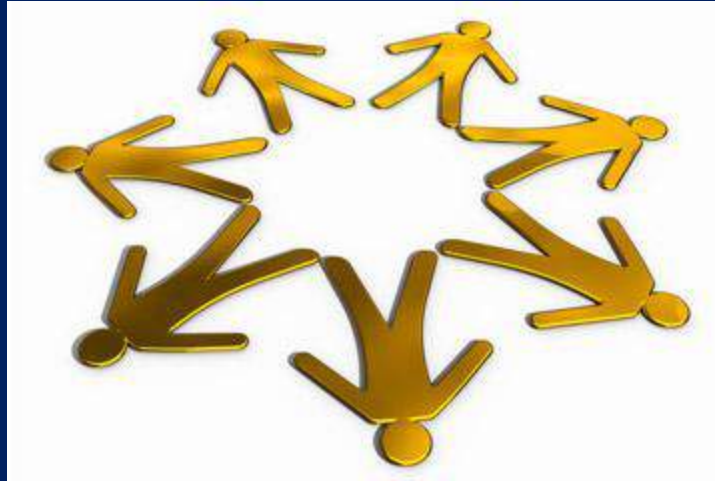


[Developing, Leading and Engaging People]



Lecture Title:

4. [Developing People – L&D Theories]

Lecturer: Paul Gauci

Date: 18th May 2026

13.00hrs-17.00Hrs



**Masters in
Human Resources Management**

Learning Objectives

Following this session students will be able to:

- Critically explain the theories and general best practices adopted by organisations relating to **learning and development (L&D)** - a critical aspect of organizational strategy, aimed at improving employee skills, knowledge, and performance while driving organizational growth.
- *Key theories and practices adopted by organizations: Behavioural Learning Theory; Cognitive Learning Theory; Social Learning Theory; Constructivist Theory; Andragogy (Adult Learning Theory).*
- -----
- Learn Best Practices in Learning and Development:
- *Needs Assessment; Personalized Learning; Continuous Development Culture; Utilizing Technology; Gamification; Knowledge Sharing; Measurement and Feedback; Inclusive and Diverse Programmes.*



Learning Method

- **Lecture focused on learning objectives and core content** as a key instructional process.
- **Formative assessment through participative learning tools and activities** will be utilised evaluating students' comprehension and academic progress throughout - with respect to understanding and applying HRM concepts.



- Learning and development (L&D) is a critical aspect of organizational strategy, aimed at improving employee skills, knowledge, and performance while driving organizational growth.
- Theories and best practices in L&D have evolved over time and draw from psychology, education, and business.
- Here are some key theories and practices adopted by organizations:



- Critically explain the theories and general best practices adopted by organisations relating to **learning and development (L&D)** - a critical aspect of organizational strategy, aimed at improving employee skills, knowledge, and performance while driving organizational growth.
- *Key theories and practices adopted by organizations: Behavioural Learning Theory; Cognitive Learning Theory; Social Learning Theory; Constructivist Theory; Andragogy (Adult Learning Theory).*



Theories in Learning and Development

1. Behavioral Learning Theory:

- Overview:
- Founded on the work of psychologists like B.F. Skinner and John Watson, this theory suggests learning is a result of conditioning. Desired behaviors can be reinforced through rewards (positive reinforcement) or discouraged through punishment (negative reinforcement).
- Rooted in behaviorism, this theory emphasizes learning through reinforcement and rewards.
- Organizations use techniques like incentives, recognition programs, and feedback to motivate employees and encourage desired behaviors.



Application in L&D:

- Training simulations or drills to reinforce specific behaviors.
- Incentive systems for skill acquisition and performance improvement.
- Use of repetitive practice and feedback loops.

Critique:

- Overemphasis on observable behavior may ignore internal cognitive processes.
- May lead to rote learning rather than deep understanding or innovation.
- Limited applicability in complex problem-solving or creative tasks.



2. Cognitive Learning Theory:

- Overview:
- Associated with Jean Piaget and Robert Gagné, this theory emphasizes internal processes like perception, memory, and problem-solving. Learning is seen as the acquisition and structuring of knowledge.
- This theory focuses on how employees process, store, and retrieve information.
- It emphasizes problem-solving, critical thinking, and knowledge transfer.
- Organizations might use structured training programs, workshops, and e-learning platforms to enhance cognitive development.



Application in L&D:

- E-learning modules that involve structured content and assessments.
- Use of instructional design models (e.g., Gagné's Nine Events of Instruction).
- Training that supports critical thinking and decision-making.

Critique:

- May underplay the influence of social and emotional factors in learning.
- Can be overly theoretical or detached from real-world experience if poorly implemented.



3. Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura)

- Overview:
- Learning occurs by observing others, imitating behavior, and receiving feedback. Emphasizes the role of modeling, imitation, and social interaction.
- This theory highlights the importance of observing and mimicking others.
- Peer learning, mentorship programs, and collaborative tools such as team workshops or shared online platforms are practical applications of this approach in organizations.



Application in L&D:

- Mentorship and coaching programs.
- Peer learning, shadowing, and on-the-job training.
- Use of social platforms and collaborative tools for learning.

Critique:

- Requires a strong organizational culture and effective role models.
- May not work well for abstract concepts or technical skills without direct practice.



4. Constructivist Theory:

- Overview:
- Developed from the work of Vygotsky, Dewey, and Bruner, this theory argues learners actively construct knowledge through experience and reflection.
- Based on the idea that individuals learn by actively constructing their own understanding and knowledge.
- Organizations apply this theory through experiential learning techniques like simulations, role-playing, and hands-on projects.



Application in L&D:

- Problem-based learning, case studies, and project work.
- Emphasis on learner autonomy and experiential learning.
- Use of interactive learning environments (e.g., simulations, gamification).

Critique:

- May lack structure for some learners who require guidance.
- Resource-intensive and may be difficult to scale across large organizations.



5. Andragogy (Adult Learning Theory):

- Overview:
- Focuses on how adults learn differently from children. Assumes adults are self-directed, goal-oriented, and bring prior experiences into learning.
- Developed by Malcolm Knowles, this theory addresses the specific ways adults learn.
- It emphasizes self-directed learning, relevance, and leveraging prior experiences.
- Organizations adopt approaches like personalized learning paths and project-based learning to cater to adult learners.



Application in L&D:

- Customizing training to leverage existing knowledge and experience.
- Offering flexible, self-paced learning (e.g., microlearning, online modules).
- Incorporating real-world applications into learning content.

Critique:

- Assumes all adults are self-motivated, which may not be the case.
- Requires L&D professionals to adopt learner-centric design, which can be challenging to implement uniformly.



Case Study: Applying Andragogy to Drive Learning in a Company

- Case Study Title:
- “Learning to Grow: How MedTech Solutions Became a Learning-Driven Organisation Using Andragogy”

Formative assessment



A. Company Background

- **MedTech Solutions** is a mid-sized healthcare technology company with 450 employees. The company recently shifted from selling hardware devices to offering integrated digital health platforms. This required employees to develop new skills in data analytics, customer consulting, and agile project delivery.
- However, early attempts at training failed. Employees described sessions as “too theoretical”, “irrelevant”, and “a waste of time”. Managers noticed low engagement and poor transfer of learning to the job.
- The HR Director, **Maria**, realised the company was treating employees like school students—delivering content *to* them rather than designing learning *with* them. She proposed redesigning the learning strategy using **andragogy**, Malcolm Knowles’ adult learning principles.



B. The Andragogical Intervention

- Maria and her L&D team redesigned the learning programme around the **six principles of andragogy**:

1. Need to Know

- Before each programme, employees received a short video explaining:
 - why the skill mattered
 - how it connected to business goals
 - how it would help them in their role



2. Self-Concept

- Employees chose:
- which modules to complete
- the order in which to complete them
- whether to learn via workshops, coaching, or self-paced digital content

3. Prior Experience

- Workshops began with:
- peer sharing of past experiences
- problem-solving discussions
- reflection on what already works
- Facilitators used employees' real cases rather than generic examples.



4. Readiness to Learn

- Learning was linked to:
- upcoming product launches
- new customer projects
- internal career pathways
- Employees could opt into learning when it aligned with their immediate needs.



5. Orientation to Learning

- Training shifted from theory to:
- simulations
- customer scenarios
- hands-on practice
- cross-functional problem-solving

• 6 Internal Motivation

- Employees set personal learning goals and tracked progress.
Managers recognised learning achievements in team meetings.



C. Outcomes After Six Months

- Participation in learning increased from **42% to 87%**
- Employees reported **higher confidence** in customer conversations
- Time to competency for new digital roles dropped by **30%**
- Managers observed **greater collaboration** and **knowledge sharing**
- Customer satisfaction scores improved by **12%**
- Maria presented the results to the executive team, who approved expanding the andragogical approach across the organisation.





- Q1. Which andragogical principles were most clearly applied in MedTech's new learning strategy?
- Q2. Why did the previous training approach fail, based on adult learning theory?
- Q3. How did linking learning to real projects improve readiness to learn?
- Q4. What role did internal motivation play in the success of the programme?

- **Q1. Which andragogical principles were most clearly applied in MedTech's new learning strategy?**
- **Model Answer:**
- MedTech applied all six principles, but the most prominent were:
- **Self-concept:** employees chose learning pathways and formats.
- **Prior experience:** workshops began with experience-sharing and real cases.
- **Orientation to learning:** training focused on practical, problem-centred activities.
- **Need to know:** employees received clear explanations of why learning mattered.
- These principles increased relevance, autonomy, and engagement.



- **Q2. Why did the previous training approach fail, based on adult learning theory?**

- **Model Answer:**

- The previous approach treated employees like passive recipients. It failed because:
- It did not connect learning to real work (violating orientation to learning).
- It ignored employees' existing knowledge (violating prior experience).
- It offered no choice or autonomy (violating self-concept).
- It lacked a clear rationale for learning (violating need to know).
- As a result, adults disengaged and did not transfer learning to practice.



- **Q3. How did linking learning to real projects improve readiness to learn?**
- **Model Answer:**
- Adults become ready to learn when they face real-life challenges. By aligning learning with:
 - product launches
 - customer projects
 - career pathways
- MedTech ensured employees saw immediate relevance. This increased motivation and accelerated application of new skills.



- **Q4. What role did internal motivation play in the success of the programme?**
- **Model Answer:**
- Internal motivation—such as personal growth, mastery, and professional pride—was activated through:
 - personal learning goals
 - progress tracking
 - recognition in team meetings
- This created sustained engagement beyond external rewards.





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- Learn Best Practices in Learning and Development:
- *Needs Assessment; Personalized Learning; Continuous Development Culture; Utilizing Technology; Gamification; Knowledge Sharing; Measurement and Feedback; Inclusive and Diverse Programmes.*



General Best Practices in Learning and Development

1. Needs Assessment: Organizations conduct thorough assessments to identify skill gaps, align training programs with business goals, and tailor content to employee needs.
2. Personalized Learning: Creating customized training programs to address individual development needs enhances engagement and effectiveness.
3. Continuous Development Culture: Encouraging lifelong learning through access to courses, certifications, and learning tools.
4. Utilizing Technology: Leveraging e-learning platforms, virtual training, and AI-driven tools for scalability and flexibility.



5. Gamification: Using gamified elements in training programs, such as point systems, leaderboards, or rewards, to enhance engagement.
6. Knowledge Sharing: Establishing mentorship programs, peer learning initiatives, and collaborative platforms to facilitate knowledge transfer.
7. Measurement and Feedback: Implementing metrics to evaluate the impact of training programs, paired with feedback mechanisms to refine L&D strategies.
8. Inclusive and Diverse Programs: Ensuring L&D initiatives cater to diverse learning styles, cultural contexts, and accessibility needs.



Critical Perspective

- While these theories and practices provide a solid foundation, organizations must contextualize their L&D strategies. What works for one context (e.g., manufacturing) may not suit another (e.g., tech start-up).
- Moreover, with the rise of AI, automation, and hybrid work, L&D must evolve to:
 - Prioritize digital fluency and soft skills.
 - Address learning equity and accessibility.
 - Foster a growth mindset and agility.



Case Study: L&D Strategy at IBM – Blending Theory with Practice

Organization:

- IBM (International Business Machines Corporation) – A global technology and consulting company.

Objective:

- To transform its workforce with future-ready skills in areas like AI, cloud computing, and cybersecurity while fostering a culture of continuous learning.

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Application of Learning Theories

1. Behavioural Learning Theory

- Use: Gamified training platforms like “Your Learning” use badges, leaderboards, and rewards to reinforce participation.
- Example: Employees earn digital credentials for completing courses, which are tied to performance reviews and internal promotions.
- Impact: Reinforcement of learning habits through extrinsic motivation.



2. Cognitive Learning Theory

- Use: IBM's cognitive learning platform tailors content using AI to recommend personalized learning paths.
- Example: A cybersecurity analyst gets a curated curriculum based on job role, learning history, and skill gaps.
- Impact: Structured knowledge acquisition tailored to the learner's cognitive processes and professional goals.



3. Social Learning Theory

- Use: Strong emphasis on mentorship, peer collaboration, and internal “Ask Me Anything” (AMA) sessions with experts.
- Example: "Think Academy" enables subject matter experts to share best practices via blogs, videos, and internal webinars.
- Impact: Promotes learning through observation, interaction, and social reinforcement.



4. Constructivist Theory

- Use: Employees engage in real-world problem-solving projects (e.g., hackathons, design sprints).
- Example: IBM's "Digital Nation Africa" initiative includes interactive tools and projects that help learners build solutions for local problems.
- Impact: Encourages experiential, hands-on learning and deep understanding.



5. Andragogy (Adult Learning Theory)

- Use: Programmes are self-directed, modular, and flexible, allowing learners to upskill at their own pace.
- Example: IBM's "SkillsBuild" platform offers personalized, real-life learning paths for both employees and the broader community.
- Impact: Respects adult learners' autonomy and experience, focusing on practical outcomes.



✓ Best Practices in Action

Best Practice	IBM Implementation
Needs Analysis	Data-driven skills assessments using AI analytics.
Personalization	AI-curated learning paths via “Your Learning” platform.
Blended Learning	Mix of online courses, live virtual sessions, and in-person workshops.
Learning in Flow	Just-in-time learning resources embedded in workflow tools like Slack and Salesforce.
Evaluation	Use of digital credentials and dashboards to track engagement and outcomes.





Outcomes

- >90% employee participation in digital learning initiatives.
- Thousands of digital badges issued—used for career mobility and recognition.
- Contributed to reduced hiring costs by reskilling internally rather than hiring externally.
- Strengthened innovation culture through continuous upskilling.



Critical Reflection

While IBM's L&D strategy is highly sophisticated and theory-informed, it also faces challenges:

- Requires significant investment in digital infrastructure.
- Self-directed models may disadvantage less tech-savvy employees.
- Balancing personalized learning with organizational consistency is complex.

✓ Conclusion

- IBM demonstrates how a large organization can strategically blend learning theories and best practices to build a scalable, adaptive, and effective L&D ecosystem.
- The integration of behavioural reinforcement, cognitive scaffolding, social interaction, experiential design, and adult learning principles creates a rich, learner-centric environment that aligns individual growth with business transformation.



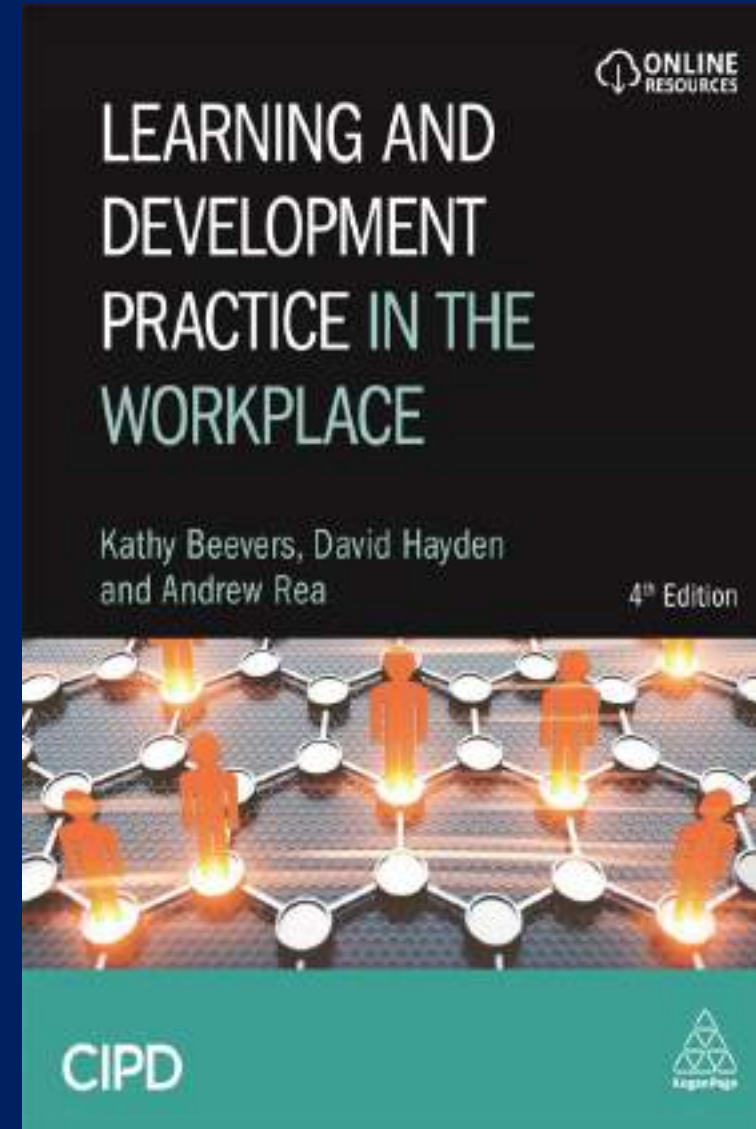
A Comprehensive Guide to Adult Learning Theories, part 1

The L&D Academy

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1eadufA9l8>



- This book covers what is required of an L&D professional and how to meet and exceed these expectations, how to align L&D activity with organisational strategy and, crucially, how to identify learning needs and design effective L&D practice.
- This new edition of Learning and Development Practice in the Workplace has been fully updated, reflecting the new CIPD Profession Map, and now has dedicated chapters on the different approaches to learning delivery, including face-to-face training and facilitation, technology-based learning, coaching, mentoring and social and collaborative learning.
- There is also expert guidance on learner engagement including insights from neuroscience and psychology, as well as advice on evaluating the impact of L&D.



Application in Practice

Case Study: L&D at Unilever – Building a Future-Fit Workforce

Background:

- Unilever, a global consumer goods company, operates in over 190 countries and employs more than 150,000 people. Facing digital disruption, sustainability demands, and evolving consumer behavior, Unilever realized the urgent need to reskill and upskill its workforce to remain competitive and innovative.

Formative Assessment



Challenge:

- Skills gap in digital marketing, data analytics, and agile working.
- Low engagement in traditional corporate training models.
- Need for inclusive and scalable L&D programs across global teams.

Actions Taken – Application of Best Practices

Best Practice	Unilever's Implementation
1. Needs Assessment	Conducted a global skills audit to identify current vs. future capabilities required.
2. Personalized Learning	Launched "My Learning Platform" – AI-powered, offering tailored courses by role, skill level, and interest.
3. Continuous Development Culture	Introduced "Flex Experiences" – short-term internal gigs for cross-functional learning.
4. Utilizing Technology	Partnered with Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, and internal platforms to deliver hybrid learning experiences.
5. Gamification	Created learning challenges and recognition systems (badges, leaderboards).

- Outcomes:

- 80%+ of employees engaged in self-directed learning within the first year.
- Increased internal mobility by 35% through upskilling.
- Stronger leadership pipeline and greater digital literacy across the organization.
- Positive feedback from diverse employees who felt represented and included in training content.

 Question:

- Critically analyze how Unilever applied best practices in Learning and Development to address its strategic workforce challenges.

Model Answer:

- Unilever effectively applied a comprehensive Learning and Development strategy grounded in globally recognized best practices.
- The foundation of their L&D transformation was a detailed needs assessment, allowing the company to clearly identify current skill gaps, particularly in digital and agile competencies. This evidence-based approach ensured that learning investments were aligned with business needs.



- To address learner diversity and preferences, Unilever adopted personalized learning through AI-powered platforms, enabling employees to access curated content that matched their roles and career aspirations.
- This aligns with principles from Andragogy (Adult Learning Theory), emphasizing self-direction and relevance.



- A key success factor was fostering a continuous development culture via “Flex Experiences,” offering employees real-world learning projects beyond traditional training.
- This reflects Constructivist Learning Theory, where individuals learn best by doing and reflecting on experiences.



- Leveraging technology allowed for scalable and flexible learning delivery.
- The use of external content providers and internal tools made training accessible across time zones and devices.
- Furthermore, gamification techniques boosted learner motivation, echoing Behavioural Learning Theory, where reinforcement drives engagement.
- Unilever also promoted social and collaborative learning, supported by Communities of Practice, consistent with Social Learning Theory.
- This encouraged sharing of tacit knowledge and peer-based development.



- Critically, Unilever embedded measurement and feedback mechanisms, using analytics and evaluation models to monitor effectiveness and guide improvements.
- Lastly, the design of inclusive and diverse programmes ensured all employees – regardless of location, background, or ability – could engage meaningfully with learning opportunities.
- In conclusion, Unilever's multi-faceted, theory-informed L&D strategy not only closed capability gaps but also embedded a high-impact, inclusive learning culture aligned with its long-term business vision.



Quiz: Learning Theories

1. Behaviourism focuses primarily on:

- A. Internal mental processes
- B. Emotional development
- C. Personal meaning-making
- D. Observable behaviours and external stimuli



2. According to Skinner, learning occurs through:

- A. Insight
- B Social interaction
- C. Reinforcement and consequences
- D. Self-reflection



3. Which theorist is most associated with classical conditioning?

- A. Bandura
- B. Pavlov
- C. Bruner
- D. Maslow



4. Cognitivism emphasises:

- A. Trial-and-error learning
- B. Mental processes such as memory and problem-solving
- C. Rewards and punishments
- D. Emotional intelligence



5. Which concept is central to Piaget's theory?

- A. Stages of cognitive development
- B Operant conditioning
- C. Self-actualisation
- D. Social modelling



6. Constructivism argues that learners:

- A. Passively absorb information
- B. Learn best through repetition
- C. Construct knowledge through experience
- D. Learn only through observation



- **7. Social Learning Theory states that people learn primarily through:**
- A. Memorisation
- B. Observation, imitation, and modelling
- C. Trial and error
- D. Reinforcement only



8. Bandura introduced the concept of:

- A. Cognitive dissonance
- B. Conditioning
- C. Scaffolding
- D. Self-efficacy



9. Andragogy (Knowles) focuses on:

- A. How children learn
- B. How adults learn
- C. Behaviour modification
- D. Memory retention



- **10. According to Knowles, adults learn best when learning is:**
- A. Teacher-led
- B. Abstract and theoretical
- C. Problem-centred and relevant
- D. Highly structured



References

- Armstrong M. (2009) Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice - Kogan Page 11th Edition
- Hayden D and Beevers K (2025) Learning and Development Practice in the Workplace - The Complete Guide Kogan Page
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