

IDENTIFYING EDUCATION AND TRAINING NEEDS: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF PROVIDER AND USER PERSPECTIVES

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We address the issue of identifying education and training needs from two key perspectives: education and training providers and program users. Misalignment between users' perceived needs and the educational offer may reduce the effectiveness of education and training programs and limit the transfer of acquired knowledge into practice. Our purpose is to examine how different stakeholders identify and define education and training needs and to what extent their expectations and priorities align. We explore similarities and differences in the understanding of competency gaps, learning goals, and expected outcomes of education and training through comparative perspective. Our findings contribute to a better understanding of the importance of aligning provider and user perspectives and emphasize the need for more inclusive, responsive, and flexible approaches to the design of education and training programs. We also offer practical insights for improving the quality and relevance of education and training practices in contemporary organizational contexts.

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1 Introduction

In today's digital age and changing workplace skills, identifying and fulfilling the needs of education and training is a key activity for an organization and educational institution to perform. Due to the fast pace of technological change and changing skills requirement in the workplace, both organizations and training institutions have to be very sensitive in identifying the competencies gap and meeting the stakeholder's needs for learning (Rumanti et al., 2025). Recently, there has been an emphasis on the importance of digital literacy from an individual and organizational level, therefore requiring an analysis framework that incorporates the stakeholder's voice in the process of identifying the needs (Hairunisya et al., 2025; Shatila et al., 2025).

Skills training is required for a wider range of competences that ensure the employability of employees and the ability of an organisation to survive and adapt in a changing environment. In particular, digital literacy was found to facilitate the effective use of digital tools by employees, the sharing and exchange of digital information and participation in a knowledge-based, value-creation process (Rumanti et al., 2025; Shatila et al., 2025). These competences are not only defined by the organisation but also shaped by the interactions of the providers and users of education and training. Providers' ability to read the needs of users and adapt their offers is a critical capability in a professional learning ecology.

Even though the criticality of the needs identification process in professional education is recognized, evidence exists of a mismatch between organizational demands and training supplies (Hairunisya et al., 2025). A mismatch may diminish the impact of educational and training programs, result in low learner motivation and produce limited generalizability of skills to the job. To overcome this mismatch, there is a need to comparatively examine the views of the two actors involved in the education and training process, namely the parties who request education and training (organizational users) and those who supply education and training (providers).

This article examines this interplay on the basis of two qualitative case studies: one of a HR department manager in a software company of medium size and one of a manager in a public further education institute. The article examines the way in

which both interviewees recognize, negotiate and achieve both sets of interests to illustrate the related processes of interest recognition, negotiation and achievement and to contribute to the debate on demand-orientation of stakeholder-orientation of professional learning in the more and more complex professional worlds.

2 Literature Review

The need for needs assessment was identified as an essential part of HRD and training to identify the gap between the actual and expected knowledge, skills and attitudes. It also needs to be aligned with the organisational objective and performance (Shatila et al., 2025) and can be conducted at different levels (organisational, task and individual) to make sure the training is relevant. Without conducting needs assessment, training may not be utilised, and employees may not gain the skills they need (Hairunisya et al., 2025). The needs of training providers and consumers need to be aligned, as the needs will be different based on the objective, outcome and work experience.

The requirement of training is dynamic rather than static due to the changing nature of work. The digitalisation of work results in job insecurity and the need for continuous reskilling (Shah and Mola, 2026). The skill gap, which refers to the difference between the skills demanded and supplied, hinders innovation and competitiveness (Braun et al., 2025). The existing competence framework might not be comprehensive, particularly in the context of Industry 5.0 (Carminati et al., 2025). The digital competence required will also be influenced by organisational performance and stakeholder involvement (Rumanti et al., 2025; Shatila et al., 2025).

The needs identification based on evidence is limited due to the unavailability of needs assessment instruments, resulting in general expressions of needs which need to be further defined by the suppliers (Rashida and Bariham, 2025). In the absence of a transfer mechanism such as coaching, limited feedback will be available from the training for future needs assessment (Ambu-Saidi et al., 2024). A skill-first approach which considers both internal and external signals can help in keeping the needs up to date (Collings and McMackin, 2025; Caterino et al., 2025).

Misalignment between provider and user can occur due to the poor connection between education and industry, resulting in skill mismatch (Kayyali, 2025; Braun et al., 2025). Resource and cooperation will influence what needs can be communicated and offered. The existence of structured evaluation criteria and the involvement of stakeholders can help in translating the general needs into a curriculum (Akhtar et al., 2024; Caterino et al., 2025).

Digital literacy is one of the emerging needs due to the impact of digitalisation on job requirement and wellbeing (Shah and Mola, 2026) and is influenced by the organisational system and HRD practices (Rumanti et al., 2025; Hairunisyah and Narmaditya, 2025). The requirement for hard, soft and transversal skills needs to be considered together for the current work environment (Carminati et al., 2025; Akhtar et al., 2024). Continuous professional development considers the needs to be changing as the job and technology change and feasibility becomes a challenge for participation and effectiveness (Rashida and Bariham, 2025; Asmare, 2025).

Transfer of learning which refers to the extent to which learning is being applied at work is considered an essential aspect of training effectiveness and is influenced by time, opportunity and support (O'Neill, 2025; Blume et al., 2017; Ambu-Saidi et al., 2024). The bidirectional transfer which considers integrating on-the-job and off-the-job experiences can enhance the effectiveness (Wahl and Hybertsen, 2025).

3 Research

The purpose of the research was to find out how the corporate client and the education institution understand and perceive the educational and training needs of the former. Using the theory discussed in the above chapters the research was of a qualitative, comparative nature including opinions of a corporate HR manager in the company MIL Sistemika d.o.o. and a director of Davčno izobraževalni inštitut (DIZI).

This study aims to investigate, on the one hand, the mechanisms and principles that lead to identifying education and training needs and, on the other hand, the extent to which the education and training needs as perceived by the organizational customers match with what is being offered and prioritized by a professional education and training supplier. By involving key stakeholders on the demand and

supply sides of education and training, this study sheds further light on how learning needs are perceived, interpreted and implemented in professional settings.

Our research questions are:

- *RQ1: How do organizational representatives (users) and education providers differ in the way they identify education and training needs?*
- *RQ2: To what extent are the education and training needs expressed by users (employees/ organizations) aligned with the offerings of a professional training provider?*
- *RQ3: What methods or tools are used by training providers and organizations to gather and interpret needs related to education and training?*
- *RQ4: What are the key barriers and drivers influencing the effective matching of education and training programs to users' needs?*
- *RQ5: How do stakeholders' expectations about the outcomes of education and training differ between users and providers?*
- *RQ6: What role does continuous professional development play in organizational strategy and training provider program design?*

For the purpose of this paper, we conducted semi-structured interviews with two stakeholders: Nina Minov (MIL Sistemika d.o.o. HRM manager) and Petra Zidar (DIZI senior representative). Questions referred to practices, tools, and strategies for identifying needs, but also on barriers and enablers for ensuring a balance between supply and demand. The paper is structured according to the research questions and in the following sections, we thematically analyse the responses of the stakeholders by looking at the points of agreement and disagreement.

Based on the analysis, this chapter provides the basis from which it will become possible to explain how organizations and educational institutions could be better engaged with each other in order to develop education and training programs that are relevant and adaptive to changing occupational needs.

4 Discussion and Implications

These six research questions, developed during our literature review, guided our research and form the foundation of this chapter. We now address these questions in light of the empirical data collected through interviews with a key representative from each stakeholder group: the Head of Human Resources at MIL Sistemika d.o.o. (Nina Minov) and a senior staff member at Davčno izobraževalni inštitut (DIZI) (Petra Zidar). We discuss the specific activities of each stakeholder in terms of perceived and expressed education and training needs, we examine the match between supply and demand, and finally, we consider the potential consequences of these relations for the system of professional learning.

The first research question we posed was to determine what the similarities and differences in the perceived educational and training needs of organizational representatives (users) and the professional educational provider and the criteria and processes are that the organizational HR leaders of MIL Sistemika and DIZI employed to recognize the need for learning. The organizational representatives of the case study organization, MIL Sistemika, determine the educational and training needs of its members through a strategic, internal, business planning process that is achieved through annual business planning, performance and development interviews, and the identification of competency gaps. Needs are determined as a result of the organizational and personal requirements of the employee and are linked to the business needs of the organization (e.g., technological growth, project requirements). The professional educational provider, DIZI, determines the educational and training needs of its members through an environmental scanning process that is achieved by consulting with members and other stakeholders as well as monitoring legislative, professional, and industry developments. According to Petra Zidar, updates in tax legislation, changes in professional standards, and sector developments determine what is taught at DIZI, and input from course participants, member companies, and other professional associations and networks helps to determine what the changing needs of their members are. Therefore, we can conclude that the organizational process is more internally focused and the provider process is more externally focused.

The second research question is: to what extent do the education and training needs of the user (employees/organizations) correspond to the offer of a provider of professional education and training, or, in other words, to what extent do the demand side (organizational development needs) and the supply side (design of the training content) match? There is a partial match between the needs of the user and the offer of the provider. Both sides value the same kind of competence: MIL Sistemika relies on digital and technical skills which are connected to the organization's purpose, whereas DIZI offers content related to professional and legal needs. The match occurs at the point where organizational needs and professional needs overlap, such as areas that require knowledge of regulations and basic professional skills.

Nevertheless, a mismatch occurs with respect to specialisation and breadth. The majority of the skills demanded by MIL Sistemika are either technical and company-specific (i.e. software applications and digital documents) or fall out of the realm of the standard professional training supply provided by DIZI, which is focused on taxation, accounting and industry standards. In this respect, we witness the lack of a collective interface to translate the demand into the supply of the hybrid skills that combine the digital and professional components.

The third question was about the tools or instruments applied by the training provider or in the organization to collect and analyse training needs. In MIL Sistemika the main instruments are the annual performance and development interview, strategic HR planning, and managers. By using these instruments, the leader and the employee can together identify knowledge and skill gaps, prioritize the development needs, and suggest specific training solutions. In DIZI the main instruments are the continuous process of stakeholder involvement (participation sheets, final course evaluation, and involvement of professional institutions). Petra Zidar added that DIZI also follows changes in legislation and professional standards. Therefore, the interpretation of needs is done both through the learners' needs and through the needs imposed by changes in legislation and expected changes in professional situations.

The fourth research question focused on the most significant obstacles and enablers that support a successful alignment of training offers and user demands. Enablers identified are the integration of structured communication and feedback

mechanisms (performance interviews in MIL Sistemika and the evaluation of participants in DIZI to collect feedback and information about the learning requirements) and the alignment with a broader strategy and external standards (the higher the training is aligned with strategic or legal targets, the more probable it is that it will be aligned with the user demands). The most significant obstacles are temporal and content-related discrepancies between the business plan (planning horizon of the yearly business plan) and the offer development process (offering development in DIZI and MIL Sistemika is done on a continuous basis without specific planning cycles), as well as a lack of comprehensive or hybrid competences (digitalisation and professional competences) in the training offers.

The fifth question addressed the perceived outcomes of education and training of both users and providers. Organizational user (MIL Sistemika) outcomes are perceived to be performance improvement, utility for immediate application and utility for achievement of organizational objectives. This could be manifest as: employees being able to perform new technical work, use computer technologies or contribute to organizational development. Provider (DIZI) outcomes are perceived to be professional expertise, legal and sectoral standards. Petra Zidar explained that DIZI perceives outcomes as, how well the student knows and understands that what they have learned will fulfil professional and legal requirements. Both user and provider perceive outcomes to be relevant and applicable; however, the organizational outcomes are more specific to the performance of the user organization, and the provider outcomes are more general to the profession across various user organizations.

The last research question addressed the strategic importance of CPD within the organizational strategy and in training provider program planning and how it influences the strategic importance of lifelong learning and the needs assessment process of both interviewees. CPD is of great strategic importance to both stakeholders. MIL Sistemika's approach to CPD is to include it in the yearly plan and in the individual development plan of the employees, which demonstrates that the continuous improvement of professional knowledge and skills is of vital importance to the business success of the organization. For DIZI, CPD is the core business of the institute, and this is why the institute aims at constantly adapting its programs to the changing circumstances in the profession, particularly in the cases where the profession is influenced by legislative changes. DIZI maintains a long-

term relationship with its clients through its CPD programs, which have to be renewed with each new legislative and professional developments. Both perspectives demonstrate the fact that CPD is of vital importance for the long-term strategy of the organization, however, the strategies are different: one is focused on business strategy and the other on professional developments within the profession.

Our study is based on two qualitative interviews representing one user and one provider. While our study provides us with specific stakeholder's perspectives, it limits the generalisability of our findings.

5 Conclusion

Through a comparative case study approach, we found that in practice, both the organisational stakeholders and providers are well aware of the significance of needs identification and alignment. Although the two stakeholders have different goals and time cycles, the common interests of relevance, engagement and responsiveness offer a good base for collaboration. Collaboration and improvements are possible on the flexibility of curriculum, synchronisation of time cycles and the integration of competence requirements. The collaboration of the two stakeholders is necessary to improve the learning effectiveness of professional education and training in an ever-changing context.

Therefore, our findings have significant implications for both practice and policy in professional education and workforce development. Organizations and providers should, for instance, set up more formal channels for co-defining needs. Joint advisory panels, co-design workshops, and shared competency frameworks could improve alignment and ensure that training portfolios reflect both organizational priorities and broader professional standards.

Providers should consider more flexible curriculum structures that support modular learning and competency customization. This would allow organizations to combine foundational regulatory knowledge with specialized digital or technical skills tailored to their context.

Continuous feedback mechanisms, such as post-training evaluations, user surveys, and engagement analytics, should be systematically integrated into both organizational learning ecosystems and provider program development. These loops will enhance responsiveness and relevance over time.

And of course, to avoid the mismatch between organizational planning cycles and provider curriculum schedules, both parties could explore real-time needs sensing methods, such as pulse surveys or digital analytics, to detect emerging skill gaps ahead of formal planning cycles.

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