Article

Addressing Agency Problem in Employee Training: The Role of Goal Congruence

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Abstract: Individualized learning plans and corresponding training programs are maintained and organized in most organizations. Employees may be averse to training if they do not see how it contributes to their professional advancement. This is an example of conflict between management and employee interests in a business. The misalignment between management's offerings and employees' desires is a significant factor contributing to such a situation. Our research focused on how companies and individuals put training resources to use from a perspective of divergent goals. It provides insights into making employee training more effective. We investigate the relationship between organizational, individual, and training efficacy using the principal–agent theory and the concept of bounded rationality. We attempted to validate three a priori conditions relating to goal congruence, training motivation, and decision-making through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. As per participant inputs, career aspirations drive employees' training preferences. The significance of goal congruence in achieving corporate objectives is often neglected in the academic literature. Although goal congruence can be a useful tool in assisting organizations in achieving their stated objectives, enhanced communication and discussion between managers and employees are required in order to improve and align employee goals with the company's, for the sake of the individual's and organization's development. Furthermore, firms should invest in technology-enabled learning that ensures better access to learning, in order to achieve the kind of productivity and profit margins that would benefit everyone involved. We have also proposed a training value transaction model that accommodates the diverse interests. The model depicts the role of goal congruence in enhanced value fulfilment of the principals as well as agents.

Keywords: technology-enabled learning; employee development; principal–agent problem; training effectiveness; goal alignment; training motivation; training value transaction model

1. Introduction

Ensuring survival in a dynamic environment makes skilling and reskilling necessary for organizations and employees [1,2], and this is achieved through employee training and learning [3]. Training significantly improves the effectiveness of sustainable management practices by positively influencing labor productivity [4]. The important role of employee training against the backdrop of Industry 4.0 is increasingly being examined by contemporary researchers [5–7]. Training contributes to sustainable HRM practices and is found to positively influence the employability skills of employees working for organizations that have adopted Industry 4.0 practices [8]. Training is also positively correlated with firm performance indicators such as profit and profit per employee and thus creating organizational sustainability [9]. Continuous learning helps improve employee performance and equips them for the future [10,11]. Employee training amounts to

organization-sponsored formal learning opportunities to improve employees' capabilities that can further the organization's competitive advantage [12]. This shows how training and learning go hand in hand. Through multiple processes, employees can grasp the company's strategy that can make them more committed to achieving those goals through the implementation of the proposed strategy [13–15]. Training can help build the competencies required for strategy execution [16]. Since skill development improves organizational performance [17], significant resources are allotted to training and development. This creates a climate for continuous learning that would encourage knowledge and idea sharing among employees of the organization. Additionally, this further promotes new knowledge and innovation [18,19], reducing absenteeism [20], enhancing the organizational absorptive capability and innovative performance [21].

Training programs for employees can be imparted in various forms, such as internal, external, virtual, e-learning, classroom training, etc. Trainer charges, salaries, venue, material development and delivery, time spent away from work, and facilities add to training costs. The newest trend in employee training is technology-enabled learning, which provides a considerably more cost-efficient model of learning, emphasizing the role of the learner. The training motivation of the trainees is a critical determinant of training effectiveness [22–24]. Individual factors such as motivation and attitudes can be changed through appropriate and timely interventions to improve training effectiveness [25]. Trainees may express interest or disinterest when asked to undertake learning modules. Several factors could influence their preferences, such as the learning topic and content, perceived qualities of the trainer, transfer of learning opportunities, and rewards attached. Employees tend to be optimistic about attending training programs that could personally benefit their career growth. Research in the early 1990s also presented that training motivation would be enhanced if trainees perceived the training program as beneficial and essential. Job utility and career utility significantly influence the training motivation of employees [22,26,27]. Career planning also relates to training motivation [28]. Recent research reaffirms similar ideas highlighting that being in a learning mode supports a sustainable career for individuals [29,30].

This goes on to prove how the significance of employee learning remains high. Training and learning programs with present or future relevance are always favored. The discussion so far has shown how extant research has established formal employee learning initiatives as being result-oriented. Learning opportunities provided by organizations could be mandatory or voluntary for the employees. While most organizations meticulously invest resources in creating and executing personalized learning plans, the employees may be unwilling to expend their efforts on training unless they see clear contributions to their career aspirations. Thus, despite best efforts, organizational training can, at times, result in failure. Well-planned training efforts may sometimes not contribute to the objectives decided initially. This points toward the varied goals that the management and employees of an organization aim to achieve. Divergent sets of goals within the same system that do not align can lead to ineffectiveness at multiple levels. Agency theory provides a structure to examine such divergent goals. In the training and learning context, the theory offers a fresh perspective as learning involves multiple stakeholders such as the learners, learning and development departments, and the top management. In such a situation, ensuring training effectiveness becomes a challenge. On the other hand, when two parties jointly contribute to the achievement of common goals, goal congruence is said to exist [31]. In employee training, goal congruence can ensure better effectiveness. Several studies have examined training effectiveness and evaluation mechanisms. However, not many studies have focused on the importance of agency behavior and goal congruence in employee training. As much as goal congruence is an agreement between the two parties [32], it implies cooperation and commitment [33,34]. Goal incongruence is cited as an important reason for an agency problem [35]. Applied to employee training, goal congruence can lead to better goal achievement.

Employee training has changed considerably in terms of delivery as well as learner orientation with the advent of technology. The technology-enabled training that is made available to employees today makes learning much more accessible and give employees a high amount of flexibility to time and pace their learning as per convenience [36]. This has made the organizational training function cater to the requirements of both the organization and the employees to a great extent. However, there is a choice aspect that works in the case of such learning. There is a large amount of decision-making related to learning that is expected from the employees. Within the choices available to them, employees try to make rational decisions relating to their own training and skill improvement.

Taking this premise further, this paper examines interest differences displayed by the organizations and individuals in employee training. The following section studies training and development in the context of the principal–agent theory and bounded rationality. It particularly investigates the goal differences of organizations and individuals from the perspective of the principal–agent problem and tries to explain the subsequent goal choices using bounded rationality. This was carried out by setting three a priori conditions based on the literature and subsequently trying to examine them with the collected data. The research objectives of our study were to examine the reasons why organizations and individual employees invest in training and to find out how each party tries to maximize their benefits by doing so.

Based on the narrative presented above, we derived the following research questions to validate empirically.

- How does training contribute to individual and organizational goals?
- Why do individuals and organizations make specific training choices?
- How is the congruence of individual and organizational training goals achieved?

The remaining study is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical background, Sections 3 and 4 explain the methodology and the data analysis, Section 5 presents the discussion, Sections 6 and 7 include the implications and conclusion, and Section 8 presents the limitations and future scope of the study.

2. Theoretical Background

Though the agency theory has its roots in economics, with the advent of time, the concept has been applied to other areas that are centered around issues associated with the prioritization of individuals' goals in a principal–agent relationship and its resolutory mechanism within an organization. It is noteworthy to mention that though the principal–agent relationship is configured in such a way that the agent has the freedom to act and take decisions within the boundaries defined by the organization [37], the motivation of individuals could be different from that of their organizational goals and their acts can be construed as self-serving by other members. The intention wielded by different groups such as owners, board of directors, employees and shareholders do not have to be the same when comparisons are carried out [38]. Therefore, the divergent motives that persist at various levels in the organization can have an impact on the expanse of agency displayed by agents in a principal–agent relationship. For example, in the training setting, there exists the possibility of involving external agents as trainers. In such cases, the training outputs are more aligned with the organization's goals when the trainer carries out a needs assessment with an emphasis on organizational performance criteria. Trainers who approach the organization with predefined, egocentric "needs" for themselves will struggle to engage in the business's requirements, and may not deliver value.

Social interaction is embedded in the principal–agent relationship, having two or more parties, where one enacts the role of an agent for or on behalf of the other, usually designated as a principal in functions that involves decision-making [39]. On many occasions, the interaction between principal and agents are based on contractual obligations and epitomize the usefulness of social connectedness. The agency theory is deep-rooted in the philosophy that co-operating parties intend to gain profits either for themselves or for the organization that they represent.

2.1. Agency Theory in Management and Its Implications for Learning and Development

One of the fundamental problems with agency theory is that of information asymmetry that exists among the multiple parties involved in the principal–agent relationship. The degree of promoting individual priorities by the principal as well as the agent is greatly influenced by the Machiavellianism of the parties in the relationship [40]. There exists a certain degree of moral hazard in such relationships as there is a possibility of agents resorting to acting independently of observation or contractual agreements in reaction to inputs provided by the principal [41]. The effectiveness of agency relies upon the degree of social connectedness and trust [42].

There exists a large volume of literature involving the agency theory in the management literature in comparison to the other fields such as political science, economics, sociology, law, and many other domains [38]. Eisenhardt in 1989 [43], studied motivation through numerous research works that are conceptual as well as empirical in nature. These works have probed the application of agency theory in different contexts such as that of information systems [44], motivation and incentives [45,46], the uncertainty of outcomes [47], risk acceptance and aversion [48], hierarchical governance [49], and organizational structure [50].

The literature in this area concluded that the assumptions under agency theory hold relevant in the management discipline and are consistent with the presupposition set for other fields namely, sociology, economics, and political science. Conflict among the parties is assumed to be an inevitable component of the principal–agent relationship. However, researchers could test alternative configurations to conflicts. An exploration of the continuous improvement effort to achieve organizational goals revealed that the trust factor that exists between the principal and agent alone is not enough to motivate the agents to put in the extra mile required to meet the objectives [51].

The development of humans has emerged in three waves. While the first wave emphasized learning, the second focused on aspects of individual performance and on improving organizational effectiveness. The third highlights diversification and globalization [52]. The third wave has resulted in a scenario that created dynamism through global perspectives and prompts more efforts to be put into learning, performance improvement and overall development.

Traditionally, the human resource function significantly emphasizes learning, and the opportunities in this area provide an avenue for the principal–agent relationship to be acknowledged within knowledge management and socialization areas [52]. The diversification of HRD into newer areas such as global HRD and virtual HRD enables us to propose certain novel conditions, and empirically validate them beyond initial definitions that are aimed at enhancing the knowledge, skills, and capacities of human resources in the organizations.

The human resource management and human resource development practices need to be closely related to an organization's strategy. Employee training is an integral element of strategic human resource management and amounts to organization-sponsored formal learning opportunities aimed at improving employees' capabilities that can further the organization's competitive advantage [12]. Employee training plays a major role in strategy execution by contributing to organizational effectiveness and productivity [53]. Learning is the most important outcome of training [25]. Without learning, training may be considered as a costly and futile exercise for an organization. Thus, coupled with the increased learner orientation, this resulted in the creation of training departments across organizations, now referred to as learning and development departments.

2.2. Individual and Organizational Goals

Organizations invest in training as a means to optimize their workforce potential. Companies also invest in developing new skills of employees according to market demand [54]. HR systems may also consider the organization's future needs and timely preparation of the workforce to execute the management activities [55]. The outcome of training is expected to improve employee performance effectively and efficiently. Formal

learning is driven in organizations through training sessions and self-learning modules made available to the employees. Learning is a result of training and refers to a relatively permanent change in cognition [56].

In the Agency Theory, there is a leader—the principal—and the follower—the agent. What binds the two parties is a contract that is initiated by the principal [57]. An agent, therefore, is a party whom the principal hires to accomplish the principal's goals and objectives [58,59]. The principal–agent problem can directly be attributed to employee training and development. The goal of the principal or the employer is to maximize profit. With this goal in mind, they try to improve capability through the skill development of employees. The goal of the agent is to maximize gains with minimum effort. Having established this, we could now examine the perspective of an employee. A definite goal that an employee may have is career progression, among others. Therefore, it can be assumed that the employee decides to attend the training or make use of learning opportunities only if it is relevant to career growth. Otherwise, the employee would prefer to dedicate maximum time to finishing the work assigned rather than compromising productive time to complete learning modules. Work commitments often take precedence. Finishing the assigned work on time can be more rewarding than attending a training program that may not contribute directly to career growth. Work completion leads to rewards such as better appraisal, increased compensation, and incentives. The agency theory maintains that the decision-maker at the top level of the organization has a low risk aversion. On the other hand, the employees at lower levels would be risk-averse and may do what is possible to avoid risk through self-serving behavior or shirking [60].

The agent or the employee may have hidden intentions—a personal agenda—parallel to the employer's plans, and this may not be fully and explicitly known to the employer. "The problem of hidden intentions refers to a situation in which the expected benefits for the principal depends on the agent's intention and the establishment of a principal–agent relation that involves sunk costs for the principal" [61]. There would be pluralistic motives, actions, and behaviors from different parties that may significantly affect the success or failure of various initiatives [43]. This explains how employee training or learning may be approached differently by the organization and the employees. Azevedo and Akdere [62] investigated the utility and implications of the agency theory in the area of training and development. They concentrated on the self-interest behaviors of the appointed trainers and how these motivations could impede the training process. Our research takes a slightly different path by looking at the employees or the trainees as the agents. At all levels above that of the employee, the agent becomes the principal while passing on orders to the levels below. Figure 1 shows a simplified representation of the principal–agent relationship in employee training. This study progressed with this structure as the base.

Training an employee provides the principal with a chance to reward or promote the agent. However, training comes at a cost, and the principal should be ready to invest. Training increases the agent's productivity through effort and their chance to be hired outside the organization increases [63]. This means that while investing in training, there are risks and benefits for the principal. One major associated risk would be that the employees might leave the organization once their skills are updated [64,65]. Therefore, the management devices control measures to avoid such situations. Examples of such measures would be bond agreements and loyalty bonuses. Organizations do this to prevent employees from leaving the company after receiving the necessary training and certification to pursue better career options. Another option exercised by the organization is to tie extrinsic rewards to new learning.

The above discussion guides us to set the first a priori condition as given below:

Condition 1. *Goal conflict between the principal and agent results in the principal trying to align the two sets of goals by introducing internal mechanisms concerning training and learning.*

The fundamental problem as per the agency theory is how the principal can persuade their agent to make the choices he would make when the agent's goals conflict with

their own [66]. This is when training is made compulsory. When training is mandatory, employees participate, willingly or not [67]. Factors such as quality commitments, statutory requirements, certifications, and stiff competition have prompted organizations to make learning mandatory for employees. To get a tighter grip on the employees, learning and skill development are tied to appraisals to ensure attendance. Deviations may be considered misconduct and may have consequences. Organizational misconduct may result from the deeds of single and independent agents who do not consider the preferences of shareholder principals and their representatives—the directors who are on the board and are part of the senior management [68]. Such misconduct would be dealt with using rules and policies. For managing employee behavior, organizations establish internal compliance structures such as mandatory certifications, digital badges, credits, and a minimum number of training hours within a given time limit. The different goals of the principal and agent are aligned by implementing rules and policies. Such congruence or alignment can lead to sustainable learning practices in organizations. Clements [69] proposed that various stakeholders could collaborate to create sustainable learning opportunities for learners. This implies how the alignment of interests of the principal and agent could benefit both the individual employees as well as the organization. Designing appropriate learning systems contributes to organizational sustainability [70]. Employee development also promotes the growth of the specific industry and the sustainability initiatives of the organization [71].
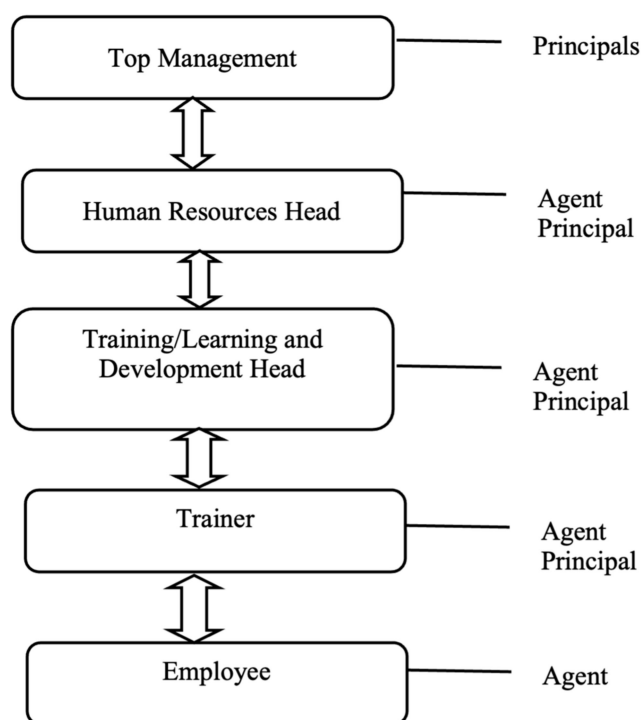

Figure 1. Principal–agent relationship in employee training.

2.3. Training Motivation, Goal Choices and Bounded Rationality

Future goals influence the motivation of learners in workplaces [72], and it can have an impact on the training choices of employees. A few employees may view training as a window to achieving their goals, while others may view it as a waste of time [22]. As per the definition, motivation includes all "processes that account for an individual's intensity, direction, and persistence of effort toward attaining a goal" [73]. The goal setting theory [74] presents that specific and intricate goals, with feedback, lead to good performance. In the principal–agent context, the principal can devise attractive goals linked to attending training programs. This could motivate individuals to attend training. Agreeing on learning goals and tying these to performance appraisals and rewards can play a significant role

in goal alignment [75]. Doing this can motivate the trainees to focus on learning as it provides a means of realizing their personal goals. Based on this, we set the second a priori condition as:

Condition 2. *A particular goal may seem more attractive to the agent if it plays a role in accomplishing larger, long-term personal goals in life; the agent is motivated to attend the training program if it contributes to their own career goals.*

Individuals generally set several milestones concerning their career goals. As proposed by the expectancy theory [76], motivational force (MF) = expectancy × instrumentality × valence. On the evaluation of the final reward, the individual makes an effort. Such effort, aligned with the career needs, can lead to better performance. In the context of training, if the individual feels that attending training would be more rewarding than completing the day to day assigned work, the individual would be motivated to attend the training. When an employee sacrifices productive work time to attend training, s/he expects it to bring benefits in the long run. Training should always address adult learning principles since adults are expected to have clear expectations. These pertain to the usefulness of the training topic, the trainers' approach, training material, how employees/trainees are treated, training settings, and so on. If these appeal to the employee as adding value to their jobs and careers, they would deem the training necessary. Adults are reasonably responsive to external motivators such as a better job or higher salaries, but the most effective motivations are intrinsic (e.g., aspiration for increased job satisfaction or self-esteem). Therefore, if adult learning principles are ignored, the training function could limit the employees' motivations [77]. Attractive rewards attached to training can also motivate employees to attend the training programs that are in line with the organization's motives. The learning-related decisions of adults are deeply embedded in the bounded rationality framework. Employees try to rationalize their decision to enroll or nominate themselves to a training program by seeking information about the utility of the program from many diverse sources such as their peers, supervisors and faculty [78]. Having looked at the typical mechanisms concerning how individual interest to attend training is built, we further examined how, within given constraints, employees make their training choices.

Similar to other areas, bounded rationality contributes to decision-making pertaining to human resource development activities [79]. Bounded rationality goes by the central assumption that actors are goal-oriented, and it factors in the cognitive, information, and time constraints that can hinder the goal achievement of decision makers [80]. Simon also argued that the choices are subjective and greatly depend on the individual characteristics of the decision maker. Thus, employees seek to maximize their benefits by choosing the best possible options within the constraints imposed by the organization. Such constraints could be related to the topic, amount or mode of training. Individual characteristics that could influence the training choices would be their career aspirations, learning or achievement goal orientation, or even individual learning styles. Proponents of bounded rationality also say that goals evolve or change over time, are formed through discussions and bargaining, and are held under control by the decision makers [79]. Bounded rationality is based on the premise that decision makers may be constrained by time or resource limitations, the ambiguity of situations, or insufficient information. Bounded rationality and rational analysis complement each other, and this implies that proactive responses, as well as satisficing, may be observed in a given decision [81]. Though rationality is the intention, actual decision-making is bounded and there could be errors in judgement [82]. Therefore, the training goals that the organization sets may or may not appeal to the individual employee, but the employee makes the most rational choice, given the constraints that could maximize their individual gains. Satisficing may happen both at the principal's and the agent's levels. In many cases, the principal may be more concerned about furthering the shareholder benefits, while what the agent wants may be more personal and long-term. However, both parties with their own priorities would try to settle for decisions that are sufficient and satisfactory within what is available [83]. In employee training,

the organization first makes a choice, making training opportunities available, and the individual employee further chooses from what the organization offers. The choice aspect is especially important in the case of flexible e-learning options that many organizations make use of.

In short, though most HRD strategies are well thought out, chances are that they could also fail, due to the contingencies involved. It therefore becomes the duty of the decision makers to devise methods that can yield positive results. The training function needs to play a strategically supportive role in organizational decision-making and direction setting. Learning professionals should be change agents who are actively involved in designing and implementing effective learning interventions that aid planned change. The training/learning and development function should play a significant role in sensitizing the organization and the employees to the consequences of the chosen courses of action—be it positive or negative. As explained above, attending training programs also involves a decision-making in terms of choosing a relevant training program from the available option, therefore, bounded rationality plays a role.

This brings us to the third a priori condition:

Condition 3. *In the process of making goals attractive and choosing attractive goals, both the principal and the agent are making decisions, respectively. The principal first makes a choice, and from the options given by the principal, the agent makes a choice.*

3. Approach/Methodology

All research aims to advance, iterate, and widen an existing body of knowledge or found evidence, and/or find new conclusions by engaging robust methods. Philosophy, methodology, and strategies bolster the research design, which investigators use to address the study's key question. Methodology is indeed the research strategy that guides data generation and interpretation to respond to the study's questions. Both positivist and interpretivist research have specific guidelines for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. A grounded-theory-based approach [84] was adopted for our study to explore the factors that help to make organizational training attractive to individuals which result in the congruence of the individual as well as meeting organizational goals. Grounded theory (GT) is a systematic and versatile approach. This method works at its best when understanding of a concept is very minimal. Another rationale behind adopting this approach is the fact that it aids in developing an analytical framework that uncovers a process in the field of inquiry. The grounded theory method also helps to produce theories based on empirical evidence. Along the lines of most qualitative studies, we were also not attempting to test any hypotheses [85,86], but attempting to garner evidence for a priori conditions set for the study in the prior section. The qualitative research approach seeks to understand a variety of social phenomena, including culture, process, occurrences, messages, and experiences. This paves the way for future research by forming conceptual models [84]. We have used a purposive sampling strategy for our study. Purposeful sampling is a qualitative research method used to recruit participants with in-depth knowledge of the issue being investigated.

We selected knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS) with operating units based out of India for our study. Knowledge-intensive businesses, to gain a competitive advantage, rely heavily on staff certification and reskilling. This attribute makes them the most desirable for this study. A combination of semi-structured interviews (10 in number) and two focus group discussions (FGD) was deemed appropriate to obtain data for a qualitative study as opined in prior works [87]. The interviews and FGD (*N* = 24), where n indicates the number of participants, were conducted in a sequential manner.

We decided to adopt a combination of interviews and FGDs based on thoughtful review of the prominent literature. Though the prevailing literature did not provide any kind of conclusive evidence highlighting the advantage of one method over another [88–90], it advocated the view that focus group data were a collective representation of ideas that emerge out of group interaction. Furthermore, FGD holds an advantage over dyadic interviews as the interview respondents would not have thought about an idea or question

in detail, as they may be habituated to a certain way of thinking. However, FGDs are not free from limitations, as observed by Janis [91] and Levine and Moreland [92], and the points discussed in the FGD could be outcomes of group think. Several researchers [93,94] have opined that the dyadic nature of interviews places respondents in a position where they have to elaborate on their views; this will help gain more crucial, and sometimes, exclusive, information. However, not many studies have systematically inquired about the similarity embedded in the data produced out of FGDs and individual interviews [95].

A technical evaluation of text generated from FGDs and in-depth interviews helped to understand that FGDs aided in identifying more macro-level issues whereas in-depth interviews provided more detailed insights into problems [90,96]. The insights gained from the above-mentioned research helped us to understand how data from focus group discussions vary from that of interviews and this prompted us to choose a combination of these two methods in our work. Our study was designed to learn about differences that are inherent in the training goals of principals and agents and how they can be aligned for achieving organizational performance, and our work was not an attempt to illustrate the comparative advantage of one method over the other.

In order to satisfy the qualifying criteria for each participant, respondents for the interviews and FGDs were recruited from knowledge-intensive business sectors where employee learning was a priority. The data were analyzed thoroughly, and the researchers felt the need to corroborate the findings with further evidence.

The usefulness of qualitative research is closely related to the quality of the participants who freely give their time and thoughts [97,98]. In the in-depth interviews, except for two, all the respondents in this study were in positions of authority and were directly involved in training decision-making. This was carried out with the purpose of learning from the newer personnel's experience. During the time of the study, participants had an average of 16 years of experience in their respective fields. Five of the respondents had been with their current employer for more than eight years at the time of the interaction. As a result, they were able to more accurately depict the changes that had occurred in these organizations' learning and training environments. The study included three women, two of whom held positions of leadership in their respective organizations. One person was an assistant director of talent development, while another was a project manager of transitions and transformations. The majority of those who participated possessed relevant degrees or certifications in their field of expertise. On average, each interview lasted approximately 30 min. Subsequently, two FGDs were organized between February and April 2022. FGD participants had an average experience of 19 years. Of the fourteen respondents invited for FGD, three were females and the rest were males. Two of them were junior-level employees with less than 5 years of experience, and the rest were middle-level and senior-level managers engaged in process ownership roles.

The participants of our study, both for interview and FGD, represented industries such as information and communication technology, pharma (R&D), management consulting, accounting, book-keeping and tax, and engineering (automobile). These are all knowledge-intensive business services. We focused on these industries as they place a high importance on employee learning. The broad purpose revealed to the participants was that this was a study on training, learning, and development. The respondents' voices/videos were recorded with their consent. It was also explained to the participants how we would analyze their responses.

To start with, we asked the respondents a few common questions that included:

- How does employee learning happen in your organization?
- What are the challenges as far as learning is concerned?
- What are all the elements that motivate and attract people to participate in learning and development initiatives?
- How many learning decisions are made by the employees? When do you call training or learning effective?

Occasional probing led to a free-flowing conversation in most cases. We ceased to probe when we attained theoretical saturation where we did not obtain any additional piece of information from the respondents. In recent years, the idea of saturation has become widely acknowledged as the cornerstone of qualitative research. It is typically taken to mean that additional data collection or analysis is not necessary at this time [99].

4. Data Analysis

The interviews and FGDs were transcribed verbatim. Preliminary coding was carried out using MS Excel. We followed a consensual coding approach for this study. After identifying the preliminary codes, we undertook a detailed analysis using the qualitative data analysis software QDA Miner. This tool was selected as it provides efficient computer assistance in the coding process and allows various options to analyze the data by viewing it from multiple perspectives. It took over 1200 min to analyze the responses. We grouped the identified codes into sub-themes and core themes. In order to avoid bias, an expert independent researcher reviewed the coded transcripts and themes. The suggestions provided by the expert were incorporated into the analysis after a review process. Table 1 details the final coding scheme and frequency.

Table 1. Coding scheme and frequency.

Championed By	Core Themes	Sub Themes	Interview	Rank	FGD	Rank
Principal	Access to training	The company has a training policy on the amount and type of training that the employees can avail	53	4	25	2
	Goal congruence	Achieving organizational goals means achieving own goals; organizational and personal goals match	15	17	30	1
Agent	Individual goal achievement	Skill development/performance goal achievement—Training helps in skill improvement, performance improvement, helps in gaining respect, prepares for promotion, improves network, helps in staying up to date	72	1	23	3
		Learning goal achievement—The long-term perspective of viewing training as useful for the present and the future; intention to make the most out of training, willingness to invest the effort in training	58	2	14	6
		Career goal achievement—Training contributes to promotion, salary increase, opens up future opportunities, helps meet career objectives	25	12	17	5
Principal	Organizational goal achievement	Organization shows continuous improvement; employees are happy; customers are happy; organization is successful and has a secure future	50	6	23	3
Principal	Organizational learning support	Time, resources, budget, tools adopted for training	53	4	10	9
		Flexible training options madeavailable to employees—e-learning, online learning	42	7	14	6
		Internal/external training options provided to employees	28	11	2	19
		Freedom and encouragement to apply new learning at the job	24	13	6	12
		Long term professional development plans for employees	18	15	6	12
		Appraisal system tied to learning of employees	13	18	6	12
		Financial rewards and incentives for learning	5	19	6	12
Principal	Organizational training assignment	Credits/badges/certification/hours recommended by the organization	39	9	6	12
		Mandatory training and voluntary training options for employees	30	10	4	18
Agent	Self-Regulated Learning	Task interest/value—the importance of learning to the individual, the perceived utility of learning in future	54	3	7	11
		Strategic Planning—Individual's long-term learning goals, learning strategies and learning plans	40	8	12	8
		Goal Setting—personal goals set by the individual	20	14	9	10
		Self-efficacy—the individual'sconfidence in their abilities	17	16	5	17

A clear difference exists in the themes that evolved out of our interviews and focus group analysis.

As per the data analysis, the code skill development/performance goal achievement was the most frequent with 72 mentions. This shows that the respondents thought that training or learning could contribute to their skill development and performance improvement. This was followed by the code willingness to invest time and effort in training that is

beneficial to future career growth (58 mentions), and interest value associated with training (54 mentions). These codes pertain to the core theme of individual goal achievement. This indicates how the respondents felt that training and new learning were useful to them. The employees thus assessed the contribution of training in their goal achievement before investing time and effort into it. Access to training provided by the organization was another key factor that motivated individuals to participate in training programs. This also highlights the importance of the availability of training policies in organizations that indicates the amount and type of training that the employees can make use of (53 mentions). This points to the core theme of organizations providing accessible learning options to their employees. A code that gained our attention concerned the participants' views on the organization showing continuous improvement, having happy employees and customers, and the participants thinking that their organizations had a successful and secure future (50 mentions). This code maps towards the core theme of organizational goal achievement. The next frequent code was time, resources, budget, and tools adopted for training, with 53 mentions. This shows how the participants felt about the organization as it set aside ample resources for employee learning.

Our analysis of FGD data helped us to develop a more macro perspective. Programs that help to attain individual and organizational goal congruence gained momentum in this discussion (30 mentions). This was followed by codes on providing access to learning for attaining goal achievement (25 mentions) and factors that result in achieving individual learning goals.

We have further examined the code frequency based on the experience level of employees. We classified the participants with fewer than five years of experience as junior-level employees and those with more than 15 years of experience as senior-level employees. Based on this classification, the most frequent codes were analyzed. As shown in Table 2, while the codes pertaining to individual goal achievement have appeared among the top-ranking codes across all levels, the codes corresponding to organizational goal achievement appears only in the case of senior-level employees. This leads us to understand that the organizational goal focus may be missing among the employees who are at the junior- and mid-levels.

Table 2. Level-wise ranking of code frequency.

Junior Level	Mid Level	Senior Level
Skill development/performance goal achievement—Training helps in skill improvement, performance improvement, helps in gaining respect, prepares for promotion, improves network, helps in staying up to date	Skill development/performance goal achievement—Training helps in skill improvement, performance improvement, helps in gaining respect, prepares for promotion, improves network, helps in staying up to date	Organization shows continuous improvement; employees are happy; customers are happy; organization is successful and has a secure future
The company has a training policy on the amount and type of training that the employees can avail	Credits/badges/certification/hours recommended by the organization	Skill development/performance goal achievement—Training helps in skill improvement, performance improvement, helps in gaining respect, prepares for promotion, improves network, helps in staying up to date
Learning goal achievement- The long-term perspective of viewing training as useful for the present and the future; intention to make the most out of training, willingness to invest the effort in training	Learning goal achievement—The long-term perspective of viewing training as useful for the present and the future; intention to make the most out of training, willingness to invest the effort in training	The company has a training policy on the amount and type of training that the employees can avail
Task interest/value—the importance of learning to the individual, the perceived utility of learning in future	Task interest/value—the importance of learning to the individual, the perceived utility of learning in future	Time, resources, budget, tools adopted for training
Flexible training options made available to employees—e-learning, online learning	Flexible training options made available to employees—e-learning, online learning	Learning goal achievement—The long-term perspective of viewing training as useful for the present and the future; intention to make the most out of training, willingness to invest the effort in training

We generated proximity charts for individual goal achievement, organizational goal achievement, and goal congruence (Figures 2–4). Proximity charts show the codes that appear most proximal to a particular code. Six codes were found equally most proximal to individual goal achievement: credits/badges/certification/hours recommended by the organization; flexible training options made available to employees—e-learning, online learning; learning goal achievement—the long-term perspective of viewing training as useful for the present and the future, intention to make the most out of training, willingness to invest the effort in training; mandatory training and voluntary training options for employees; task interest/value—the importance of learning to the individual, the perceived utility of learning in the future; and the company has a training policy on the amount and type of training that the employees can avail. This list emphasizes the importance of organizational training and the resultant learning in achieving individual career goals.

In the case of organizational goal achievement, the following two codes were most proximal: internal/external training options provided to employees and the time, resources, budget and tools adopted for training. This outcome presents how organizations use training to achieve the overall goals through their employees. Additionally, it also shows how organizations try to facilitate and support employee training to further goal achievement.
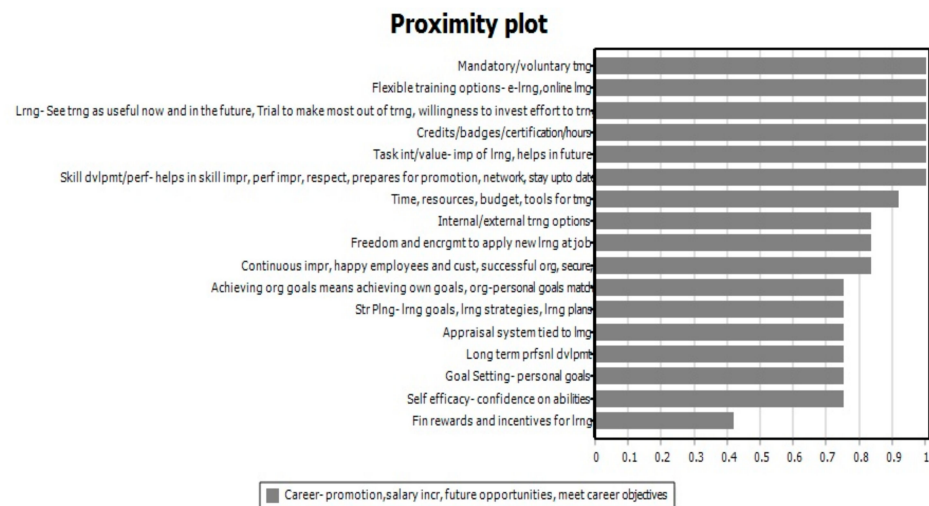

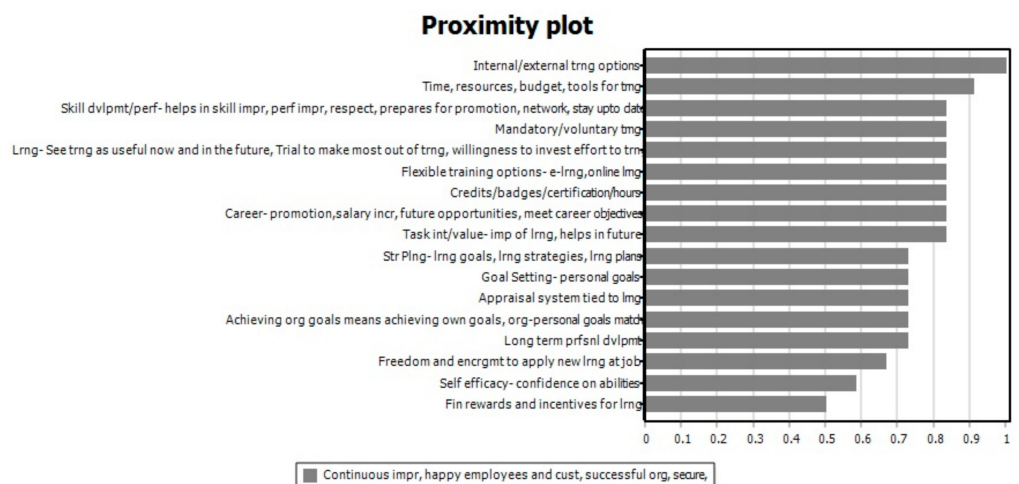**Figure 2.** Proximity plot for the code on individual goal achievement.

Figure 3. Proximity plot for the code on organizational goal achievement.

Figure 4. Proximity plot for the code on goal congruence.

On generating the proximity chart for goal congruence that is an aspect that can enhance goal achievement at both the individual and organizational levels, the code for time, resources, budget, and tools adopted for training was the most proximal. The second most proximal codes were, self-efficacy—the individual's confidence in their abilities, and the appraisal system tied to learning of employees. The code on self-efficacy maps to an individual's self-regulation in learning. Thus, facilitation of training by the organization and having control measures in place, such as an appraisal system tied to learning, can be a two-pronged approach from the organization's side. From the individual's side, being confident in one's own abilities to undertake the training assigned by the organization will also contribute to goal congruence.

From the data, it is clear that the individuals have their own sets of goals relating to their career, learning, and performance. They look for learning opportunities that directly contribute to their specific goals. The following remarks by the participants could throw light on this phenomenon:

> "We are structured in a way that we have separate focus groups on technology, industry, process leadership and culture. So, all of these give multiple options to learners. And they are again given avenues for creating learning paths required for their career outcomes."

> "[What is important is] how these learning opportunities incentivize them to grow within the organization. What is the learning path that they can take? Along with that, what kind of career options can they have?" one of the HR leaders who participated in our FGD opined.

> "For teams that are outcome focused—teams such as research and development, leadership teams, strategy teams—their intrinsic motivation to learn is relatively higher because they have a much better visibility of how they would grow within the organization or the industry."

One of the junior-level participants explicitly shared that the skill set contributing to growth in a career influences learning choices: "So, talking from an individual motive to be frank, being in the consulting industry, we run on projects. So I do not want to be on bench! So I would obviously try to gauge all these skillsets that are required for my project that I should have."

The following vignettes, on the other hand, highlight the aspects of organizational goal achievement that were mentioned by the participants of our study, especially those who were representatives of the management. They explained how employee training impacts organizational performance.

"One key indicator of whether the training program was a success would be the people management score we will be getting in the employee satisfaction survey. So, we peg each of those programs to one of the outcomes. The clear indication of training success also reflects in the customer satisfaction scores taken after a specific period of time."

"In an IT services industry, for the very core of survival, obviously learning is required. Because, if you see what we deliver to the customer hinges heavily on what we learn as an organization."

"What kind of business strategies or objectives can we take or propose which will give us the edge over our competitors? So today, if you see, every other organization has a new strategy—yesterday it was agile, before that it was digital. Today we're talking about virtual reality. Tomorrow it could be something else. Therefore, to be able to provide futuristic solutions to the customers, and to stay competitive beyond relevant, what kind of learning has to be implemented?"

"We give the [client] organization the confidence that our people are the best with respect to the various practices, the technologies, tools, and all that. Proficiency, capability, competence with respect to our business needs—that would be how generally, across the organization, I would explain the importance of training programs."

The learning initiatives ensure the highest degree of customer satisfaction but also aid in attaining organizational effectiveness.

"We can actually see any dip in productivity, quality, and adjust the needs of the organization with respect to training, and provide feedback to the training organization as well as to the departments and the various functions to ensure that necessary capability of being built into the organization."

The analyses detailed earlier, together with the excerpts presented above, support the first a priori condition that there is a goal conflict between the principal and the agent. The individuals believed that their learning choices were influenced by career growth opportunities. In contrast, the senior managers perceive learning programs as a mechanism for achieving better customer satisfaction and overall organizational success. The analysis thus gave answers to the research question: How does training contribute to individual and organizational goals?

The theme 'organizational training assignment' featured to a great extent in both FGDs and in-depth interviews, indicating the active implementation of control measures by the organizations to guide the learning choices of the employees. This helps to ensure that organizational goals are met while pursuing individual goals. The following snippets could illustrate this idea better.

"Even though democratic learning opportunities are available, people coming forward and getting motivated themselves—we have a gap there. That is where we need to have this carrot and stick mechanism to drive people from behind and then get them into the learning experience."

"When different aspects of training are involved over a particular period of time, we design certification in a way that they feel as if they have really earned it."

"There are specific certifications and other things which the organization is looking at which we need to actually get."

"So, someone who completes the training, I mean certification—anyone who attempts a certification gets a bronze badge, irrespective of whether they scored or not. . . . and it progresses to silver, gold and platinum. So, there are four badges, and the score for those badges are designed, and decided based on the industry-expected competence for each role."

The above snippets reinforce the idea that although learning programs appear to be voluntary, there is a conscious effort from the learning heads to embed elements that will help in attaining organizational goals. The above validates one of our a priori conditions set for the study that goal conflict between the principal and agent results in the principal trying to align the two sets of goals by introducing internal compliance structures concerning training and learning.

Based on the data analysis, we came up with a model (Figure 5) to represent this condition.
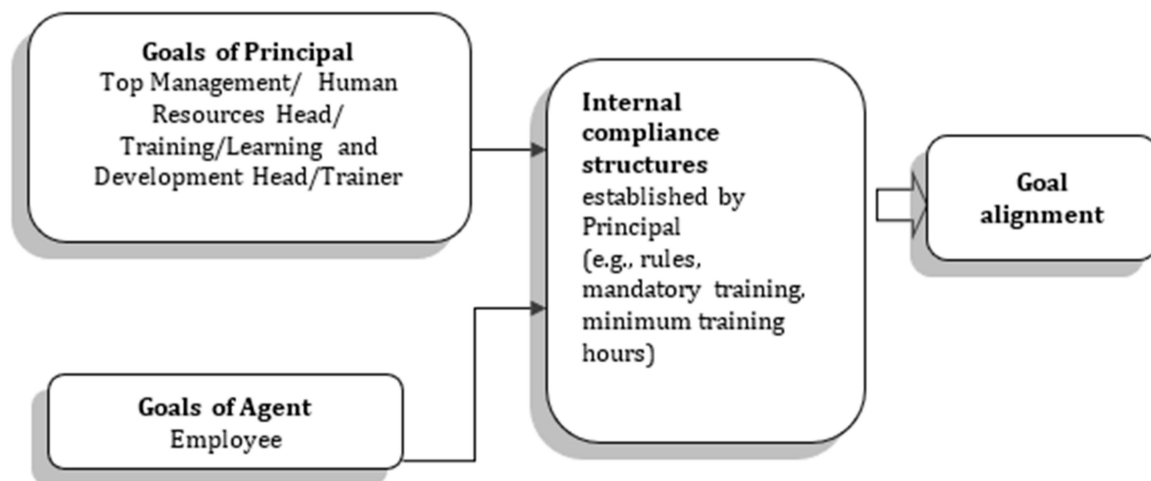
Figure 5. Congruence of goals.

Analysis of the data helped us to understand there was enough support in the data for the second a priori condition for the study: A particular goal may seem more attractive to the agent if it plays a role in accomplishing larger, long-term personal goals in life; the agent is motivated to attend the training program if it contributes to their career goals. This also goes on to answer another of our research questions: How is the congruence of individual and organizational training goals achieved?

The frequency table indicates the high count of codes related to individual goal achievement. All three codes under that category signal the contribution of training to performance and future career prospects. Training programs that directly contribute to the individual's career growth are favored more, as was pointed out by the participants of our study, and is indicated in the following vignettes.

> "Another consideration is how these learning opportunities incentivize us to grow within the organization. What is the learning path that I can take? Along with that, what kind of career options I can have."

> "In fact, we have created a place where they could view how they can go from one role to another, and what are those skills, capabilities and competencies or proficiency level of these competencies that will help them to move to the next level or the level that they aspire."

> "There are a lot of benefits like if you attend these training programs, you can definitely show it in the resume that you have completed so many."

There was also an instance when one participant mentioned how the organization gives the employee a future career focus when the employee himself/herself is unable to see it.

> "If somebody is doing a training program on his own, maybe he will be more interested in [topics related to] whatever he is currently doing. But we also need to see their future roles, and for that, I think we are actually providing some motivation with respect to doing some programs."

Based on the second a priori condition and subsequent data analysis, we proposed the model in Figure 6 to explain how organizations motivate employees to attend training.
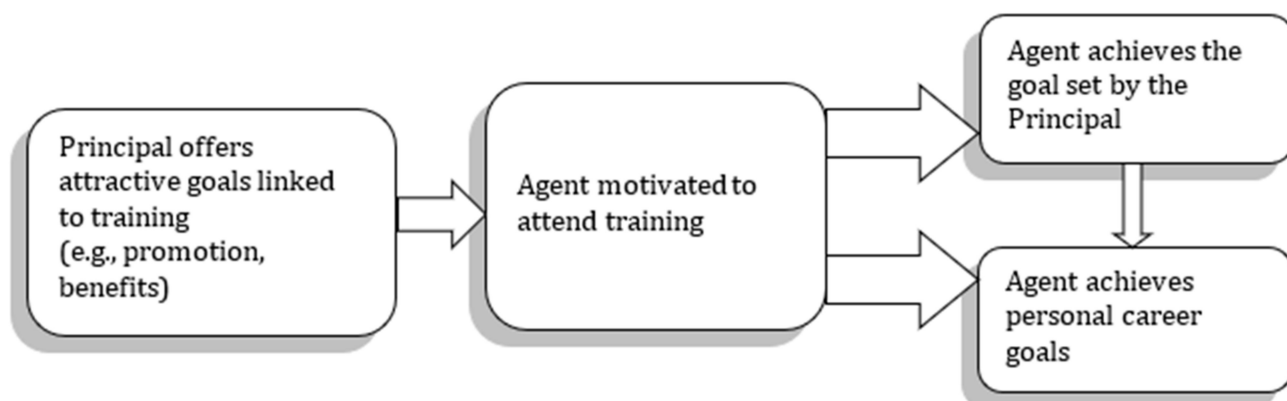

Figure 6. Mechanism to boost the motivation to attend training.

The employees (agents) tend to choose programs that will benefit them in progressing in their career, rather than attending generalist programs that are focused on organizational goals.

Content analysis of the interview and FGD transcripts yielded clear indications of the choice aspect in learning. The participants narrated how their organizations have tie-ups with learning partners in addition to internal training programs organized for the employees. Additionally, they even mentioned group and individual learning plans and learning calendars in many cases. Sticking to the broad plans, the employees are allowed to choose from the broad gamut of courses available to them. This ensures that both organizational, as well as individual preferences are catered to. The following excerpts from the transcripts are testimony to this:

"For example, in the machine learning area at the third level of depth or proficiency, I may need 20 people to work on three different projects which are coming. So, this information will be available to the associates, and the associates will be able to come and voluntarily pick those learning opportunities. We will publish the learning calendar—we have a global learning calendar—and the associates who are interested in that area will come forward and enroll in those learning programs, and then in the next 3 months' time they will be able to go through the learning program and graduate themselves to that particular competency proficiency level required for further business."

"We gave the learner their right to learn—democratizing learning is the kind of buzzword today. So with the help of learning experience platforms (LXPs) and learning and performance platforms (LPPs), democratizing the learning has definitely happened."

"We have online training in (vendor name). I mean, all those are open to us. Based on our relevant topics and free time, we can keep accessing it. Most of the time in the training tracker, we get classroom training. We get it on a monthly basis [announcing that] certain topics will be conducted for particular job levels on these dates. So, once we get the intimation, we will go to our portal and nominate ourselves for that particular training."

"Our learning management system—there have been multiple options before us. One is that we have some internally developed platforms. Like we ourselves have something called 'to share the best' where our people do repeated training. We have an audio-visual version which has been stored into a repository, and anyone can access it."

The above statements helped us to confirm that our third a priori condition does hold valid: In the process of making goals attractive and choosing attractive goals, both the principal and the agent are making decisions, respectively. The principal first makes a choice, and from the options given by the principal, the agent makes a choice. This answers our research question: Why do individuals and organizations make specific training choices? Using the model shown in Figure 7, we represented this condition regarding the choice aspect in training.
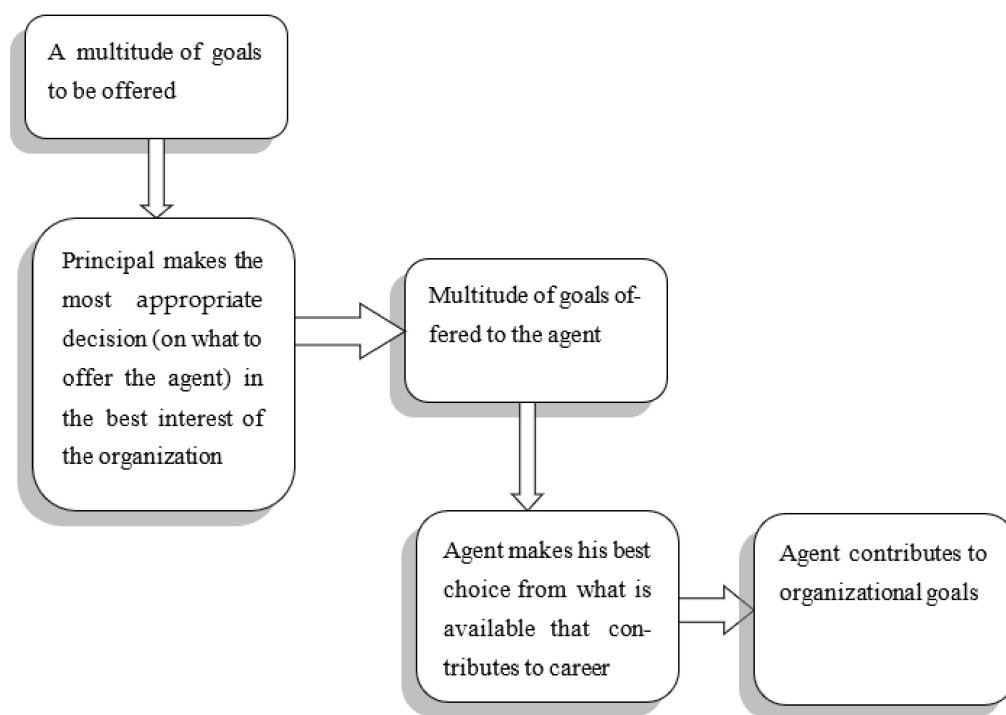
Figure 7. Selection of goals through satisficing.

5. Discussion

Our research sought to discover what makes training appealing to individual employees and what factors influence their personal preferences. It also attempted to determine how to increase corporate goal achievement through employee training. This topic is timely since a competent and skilled workforce is critical for the long-term viability of any business in the face of a constantly changing environment. While learning goals may differ, training contributes to an organization's intellectual capital. As a result, we conducted this research on knowledge-intensive business services that heavily rely on knowledge employees. The study's qualitative character provided us with greater insights into the research topic by elucidating why particular behavioral choices related to training are seen.

The gaps between organizational and individual goals can be bridged substantially with the help of technology-enabled training as it provides choice, flexibility, and personalization in employee training and learning. The themes of access to training and self-regulated learning highlight these aspects that have already been confirmed in the existing literature [100–104]. The flip sides to technology-enabled learning, such as difficulty in monitoring, ensuring compliance, and assessing the actual learning, can be mitigated to a good extent using certain control mechanisms such as insisting on a particular amount and level of learning. Certain aspects in employee training are mandatory, while others are voluntary [105].

Given the goal differences between the principal and the agent, working towards goal congruence in employee learning and skilling helps to align individual and organizational learning goals thereby leading to positive outcomes [31,33,34]. Furthermore, one can conclusively state that training remains a core human resource development activity with

both encouraging rewards and potentially calamitous drawbacks, and it is vulnerable to a wide range of paraphernalia from the organizational environment. Nevertheless, the policy heads and the trained might err, and there will be unmet expectations on both sides. Our study bolsters the idea that the foundations of agency theory could be used to analyze learning and development in an organization as it helps to uncover the mutually incompatible intentions, actions, and behaviors that could have a great impact on its success as well as failure [43]. We adopted the individual utility framework proposed by Azevedo and Akdere [106,107]. This refers to the notion that by partaking in an array of activities related to one's employment, one may obtain rewards of many kinds, including financial, social, and/or psychic. In analysts' assessments, these gains, dubbed a utility by financial experts, are considered optimized by the individual.

Our work was based on the agency problem as it has a bearing on learning and development, and in which the principals or employers enter into an agreement (either explicitly or implicitly) with the agents or employees to carry out tasks that have been delegated on their behalf, in circumstances where the agent employees have (at least) some independent decision-making capacity or authority [60,108]. Our study helps to understand that if the actors—principals and agents—are supposed to be rational economic entities, then it is important to examine principal—agent relationships since the individual aims of the parties involved may conflict with the organization's shared goals (i.e., self-interested maximizers of personal utility).

The word "contract" is used to describe the necessary agreement between the principal(s) and the agent(s) that spells out each party's duties and rights, as well as how performance will be judged, along with the payoffs or returns [109]. Parties to a contract are legally obligated to fulfill the terms of the agreement. Our study findings showcase that there exists an asymmetry of information and varied risk preferences exist among the system's participants. Executives are not risk averse and are happy to pass the buck to lower-level employees. This is in line with previous studies that state workers at lower levels may engage in self-serving behavior or shirking to prevent potential harm [59].

Knowledge asymmetries refer to the reality that individual actors act differently as a result of information that is known to others but not to them. Each member of the organization has access to some level of confidential information that may influence their behavior, even though everyone may have a basic grasp of the situation and how it is operated. The principal and agent may resort to a different set of behaviors as narrated below based on the set of information they possess as observed in our FGDs and in-depth interviews.

Principal and non-principal behaviors: In accordance with the terms of the agreement, the principal monitors the agent's initiative-driven actions or behaviors. These actions vary in risk depending on the activity and are in line with the goals and objectives of the company.

An example of principal behavior in our case is when organizations recommend training programs as per project or organizational requirements. As mentioned by some of the participants, there could be recommendations based on conditions put forth by clients to showcase employee skills. Such skill improvements contribute to organizational growth. A principal will instruct an agent to act against the interests of the organization and just to benefit the principal in these high-risk circumstances. The agent is unaware that their actions are contrary to the organization's objectives. In the organization, risk is clearly shifted downward by the principal in this scenario. A typical example of non-principal behavior would be pressurizing the learning and development departments to demonstrate improvements in metrics related to employee learning and skill building. Employees may be compelled to undertake learning modules for the organization to claim better training performance. Such training does not contribute to organizational performance.

Agency and non-agency behaviors: When the agents purely look at personal gains through company-sponsored learning, it amounts to non-agency behavior. They may nominate themselves for certification-oriented modules so that it enhances their value in

the external job markets. The benefits of such skilling may not necessarily contribute to the organizational goals—it may be used by the individual employees only to further their job prospects. Employees may also tend to skip behavioral or quality-related training programs when nominated, assuming the lack of utility of these in making their profiles attractive. These are self-initiated acts by the agent that conflict with the organizational goals and are meant to benefit the agent (high risk for the organization and resulting in potential job loss for the agent). The agent increases their personal usefulness while disregarding the organizational costs.

The agency behavior is witnessed when the agent acts in accordance with the contract and for the benefit of the organization. The agent aligns both individual and organizational objectives to maximize individual utility. Agency behavior is displayed when the employee realizes the reason for the learning recommendations that are put forth. The employee knows that attending training is important for the organization's sustainability and that the learning gained thus will contribute to organizational performance. A key understanding from our study is that the information must flow freely up and down the organization for the system to function. The information serves two important purposes in the world of agencies: First, each actor owns private information regarding their preferences, aims, and risk aversion. Second, it is difficult for the principal to oversee or verify agent's conduct [43,110–112]. In an ideal workplace, the principal is aware of the agent's professional behaviors and is able to monitor, evaluate, and reward them correctly. However, in a real-world scenario, when all learning is directed at organizational goal achievement, the employees may approach it with skepticism as they doubt whether their individual career needs would be met. As has been noted in past research, agents want to further their interests without risking much. Therefore, a solution to this dilemma is to align individual and organizational goals. Staying within the broad range of the organizational requirements, individual competency levels, potential, and career aspirations can be considered, and learning can be planned accordingly for each individual employee. The learning support provided by organizations despite the control measures boosts employee learning [113,114] and this has been reinforced through our data analysis. As indicated by the proximity plots, training plays an important role in furthering individual careers as well as organizational goals. Providing proper access to learning resources while having strict processes to monitor and direct employee learning can help achieve goal congruence.

Consequently, we feel that measures to bring in goal congruence could help align the goals of the principal and the agent. Goal congruence is when meeting individual goals automatically leads to organizational goals. Organizations must think of mechanisms to ensure congruence. While training assignments and control mechanisms are options on the one end, there could also be more cooperative means of getting employees to comply. One-on-one meetings to understand employee aspirations and charting learning and development plans factoring in individual aspirations and organizational goals could be beneficial. Another idea that organizations could employ is to tell their employees the rationale for recommending learning modules. Once this is understood, the employees may display an enhanced interest in learning. Additionally, this would enable better decision-making by employees within the training choices made available to them. Doing this would thus alleviate the principal—agent problem in employee training and improve decision-making rationality. The orientation on organizational goal achievement does not seem to be high among junior employees. Therefore, better communication among employees and their reporting managers regarding learning requirements, both individual and personal, can lead to better results.

Alternatively, the organization can think of developing and implementing a training value transaction model (Figure 8). The rationale behind proposing such a model is to define and categorize the interests that individuals and organizations attempt to satisfy through contemporary employment. This is because behavior is influenced by an individual's or a firm's basic needs. Organizations (principals) can utilize a new model by absorbing more elements of the psychological contract. Conventionally, every contract has two parts: one

very normative and formal by nature, and the other is based on trust, which regulates formal and informal relations also known as psychological bondage [115]. It is worthwhile to state that all such agreements have elements such as voluntarism, resilience, losses, and incompleteness, as well as automatic processes [116], and these agreements have worked well up until recent years. However, with the failure of existing models of business and a new type of employment relations evolving, the focus has shifted towards meeting the requirements of both parties, as well as expectations regarding behavior towards one another. Furthermore, the uncertainty and precariousness prevailing in the external environment has reduced dependence on automatic processes, giving scope for more of a transactional nature to the employer (principal)–employee (agent) relationship [117]. Along similar lines, we are of the view that contemporary workplaces do not offer much space for automatic conditioning and hence it is important to generate awareness regarding the needs of both the employer and the employee, and the same should be gratified through an agreement. The key actors who are party to the agreement could be the individual employees (agents) and the organization (principal).
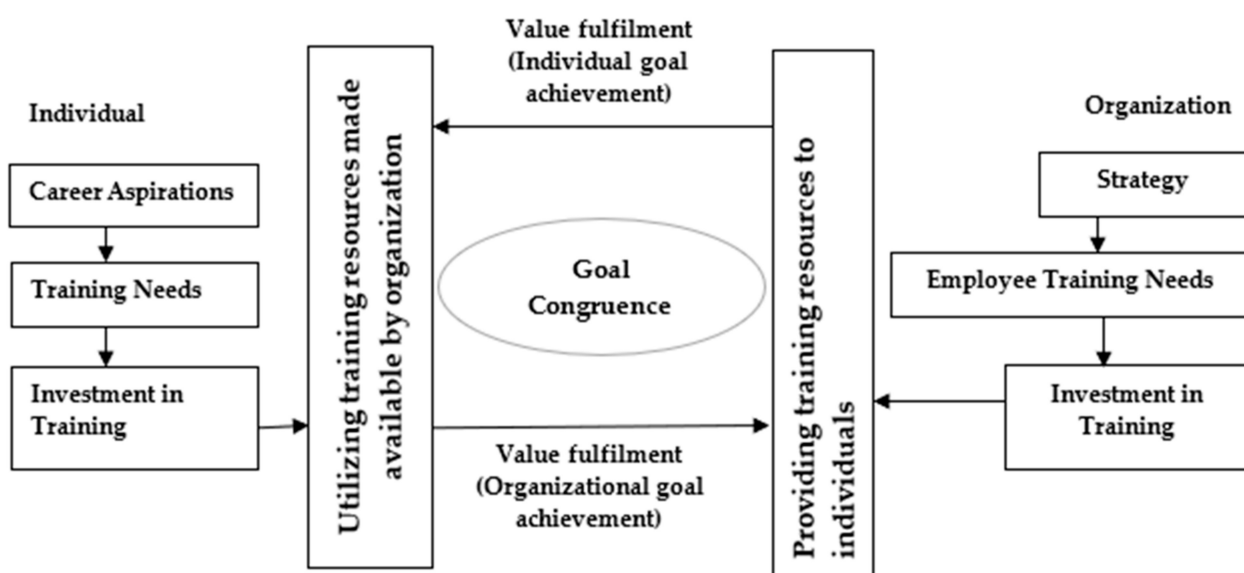

Figure 8. Training value transaction model.

The model that we have proposed is along the lines of what was proposed by Gaile and Sumilo [118]. We assumed that both the principal and the agent hold the same importance and so equal weights were assigned. Therefore, the model assumed that both parties were motivated by the same degree of interest in attaining their needs, that is, to obtain maximum output with minimal inputs. The principal and the agent motives would have been predominately guided by their own ideas and their actions are manifestations of their values that are firmly rooted in assumptions about life as well as business [119]. By considering the above factors, in the model proposed by us, an organization invests in a people development program assuming that it will aid in them gaining a competitive advantage; on the other hand, individuals attend training programs that facilitate career growth. The core object of the agreement is a training program that is well-conceived and effectively delivered. Through this process, value fulfilment or need gratification tends to occur for both parties. This approach aims at improving employer (principal) and employee (agent) relations and brings in a new wave of people management, which has been conventionally based on control and subordination that was previously attained through a bureaucratic process or by means of bullying [120]. As is stated elsewhere in this paper, by defining both the principal and agent as partners entering into an acceptable agreement, we aim to project a contract based on social and financial bonds promoting

entrepreneurial labor principles [121]. This is otherwise called an affective commitment, instead of a relationship that is deeply strained by structural and financial bonds also termed as a continuance commitment [122]. This new principal–agent model suggested by us aims to move past formal training models and identify the true needs of each actor in this system and attain satisfaction. This reminds us that organizations should find ways to strike a new balance of formality and informality in training and assimilation areas. This helps to develop sustainable employee relationships. Our study highlights the need to incorporate both contextual and individual factors in training efficacy models [28] to improve them. This article explored the relationships between the contextual predictors that Mathieu et al. suggest are important for successful learning [22].

6. Implications

6.1. Policy Implications

Our study helped to understand that business houses have started prioritizing learning and training to a greater degree than in previous decades, which is in line with the human resource literature. The perspective of viewing training as a cost has transformed into considering it as a prudent investment decision. Furthermore, the motivation for different actors for attending learning programs is quite diverse. Hence, this emphasizes the need for managers to focus more on training programs that cater to the interests of diverse groups. One of the most important observations was that as contextual factors such as organizational support and access to learning are essential for attaining individual and organizational objectives, managers can plan for interventions that influence employee perceptions. A well-framed policy or directive can help the available organizational support mechanisms for learning and maximizing benefits.

6.2. Managerial Implications

Apart from generating policies, managers can invite employees for discussions before commencing training programs. This can help the employer/employee to provide/receive a realistic picture of the training and the advantages of enrollment. In addition, emerging from this study is the lack of learner understanding of the big picture and organizational understanding of trainee motivation. A better understanding on both sides can result in goal congruence and outcome maximization. Despite the fact that these particular strategies did not appear in this study, more recent examples of personalization strategies demonstrate that there are numerous ways to add more systems and customization to HRD interventions by conducting needs and work analyses, taking into account a variety of employee learning preferences, and implementing transfer-enhancing measures. Additionally, being informed of how a person learns better using different approaches or under varying environments has been used to enhance job productivity. This is because different people learn best in different settings. Individual training programs can increase employee ratings by providing exemplary practical examples. This enhances the company's culture and attracts potential employees. Personal growth encourages both retention and recruitment.

6.3. Implications for Employees/Individuals

Individualized training programs can be beneficial to employees' personal and professional development. Individual employee training programs enlighten employees on their roles, objectives, and methods of contributing to the team. As a result, for an individual, it is less complicated to concentrate on personal development and determine how they might advance their position and contribute more effectively. Customized learning strategies help employees to develop specialized abilities. This might further aid employees in relating their responsibilities to their skills. Individualized training programs are popular across different sectors because they boost engagement among employees and decrease attrition. Furthermore, this aids people in taking proactive steps to manage both growth and fixed-mindset cues. People can consult upon resources to create a growth mindset, thereby

helping themselves and others in learning. This also helps to replace fixed self-perception through discussion regarding the skills that are helpful in sustaining a career.

7. Conclusions

Our article is based on agency theory and examines the role it plays in the design and delivery of learning and development activities in a comprehensive manner. The arguments, analysis, and propositions presented in this work are relevant to any organization with a learning and development function/unit/department, as agency theory identifies the central nature of human beings in a chain of command. We note that regional cultural differences may be considered as the objective, nature, design, development, implementation, and evaluation of training programs may differ regionally. Many studies on agency theory, human resource development, and related subfields have appeared in the last two decades [38,106,107,123–127], and previous research has explored and addressed both organizational development (OD) in a broad sense, and agency theory in particular. However, the purpose of this paper was to fill a knowledge gap in the HRD literature regarding agency theory and learning activity, another silo that must be integrated. Our work proposed placing a strong emphasis on the relationship between theory, research, and practice and application, with the hope that the ideas put forth will advance the field of learning and development and help identify and resolve issues as they arise.

The purpose of this research is to offer advice—along with a small word of caution—to those who have been entrusted with the vital task of providing learning to those who require it and want to enhance their performance. The goal of this article was to employ agency theory as a guidepost to better understand the design, implementation, and evaluation of training and development programs, and not to laud or criticize it for what it reveals about individual behavior. Our work depicts the view that the nature of learning poses many barriers to the assessment and attainment of organizational outcomes and understanding how agency theory operates inside a company and is vital for continuous learning programs and improvement efforts. With our work, we have proposed conceptual models that can help improve the effectiveness of learning itself in situations that involve multiple actors (in this context the learners, learning program managers and trainers).

Determining training efficacy becomes even more challenging when various actors are engaged due to agency-related behaviors. Thus, the interaction between agency theory and learning needs to be rigorously explored. Although much attention has been focused on the agency actions of executives [128–131], this article emphasizes how pertinent it is to pay attention to the nature and characteristics of these actions and their potential implications on other activities, especially learning function.

8. Limitations and Future Scope

This study emphasizes the importance of customized learning strategies and addresses the issue of how organizational and individual goal congruence in employee training can be attained. However, similar to other studies, our work was also not free from limitations. We have identified a few areas where our study could have been enhanced and where similar research could be conducted in the future.

Primarily, our study does not indicate how the attainment of goal congruence can enhance organizational performance. Future research can be carried out to identify the antecedents of customized learning initiatives and develop an exhaustive framework of both antecedents and their consequences on both individual and organizational levels.

Second, we cannot generalize our findings to all industries because we only examined a specialized subset, that is, knowledge-intensive business services. In addition, we did not compare how other companies in distant economies manage measures for attaining goal congruence. The preparedness level of various business houses to match Industry 4.0 standards can make a difference in their learning strategies, and this was not considered in our study. Furthermore, evaluating the applicability of the goal congruence construct in other cultures is a crucial topic, as global economies are becoming more interconnected. It is

imperative to compare the effectiveness of the framework and evaluate its generalizability to other business systems and organizational structures by way of conducting cross-national studies. This is essential for maintaining the corpus of knowledge on training and its impact on business performance.

Thirdly, future studies should incorporate more detailed forms of training, in addition to perspectives on new digital competencies and the changing role played by human resources in businesses, as a result of the impact of digitization on training delivery.

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