

Managerial influence on employee learning: contextual insights from industrial companies in Sweden

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore how managers influence employee workplace learning within two distinct organizational environments in Swedish manufacturing industries.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a qualitative research design, 17 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 managers from 2 companies. Thematic analysis identified patterns and themes, providing a nuanced understanding of managerial influence on workplace learning.

Findings – Findings indicate that managers' perceptions of their roles and their organizational context impact how they create learning opportunities for employees. High-pressure environments prioritize efficiency and short-term results, constraining managers' ability to support long-term learning and development. In contrast, balanced environments emphasize relationships, psychological safety and long-term development. Managerial support is thus shaped by both organizational context and individual perceptions, highlighting the importance of differing organizational pressures in shaping managers' leadership toward employee workplace learning.

Research limitations/implications – The findings provide a contextualized understanding that requires cautious interpretation when applied to other contexts. The reliance on self-reported experiences and the purposeful sampling used in this study present challenges for generalizing the results even within the chosen context. Readers are advised to exercise caution when interpreting the study findings, considering the specific organizational environments and managerial roles examined.

Practical implications – Organizations should invest in leadership development programs that emphasize relational aspects, such as trust and communication, to create supportive learning environments. Managers should be encouraged to establish structures and routines that promote discussion and reflection.

Originality/value – This research nuances Tynjälä's 3P model of Workplace Learning by showing how managerial support is affected by the organizational environment and individual perceptions of that context, which in turn affect employee learning processes and outcomes. The study offers theoretical and practical insights for enhancing learning environments within organizations.

Keywords Managerial influence, Managerial perceptions, Workplace learning, Tynjälä's 3P model, Organizational context, Learning opportunities

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Managers are vital in facilitating employee workplace learning (Do and Mai, 2020; Hillberg Jarl, 2024; Matsuo, 2012; Wallo *et al.*, 2021; Yukl, 2013), as they possess the formal



authority to lead in ways that enhance learning (Jo and Shin, 2025; Mazzetti and Schaufeli, 2022). Unlike non-managers, managers lead teams and manage tasks, granting them the authority to influence employee autonomy, particularly in problem-solving (Arundel *et al.*, 2007; Korica *et al.*, 2017; Nordlöf *et al.*, 2012). Leadership, as described by Yukl (2013) and Northouse (2019), involves influencing others to achieve common goals. Managers' leadership in relation to employees is shaped by their views on employees' willingness and need to learn, as well as factors such as age, gender (Gustavsson and Eriksson, 2010) and career development prospects (Munro *et al.*, 2000). However, organizational pressure, defined as the demands and stressors placed on individuals in their work environment, such as role ambiguity, role conflict and workload, can also affect managers' job performance (Gilboa *et al.*, 2008). Managers' perceptions – defined as their self-held beliefs, attitudes and assessments regarding their own attributes and actions (Lord and Dinh, 2014) – impact their behaviors in supporting employee learning through direct support and creating learning opportunities (Lundqvist *et al.*, 2022). For instance, Gagné *et al.* (2020) revealed that managers' leadership behaviors and perceptions significantly impact employee motivation and learning outcomes, particularly under varying organizational contexts. Organizational context plays a crucial role in shaping how managers perceive their roles, the scope of their actions and how they act. Studies such as those by Ghoshal and Bartlett (1994) emphasize the interactive development of context and managerial action, highlighting the importance of organizational context in influencing managerial behaviors. Additionally, Revilla *et al.* (2020) examine the relationship between organizational context and managerial turnover, demonstrating how contextual factors such as entity size and employment systems impact managerial performance. When managers perceive employee learning as a common goal within the organizational environment (Cantarino and de Araujo, 2022), the likelihood of them engaging in leadership actions that foster employee development increases (Wallo *et al.*, 2021). However, how perceived organizational pressure interacts in affecting managers' leadership behaviors is yet to be investigated (Gagné *et al.*, 2020). Understanding how managers perceive their organizational environment and how these perceptions affect their leadership behaviors is therefore essential for enhancing employee workplace learning.

Workplace learning (Billett, 2020) is a relational and interdependent process involving both social and personal factors (Billett, 2014). Recent research indicates that workplace learning is enhanced when managers exhibit exemplary behavior, provide direct support and create environments where employees can negotiate meaning. This involves recognizing both managers and employees as active learners who negotiate their identities to understand their roles and positions within the organization (Hillberg Jarl, 2024). Furthermore, Gustavsson and Lundqvist (2021) found that managerial support can act as a reward for employees, increasing their sense of appreciation and reducing stress, which positively impacts learning processes.

However, how managers' perceptions of their support to employees are created and provided remains underexplored and warrants further investigation. This study aims to provide a contextualized understanding of how managers influence employee workplace learning in different organizational environments. Specifically, the focus will be on two distinct types of environments characterized by different levels of pressure. The research question guiding this study is: How do managers' perceptions of their role and organizational environment influence their activities toward employee workplace learning? The findings from this research could inform future managerial development programs and organizational strategies, enhancing managerial conduct and potentially improving the workplace learning environment for employees.

2. Theoretical background

Workplace learning (WPL), as defined by [Billett \(2014\)](#), encompasses both individual and team learning. Individual learning involves social interaction with the environment and the psychological absorption of influences and impulses ([Illeris, 2004](#)), personal meaning-making ([Wenger, 2010](#); [Winch and Ingram, 2002](#)) and is based on the individual's identity and self-understanding, occurring through the interplay between the individual and the environment ([Illeris, 2018](#)). Team learning, while connected to individual learning, includes additional processes that capture the unique dynamics of teams learning together. These processes involve seeking feedback, sharing information, asking for help, discussing mistakes and experimenting ([Edmondson, 1999](#); [Rigolizzo and Zhu, 2021](#)). The outcomes of these processes, such as the team's perceived unity, trust, or disagreement, are also considered ([Jacobsson and Åkerlund, 2019](#)). Team learning emphasizes collaborative interactions and the collective negotiation of meaning ([Nellen et al., 2020](#); [Wenger, 2010](#)), which could enhance team learning outcomes when circumstances are conducive.

[Tynjälä's \(2013\)](#) 3P model, encompassing Presage, Process and Product factors, provides a framework for analyzing managers' accounts of their roles, leadership activities and views on employee workplace learning. The 3P model emphasizes that workplace learning is situated within and between organizational members in a sociocultural setting, creating unique circumstances for ongoing interactions. According to this model, learning outcomes (Product), such as personal development, creative solutions and improved work climate, result from nonformal and formal learning activities (Process), which are preceded by individual interpretations of learner factors and the learning context (Presage). In this model, a learner can be an employee or a manager who learns within an organizational context. The 3P model highlights the complexity of workplace learning and illustrates that learning outcomes can be the combined or sole products of learner factors, the learning context and the interpretation of these through both intentional and unintentional activities. For this study, it is important to emphasize that managerial support is one of the phenomena listed under the presage part of the model, within the learning context subsection. Managerial support is assumed to be interpreted by other learners, such as employees, leading to certain activities in processing these interpretations, which ultimately may result in learning outcomes, as the product part of the model illustrates. According to the 3P model of workplace learning, a team or an individual at the workplace can acquire both improved work skills and harmful work practices. Learning outcomes can appear as results of managerial support (learning context) as well as from learner motivation (learner factor), both of which are interpreted by the individual or team and acted upon in collaborative or individual activities.

Managerial work involves both direct leadership actions, such as hiring and training staff, and indirect actions, such as encouraging and motivating employees ([Mintzberg, 1990](#)). According to [Hales \(1999\)](#), managers' activities are "constituted, defined and legitimized by the resources and rules of the systems in which they are located, as actions which affirm the identity, responsibility and accountability of 'managers' " ([Hales, 1999, 347](#)). The organizational context influences how employee workplace learning is viewed and what type of leadership activities are preferred. However, the individual manager can also "by their actions (or inactions), make a difference; how they do so and the extent to which they do so are far from clear" ([Hales, 2001, 57](#)). Prior studies support the value of a strong learning culture often driven by proactive leadership ([Marsick and Watkins, 2003](#)). A recent scoping study by [Lyons \(2023\)](#) describes how employee learning can be influenced by thoughtful managerial interventions in collaboration with the employee. [Lyons \(2023\)](#) also suggests that managers who practice leadership behaviors such as

manager-as-coach (Lyons and Bandura, 2021) and transformative leadership (Braun *et al.*, 2013; Jo and Shin, 2025) build and establish strong relationships with their employees. In sum, the manager-employee relationship is crucial in all types of managerial actions intended to enhance employee workplace learning.

Within the 3P model, managers, as representatives of the employer, are responsible for creating the prerequisites for learning for individuals, teams and entire work communities (Ellström, 2011). The 3P model guides the research design of this study by providing a structured approach to analyze the presage, process and product factors involved in workplace learning. Material collection will focus on gathering qualitative insights from managers about their perceptions and actions, while analysis will interpret these findings within the context of the 3P model.

3. Method

A qualitative research design was chosen to explore managerial influence on employee learning in the workplace (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Kjellström *et al.*, 2020). Qualitative methods are well-suited for examining complex social phenomena, such as perceptions and learning, aiming to understand the meanings and interpretations individuals attach to their experiences (Conger, 1998; Leavy, 2014). To capture the nuanced and context-dependent nature of organizational life, semi-structured interviews with managers were conducted (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

To illustrate how managerial perceptions of their roles and activities on employee learning are affected in different organizational environments, the researcher selected two companies, Alpha and Beta, and contacted them directly to request participation in the study. Alpha, a large, private equity-owned firm, emphasizes internal training and was believed to provide insights into managerial perceptions in a dynamic environment. Beta, a mid-size, family-owned enterprise, prioritizes long-term employee welfare, offering a balanced context for understanding ethical practices and development. These two companies were chosen because they represent both similarities, as they are both in the industrial manufacturing industry, and differences, owing to their different types of ownership and entity size. This selection was made to study how managerial perceptions are influenced by distinct organizational contexts, in line with the research question of the study.

No prior relationships with the respondents ensured reflexivity and minimized the potential influence of the researcher's position on the interviewees (Berger, 2015). Managers were selected because of their interest in participating in the study after access to the companies was granted by each company's HR manager. The participants represented seven different roles across these two companies and were interviewed two or three times (Table 1). The interviews were informed by Tynjälä's 3P model of Workplace Learning and delved into managers' views on their leadership and their perspectives on employee learning. This approach aligns with the methodology used by Beenen *et al.* (2021) who emphasized the importance of capturing detailed managerial perspectives through semi-structured interviews to understand their influence on employee learning. Recognizing the subjectivity of both interviewer and interviewee, interview accounts are seen as generated within an empirical social reality, influenced by how managers perceive themselves in the interview situation (Qu and Dumay, 2011).

The data set consisted of 17 meticulously transcribed interview transcripts, capturing rich qualitative data on managers' reflections on their leadership activities and employee workplace learning. The material includes diverse perspectives, representing a range of managerial roles across two organizational contexts that are similar in industry but differ in ownership and size. This diversity provides a robust foundation for the interpretation and

Table 1. Study participants

Company	Manager code	Participant role	No. of interviews	Managerial experience
Alpha	A1	R&D Director	3	6 years in current role, 23 years of managerial experience in general
	A2	Group Technical Manager	2	7 months in current role, 3 years of managerial experience in general
	A3	Industrial Engineering Manager	3	5 years in current role, 13 years of managerial experience in general
	A4	IT Manager	3	3 years in current role, 3 years of managerial experience in general
	A5	Manager for Production Planning and Operative Sourcing	2	2 years in current role, 2 years of managerial experience in general
Beta	B1	HR Manager	2	10 years in current role, 37 years of HR related experience in general
	B2	Finance Manager	2	14 years in current role, 14 years of managerial experience in general

Source(s): Author's own work

development of themes. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, a method well-suited for generating themes from qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2023; Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

The iterative process began with familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts (Naeem *et al.*, 2023) during which the researcher sought to reflexively interpret the interview transcripts. In this phase, Tynjälä's 3P model of Workplace Learning informed the analysis as a theoretical framework. Key sentences and phrases that the researcher believed reflected meanings were highlighted and assigned specific codes (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). The coding process focused on several key areas: the conditions under which managers exercise leadership within their organizational environment and role, detailed descriptions of their managerial actions (such as providing direct support to employees, organizing work units, teams and tasks), their perspectives on the learning process and their experiences of concrete learning outcomes in employees that were believed to be influenced by managerial actions. This approach aligns with the methodology discussed by Williams and Moser (2019), who emphasize the importance of coding in revealing themes embedded in qualitative data.

As this process progressed, previously generated codes were both abandoned (such as managers' prior experiences), rephrased and merged, as the researcher continuously sought to find the narratives of meaning in the transcripts that would reflect the main research aim of the study. Codes with similar attributes were clustered into themes and refined through this iterative process (Lungu, 2022). Final themes were structured in the findings section with inspiration from the 3P model, illustrated with selected quotations from interview transcripts, in a way that would reflect the 3P model's movements from the managerial role (presage

learning context), through managerial activities (arrow from learning context through interpretation to learning processes), to perceived learning outcomes (product).

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were used throughout the research process. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants, allowing for a deeper understanding of their experiences (Stahl and King, 2020). Triangulation was achieved by interviewing managers from different organizational contexts and roles, providing a comprehensive view of the phenomena under study. Transferability was supported by providing descriptions of the research context and participants, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other settings.

4. Findings

The findings of this study are organized into three main themes (Table 2), each informed by Tynjälä's 3P model of workplace learning: contextual foundations, dynamic interactions and evolving outcomes. These themes help to structure and illustrate the results. Managers are referred to by their titles and managerial code.

4.1 Contextual foundations: understanding managerial roles in specific organizational settings

This theme explores the initial conditions in which learning takes place. It includes managers' reflections on their roles and the organizational setting. This theme highlights how managers shape the learning context.

4.1.1 Perceptions of position. This subtheme includes narratives about the formal managerial role, possibilities to act and views about the organizational setting. In Alpha, managers generally describe how they experience difficulties related to their managerial role and job in relation to the prevailing situation of their organization. It became clear during the interviews that these managers overall experienced a certain pressure to deliver fast results, and results and cost reduction were the prevailing values at Alpha. For instance, the R&D

Table 2. Themes containing interpretation of the interview transcripts

Main theme	Description	Subthemes	Description of subthemes
1. Contextual Foundations: Understanding Managerial Roles and Organizational Settings	Empirical descriptions of the managerial formal role, possibilities to act and views about the organizational setting	1.1 Perceptions of Position	Managers' views on their formal roles and organizational conditions
		1.2 Creating conditions for learning	Managerial activities aimed at creating a supportive learning context Activities moving from presage (learning context/manager support) to process (via learners' interpretation of activities)
2. Dynamic Interactions: Managerial Influence on Learning Processes	Managerial activities and their presumed impact on learning		Concrete outcomes and results of learning processes as perceived by managers
3. Evolving Outcomes: Results of Managerial Influence	Illustrating the presumed impact of managerial actions on employee learning outcomes		

Source(s): Author's own work

Director at Alpha (A1) described that the position required a certain translation of information from top management which could, if directly passed on without “translation”, create an increased pressure on employees to work harder. From the R&D Director’s position, it was described that the staff of engineers are primarily motivated by problem-solving, learning on the job and experiencing development as engineers. The R&D Director of Alpha described that: “The pressure to deliver results from high management needed to be translated before reaching the employees to leave some space for learning time.” This perceived pressure from top management at Alpha was also experienced by other managers at Alpha, for instance, the Manager for Production Planning and Operative Sourcing (A5), who described that:

The owners have five-year plans for their companies. Their idea is to merge companies so that they complement each other. And then sell them off. But in this case, they probably must sell off cheaper. Because they haven’t really succeeded with mergers. There is a lot of positives for the company itself here locally. But the sad thing is the ownership structure. We are not allowed to replace the ones that quit, managers will not get their expected bonuses, and I was supposed to be sent on leadership training. That hasn’t happened. All types of investments in personnel, both managers and employees, are removed. I have had difficulty motivating my staff because we have such limited resources.

Notably, the Group Technical Manager (A2), who was directly reporting to the R&D Director, did not describe the managerial position in this problematic way. One reason could be that this manager was only 7 months on the job at this time. But another reason for this differing description can be that the R&D Director had succeeded in some ways in protecting this subordinate manager from at least some of the pressure experienced from top management. The Group Technical Manager described that information needed “condensation” so that the group of employed engineers under this managers’ supervision could receive a specific and practical list of assignments to work with. The managerial role was about organizing the work group and deciding which job tasks the group should prioritize. Specifically, the Group Technical Manager said: “I may receive information or assignments from different parts of the organization. And then I must condense it down to something practical that my group can work with later.”

The role as a manager also seemed to be somewhat elevated at Alpha since the IT Manager (A4), who at times communicated with the actual users of the IT equipment, perceived that:

You must have a position in the company first to be really listened to. Those who really do the work on the floor, you might not listen to them. Information like suggestions for improvements from the regular employee do not reach management since there seems to exist a view that managers are the ones that should solve the problems.

In Beta, the narratives about their role in their organization were centered around how they personally related to the included responsibilities to lead a certain function. The HR Manager (B1) and Finance Manager (B2) described a balanced work environment in which they had support from each other if needed, and that top management at Beta had great faith in their ability to do their job. The HR Manager was extensively involved in supporting and coaching other managers at their locations and only had one direct reporting employee. The HR Manager stated: “The leadership is just there; it’s just to the side. So, if too much is required of me in my daily work, I can find it a bit of a chore.” The HR Manager at Beta reasoned about the role and position and felt that there was no room to lead since this was not, particularly the main task of the HR position.

4.1.2 Creating conditions for learning. This subtheme addresses the activities undertaken by managers, which are interpreted as influencing the employees' learning environments. Managers from both Alpha and Beta use joint monthly meetings to organize their work groups seeking to create knowledge-sharing opportunities and exchanges for increased learning. The Industrial Engineering Manager (A3) explains:

These joint meetings are there to create further community between them, so that actual tasks and information can be carried out and handed over more easily than if they did not feel the same commonality.

In this regard, the Finance Manager at Beta pointed out that close collaboration between HR and Finance at Beta often involves resolving conflicts, which can initiate learning processes leading to learning outcomes. The Finance Manager mentioned: "We work quite closely with HR and [...] finance and HR and we are seven women then. And small conflicts arise from time to time." This quote underscores the enhancement of interpersonal and conflict resolution skills through such interactions, which in this instance are made possible by a presage component of jointly monthly meetings created by these managers in collaboration with other managers in their organizations.

Several managers describe how they work to create meeting structures and routines to create arenas for relationship-building with employees. The R&D Director described the importance of "Planning that leaves room for direction and extent of intelligibility. It is to be measured by others." Reasons for acting in this direction can be an opinion that it is important to understand employees' work processes and values, as the Group Technical Manager at Alpha put it: "To be a good manager, you must know somewhere how these other people work. What they value. Dare to ask. it is very important." This view is supported by the IT Manager at Alpha who highlights the value of regular, open-ended meetings and describes that:

We have set up an appointment every Wednesday afternoon. Where we don't have an agenda from the start. I've been setting it up all year. But before each time, there are different things we take up.

Meeting structures like this provide a flexible platform for discussing various issues as they arise, which enable relationship building with employees and can help to start and affect their learning processes.

Managerial activities to affect employee workplace learning also include other managerial initiatives. The Group Technical Manager stated:

As a manager, I must make sure that we spend enough time to obtain information. [...] I have created a process around how we should work with learning, in terms of technology then, technology development, allocated time in [...] everyone has a day a week that is booked where they should work on knowledge acquisition in their areas.

This quote illustrates that providing learning opportunities was a priority for the manager in that work group. The starting point here was employees with the ability and willingness to learn, and this manager tried to ensure that there was time set aside regularly for skills development. Another example of managerial actions for learning opportunities comes from the Industrial Engineering Manager: "They (the employees) may be the ones doing the wrong thing. But it's the same. But it is about a lot that, like, we must set a structure so that we will be good for next time." This quote further illustrates managerial activities that aim to enable employee learning. Managers at both Alpha and Beta create learning conditions by organizing joint monthly meetings and establishing structured routines to foster knowledge sharing and relationship building. However, while Alpha's managers focus on internal training and flexible meeting structures to understand employees' work processes and

values, Beta's managers emphasize close collaboration between HR and Finance to resolve conflicts and enhance interpersonal skills, reflecting their commitment to long-term employee welfare.

4.2 *Dynamic interactions: managerial influence on learning processes*

This subtheme focuses on activities that move from presage (learning context/manager support) to process (through learners' interpretation of activities). Managers from both Alpha and Beta describe activities that intend to directly affect employees' learning processes. Concerning communication directly with employees, managers can seek to uphold a balance between delegation and support. These activities the Industrial Engineering Manager of Alpha described as part of the managerial role and as "work on delegating but also supporting people in their situation." In this instance, the HR Manager of Beta highlighted the importance of encouraging employees to make their own decisions, stating that it is essential to "push to own decisions." Similarly, the Finance Manager at Beta described a direct support situation with employees in which:

I tried to show them how to start working when you have a diff on an account. And I think they've probably learned better to [...] Because then the idea was that the next time they have a diff on the account, they should first start trying to look this up themselves, before they come and ask me then.

The Group Technical Manager underscores the role of supporting and questioning employees' standpoints, noting that a managerial approach involves "helping them (employees) ask questions necessary to learn and develop by supporting, illustrating and questioning." Also, the IT Manager stressed the importance of creating individual relationships with employees to meet their unique needs. This personalized approach not only facilitates better communication but also supports tailored learning opportunities. In the same vein, the Group Technical Manager highlights the balance between: "Coaching and personal responsibility and in that also comes a certain trust, that 'I trust you to handle your tasks, I don't have to get involved but come to me if you have problems.'" This statement reflects a managerial philosophy of striving towards creating trust and empowering employees, emphasizing the importance of strong relationships between manager and employee.

Managers can also be involved in negotiations with their peers or stakeholders within the organization. This type of communication involves investing time in building relationships with other managers, which could be one way to influence employee learning by: "helping my group, relieving them, with the help of, by helping another group how to work effectively. (A2)" In this instance, the R&D Director at Alpha noted the importance of creating acceptance for tasks both within the group that will perform them and among different clients from various directions. These accounts highlight how negotiation helps in aligning certain group's tasks with the expectations of various stakeholders, which involves protecting and supporting employees by facilitating effective collaboration with other groups and thereby other managers.

Managers from both Alpha and Beta engage in activities that balance delegation and support, supporting employee autonomy and learning. At Alpha, managers emphasize personalized communication and building individual relationships to meet employees' unique needs, while Beta's managers focus on encouraging employees to make their own decisions and resolving conflicts collaboratively. These approaches reflect Alpha's dynamic environment and Beta's commitment to long-term employee welfare.

This theme also consists of managers' views of their employees' learning activities and interactions. Here, we find an opinion from the Group Technical Manager from Alpha stating collaborative learning as a factor of great potential: "Learning is best created in collaboration. By sharing knowledge with others, who must then translate it into their own practice, strong development can be achieved." These learning activities can be initiated by the manager, for instance the IT Manager of Alpha who described a managerial support situation: "I ask, 'yes, but have you had meetings? Have you taken an activity log?' and this bit about asking for [...] you ask for how you have done things.". Learning can also be initiated by a manager who receives questions from the organization about their team's work. Here described by the Industrial Engineering Manager:

What happens is that I get the question like this: "What have you done?" "What have you added now?" And then I get to do the analysis, or me and my team, do the analysis on costs and everything. And check what has happened. And then we get to call a meeting and say like this: "This, this and this have happened." And this you have missed, and this you have missed, and this you have missed. And this we may have missed. So, it can be two parts, but it's a lot about communication. But we have a suggestion that you could do this next time.

4.3 Evolving outcomes: employees' learning outcomes as results of managerial influence

This theme illustrates how managers describe employee learning outcomes, presumably partly because of their managerial influence. The Finance Manager and the HR Manager from Beta described their workplace as balanced and that they perceive that they can do their job as a manager without interference. Subsequently, learning outcomes were described as what the group, as a collaborative unit, had learned together or how strong relationships with many different individuals have been established: "Maybe that's when it happens the most. When there is no agenda but there is something there. And yet there is a strong enough relationship." Here, the HR Manager at Beta describes learning outcomes in terms of established relationships with other managers at the company, which at times was manifested in practice when managers turned to the HR Manager for guidance or support, because these managers had learned to value that relationship. The Finance Manager described that the work group of seven employees had, together with the HR Manager and HR employee, "learned to distribute the tasks in a better way and have a little more reserve value, some opportunities to relocate in connection with absence and so on."

At Alpha, learning outcomes were often described as results of individual direct support and negotiation between the manager and the employee. For instance, the Manager for Production Planning and Operative Sourcing described:

If I encounter a problem, I try to solve it myself. Not everyone works like that. When they have a problem, they blame it on their boss. There was a lot of conflict. What I did then was try to break up one group a little so that we came together more. I have done the company a favor because I have gotten rid of some rowdy individuals.

The Industrial Engineering Manager described discussions about what their department should do and should not do as challenging:

It's often the person who is perhaps my deputy manager who thinks that "this is how it's been said from the beginning that it should be done", so then [...] and he has a long history in the company too, in [...] in the same department. So, he's just like this "no, but this is how the division is" and I just [...] and then maybe I think like this "yes, but maybe this can be moved around a bit", so. I think those kinds of discussions are probably the most difficult. He's very [...] he's quite square, or [...] but it requires a little discussion before he [...] he doesn't just buy it straight away, but he usually needs a little time.

In contrast to the other managers at Alpha, The Group Technical Manager who was only 7 months old on the job, could describe how his work unit had changed towards focusing more on their main assignment:

If we talk about learning and so on, it's like I said [...] This group is unique in the way that it's part of our main mission, but when I started here and as I've already been warned about, a little understaffed and a lot of other things came in on the side. They didn't really work on what they were supposed to do, but it's more about producing quick assignments all the time that may not be strategically correct or that are about learning in many ways. So that's the advantage of us linking learning to their main tasks. So, what I've done since I started here is that I've created a process around how we're going to work with learning, technically, technology development, allocated time in [...] everyone has a day a week that's booked where they're going to work on increasing knowledge in their areas. Recently, I received confirmation that my employees have learned to have a better structure to their assignments thanks to this process.

This section highlights how managers describe employee learning outcomes, with Beta managers focusing on group collaboration and strong relationships, while Alpha managers emphasize individual direct support and negotiation between managers and employees.

5. Discussion

The study reveals that managers' perceptions of their roles, and the organizational environment significantly influence their leadership activities and, consequently, employee learning. At Alpha, a high-pressure environment prioritizes short-term results and cost-efficiency, which constrains managers' ability to support long-term learning and development. Managers at Alpha often need to "translate" top management directives to reduce pressure on employees, indicating a protective approach to create space for learning opportunities.

In contrast, Beta's balanced and supportive environment allows managers to focus on relational aspects and long-term development. Managers at Beta described their environment in terms of a supportive context emphasizing a psychologically safe workplace and supporting open communication, trust and continuous learning (Edmondson, 1999). The emphasis on psychological safety and relational aspects aligns with the findings of Gustavsson and Lundqvist (2021), who found that managerial support can act as a reward for employees, increasing their sense of appreciation and reducing stress, which positively impacts learning processes.

Since the pressure on managers was experienced differently in the two organizations studied, the managers' actions toward their employees were also affected (Arundel *et al.*, 2007). At Alpha, managers engage in direct support and structured learning opportunities, such as regular, open-ended meetings and dedicated time for knowledge acquisition. These activities reflect a focus on immediate, task-oriented learning, driven by the high-pressure environment (Arundel *et al.*, 2007). At Beta, managers prioritize creating opportunities for collaborative learning and conflict resolution. Regular team meetings and feedback sessions facilitate reflection and discussion, enhancing interpersonal and conflict-resolution skills (Edmondson, 1999). This approach aligns with the Process component of the 3P model, emphasizing the role of social interaction and personal meaning-making in learning processes (Illeris, 2004; Wenger, 2010).

The comparison between Alpha and Beta illustrates how different organizational contexts shape unique learning processes and outcomes. Alpha's high-pressure environment leads to structured, task-oriented learning processes focused on immediate, practical skills that directly contribute to short-term results. Managers create structured opportunities for learning, such as regular, open-ended meetings and dedicated time for knowledge acquisition

(Mintzberg, 1990). Learning outcomes at Alpha are often geared towards achieving efficiency, cost reduction and enhanced problem-solving abilities, reflecting the organization's emphasis on short-term gains (Gilboa *et al.*, 2008).

The study also highlights how managerial actions translate into tangible learning outcomes. At Alpha, learning outcomes are often related to individual competence improvements and better task management, reflecting the focus on immediate results. The Group Technical Manager's efforts to link learning to main tasks demonstrate the potential for positive outcomes even in high-pressure environments (Gagné *et al.*, 2020).

At Beta, learning outcomes include strong relationships, effective task distribution and enhanced conflict resolution skills. These outcomes illustrate the benefits of a supportive and balanced environment in facilitating continuous learning and development (Gustavsson and Lundqvist, 2021). The HR Manager's role in building strong relationships and providing guidance underscores the importance of relational aspects in achieving positive learning outcomes. These findings are consistent with the work of Lyons and Bandura (2021), who emphasized the importance of manager-as-coach and transformative leadership in building strong relationships with employees.

Beta's supportive environment encourages collaborative learning processes that foster strong relationships and the long-term development of a broader range of skills. Regular team meetings and feedback sessions facilitate reflection, discussion and knowledge sharing (Marsick and Watkins, 2003). Managers prioritize creating opportunities for collaborative learning and conflict resolution (Lyons and Bandura, 2021). Learning outcomes at Beta include strong relationships, effective task distribution and enhanced conflict resolution skills, contributing to overall professional growth (Braun *et al.*, 2013).

These differences highlight the importance of organizational context in shaping how managers perceive their roles and how they support employee learning. In high-pressure environments like Alpha, learning is more structured and immediate, while in balanced environments like Beta, learning is more collaborative and long-term. The findings extend Tynjälä's 3P model by providing illustrative findings on how managerial support (Presage) influences learning processes (Process) and outcomes (Product). The study highlights the dynamic interplay between contextual foundations, managerial activities and learning results, emphasizing the importance of supportive environments in achieving sustainable learning outcomes (Tynjälä, 2013). The comparison between Alpha and Beta illustrates how different organizational contexts shape managerial perceptions and leadership activities, ultimately influencing employee learning (Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1994; Revilla *et al.*, 2020).

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to provide a contextualized understanding of how managers influence employee workplace learning in different organizational environments, specifically focusing on two distinct types of environments characterized by different levels of pressure. The research question guiding this study was: How do managers' perceptions of their role and organizational environment influence their activities toward employee workplace learning?

The findings reveal that managers' perceptions of their roles and the organizational environment significantly influence their leadership activities and, consequently, employee learning. At Alpha, a high-pressure environment, short-term results and cost-efficiency are prioritized, which constrains managers' ability to support long-term learning and development. Managers at Alpha often need to "translate" top management directives to reduce pressure on employees, indicating a protective approach to create space for learning opportunities. In contrast, Beta's balanced and supportive environment allows managers to focus on relational aspects and long-term development. Managers at Beta described their

environment in terms of a supportive context emphasizing a psychologically safe workplace and facilitating open communication, trust and continuous learning.

This study extends Tynjälä’s 3P model by elucidating how managers influence employee learning processes and outcomes, as shown in [Table 3](#).

Study results underscores that through their leadership, managers can shape both the structures that facilitate employee learning and development and directly support employees in their work situations. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in nuancing the 3P model to highlight the role and conditions for managerial support, providing a structured approach to understanding the interplay between contextual foundations such as managerial support (Presage), dynamic interactions like team collaboration and feedback sessions (Process) and evolving outcomes such as improved task distribution and enhanced interpersonal skills (Product).

6.1 Practical recommendations

Based on the study findings, several practical recommendations emerge for managers and organizations aiming to enhance employee workplace learning. First, managers should cultivate self-awareness to understand how their actions impact employee learning processes ([Lord and Dinh, 2014](#); [Rostrom, 2022](#)). Improved self-awareness can help managers create a more supportive and conducive learning environment.

Encouraging teamwork and knowledge sharing is essential, as it enhances problem-solving skills and fosters a sense of community within the organization ([Billett, 2014](#); [Edmondson, 1999](#)). Managers should also focus on building trust and maintaining open communication channels, which are crucial for creating a supportive learning environment. Regular team meetings and feedback sessions can facilitate reflection and discussion,

Table 3. Summary and comparison between Tynjälä’s 3P model of workplace learning and study results

Aspect	Theoretical Framework (Tynjälä’s 3P Model)	Empirical Evidence (Results Section)
Presage (Contextual Foundations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning context includes managerial support, organizational culture and individual learner factors - Managers create conditions for learning through their presence and actions which are interpreted by other learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managers’ perceptions of their roles and organizational settings influence their ability to support learning - High-pressure environments (Alpha) limit learning opportunities, while balanced environments (Beta) support relational and long-term development
Process (Dynamic Interactions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning processes involve both formal and informal activities, including managers direct support and creating opportunities for learning - Emphasis on social interaction and personal meaning-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alpha and Beta seem to have two distinct types of learning processes – Alpha with focus on direct support (high pressure) and Beta with focus on creating opportunities (balanced)
Product (Evolving Outcomes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning outcomes include personal development, improved work skills and enhanced work climate - Outcomes are influenced by the interaction between presage and process circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Noticeable individual competence improvements such as better task management at Alpha - Positive outcomes in Beta include strong relationships and conflict resolution skills

Source(s): Author’s own work

helping employees to learn from their experiences and from each other (Wallo *et al.*, 2021). These activities are important in both high-pressure and balanced environments to ensure continuous learning and development.

Managers should ensure that they provide the necessary resources and support for learning activities, enabling employees to engage in continuous professional development (Billett, 2020). This includes allocating time for skill development and creating structured opportunities for learning. Managers should adapt their leadership styles to align with the specific organizational context. In high-pressure environments, managers may need to focus on efficiency and immediate results while still providing support for learning. In balanced environments, managers can emphasize relational aspects and long-term development.

6.2 Study limitations and future research

While managers' perceptions and narratives offer valuable insights, the reliance on self-reported experiences presents inherent limitations. Self-reported material can be subject to biases, such as social desirability bias and recall bias, which may affect the accuracy and completeness of the information provided (Qu and Dumay, 2011). Consequently, readers are advised to exercise caution when interpreting the study findings, considering the specific organizational environments and managerial roles researched.

Future research could benefit from exploring a wider range of organizational contexts and incorporating multiple perspectives, such as those of employees, to enrich the understanding of how managers influence employee workplace learning. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how managerial leadership activities evolve over time, further illuminating their impact on employee learning processes and outcomes (Wallo *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, exploring the interplay between different leadership styles and workplace learning could offer additional dimensions to the current findings. For instance, examining how inclusive or transactional leadership practices influence employee learning across various contexts (Hillberg Jarl, 2024) could add a leadership dimension to how employee workplace learning can be encouraged by managers.

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