



LEARNOVATE
Leading Learning Innovation

Demonstrating the Business Value of L&D

Phase 2 Research Report

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Phase 2 - Core Research Project



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1. Executive Summary

We asked the Irish Learning & Development (L&D) industry, what are the biggest problems they face? They agreed the challenge of showing the senior management team the business value of what they do was the top issue. We found this challenge resonates as a major challenge for L&D across the globe. Udey report 77% of L&D leaders are seeing more demand to show business value (2017).

In our Phase 1 we triangulated our research through industry organisations, academic and industry research. This project concluded with the development of a potential model to assist L&D in their task. A simple but significant shift proposed was to think of business value as a parallel activity to learning evaluation, rather than the end of the same chain. The model was built around the four areas of Plan, Explore, Analyse and Share (PEAS).

Phase 2 saw us co-create and test the first two stages of our model with participation from two industry members; a law firm and a financial institution. We used live data from real projects to learn, iterate and test if the model was suitable.

The project leveraged an adapted version of 'Jobs to be Done' for the 'Plan' stage, to dig deep and identify the 'business value impact' for any L&D intervention requested.

Moving to the 'Explore' stage using real-life data from the organisations' projects we arrived at five elements (see below) required to translate the business value impact goal into a prediction of value. The five elements fit all our scenarios and was also able to be retrofitted to the case studies from Phase 1.

| Intervention | Organisation Impact | Relationship | Participants | Business Value |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Proposed intervention design | Hypothesised effect on behaviour | Related impact effect on organisation | Expected number of participants | Business value for organisation |

The five components come together as the following hypothesis:

*If the **Intervention** is successful it will have **Organisation Impact** which will have **Relationship** impact for the organisation across # **Participants** delivering **Business Value**.*

Three real-world projects were analysed and are detailed in this report, showing a combined business value of over €1.5 million. The progress in this phase and the industry support have been encouraging. We are now keen to move on and maintain the momentum into Phase 3; to develop a pilot digital support model and progress the Analyse and Share phases.

2. Introduction and Context

The impetus for this research came from the findings of a Learnovate phase one research project. Learnovate and the Irish Institute of Training and Development (IITD) co-hosted a workshop with IITD members to identify an important issue facing Learning and Development. The issue of most concern emerging from the workshop was “the need to show the business value of L&D to the senior leadership team”. Learnovate subsequently carried out a Phase 1 research project in the area, culminating in an analysis report and hypothesised model to resolve the issue.

The report from Phase 1 took a multi-lens view to investigate the space, including:

- Case studies of organisations in Ireland currently showing business value.
- Current academic thoughts in the area.
- The L&D industry associations’ views.

Recent industry research uncovered the evident need for L&D to show business value, a Udemy for Business report tells us that 77% of business leaders see the availability of skills as the biggest threat to their business, while the same percentage of L&D leaders are seeing more demand to show business value (2017).

The purpose of the Learnovate project was not to look at data analytics techniques or technologies in the marketplace. It sought to probe, at an appropriate level, how L&D might start to move forward and experiment with delivering business value metrics.

The case studies looked at six organisations in various industries where senior management view Learning & Development (L&D) as a department that adds value rather than as a cost centre. Across these companies, several similarities arose: L&D seen as a valued partner rather than being constrained by the smaller detail of cent-for-cent return on investment. Aligned to this they are seen as part of the team responsible for business value, therefore if results are positive L&D has played its part and does not need to prove they were the only factor involved. Most teams started with projects where showing business value was easier and seek to build on what they learn to extend the approach to other projects. Showing value to the senior leadership team involved taking that extra step and thinking about what the business benefit should be, establishing this before the learning intervention and returning to measure it afterwards. Reporting is nearly always in terms of financial impact; it is in the language of the senior management team and is kept simple. Other similarities brought to light were:

- A detective-type approach to understanding the business problem.
- Involving the wider team, such as finance, to assist in validating findings.

- Employing experimental methods to show value.
- Broadcasting successes in business terms to the wider organisation.

To develop the research, it was believed a model would be required, models do exist, but they appear to fall short of L&D's requirements. Models like Kirkpatrick's four-level evaluation can be too open to interpretation while Phillips ROI Model can appear complex and time-consuming.

In phase one an initial hypothesis was put forward as a potential model for L&D to start showing business value. A simple but significant shift proposed was to think of business value as a parallel activity to learning evaluation, rather than the end of the same chain (see below) and also to provide practical guidelines toward achieving the business value goal through a four-stage structure: Plan, Explore, Analyse, Share. The model proposed is flexible to allow for the context-driven nature of L&D from organisation to organisation. This initial model was to inform further research, to validate and iterate, but meanwhile could provide guidance to L&D professionals who want to start looking at demonstrating the business value of L&D.

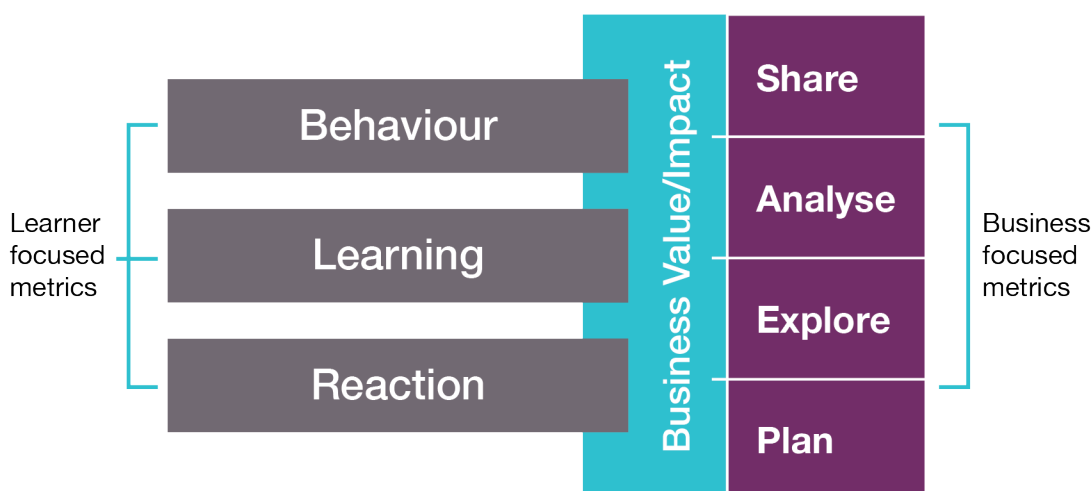


Fig1. Hypothesised model to show business value – PEAS

3. The Business Value of L&D. – Phase II Approach

The Learning & Development (L&D) challenge to show value in a meaningful way to senior management is one that resonates in research across the globe, (Omran Aly, 2017; Percival, Cozzarin and Formanek, 2013; Srimannarayana, 2017). It is five years since Kirkpatrick stated:

“Whether you’re one of the inhouse survivors or a struggling consultant, you can no longer coast on lofty notions about continuous learning and employee development. You need to provide compelling evidence that training delivers bottom-line results and contributes to mission accomplishment.”

(Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Traditionally, and to a large extent currently, L&D demonstrated value through means such as learner engagement and performance improvement. These are measurements of learning’s impact on the learner. In an era where business relies more and more on human capital, the importance of business accountability has come sharply into focus.

Jos Arets, (2017) from the 70:20:10 Institute puts it as follows:

“Over the past decades, L&D has been busy trying to demonstrate the value of learning. However, this is no longer seen as being sufficient nor relevant. Learning in organisations is intended to improve performance measurably..... This is one reason the interest to demonstrate business impact is so high in L&D.”

Reflecting on Arets’ quote above, the word ‘performance’ is ambiguous and therefore open to interpretation. Performance improvements must be translated into business terms that resonate, including capacity, sales, profit etc. One reason it has proven so difficult for L&D to model business impact is the variation in activity from organisation to organisation. Even within a single organisation an L&D intervention can vary from sales training, health & safety, to soft-skills development, and may include many more types of intervention. Each intervention will more than likely require a different approach to translate the outcomes into a language that will resonate with senior management teams.

Traditionally L&D has been cautious of how accountable a learning intervention alone is in relation to any consequential outcome. As Williams van Rooij says, “In L&D, context influences the nature and type of analytics” (2018). The takeaway here is that the diverse nature of L&D projects and subsequent outcomes are so context-driven that case studies

emerge as the most meaningful way to study the area (Williams van Rooij, 2018).

Learnovate found evidence to support this approach as detailed in the Phase 1 research report. The companies interviewed were each using their own method to analyse and demonstrate the business value of their efforts.

In 2020 Learnovate sought to build on these findings in an exciting research project to investigate the development of a model to help Learning and Development show the business value of their initiatives in a repeatable fashion, allowing for the wide variance in both organisation structure and L&D initiatives.

Phase 2

The best innovations come from co-creation, we signed up two organisations to participate in phase 2, a multi-national law firm with a base in Ireland and an Irish financial organisation. The anticipated benefits for participants were; the ability to influence the design and development of a solution to an identified problem for L&D, potential first / early view of solutions and the option to trial / adopt the approach.

The goal of this phase was to further develop PEAS, to refine, define and deploy a pilot prototype model with real cases. The project ran for four months coinciding with the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic which introduced challenges to the process. The project involved five online meetings with the law firm between March and June and five meetings with the financial institution between April and July 2020. Input from participants was very valuable and reasonably light touch.

As mentioned, PEAS (Plan, Explore, Analyse and Share) was the starting point, however from the outset it was agreed that all was up for challenge during the process of co-creation, to ensure ease of use and suitability for purpose.

Plan

For the 'Plan' stage we deployed the validated framework, Jobs to be Done (JTBD), used by Learnovate as a mainstay of our innovation process. The framework investigates the true nature of the problem a customer seeks to solve through any intervention. The process was adapted in this instance adopting "the organisation" as the customer and interventions as relating to any request to L&D. The process seeks to understand beyond; the features of an intervention, the acceptance of the intervention by the staff, and the expected effects of the intervention on behaviour, to investigate what job or business problem the organisation will solve if the intervention is successful, usually a monetary figure. We ask the individual or

team that requests the intervention from L&D to represent the organisation in a short workshop.

Given the early stage of the design both L&D teams decided to represent their organisations based on current and recent projects. Learnovate staff led the facilitation role which would ultimately be led by L&D in the final version. The workshop does not look at solutions or intervention designs at this stage it purely works to identify, as the name suggests, the Jobs to be Done or problems to be solved. In the workshop we probe the functional and associated social and emotional jobs the organisation might seek to achieve. We then push on to explore what are the likely gains and barriers using the canvas below.






| | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Customer | | Request to L&D | |
| Jobs to be done Functional  <div></div> Emotional  <div></div> Social  <div></div> | | Outcomes (Gains)  <div></div> <hr/> Barriers (Pains)  <div></div> | |

Fig 1. Jobs to be Done Canvas adapted for PEAS

The Gains and Barriers sections ultimately provide the directions to identify the real business value of interest. It is here that the facilitator is required to push the participants to think deeper than perhaps they might initially as to the 'why' this project is being sought? What is the problem the organisation has that it hopes the intervention will solve from a business perspective? This exercise also serves the purpose of answering the questions; is L&D the right solution? and what focus should the intervention take? For example, the request may be to improve onboarding, in probing this area it may be a case of looking at why? Is the problem the current onboarding is not working? Is the problem that too many people are exiting? And ultimately what are the business issues. The time to deliver onboarding draws

on current resources and also while onboarding, staff may not be delivering at full capacity so for instance in sales there may be revenue opportunities not being maximised.

Explore

The output from the workshop identifies the reasons the intervention is being sought, now we enter the second Explore phase. Parallel to the design of the training needs analysis and design the next task is to explore what way business value might be shown? and how we might uncover data to support the case. This aspect requires analysis of the workshop output and formulating a business value hypothesis, to use the example of onboarding sales above. If the onboarding of sales staff can be reduced in time without any loss in effectiveness, or indeed with improved effectiveness then there is potential to investigate one or more aspects that will return business value to the organisation. In developing the hypothesis there will be some need for an educated opinion from L&D on the level of impact, the value may also reveal itself in more than one way. Using the example above we might hypothesise that time for current staff in providing training can be saved, time that can be deployed in other aspects of their roles and maybe more importantly if sales staff are up to full operational capability quicker they are delivering more sales to the organisation. To explore this area will most likely need L&D to seek assistance from other departments such as sales, finance etc. to start to put figures behind the hypothesis. Salaries, sales targets etc. will all start to bring the picture together. In the design this aspect is seen as one of the strengths of the model, when the data being proposed is supported and validated by other departments in the organisation, a finding that rang true in our Phase 1 findings.

The end of the explore phase is a statement to support the L&D intervention design proposal making a claim on expected business value. Note as mentioned before not all interventions will lend themselves as readily to this project and our suggestion is to start with projects that might have a more readily identifiable business outcome and build from there. The statement should also capture the 'as is' situation using the gathered data which will be used as the benchmark for the effectiveness post intervention.

Analyse and Share

Within the scope of Phase two the concept was to focus on Plan and Explore, gain insights to the Analyse and Share phases and seek to develop those phases in subsequent co-creations.

Referring back to the Phase 1 report these areas are:

Analyse (after the intervention)

Once again, the concept is to keep it simple; most of the case studies we looked at used a simple A vs B or 'A-pre' and 'A-post' measure of the effect. It is a repeated measure and comparison against the data from the Explore phase. The case studies showed when finance or commercial are involved, they may well be able to assist with the 'number crunching' and add validity to outcomes. In addition, there are many user-friendly statistics packages now emerging to allow non-statisticians to generate statistics, for example, Stats iQ

<https://www.qualtrics.com/uk/iq/stats-iq/>

Share (after the intervention)

The literature and the case studies reported one of the most important, and often forgotten tasks is to share any good news in the right way to the right people. If the good news is shared in a business value format it is likely to resonate easier with the wider organisation. Also, it will earn future buy-in, not just from the senior management team but also from other units in the business to see L&D as an asset that adds value rather than a 'cost centre'. While storytelling is around since the dawn of human communication it has seen a recent resurgence as a means of teaching and learning. L&D should leverage the storytelling approach in sharing news; make them care, book-end it, make it purposeful, engaging and emotional. Visuals can also help in providing interest, context and telling a story very quickly.

The next section of this report looks at what we found deploying this approach with two organisations.

4. Co-creation

The Covid-19 pandemic coinciding with phase 2 saw the need to undertake almost all interactions online. Mural and Zoom were the tools of choice to host the workshops online and served their purpose well. Indeed, with one participant based in New York online suited best.

The concept of Jobs to be Done is not a complicated one but it is a way of thinking that can be different to the way people normally think about challenges. Humans appear to be hardwired to focus on solutions while JTBD looks at problems. Note as reported here the following might seem like a complicated, protracted process but becoming proficient at running this workshop is a low ramp and, in the flow, should not take more than 90 minutes. It also serves to position L&D more in that consultant role focused on delivering business value.

The participants started by agreeing what the defined intervention was and its purpose? We often refer to this in Learnovate as 'The Thing', the thing is the idea and brings focus, for instance "Improve the onboarding process for our sales team". This is our reference point, and as we explore the space it provides the check point to ensure we are on track. For example, we might say a JTBD is to reduce absenteeism in the organisation, a laudable idea but unlikely to be impacted much by onboarding.

Having identified the 'The Thing' we started to explore what 'jobs' we might expect to complete for the organisations. As a first attempt we did have a rocky start with each organisation as participants got used to the process. We found that time for reflection helped the teams re-think the JTBD and to refocus the projects. As future facilitators this was good to see, they were 'getting it' and becoming invested in the project, rethinking and sharpening the focus on 'jobs' the intervention might realistically achieve. A related point and intended function of the model is that it can identify at an early stage where an L&D intervention may not be the right approach to solve the problem.

With our Jobs to be Done identified we moved on to the other two areas of the canvas, reflecting on the identified jobs we sought to identify what gains our customer, the organisation, could realistically expect and what barriers might be faced. The participants found this aspect easier to work with, although there was a quick default to look at cost reduction as a gain and cost of intervention as a barrier. Being mindful of costs is always important but it falls to the facilitator in the workshop to push participants to also look beyond the cost aspect to look for growth angles that can improve sales, outputs, profits etc.

The final stage of the workshop involved ranking the most valuable; Jobs, Gains and Barriers. This provided us with the materials to formulate the base hypothesis. As a co-create session, we had loose ideas around the development of the hypothesis structure entering the process. We wanted to investigate links from performance and/or effects to business outcomes. We set about exploring an approach with input from the participants and what we learned in Phase 1. Using the real-life data from the organisations' projects and in conjunction with both teams we arrived at the five elements below (see Table 1) which fit all our scenarios and was able to be retrofitted to the case studies from Phase 1.

| Intervention | Organisation Impact | Relationship | Participants | Business Value |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Proposed intervention design | Hypothesised effect on behaviour | Related impact effect on organisation | Expected number of participants | Business value for organisation |

Table 1. Components of Business Value hypothesis

The five components come together as the following hypothesis:

*If the **Intervention** is successful it will have **Organisation Impact** which will have **Relationship** impact for the organisation across # **Participants** delivering **Business Value**.*

A hypothetical version in line with the onboarding sales scenario might look like this:

*If the **Sales Onboarding Programme** is successful it will **Bring new sales team to full target four weeks earlier** which will **mean additional sales of 4 x €5,000** impact for the organisation across **6 per quarter participants** delivering **€120,000 additional sales per quarter**.*

As we worked this model, we found that the outputs from the JTBD meant there was usually more than one impact hypothesis to be developed for each project.

It is worthwhile to explore two of the components above in some more detail as they are the two that may well require some detective work and the need to interact with other departments. **Organisation Impact** refers to the effect the intervention will have on the staff, for example, improve performance, reduce downtime etc. In deciding organisation impact L&D must make an estimated call on the associated impact either in percent or actual measurements such as hours. The second is **Relationship**, here we seek to link the Organisation Impact to a business value metric and formulate a ratio. Using the example above the organisation impact was full sales potential four weeks earlier, the relationship here could be full sales equates to €7,000 sales per week, onboarding sales is typically €2,000 per week, therefore the additional sales is €5,000 per week at full quota, multiplied by

4 weeks equals €20,000 increased sales. This is a part that may feel uncomfortable for L&D as it is a new approach in many cases and making a bold prediction may cause some stress, but to show business value it is a necessary one. Also, to bear in mind that even if the effect were to turn out half of what was estimated, in this case, it would still be €60,000 increased sales per quarter.

Part of our assumptions in developing this model is that there are a finite number of top-level categories under both Organisation Impact and Business Value. This assumption will no doubt be challenged as we move forward and will evolve, but this finite number allows for the development of a model that again makes it easier to use and adopt. Under Organisation Impact our starting set includes, improve performance (better), increase performance (more), and reduce downtime/non-productive time. In Business Value we propose; Increased sales, increased profit, reduced costs and time saved leading to increased productivity.

Value measurement

Phase 2 was focused on the two stages 'Plan and Explore' but we did take into account that we would need to trap our data now for use in the future, to back up our claims, as this is a crucial element for strengthening L&D's claims and providing a profile as value provider.

The two most common ways we believe to do this is either:

Measure as is at time 'A' before the intervention and then measure again at time 'B' allowing for a reasonable amount of time. In our hypothetical model above this would not work as the team are not currently working at full capacity for the company, they are being onboarded. In this case the more appropriate model would be to measure a previous team using historical data. So, the format here would be to measure Previous Team 1 sales for the last four weeks of their onboarding (the control group) and compare this with the New Team 2 for the equivalent period post the new shorter onboarding.

We believe that to promote adoption and use of this model it has to be simple and the simpler we can keep it the better. The two measurement approaches above will cover most scenarios but over the course of phase two a third emerged which is associated with cost reduction. Cost reduction is less about measure/remesure and more about planning, reporting and converting to financial metric where possible, we will show examples of this in the next section.

Below is a graphic representation of the stages and model as described thus far.

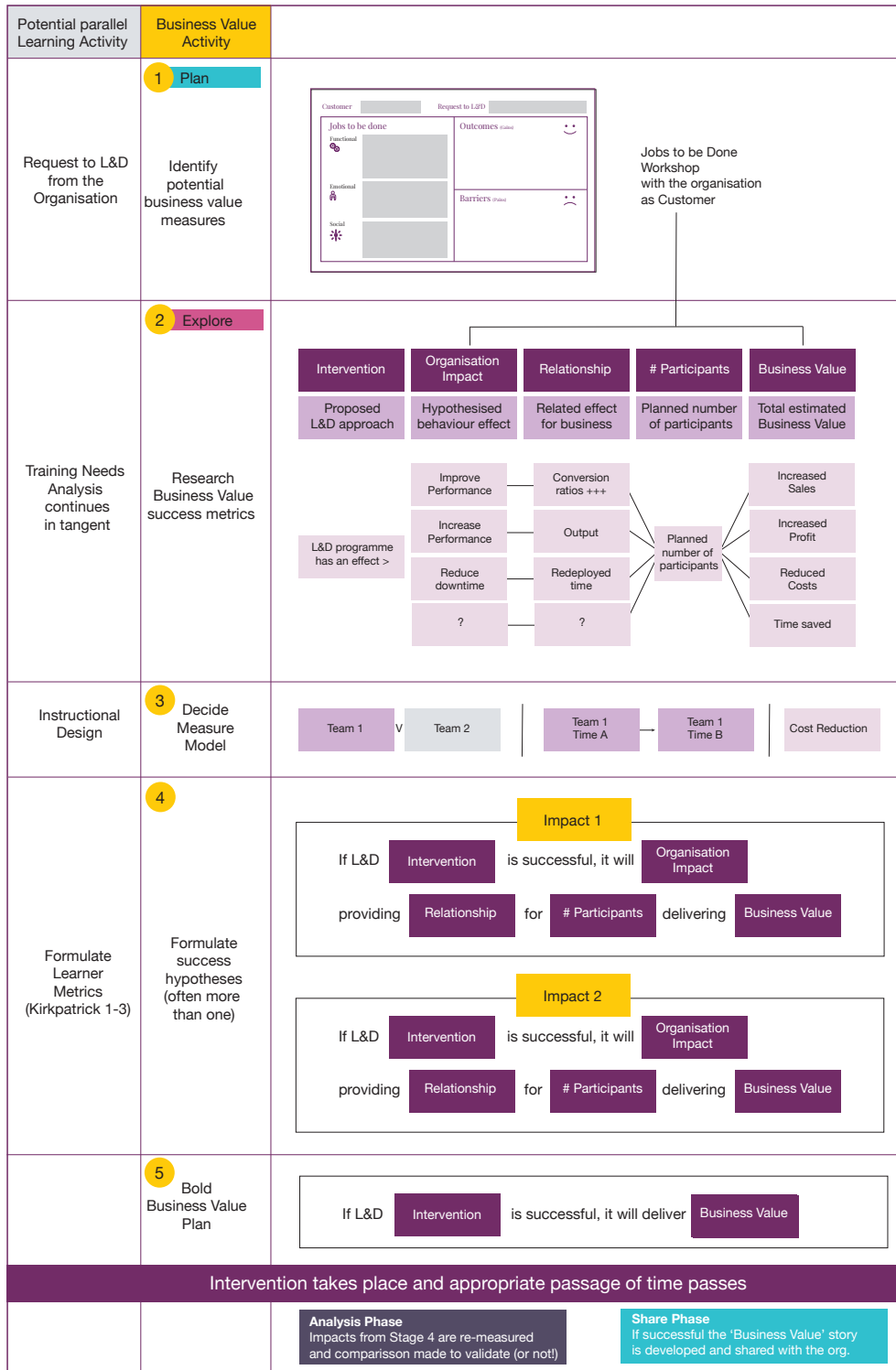


Fig 2. Phase 2 PEAS Model

5. Findings

The purpose of phase two was to implement the hypothesised model with real cases from industry. To comply with privacy for the participants the following represents slightly adjusted data from these cases however the adjustments, agreed with the participating organisations, are small enough to still make the data shown here as representative of the real figures.

The following figures were developed in partnership with the participants and their interactions with other departments within their organisation. To show the model in operation the projects have been mapped to the PEAS model on the previous page.

The samples are real but which company each example refers to has been left out, again to protect confidentiality.

All participants worked with Learnovate in weekly sessions to derive the following cases, and all were happy and confident with the plans derived, finding it a very different approach and one they were keen to deploy going forward.

In reviewing the figures below, and to take the first example in Fig 3. L&D traditionally might be asked to improve the onboarding process and go about the business of improving the process to the best of their abilities, but when L&D are able to show that their efforts are bringing over €700,000 in value to the organisation, solving a business issue, it puts that effort in a different light. Does it make L&D nervous about delivering on that promise?

Possibly, but even delivering half that demonstrable figure is valuable. If it does not deliver it brings the question of was onboarding the problem? Was the programme ineffective? All questions that an L&D function looking to be seen as a value provider should be willing to face.

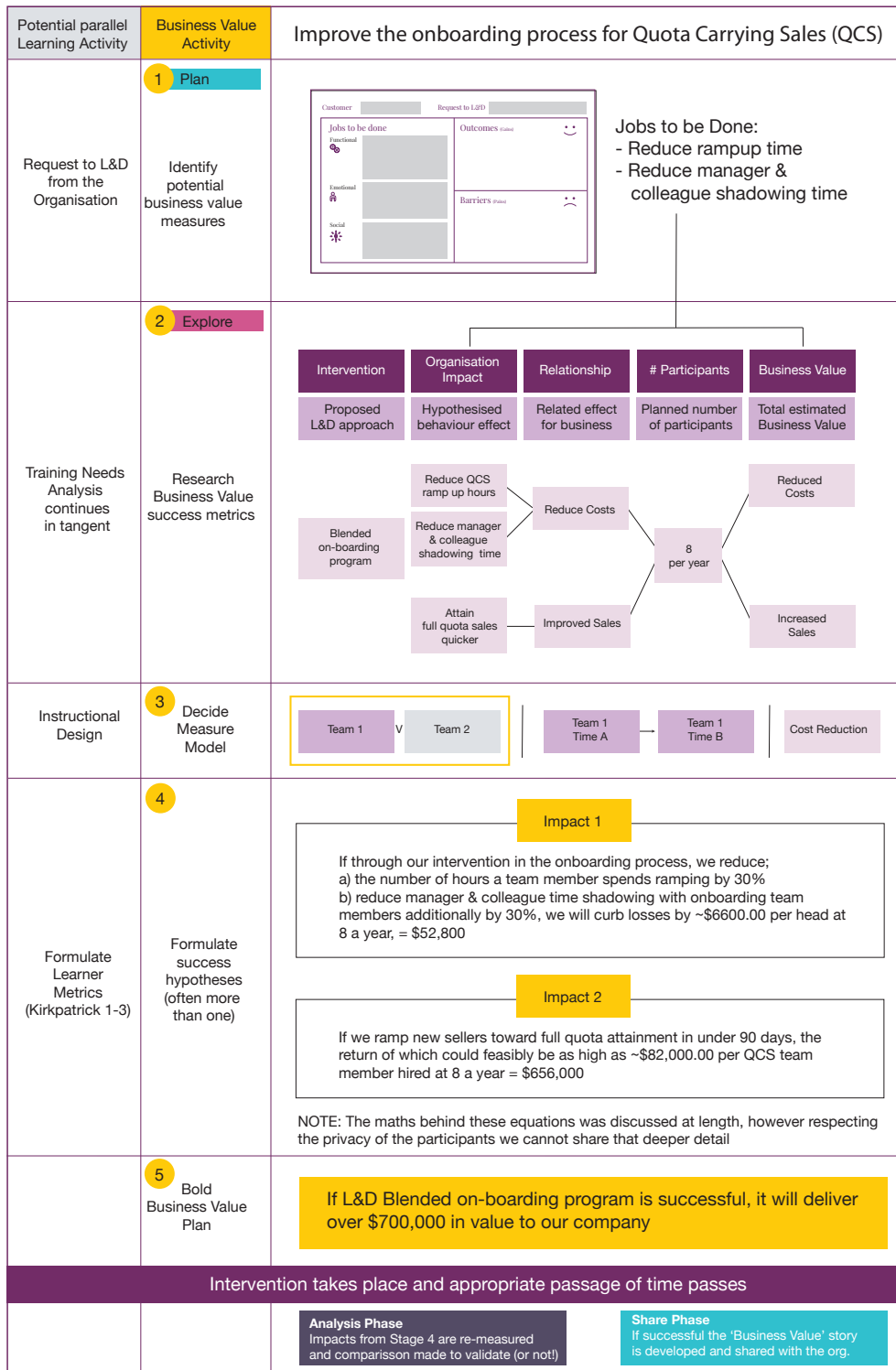


Fig 3. PEAS applied to improve onboarding project

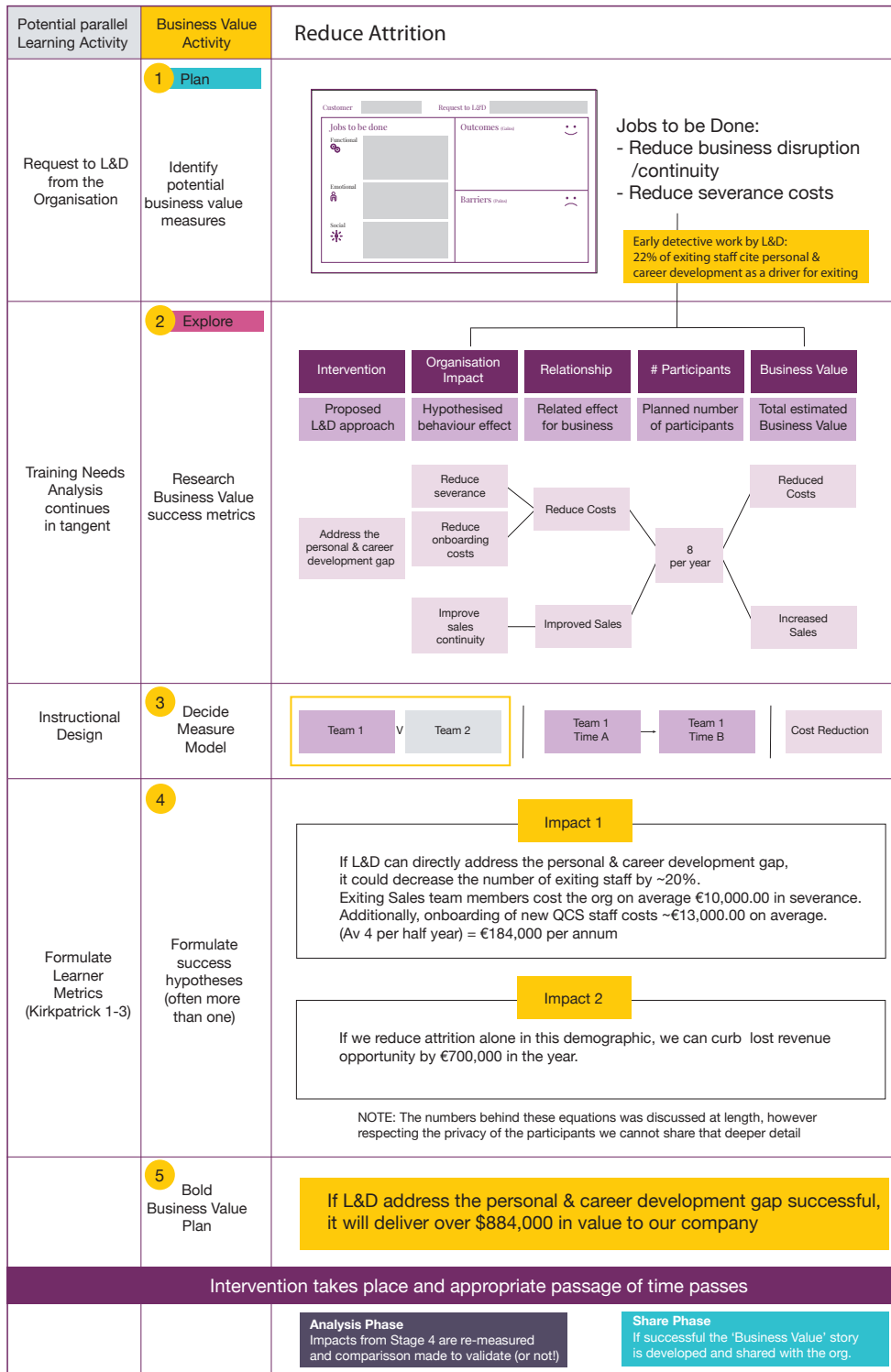


Fig 4. PEAS applied to improve personal & career development

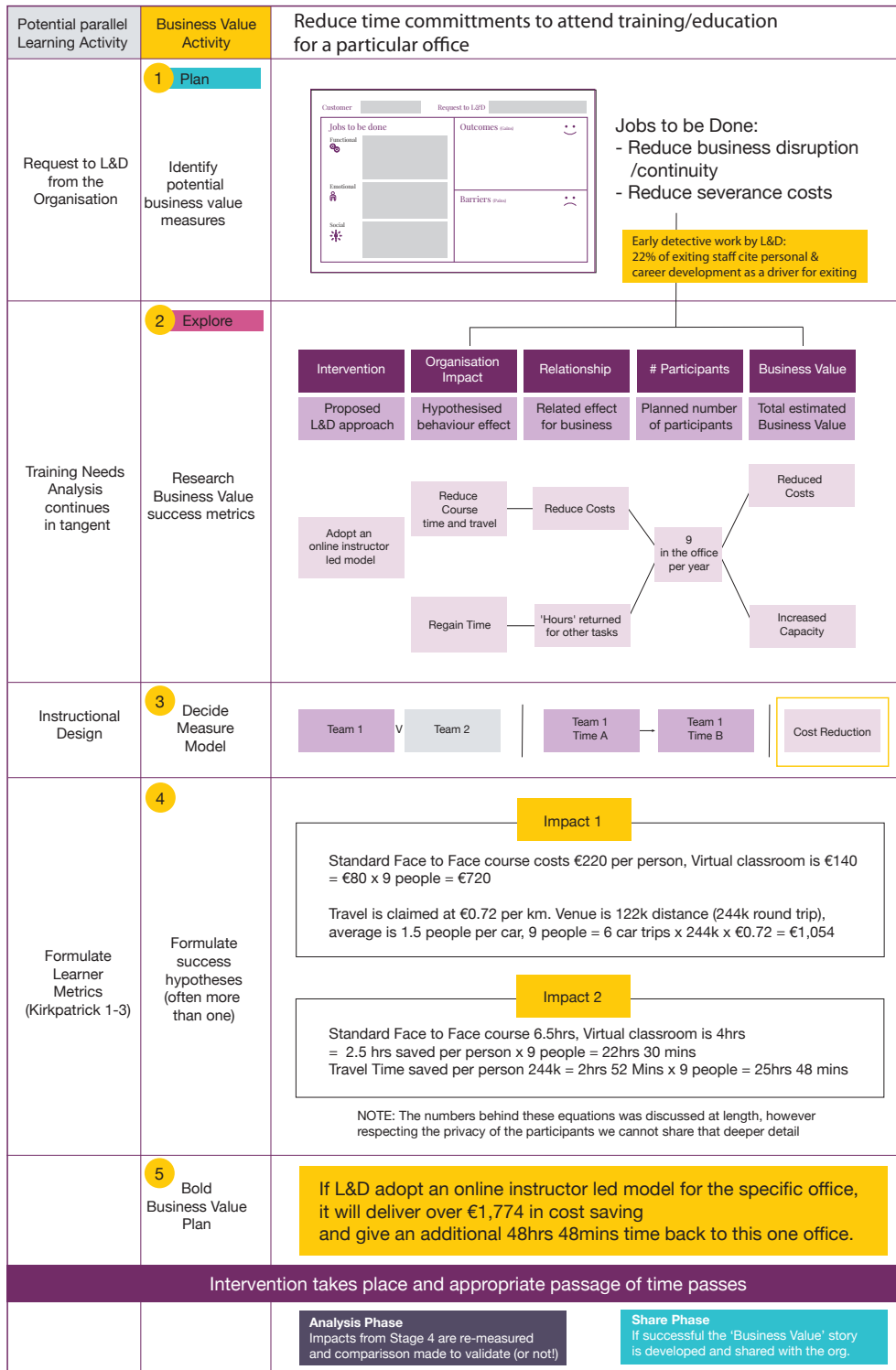


Fig 5. PEAS applied to reduce time commitments to attend training

6. Future Work

Following the exercises above both organisations felt more empowered and confident that the model is something they would use and would be keen to develop. Both organisations also showed comfort, even after this short exercise, that they would be able to follow the process and in fact each were already exploring further dimensions to bring to both the current cases and future ones. As we have said many times, the detective approach is a fundamental part of the model, not accepting the first reason given for undertaking a project but pushing to find out what is the business value driver.

L&D is traditionally acknowledged as being under resourced and time poor, so the support of a model to follow is welcome. In further developing this model we are interested in the concept that in terms of both the 'Organisation Impact' and 'Relationship' components there appears to be a reasonably small number of variables. This opens the way to explore how the development of a digital tool might be able to support L&D further in showing business value. Our intention from the outset is to look at developing a digital support tool or app, similar to a project management tool that in an unobtrusive way supports and prompts L&D through the process, minimising the effort for L&D while maximising the subsequent value of the output.

The Phase 2 project did not look at the 'Analyse' and 'Share' stages, in the next phase and as we develop the digital tools, we will again look to co-create these two aspects of the platform with industry partners. We will develop these leveraging inputs from the same two partners from phase 2, one of the original partners from phase 1 and possibly seek others to contribute as well.

We are looking to maintain the momentum of Phase 2 and envisage moving into Phase 3 this Autumn with a view to developing a prototype and testing with organisations before the end of the year.

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