these plans were rarely revisited. The professional development plan canvas addressed this issue by providing a structure that encourages continuous engagement.

Liked sections and structure

Participants expressed positive feedback regarding specific sections of the professional development plan canvas, including the action plan, timeline, identification of desired goals, and identification of potential sources of support. The structured format of the canvas was highly appreciated as it facilitated clear and organized planning of self-development.

Ease of use and visual appeal

The professional development plan canvas was perceived as easy to use, allowing designers to effectively articulate their development goals. The visual elements of the canvas, combined with its simplicity, enhanced understanding and engagement among users.

Desire for sparring and accountability

Participants expressed a preference for independently creating their development plans while having a sparring partner or group to provide feedback and hold them accountable. This collaborative approach was seen as beneficial in enhancing the quality and effectiveness of individual development plans.

Sharing plans with peers and mentors

Designers indicated a willingness to share their development plans with peers and mentors, recognizing the value of external input and guidance in refining their goals and strategies. Integration with existing platforms, such as an existing internal tool, was suggested.

3.7.6 Deliverables

Figure 25: The initial report of the development project was published on 16.12.2020 and the final report on 25.10.2022.

The project generated several key deliverables, shown in table 5. The deliverables were presented to the stakeholders, including the initial and final report of the project (Figure 25). The deliverables were also made accessible to all employees via a dedicated page for the development project in Gofore intranet shown in figure 26.

Table 5: The deliverables of the development project for case company Gofore

Deliverable	Content
Initial report	Initial report on the development project presented on 16th of December 2020.
Professional Development Journey Map	A tool that visualizes the stages of an employee in their professional development within the company. It includes key milestones, resources, and potential challenges or opportunities at each stage.
Professional Development Plan Canvas	Miro canvas that serves as a structured framework for employees to plan and track their professional growth. It includes elements such as discovering your own strengths, goal setting, and progress tracking.
Final report	A comprehensive report on the findings of the development project and the recommended actions derived from them, as well as the continuation of existing good practices

The initial report (Figure 25) was made at the point of the project, when the supporting design team could no longer continue to support the development project. Simultaneously, the author also had to take a break from the development project due to other work commitments. The author continued the development project after the decision had been made to write her thesis on the project and to continue working on it until it was finalized. The initial report consisted on the sections background, project target, process, discovery, workshops, solutions, the professional development journey map of a designer and test results, the development plan tool concept ideas and MVP visualisation (shown in appendix 6).

The professional development journey map was a part of the final report and accessible in a dedicated page of the development project in Gofore intranet. The Professional development plan canvas was shared on Miro tool's templates available for all employees with Miro license in use (figure 27). The links to the Miro template were accessible in the same page in Gofore intranet as the other materials. It was also shared in the professional development page in Gofore intranet, ensuring its availability to all employees when making their development plan.

Figure 26: Information about the project in Gofore intranet with the materials.

In practice, it was observed that the new Professional Development Plan Canvas was not widely discovered, although among designers, awareness of the tool was better due to testing. Consequently, efforts were made to expand awareness, particularly among supervisors and internal coaches, enabling them to incorporate the tool into their discussions on professional development and collaborative development planning with individuals. The canvas was shared in supervisors and internal coaches communications channels in Slack and also presented in their specific meetings. Additionally, the use of the Miro tool and template requires a software license. Therefore, the Professional Development Plan Canvas is more widely used in roles where these conditions are met.
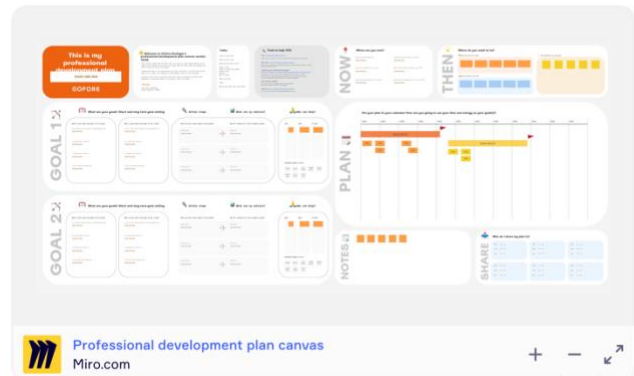
Figure 27: Professional development plan canvas in Miro-tool

The final report (figure 25) was compiled at the end of the project to summarise the main deliverables and results of the project. The content included the starting point of the development project, the process and the questions guiding the development task, discover, define and develop phases and deliver phase with more detailed results of the project, key insights, actions taken and solution ideas and suggestions for the future. In the appendix 4 action plan based on the findings there is a summary of the actions presented in the final report, some of which are a continuation of existing good practices, some actions already taken, and some suggested future actions based on the findings.

4   Results

The objective of this research project was to improve the self-directed professional development process at the case company to better help employees grow. Furthermore, the objective was to develop supporting services and tools for the phases of the professional development process for the use of both employees and the company. This chapter answers the questions guiding the development task by analysing the research results to find out what the challenges and needs of employees are and how self-directed learning in the workplace can be better supported by processes and tools. The questions guiding the development task are answered in more detail in chapter 5 Conclusions and discussion.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first chapter, 4.1 focuses on the first question guiding the development task. It delves into the challenges and needs experienced by the employees in self-directed professional development in the workplace. Chapter 4.2 summarizes the findings on the second question guiding the development task. It includes the findings on how self-directed learning in the workplace can be better supported with

processes and tools. The third chapter 4.3 focuses on the impact of the development project on the case company.

Together, these chapters provide a comprehensive overview of the key findings from this research-based development project for the case company Gofore's Design business area.

4.1 What are the challenges and needs experienced by the employees in self-directed professional development in the workplace?

The challenges and needs experienced by designers that emerged from the data can be divided into five different categories. These categories are explained in more detail below.

Self-responsibility for development planning

Designers largely shoulder the responsibility for creating development plans and dedicating time to professional growth. The research highlighted the variability in engagement, with some designers actively making plans while others neglect this aspect. A need to encourage a more proactive and structured approach to career development was observed.

Limited sharing of development plans

A notable observation was the limited sharing of development plans among designers. This lack of communication and collaboration hinders the potential for collective learning and knowledge exchange. The research underscored the importance of fostering a culture of sharing and creating platforms for designers to communicate and support one another.

Lack of clarity on time allocation and recommended learning

Participants expressed uncertainty regarding the allocation of time and the recommended types of learning for professional development. This lack of clarity poses challenges for designers in effectively planning and pursuing their growth objectives. The research suggested the development of comprehensive guidelines to provide designers with clear direction and recommendations for their professional development journeys.

Need for peer sparring, mentoring, and coaching

The research highlighted the strong need for peer sparring, mentoring, and coaching in supporting designers' professional growth. Participants recognized the value of collaborative relationships and peer feedback in shaping their development plans and achieving their goals.

Importance of learning opportunities and peer learning in projects

The research emphasized the significance of creating opportunities for learning within projects and fostering peer learning environments. Designers expressed the desire to learn from their peers and leverage collective expertise, underscoring the importance of incorporating peer learning initiatives into project teams.

4.2   How can self-directed learning in the workplace be better supported with processes and tools?

The development project showed that the description of the process helped employees to understand the different stages of the process, the support services, and the tools available to help them progress in their professional development. The identified challenges of lack of clarity in career paths and lack of a model and structure for development plans can be addressed with a clear professional development process, career paths and professional development plans. A consistent format for employee professional development plans, joint sessions with the supervisor and development support services together can support employees in self-directed learning.

To support and guide self-directed learning within the case organization, the research suggests a multifaceted approach that includes support from the workplace, supervisors, and coaches. The outcomes emphasize the importance of fostering a supportive environment that encourages effective self-initiated learning and enhances the employee experience. Self-directed learning should be supported by recognizing the individual nature of development planning and the need for clear guidelines and peer sparring or mentoring. The limited sharing of development plans suggests a need for a more open culture and practice to share their development plans.

To guide self-directed learning effectively, the organization should also ensure the usability of development tools, and regularly collect feedback on the learning process and tools. Additionally, the organization should continue good practices that are already working and implement actions based on the research findings to enhance the self-directed learning environment. By focusing on these areas, the case organization can cultivate a that embraces continuous learning and professional development that aligns with the company's goals and the employees' aspirations.

Coaching is highlighted as a valuable tool for professional development planning, and the research underscores the need for processes and tools that help employees in their self-directed professional development journey. The use of tools like the Professional Development Plan Canvas can be beneficial in supporting the phases of the professional development process for both employees and the company. The professional development canvas was considered as an effective tool with positive feedback on multiple sections of the

canvas, on the ease of use and the emphasis on sparring and sharing. The use of this tool can be seen as valuable in the future.

Moreover, the research-based development project within the organization points to service design and agile culture of experimentation as key elements embedded in the company's approach to development projects. These elements align with the principles of self-directed learning, as they focus on user-centeredness, stakeholder involvement, and creating practical solutions through a well-controlled process. In conclusion, the case organization should continue to foster a culture that values autonomy, provides necessary resources and tools, and offers guidance through coaching to support the self-directed learning of its employees.

The need for structure and guidelines from the organization to enable and support self-directed learning was found both in theory and in research. The need for more structured approach to career development was indicated in the findings, as well as a professional development journey map proven to help visualize the process and increase understanding of the possibilities. Uncertainty on recommended types of learning hindered effective professional development planning. Also, the professional development plan canvas was shown to help with providing more structure for development plans as it was easy to use, and the structured format was highly appreciated in facilitating clear and organized planning. One discovery was inconsistent formats of professional development plans where a single clear canvas can bring a sense of ease. As the demands of the job can make self-directed learning difficult, goals and professional development plan agreed with the employer can serve as a useful tool. The research found that the lack of clarity on time allocation possessed challenges for designers in effectively planning and pursuing their growth objectives.

The findings of the professional development journey map and professional development plan canvas tests offered valuable insights into the needs and challenges of professional development in the design field. The findings from the professional development journey map test underscored the importance of mentoring and coaching for clarifying development goals and navigating the path to achieve them. Peer designer feedback was identified as essential for aligning project-related professional development goals. Additionally, participants emphasized the significance of career growth stories, the professional development lifecycle, and the link between mentoring and the professional development plan. These insights highlight the need for increased peer learning opportunities within project teams and the importance of understanding the impact of professional growth on senior status.

Similarly, the test results for the professional development plan canvas revealed positive feedback regarding its usability and structure. Participants appreciated the sections related to the action plan, timeline, goal identification, and support network. The canvas was viewed as easy to use, visually appealing, and effective for planning self-development. Furthermore,

participants expressed a desire to independently create their plans while having a sparring partner or group for accountability and feedback. Sharing plans with peers and mentors was seen as valuable for refining goals and strategies. The integration of the canvas with an internal tool and forecasting customer needs on designer skills was suggested for enhanced alignment and strategic planning.

4.3   The impact of the development project

In this chapter, we look in more depth at the impact of the development project on the case company Gofore. We focus, not only on the Design Business Area, but also on the company-wide impact of the actions taken and the findings and suggestions. The research project's findings and outcomes can be considered to hold significant value for Gofore's ongoing development of professional development support. Moreover, individual designers and employees within the company stand to gain from the results generated by the development efforts. Specifically, the Professional Development Canvas serves as a practical tool accessible to all employees, garnering positive feedback from various stakeholders, including the People Operations team, internal coaches, supervisors, and individual employees.

A plan of actions was created to continue to develop the support for professional development. This plan can be found in Appendix 4, in addition to a more extensive secret report on the case company. The majority of actions recommended in the early reports have been successfully implemented or are in the planning phase. Some actions are still proposed for future implementation. While transforming the research findings into actionable steps required time and effort, gradual progress has been made. The professional development canvas is being utilized by internal coaches, individuals across Gofore, and during annual professional development planning sessions with Supervisors. The adoption of the canvas in these contexts reflects its practical application and its integration into existing processes. This demonstrates a concrete implementation of the research findings.
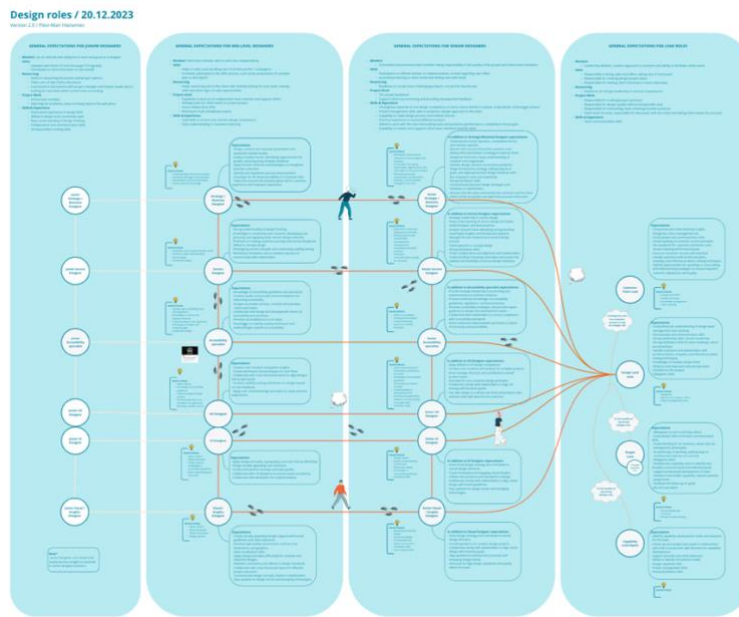
Figure 28: Designer roles and mastery paths visualisation

Designer roles and mastery paths shown in Figure 28 were designed by the author to support professional growth further as one of the actions based on the findings. Please note that the material in the picture is not detailed, as the original material is confidential. When finalising the work, the name was updated to Designer competences and evolved into text format on an intranet page (Appendix 3). The information comprises role descriptions, general expectations for designers, and insightful tips, serving as a foundational resource for professional development and career trajectories. This comprehensive resource is intended to aid individuals in their pursuit of professional growth and assist Supervisors in supporting their team members. Additionally, this information can be valuable in the recruitment process, providing clarity about designer roles. The approach encourages versatility, allowing individuals to excel in diverse domains and engage in multifaceted projects while concurrently occupying multiple roles. Ultimately, individuals have the autonomy to shape their unique career paths, with the organization serving as a supportive resource.

The insights gained from the test results offered a deep understanding of the needs and obstacles encountered in professional development. Particularly, the findings emphasized the pivotal role of mentoring, peer collaboration, transparent guidelines, and comprehensive learning opportunities in advancing designers' professional journey. The actions taken and future suggestions presented in this chapter offer practical steps to address these needs and foster a culture of continuous learning and professional development within the design community. The results provide a solid foundation for further continuous improvement in supporting self-directed professional development.

The change in the author's role to supervisor in Design business area, with a specific focus on professional development, has facilitated the implementation of actions based on the research findings. The author's role has provided the necessary focus and influence to initiate and plan more targeted actions in response to the identified needs and challenges. Additionally, the author has collaborated closely with Gofore Group's People Development responsible to ensure alignment between the efforts in Design and the broader organizational objectives. This collaboration has facilitated the exchange of ideas and practices between the Design business area and the group level, enabling the sharing of insights and the implementation of coherent strategies.

Furthermore, the author has sought to foster collaboration and harness the results of other internal development projects including development of Design Vision, developing guild activities, and key professional development themes. Gofore Design mindset from Gofore Design vision project (2022–2023) adds to the goals and vision of design and emphasises new learning and a growth mindset that provides a solid basis for professional development themes. By actively engaging with these projects and promoting open dialogue, the author has sought to create a cohesive and interconnected framework for professional development. Through this collaborative approach, the author has aimed to enhance the suggested themes of professional development by leveraging collective expertise and fostering knowledge exchange. By emphasizing effective communication channels and encouraging collaboration among stakeholders, the author strives to cultivate a culture of continuous learning and growth for designers within the organization.

The actions taken as a result of this research were implemented during the period from late 2022 to 2023. Therefore, the immediate impact of these actions may not be fully reflected in the Employee Experience Survey conducted in March 2023. However, it is essential to monitor the results of the Learning and Development section of the survey for the years 2023 and 2024 to assess the effectiveness of the actions implemented within Design business area. By comparing these results over time, it will be possible to evaluate whether the initiatives taken in Design business area have indeed made a significant impact on the learning and development experiences of employees. It is worth noting that some of the actions undertaken as a result of this research are company-wide, suggesting that their potential influence extends beyond the Design business area. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of the survey results will provide valuable insights into the overall organizational impact of these actions on learning and development practices.

5   Conclusions and discussion

This thesis has explored the topic of supporting employees' self-directed learning in the workplace. The insights obtained from both the knowledge base and the case project's development offer perspectives that can inspire the development of processes and tools to better support self-directed learning in any workplace setting.

This chapter brings together the practical aspects of the development work and the knowledge base established earlier. In chapter 5.1, the focus is on drawing conclusive insights regarding the development task and addressing the the questions guiding the development task. Chapter 5.2 delves into a discussion of these conclusions in the context of the knowledge base, establishing valuable connections between practice and theory.

Ethical considerations and limitations are discussed in chapter 5.3. The reflection of the thesis process is introduced on chapter 5.4. Finally, the thesis concludes with chapter 5.5, where the areas for further research are addressed, providing a forward-looking perspective.

5.1   Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the development task *"How to support employees' self-directed learning in the workplace"*. The knowledge base aimed to comprehend the significance of self-directed learning and strategies for supporting it in the workplace. The development project delved into the challenges and needs of the employees on the topic and developed the current process and tools supporting self-directed learning for both employees and the company.

The questions guiding the development task for this thesis were:

1)   What are the challenges and needs experienced by the employees in self-directed professional development in the workplace?

2)   How can self-directed learning in the workplace be better supported with processes and tools?

The development task *"How to support employees' self-directed learning in the workplace"* was partly answered in the knowledge base and was deepened by the results of the research-based development project through the two questions guiding the development task. The knowledge base established a foundation based on self-determination, self-directed learning in the digital age, intrinsic motivation, coaching and coaching leadership and comparing the concepts on employee experience with self-directed learning. The framework provided insights into the psychological aspects that drive self-directed learning and the organizational conditions that support it. These findings are discussed further in the next chapter 5.2

Discussion. It should be noted that the impacts on employee experience were limited to the research-based development project of this thesis. Therefore, the research-based development project does not validate the indications of the knowledge base on the connection between employee experience and self-directed learning.

The significance of self-directed learning in design consulting, particularly within the context of design projects, is highlighted by the dynamic and often project-based nature of the work. Design consultants frequently transition between projects, working in self-directed teams without the constant presence of a supervisor. This fluid environment necessitates a proactive approach to learning, where designers must adapt swiftly to the changing needs of each project. The ability to engage in self-directed learning enables designers to stay ahead of evolving design industry and demands of clients. This approach to learning is not only reactive but a deliberate strategy for ongoing personal and professional development in the field of design consulting.

The first question guiding the development task focused on understanding the case company Gofore's Design business area employees' challenges and needs in the area of professional development in the workplace. The interviews, participatory observation, co-development workshops, professional development roadmap and professional development canvas test results and validation results helped to identify several challenges and needs. The main needs were access to mentoring and coaching for goal clarification, peer feedback and learning, inspiring career growth stories and a clearer professional development growth journey. Furthermore, a need emerged for more structured development planning, sharing the plans, and learning opportunities in projects. The challenges identified were lack of clarity on time allocation and recommended types of learning and, for some, the lack of designer colleagues in projects enabling peer learning.

The second question guiding the development task focused on how to better support self-directed learning in the workplace through processes and tools and aimed at producing a concrete process and tools for this purpose. The development project showed that the description of the process helped employees to understand the different stages of the process, the support services, and the tools available to help them progress in their professional development. The identified challenges of lack of clarity in career paths and lack of a model and structure for development plans can be addressed with a clear professional development process, career paths and professional development plans. The professional development canvas was considered as an effective tool with positive feedback on multiple sections of the canvas, on the ease of use and the emphasis on sparring and sharing.

Through the research and development process, all predefined goals and objectives were successfully achieved, and the initial questions guiding the development task were effectively

addressed. Furthermore, the research-based development project produced practical tools designed to support employees' self-directed learning in the case company.

5.2   Discussion

The emphasis on employee experience has grown significantly in discussions about attracting top talent with employees are prioritizing professional development over job satisfaction (Eklund 2021, Gallup 2019). Digital work environments are seeing a growing trend toward self-direction, creating a greater need for advanced self-directed learning in the workplace (Eskola 2021, Martela & Jarenko 2017). As discussed in the knowledge base, effective self-directed learning requires support from the workplace, supervisors, and potentially from coaches (Gratton 2022, Hiila et al. 2019, Savaspuro 2019a & 2020). According to principles from positive psychology, recognizing individual strengths and nurturing motivation are key factors in this process (Martela 2014, Ruutu &Salmimies 2015). Consequently, coaching is positioned as a valuable tool for planning and achieving professional growth and can be a useful skill for supervisors as well. (Carlsson & Forssell 2017, Finnish Coaching Association 2023, Hawkins & Smith 2006, Ruutu & Salmimies 2015, Ibarra & Scoular 2019, Jones et al. 2016).

The research findings also indicated the need for coaching, mentoring and peer sparring as essential components for fostering professional growth. This emphasis on collaborative and supportive learning environments aligns with broader trends in organizational development, indicating that effective professional development is best achieved through a combination of personal initiative and structured support. As noted in the knowledge base, reflection, feedback, praise, and sharing experiences can enhance learning. The research also indicates that peer feedback and peer learning and learning opportunities in projects are needed. The need for project learning opportunities is also linked to theory in the way effective self-directed learning requires purposefulness, building on existing knowledge, and opportunities to partice new skills. The motivation for self-directed learning may also stem from the need to prepare for job tasks, tackle work-related challenges, and pursue personal interests. Sharing of experiences was found to improve learning in the knowledge base , which can be identified in the request for career growth stories and the desire to share professional development plans with peers and mentors in research findings.

The need for structure and guidelines from the organization to enable and support self-directed learning was found both in theory and in research. The need for more structured approach to career development was indicated in the findings, as well as a professional development journey map proven to help visualize the process and increase understanding of the possibilities. Uncertainty on recommended types of learning hindered effective professional development planning. Also, the professional development plan canvas was

shown to help with providing more structure for development plans as it was easy to use, and the structured format was highly appreciated in facilitating clear and organized planning. One discovery was inconsistent formats of professional development plans where a single clear canvas can bring a sense of ease. As the demands of the job can make self-directed learning difficult, goals and professional development plan agreed with the employer can serve as a useful tool. The research found that the lack of clarity on time allocation possessed challenges for designers in effectively planning and pursuing their growth objectives.

The research findings offered significant insights into the challenges and opportunities related to employee professional development in the workplace. By promoting proactive career growth, cultivating a culture of knowledge-sharing, and providing clear guidelines, the organization can set out to tackle these challenges. Also integrating learning opportunities and peer-learning initiatives within projects can be seen as important for creating a collaborative and supportive environment for designers. Additionally, this the theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of self-directed learning and the employee experience. Integrating self-directed learning into the employee experience enhances workforce engagement and productivity. Overall, self-directed learning fosters a more empowered workforce, benefiting both individuals and organizations. Importantly, there are no contradictions between the knowledge base and the research conducted in the development work; instead, they complement each other by offering diverse insights into the challenges and opportunities surrounding employees' professional development.

The research project's findings and outcomes hold significant value for Gofore's ongoing development of professional development support. Moreover, individual designers and employees within the company stand to gain from the results generated by the development efforts. Specifically, the Professional Development Canvas serves as a practical tool accessible to all employees, garnering positive feedback from various stakeholders, including the People Operations team, internal coaches, supervisors, and individual employees. Furthermore, the development of Designer Competence Definitions and associated materials, including visualizations and role expectations, based on this research, is beginning to enrich professional development discussions between supervisors and designers.

The research may be of wider value to companies that are developing a process of self-directed professional development, particularly in the design and IT consultancy as the challenges identified are best generalised to the same sector. The research in the theoretical part can be used more widely. Professional development plan canvas is one example of a consistent tool for making a development plan. Other companies and organisations can also benefit from creating a canvas tailored to the needs of their own employees. This research and its results can serve as inspiration and a reference point for the development of processes and tools to support professional development more widely.

5.3   Limitations and ethical considerations of the thesis

The aim of this development work was not to find transferable knowledge, but to find insights and solutions to support the professional development of the designers and other employees in the case company. Many knowledge-intensive business organisations face the same challenge in supporting the professional development of their employees and it is likely that the results of this thesis will benefit organisations with similar challenges, roles and company structure more widely. Quantitative and qualitative data were both part of the research process. However, none of the data collected offered statistically representative or generalizable results, which is indicative of qualitative research. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 121).

As the development process followed the service design process, the research was conducted using the company's own employees and excluded research with other parties. The data collected throughout the thesis process was safely stored on both the researcher's computer and the Miro tool used for collect data. Once the analysis is completed and the thesis is finalized, the data will be destroyed. According to the Arene (2020, 21-22) guidelines, neither an ethical advance evaluation nor a research permit was necessary for this thesis.

The research-based development project research methodology employed in this thesis has inherent limitations, though it offers valuable insights into complex phenomena by providing extensive and detailed information on the case (Ojasalo et al., 2014, p. 52). However, it is essential to acknowledge that the intention of this thesis was not to generalize findings but to offer useful insights and suggestions for supporting employees' professional development in the workplace within the case company.

One significant limitation arises from the extended time span of the development project, as the case company's situation evolved during the project. One contributing factor to this was that client projects often take priority in consultancy firms, leading to delays and challenges in completing internal development projects. Moreover, the author's full-time employment without study leave during the thesis writing process posed time constraints.

The initiation of the project at the workplace, even before its selection as the master's thesis case, may have influenced the sequence of events and the depth of consideration given to the knowledge base during the development project. The project commenced at the workplace in August 2020 with a small assignment to refine the reasons behind the EX survey results and find possible solutions. Based on the initial findings, the development project was decided to be continued and plans were refined. After the projects preliminary report was completed in December 2020, the project was put on hold. The possibility of using the development project as a master's thesis topic only came up in the late spring of 2021, where it was seen an opportunity to continue the research and development project. At this point, the research

plan was refined, and the author began to advance the development project with the precision required for the master's thesis.

Additionally, the dependence on employees primarily from the Design Business Area during the development project may impact the transferability and scalability of the results to the entire organization. Nevertheless, efforts were made to ensure the generalizability of concrete tools, such as the Professional Development Canvas, which has been widely adopted across the company without notable challenges in applicability to various roles. Focusing on the Design Business Area inherently limits the generalizability of the findings, necessitating caution when interpreting the results. However, the results may still be applicable to similar companies with employees in comparable roles, serving as a reference point for future research endeavors. As the research and development work was confined to the Design business area within the case company, conducting a broader study across different departments could further investigate variations in practices and assess the satisfaction of both management and employees with these practices and processes. Despite these limitations, the insights gained from this research project contribute to the ongoing discourse on employee professional development in the workplace.

5.4   Reflection of the thesis process

The journey through this research process has been an invaluable learning experience for me. Although I am experienced in service design methodology and frameworks through years of professional experience in various development projects, undertaking a master's thesis was undoubtedly pushing the boundaries of my comfort zone. Looking back, I realize that I could have planned the research work even more meticulously, especially concerning the analysis and documentation of data. However, conducting workshops, interviews, creating visualizations, and developing tools were the aspects of this work that came more naturally to me.

With over 18 years of experience working as a designer and continuously pursuing further knowledge, starting my master's level studies introduced a whole new level of complexity, particularly in grappling with theoretical concepts. While I excel at grasping the bigger picture in complex scenarios and finding solutions, delving into academic literature and creating the knowledge base and explaining chosen solutions academically proved challenging. Additionally, my decision to write the master's thesis in English, driven by the English language work environment of the case company and the language of the collected data and sources, further compounded the challenges. Nevertheless, this journey has significantly enhanced my skills in academic writing, literature review, and writing in English, although at times, I struggled to find better ways to articulate my thoughts. I have also finally mastered finding and interpreting academic literature.

Balancing demanding work and family commitments with the independent study required for the thesis has been one of the major challenges throughout this journey. Transitioning to more demanding roles in my job made it evident that I did not have the capacity to fully dedicate myself to writing the thesis. Integrating courses into my work was considerably easier, and I underestimated the time commitment required for the thesis. Long breaks in progressing with the thesis and short writing sessions proved to be a detrimental combination. Ultimately, I ended up to spending my time reviewing previous work and attempting to catch up on where I left off and what needed to be done next without getting much writing done. Often, the unfinished data searches from the previous session felt unfamiliar, and I struggled to determine the next steps. Finally, taking a few long weekends off here and there allowed me to focus for extended periods and make progress.

While I was internally motivated to develop support for professional development in the case company and complete the work I had started, I found it challenging to muster the same motivation for writing the actual thesis. Constructing the knowledge base and justifying the methods with academic literature were particularly frustrating, possibly due to my extensive experience, as I did not require to justify familiar methods for myself. Additionally, there was no urgency to complete the thesis due to not having an acute need for the degree. I also lacked the time to attend thesis seminars due to work commitments and did not have much peer support from my study group. I completed my studies entirely remotely during the COVID era, so I never met my teachers or fellow students in person. Furthermore, I lacked guidance from my workplace for the thesis or perhaps did not ask for it clearly enough. My resilience and motivation were repeatedly tested, but I was determined to complete the thesis and obtain the degree. Fortunately, I was interested in the thesis topic, and wanted read many of the literature sources used in this work as part of my development as a coaching leader.

In hindsight, I am content with the lessons learned from this process, although I had hoped they would have come more easily. This experience underscores the challenges of self-directed learning without adequate support. Having coaching support along the way might have been beneficial. Although I recognize areas for improvement in the thesis process in retrospect, it has imparted lessons that I may not have gained otherwise.

5.5   Areas for further research

During the thesis work, the research delved into exploring and learning about supporting self-directed learning in the workplace, yet there remained much to explore. Firstly, there is a need to examine effective leadership strategies for professional development and the identification of professional development themes. It would also be worth exploring how to inspire employees to engage in self-directed professional development. Additionally, it is

relevant to investigate how coaching leadership can enhance overall employee experiences and contribute to fostering a culture of self-directed learning within organizational settings.

Moreover, it is important to address the complexities involved in fostering skills development specifically tailored to the unique demands of consulting work. Also, an examination of the prevalence and efficacy of coaching services in companies is essential. Understanding the extent of the need for coaching services and evaluating their impact on employees' self-directed professional development can provide valuable insights into optimizing support mechanisms within organizational settings.

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Note that the DeepL translator has been used in this report to support the fluent translation of the text, as the author is not a native English speaker.

Figures

Tables

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview questions

Interview questions

Baseline questions:
Name
Role
Business Unit
Responsibilities in professional development of employees

1. How do you see the importance of professional development in your BU?
2. Can you walk us through the process of professional development of an employee?
3. What kind of challenges have you noticed in the process?
4. How are professional development needs identified within your BU?
5. How would you make that better?
6. What kind of professional development plans do employees do?
7. Where do you collect all the professional development plans?
   ->Do you keep track of them?
8. What tools are used to support professional development?
9. What other tools or features do you think would be of benefit?
10. How do you use data in planning professional development?
11. What kind of use of data you think would be of benefit?
12. Anything else come in mind in the area of professional development?

Appendix 2: Test questions for the professional development plan

1. Fist thoughts about the canvas?
2. Was the canvas easy to use? How?
3. What were the most useful sections for you? Why?
4. Was there something you don't see use for? Why?
5. Would you add something? What?
6. What was your starting point? Have you made a professional development plan before?
7. Would you like to use this canvas by yourself or with someone? Who?
8. Would you like to have a sparring buddy, group, or coach to help you with your journey towards your goal? How?
9. With whom and how would you like to share your goal and plan with?
10. Any other comments?

Appendix 3: Design Competences intranet page

Design competences visualization.

- General expectations for Junior Designers
- General expectations for Mid-level Designers
  - Mid-level Designer roles (expectations and good to know)
- General expectations for Senior Designers
  - Senior Designer roles (expectations and good to know)
- General expectations for Lead roles in Design
  - Lead roles in Design (expectations and good to know)

General expectations for Junior Designers
- **Mindset:**
  - can-do attitude and willingness to learn and grow as a designer
- **Sales:**
  - Updates own Hohto CV and one-pager CV regularly
  - Participates in client interviews on own behalf
- **Resourcing:**
  - Active in resourcing discussions and project options
  - Takes care of own Hohto allocations
  - Is proactive in discussions with project manager and People Leader about looking for new tasks when current ones are ending.
- **Project Work**
  - Active team member
  - Asks help for problems, does not bang head to the wall alone
- **Skills & Experience**
  - Some work experience in design field
  - Skilled in design tools commonly used
  - Basic understanding of design thinking
  - Collaboration and communication skills
  - Strong problem-solving skills

> ⚠️ **Note**
> Junior Designers are rarely hired, mostly we hire straight to mid-level or senior designer positions

- Possible Junior designer roles

General expectations for Mid-level Designers
- **Mindset:**
  - Solid team member able to work also independently
- **Sales**
  - Helps in sales cases by filling own CV (Hohto profile + onepagers)
  - If needed, participates in the offer process, such as the preparation of a project plan or description
- **Resourcing**
  - Helps resourcing also in the client side. Actively looking for over work, missing skills and other signs of sales opportunities
- **Project work**
  - Capability to work as an independent team member and support others
  - Actively looks for client needs in current project.
  - Good collaborative skills
  - Working in multi-disciplinary teams
- **Skills & Experience**
  - Solid skills in at least one relevant design competence
  - Solid understanding in customer-centricity

Mid-level Designer roles (expectations and good to know)
- Strategic/business Designer
- Service Designer
- Accessibility specialist
- UX Designer
- UI Designer
- Visual/graphic Designer

General expectations for Senior Designers
- **Mindset:**
  - Committed and proactive team member taking responsibility in the quality of the project and other team members.
- **Sales**
  - Participates in offered solution or implementation, at least regarding own offers
  - proactively listening to client needs and finding new sales leads
- **Resourcing**
  - Readiness to accept more challenging projects, not just the favorite pet
- **Project Work**
  - The project backbone
  - Support others by mentoring and providing development feedback
- **Skills & Experience**
  - Thorough expertise in one design competence or more coarse skillset in several, understands of the bigger picture
  - Project management skills, able to propose a design approach to the client
  - Capability to make design process and method choices
  - Practical experience in several different projects
  - Skilled to work with the most demanding tasks and problems (performance, scalability) in the project
  - Capability to mentor and supports other team members and the client

Senior Designer roles (expectations and good to know)
- Senior Strategic/business Designer
- Senior Service Designer
- Senior Accessibility Specialist
- Senior UX Designer
- Senior UI Designer
- Senior Visual/graphic Designer

General expectations for Lead roles in Design
- **Mindset:**
  - Leadership abilities, creative approach to solutions and ability to facilitate others work
- **Sales**
  - Responsible of doing sales and offers, taking care of customers
  - Responsible for creating design project plans
  - Responsible for leading client interviews or team interviews
- **Resourcing**
  - Readiness for design leadership in several competences
- **Project Work**
  - Responsible for creating project practices
  - Responsible for design quality without being bottleneck
  - Responsible for onboarding, team meetings & other practices
  - Client work focused, responsible for discussion with the client and taking client needs into account
- **Skills & Experience**
  - Good communication skills

Lead roles in Design (expectations and good to know)
- Design Lead roles (a role used in client projects, title Design Lead, UX Lead for example)
- People Lead = possible Capability Lead role (a role usually on top of any design role)
- Capability Lead (role) (a role usually on top of any design role)
- Customer Team Lead (a temporary role in a customer account on top of a design role)

Appendix 4: Action plan based on the findings

Actions plan based on the findings

Continuation of good practices based on the findings:
- Selling more design teams to customer projects that also act as a platform for sharing knowledge and supporting professional growth.
- Sharing courses, materials, seminars, and other resources for designers to draw inspiration from.
- Implementation of feedback guidelines and templates to facilitate effective peer and project feedback.
- Consideration of designers' skills and professional development goals when matching them to projects.
- Providing coaching services to support designers in their professional growth.
- Utilization of Hohto data, skill categories, and Skill radar tool in aligning designers' skills with development goals.

Actions taken based within the company on the findings:
- Designer roles and mastery paths visualization to provide a clear trajectory for career growth.
- Adoption of the professional development plan canvas as a structured tool for planning self-development for all goforeans as a part of Gofore's development and success frame.
- Establishment of new company-wide professional development guidelines and a development path canvas in Gofore intranet.
- Compiling information on using coaches and mentors in the Gofore intranet Design pages for easy access and reference.
- Incorporating the filled professional development plan canvas into discussions with supervisors, mentors, or coaches to guide career conversations.

Suggested future actions based on the findings:
- Conduct a pilot run on small peer sparring groups to foster collaborative learning and support among designers or smaller capability teams.
- Establishing a Gofore Design professional development themes that are in line with the co-created Gofore Design vision.
- Better sharing training courses and materials for self-learning on professional development themes.
- Identifying designer forums and meetings that offer optimal opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration, improving the functioning of designer guilds.
- Collecting and sharing career stories on the Gofore intranet Design pages to inspire and provide insights to designers.
- Providing a dedicated space for development plans within the internal software profile to ensure visibility and accountability.

Appendix 5: Professional development plan canvas

Appendix 6: The first draft of the professional development plan MVP in a digital tool

What do I do now? Roles, skills, projects, tools, methods
1. GOAL : Roles, skills, projects, tools, methods..
DL
Skills / knowledge to learn
What helps me?
Who helps me?
Action steps
Measuring, feedback plan

What do I do now?

Role, skills, projects, tools, methods..

My role now **My skills now**

Role Role   Skill Skill Skill Skill Skill

My goal

Role, skills, projects, tools, methods..

Link to conflu

My goal role **My goal skills**

Role Role   Skill Skill Skill Skill Skill

What I need to learn to get to my goal and how?

Skills/knowledge, how to learn and grow?

Link to conflu

Deadline for my goal

dd.mm.yyyy

What helps me? + ADD

Online course ▼ Tell more..
Mentoring ▼ Tell more..
Project learning ▼ Tell more..

Link to conflu

Who helps me? + ADD

Firstname Lastname ▼ How?
Firstname Lastname ▼ How?

Link to conflu

Action steps + ADD

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

How do I measure if I have reached my goal?

Measuring..

How do I get feedback as I grow and take steps towards my goal? + ADD

Culture amp ▼ Tell more..
Other ▼ Tell more..

Link to conflu

Share your plan + ADD

Firstname Lastname ▼ Message

Save