

Scaling Human Capabilities: A Learning Architecture for Knowledge Management

Joachim Schmitt

Aschaffenburg University of Applied Sciences, Germany

Joachim.schmitt@th-ab.de

Abstract: Artificial intelligence is fundamentally changing the nature of knowledge work by providing greater support for the generation, organisation and retrieval of knowledge. Consequently, organisational performance is becoming more dependent on human capabilities such as ownership, collaboration and responsible judgement. While existing learning approaches address individual aspects of this challenge, they rarely combine effectiveness, sustainability and scalability. This study therefore asks which learning architecture can systematically develop collaborative human capabilities while enabling organisation-wide implementation. The development methodology combines a literature review with an action research project and an exploratory pilot evaluation to develop and evaluate the proposed Learning Architecture. The literature review examined peer learning, learning psychology, neuroscience, organisational learning and adult education in order to identify design principles for the development of collaborative capabilities. These findings were then translated into an iterative action research process involving researchers, executives and trainers. The resulting learning approach was then evaluated in six pilot projects involving participants from different organisations. The study developed a Learning Architecture comprising four complementary design elements: Learning Circles as the collaborative learning format. A Learning Cycle as the didactic process. A shared but adaptable curriculum. The Learning Journey as the organisation-wide implementation framework. Together, these elements combine structured organisational orientation with decentralised self-organisation. Participants gave positive evaluations of the learning environment, particularly the self-organisation of the Learning Circles. Knowledge acquisition, reflection, practice and peer feedback were also evaluated positively, whereas workplace tasks were seen as the weakest. Participants further reported perceived improvements across all outcome dimensions, with the strongest effects observed for collaboration within work teams. The study contributes to contemporary knowledge management by proposing a Learning Architecture that systematically connects individual collaborative learning with organisation-wide capability development. It argues that, as explicit knowledge and increasing parts of professional tacit knowledge become more accessible through digital systems, competitive advantage increasingly depends on collaborative capabilities through which knowledge is interpreted, evaluated and responsibly applied in organisational practice. The study provides a structured and scalable mechanism that links knowledge management and organisational learning while preserving decentralised collaborative practice. Although the exploratory pilot does not permit conclusions about long-term behavioural or cultural change, it provides initial empirical support for the proposed conceptual framework and establishes a foundation for future longitudinal research.

Keywords: Knowledge management, Organisational learning, Peer learning, Learning circles, Human capabilities

1. Introduction: Transforming Technology and Transforming People

Artificial intelligence is reshaping knowledge work by increasingly supporting analysis, automation and the management of knowledge. As a result, organisations increasingly depend on distinctly human capabilities such as ownership, collaboration and responsible judgement (Hofmann, 2023; Alavi, Margherita and Massaro, 2024). For organisations, this shifts the challenge from introducing new technologies to systematically developing these human capabilities across the workforce. The representative TÜV Professional Development Study (2026) confirms this trend and identifies social skills as the most important future competencies in every sector of industry in Germany. Wittich (2026) found ownership and collaboration to be the soft skills most frequently requested by employers.

This shift is also relevant for knowledge management. Even when knowledge can be generated, organised and distributed through AI-supported systems, its effective use depends on how people interpret, share and apply it in their day-to-day work. These capabilities are closely associated with tacit knowledge, behavioural routines and social interaction. This is challenging for KM as these capabilities are difficult to develop through documentation or conventional knowledge transfer alone. The present study consequently examines how human capabilities relevant to knowledge work can be developed through a structured and scalable learning architecture.

Existing learning formats address individual aspects of this challenge but combine effectiveness, sustainability and scalability only to a limited extent. Town halls and microlearning can reach large groups but rarely provide sustained opportunities for behavioural practice. Workshops can create intensive learning experiences, but the transfer of learning into everyday work remains challenging (Blume et al., 2010; Baethge, Severin and Weiß, 2013). Business coaching can support lasting individual development but is difficult to implement across an

entire organisation because of its resource requirements (Kotte et al., 2016). Peer learning offers workplace relevance and scalability, yet many formats provide insufficient common structure for the systematic development of shared behavioural capabilities (Schmitt et al., 2026). Organisations therefore still lack a learning approach that combines effectiveness, sustainability and scalability. This paper therefore addresses the following research question:

Which learning architecture can support the systematic development of ownership, collaboration and organisational culture while combining effectiveness, sustainability and scalability across the organisation?

2. Method

2.1 Literature Review

A targeted narrative literature review was conducted to establish the theoretical foundation of the study. The review first examined existing peer-learning approaches and their potential for structured, organisation-wide implementation. It then analysed research from learning psychology, neuroscience and organisational learning to identify how soft skills, mindset and collaborative behaviour can be developed effectively. In addition, literature from management and adult education was reviewed to define the learning curriculum and its scope for different target groups.

2.2 Action Research

The findings of the literature review were transferred into an action research project to develop a scalable Learning Architecture. Following established principles of action research (Lewin, 1946; Coghlan and Brannick, 2014), five researchers, three executives and twelve trainers collaborated throughout the development process, combining scientific perspectives with practical experience.

The Learning Architecture evolved through iterative cycles of design, implementation, evaluation and refinement. Two collaborative concept workshops produced the initial learning design. The first drafts of the learning modules were iteratively reviewed, tested and refined, resulting in an elaborate participant guide. A spin-off organisation then adapted the Learning Journey for two target groups and coordinated two pilot implementations. Findings from both pilots informed the final refinement of the participant guide.

The author participated throughout the project as a member of the action research team and subsequently became a partner in the spin-off organisation. This dual role provided continuous access to the development process but may also have introduced researcher bias, which should be considered when interpreting the findings.

2.3 Pilot Evaluation

The Learning Journey was evaluated in two programme variants, which were implemented in six pilot projects. The companies involved were recruited through the MAINPROJECT network at Aschaffenburg University of Applied Sciences. A total of 82 participants took part in the programmes. The analyses reported in this paper were based on 43 completed final questionnaires (52%).

Participation was voluntary and questionnaires were completed anonymously. Companies approved the programmes as part of their HR development activities. Where employee representation bodies (works councils) existed, the questionnaire was approved prior to implementation.

This study's questionnaire was specifically developed based on the Learning Journey's learning objectives and design principles. It comprised 20 items organised into the three evaluation dimensions shown in Table 1, as well as two demographic questions.

All Learning Journey variants followed the same Learning Architecture, shared the same learning objectives and were based on a common curriculum. They differed only in the scope and wording of the content to reflect the requirements of two target groups. As the study evaluates the Learning Architecture rather than individual programme variants, all responses were analysed as a single dataset using the same questionnaire.

Table 1: Example questionnaire items for the three evaluation dimensions

Dimensions	Example statement	Scale
Perceived behavioural improvement	The learning journey has significantly improved collaboration within the team.	1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree)
Fit of the didactic Learning Cycle	The exercises helped me to explore different perspectives and develop approaches for everyday situations.	1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree)
Support of the learning environment	Self-organisation (scheduling, time management, moderation) within the Circle worked well throughout the entire learning journey.	1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree)
Demographic information	What is your role within the company?	A Employee without managerial responsibility. B Employee with partial shared responsibilities in project management. C Manager with personal responsibility for staff.

Although questionnaires were completed at several measurement points during the programmes, only the final responses were analysed as the study focuses on participants' overall assessment of the Learning Architecture.

3. Results: Learning Architecture

3.1 Learning Circles

The literature review identified Learning Circles as a promising format. Based on peer learning, it is highly scalable, enabling broad participation while keeping costs low. Unlike many other peer-learning approaches, the concept combines self-organisation with structured content. This allows participants to build on their own experiences while developing shared organisational principles and linked behavioural practices (Sinnayah et al., 2024; Graf & Liebhart, 2024; Schmitt et al., 2026).

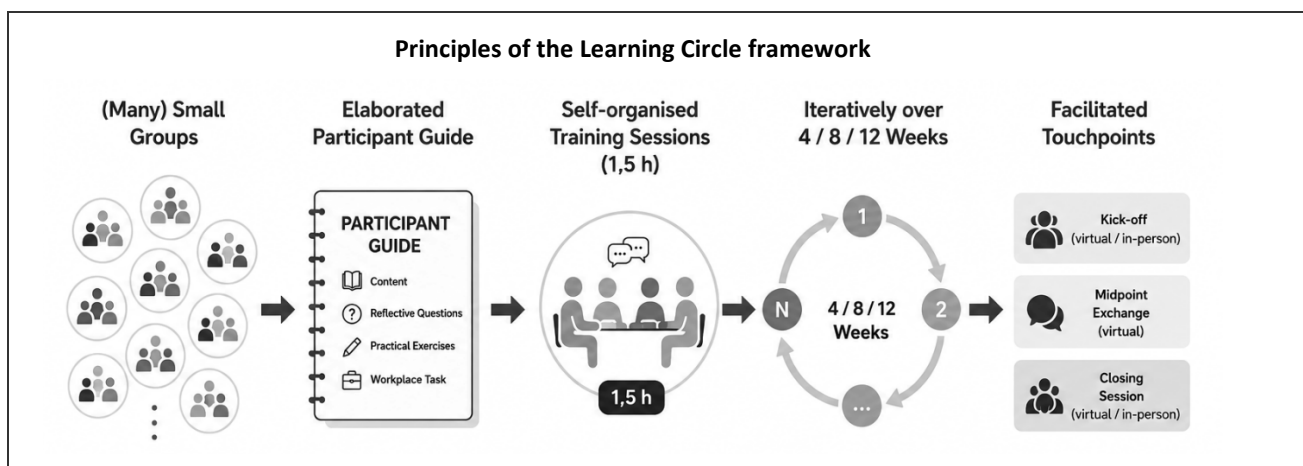


Figure 1: The Learning Circle concept illustrating the basic elements (Source: Own illustration)

Furthermore, Learning Circles organise integrate learning into everyday work through recurring collaborative sessions, which support the establishment of routines (Hodgson, 2023; Wijga, Beusaert and Kyndt, 2025). Initial evidence also suggests medium-term effects. Augner et al. (2024) evaluated John Stepper's "Working Out Loud" which focuses primarily on professional visibility and networking. Its underlying Learning Circle Concept is comparable and participants still reported measurable behavioural improvements six months after completing the programme.

3.2 Learning Cycle

The review on learning psychology and neuroscience provided the foundation for the didactic Learning Cycle. Current research indicates that the development of soft skills is a complex relearning process. Communication,

collaboration and mindset are largely shaped by established behavioural routines embedded in unconscious patterns of action (Kullmann and Seidl, 2005; Schmitt, 2011; Roth, 2018). Developing these capabilities requires more than knowledge transfer. It requires a didactic process that systematically combines knowledge with reflection, practice, workplace task, peer feedback and reinforcement (Argyris and Schön, 1999; Heckhausen and Heckhausen, 2010; Roth and Ryba, 2016; Rogers, 2016). Based on these findings, the action research team developed the Learning Cycle shown in Figure 2:

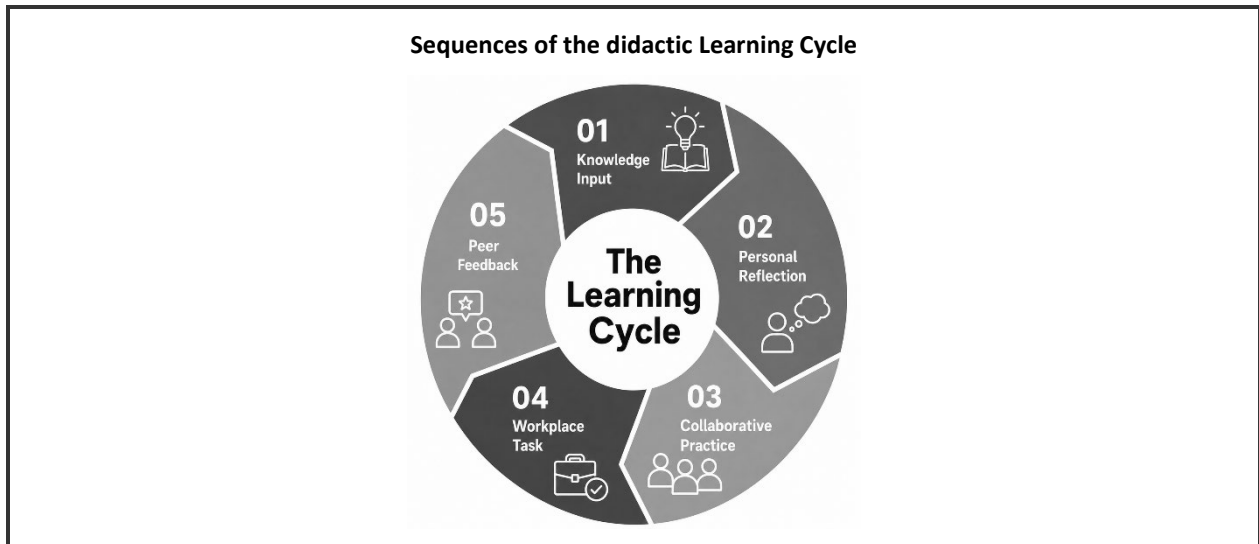


Figure 2: The didactic Learning Cycle illustrating the iterative sequence. (Source: Own illustration)

First, new knowledge is introduced to establish a shared understanding of the content. Participants then reflect on their own experiences, connecting the new knowledge with their existing perspectives and everyday work. Practical exercises allow them to experience new behaviours in a safe environment before transferring them into their daily practice underpinned by workplace tasks.

At the beginning of the following session, participants share their experiences, reflect on the workplace task and provide peer feedback. The cycle is repeated in each Learning Circle session, introducing new content while progressively reinforcing new behaviours with the aim of establishing sustainable routines.

3.3 Learning Scope

The Learning Journey content was developed during the action research process on the basis of current soft-skills curricula and aligned with recent analyses of contemporary workplace challenges (Beck and Cowan, 2008; Münchner Kreis, 2020; Erpenbeck and Sauter, 2024). The curriculum covers communication competencies alongside related topics such as dealing with change, handling mistakes, and self-management. At an advanced level, the curriculum also explores systems thinking and leadership.

As adult learning must build on existing competencies and challenge participants without overwhelming them, the programme was adapted for different target groups (Langheiter, 2022). While the underlying Learning Architecture remained unchanged, the language, thematic depth and practical examples were adapted to the participants' prior knowledge and professional responsibilities. The objective was to establish a common curriculum that would support a shared organisational culture at different stages of professional development.

The "Teamwork" Learning Journey is designed for participants with little or no prior experience of modern teamwork. It comprises eight learning sessions and can be extended by four additional "Team@Work" sessions, which cover video-based collaboration. During the pilot projects, 50 participants from three companies completed this Learning Journey.

The "New Work Mindset" Learning Journey consists of twelve learning sessions. It is intended for experienced professionals and managers who have received prior training in communication skills. During the pilot projects, 32 participants from three companies completed this Learning Journey.

Each session combines thematic input with practical exercises based on either case studies or the participants' own professional experience.

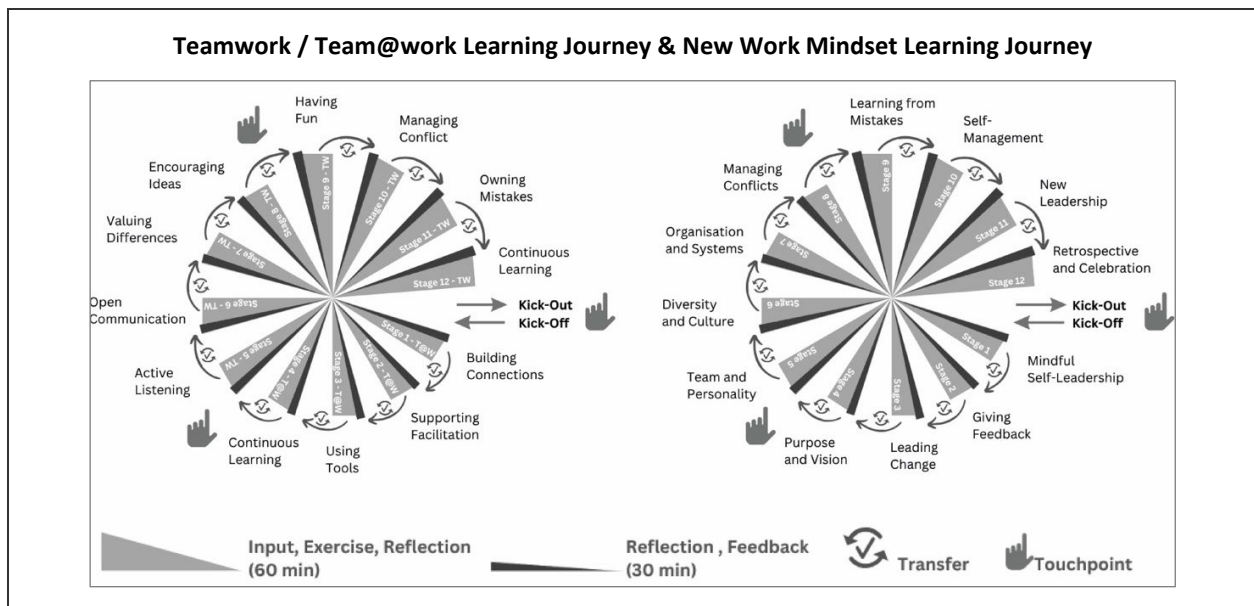


Figure 3: Content and structure of the two Learning Journeys variants. (Source: Own illustration)

3.4 Learning Journey

The Learning Journey integrates the Learning Circles, the Learning Cycle and the curriculum into a coherent Learning Architecture. It combines self-organised peer learning with recurring facilitated touchpoints.

The programme begins with an interactive “Kick-off” involving all participants and facilitated by an internal HR professional or an external coach. During the Kick-off, participants are assigned to Learning Circles of four to six members. Any number of Learning Circles can participate simultaneously in the same Learning Journey. A participant guide, designed according to modern storytelling principles, structures the entire programme. It provides orientation through structured content and a clear sequence of reflection questions, practical exercises and workplace tasks.

Each Learning Circle follows its own schedule, typically meeting every one or two weeks for a 90-minute learning session. While the sessions are organised independently, all Learning Circles participate in facilitated touchpoints after approximately every four sessions. Supported by regular motivational emails, these touchpoints provide opportunities for reflection, questions and shared learning across the different Learning Circles. The Learning Journey concludes with a joint “Kick-out”, where participants reflect on their experiences and share their learning.

4. Results: Pilot Evaluation

The following results are based on the final questionnaires completed by 43 participants across the pilot programmes. Table 2 summarises the characteristics of the participants.

Table 2: Participants by Learning Journey variant and participant characteristics

Learning Journey	n	Role at workplace	n	Organisational tenure	n
Team@Work	6	A Employee without managerial responsibility	26	Less than 1 year	4
Teamwork	17	B Employee with partial shared responsibilities in project management	7	Up to 5 years	20
New Work Mindset	20	C Manager with personal responsibility for staff	10	Up to 10 years	6
				More than 10 years	13
	43		43		43

The completed questionnaires (n = 43) contained valid responses for all reported items. The only exception was the knowledge item within the evaluation of the Learning Cycle, for which one response was missing (n = 42).

The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Means and standard deviations were calculated for each item and for the aggregated dimension. Given the exploratory nature of the pilot study and the limited sample size, no inferential statistical analyses were conducted.

4.1 Perceived Improvements

The first part of the questionnaire focused on four complementary dimensions linked to the objectives of the Learning Journey.

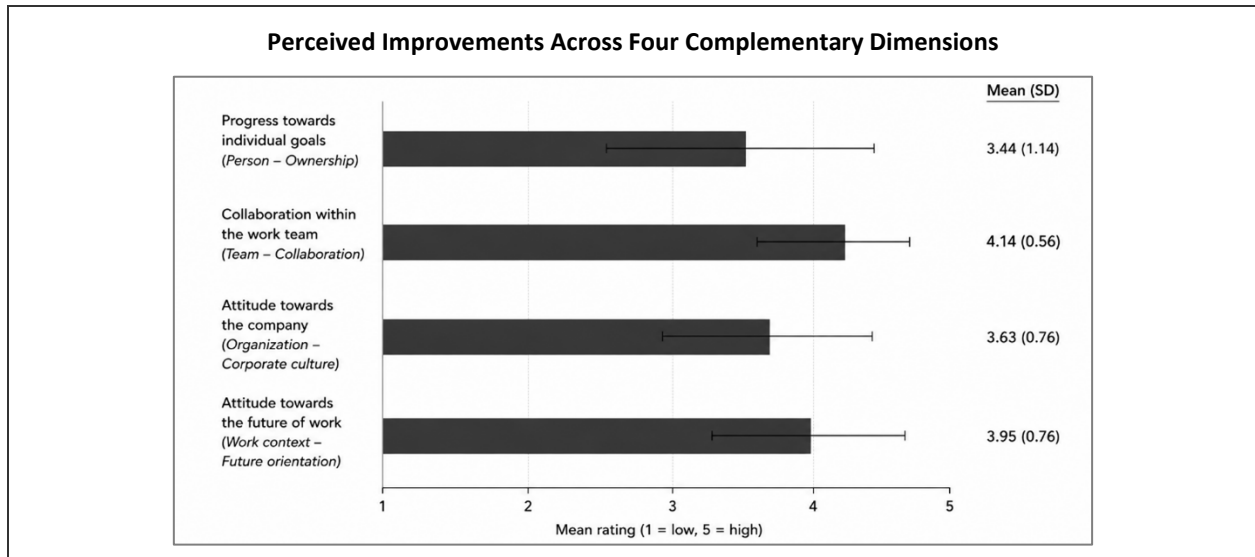


Figure 4: Perceived improvements reported by participants (n = 43). Ratings are based on a five-point Likert scale (1 = low, 5 = high). Error bars indicate ± 1 standard deviation

The results show positive perceived improvements across all four dimensions, ranging from the individual to the organisational level. The highest perceived improvement was reported for collaboration within the work team (M = 4.14, SD = 0.56).

4.2 Learning Process

The second part of the questionnaire evaluated the didactic learning sequence underlying the Learning Journey. The five dimensions correspond to the five stages of the Learning Cycle.

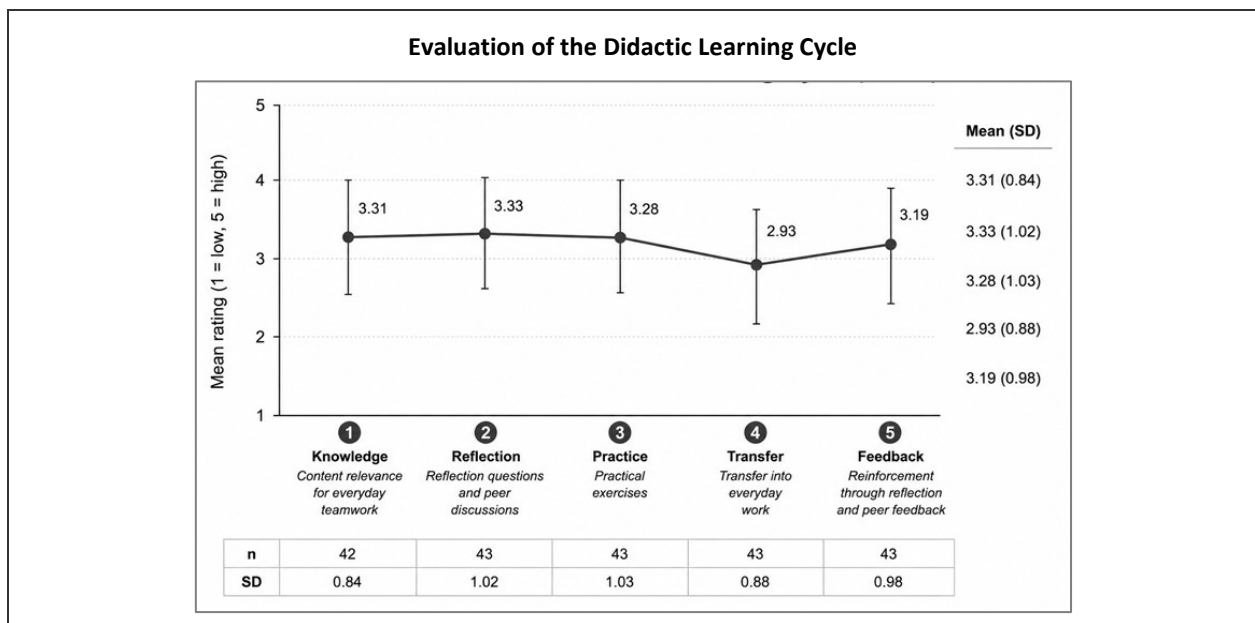


Figure 5: Integrated evaluation of five learning stages (n = 43). Ratings are based on a five-point Likert scale (1 = low, 5 = high). Error bars indicate ± 1 standard deviation

The results show positive evaluations for knowledge acquisition, reflection, practice and feedback. Ratings for the workplace task were comparatively lower and remained close to the neutral midpoint of the scale.

4.3 Learning Environment

Another part of the questionnaire evaluated three complementary elements of the Learning Architecture supporting the Learning Journey.

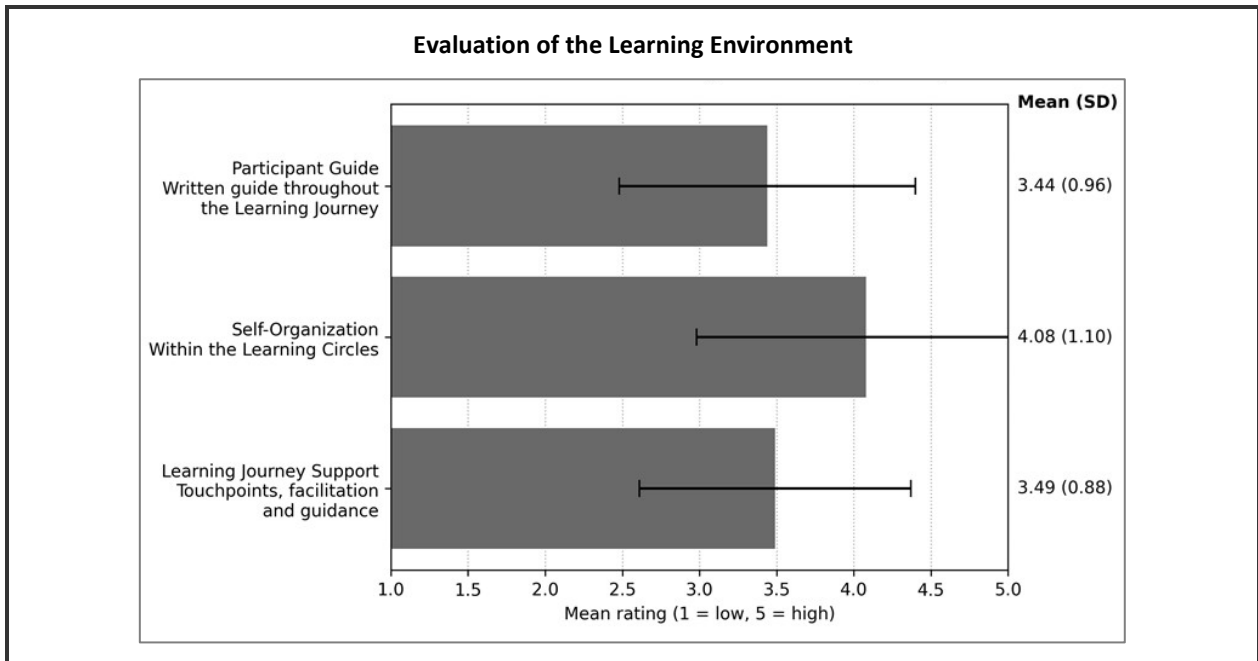


Figure 6: Integrated evaluation of the learning environment supporting the Learning Journey (n = 43). Ratings are based on a five-point Likert scale (1 = low, 5 = high). Error bars indicate ± 1 standard deviation

The results show positive evaluations across all three elements of the learning environment. The highest ratings were reported for the self-organisation of the Learning Circles.

5. Discussion

Taken together, the literature review, action research and pilot evaluation describe the development and initial evaluation of a Learning Architecture comprising four complementary design elements. The positive evaluation of the Learning Environment suggests that structured organisational orientation and decentralised self-organisation are complementary. Participants rated the self-organisation of their Learning Circles particularly highly, despite working largely without continuous facilitation. This finding is consistent with research emphasising trust, psychological safety and repeated social interaction as central conditions for collaborative knowledge processes (Pasipamire et al., 2025). At the same time, the literature review revealed that self-organisation alone is insufficient for supporting organisation-wide development through collaborative learning. Unlike many well-established peer-learning approaches, the Learning Circles developed in this study combine decentralised collaboration with a shared curriculum. This enables participants to connect their own workplace experiences with common organisational principles and development objectives (Schmitt, 2025; Schmitt et al., 2026).

A similar pattern emerges for the Learning Cycle. Participants evaluated knowledge acquisition, reflection, practice and peer feedback consistently positively, whereas workplace tasks received comparatively lower ratings. This finding reflects the well-documented challenge of transferring learning into everyday work (Blume et al., 2010; Baethge et al., 2013). The overall pattern suggests that workplace transfer should not be understood as the responsibility of a single learning element. Rather, the continuous iteration of reflection, practice and feedback appears to create a broader transfer process over time. This interpretation is consistent with Taylor's (2007) understanding of tacit knowledge, which develops through repeated action and shared practice rather than through information alone. The particularly positive ratings for collaboration within work teams provide

initial empirical support for this interpretation, suggesting that transfer may emerge from the iterative Learning Cycle as a whole rather than from workplace tasks in isolation.

The learning scope represents the third design principle of the Learning Architecture. Rather than standardising learning content, its common curriculum establishes shared developmental principles while allowing language, thematic depth and practical examples to be adapted to different target groups. This finding is consistent with Langheiter's (2022) argument that effective adult learning must connect new content with existing competencies and professional experience. At the organisational level, Hodgson's (2023) understanding of routines provides an important theoretical explanation for this design. Rather than defining routines as repeated behaviours, he conceptualises them as organisational capacities that enable context-sensitive action across different situations. The Learning Architecture follows this logic by providing common orientation without prescribing identical behaviour. Through recurring collaborative learning practices, participants repeatedly engage with shared principles of ownership, collaboration and responsible judgement while interpreting and applying them within their own professional contexts (Schmitt, 2011). The positive evaluation of attitudes towards the future of work provides an initial indication that such repeated collaborative practice may contribute not only to behavioural improvements but also to broader mindset development.

Taken together, these findings highlight the study's key contribution: integrating social learning, didactic structure, a shared curriculum, and organisational implementation into a coherent Learning Architecture. The four design elements fulfil complementary functions. Together, they provide a common organisational orientation while maintaining decentralised responsibility for learning, reflection, and workplace application. This integrative perspective situates the study within the ongoing debate surrounding the relationship between knowledge management and organisational learning. Khadir and Durst (2025) distinguish between the two fields based on their respective primary focus. Knowledge management focuses on how people create, interpret, share, and apply knowledge in their day-to-day work. In contrast, organisational learning examines how these individual learning processes become embedded in organisational capabilities and performance. Rather than treating these concepts as competing perspectives, the authors argue that they should be understood as complementary. The Learning Architecture developed in this study operationalises this relationship by systematically connecting individual collaborative learning with organisation-wide capability development.

This human-centred understanding of knowledge management becomes increasingly relevant in AI-supported knowledge work. As Alavi et al. (2024) argue, generative AI increasingly supports the retrieval, organisation and externalisation of knowledge. Consequently, the strategic challenge shifts from knowledge availability towards the human capabilities required to interpret, contextualise, judge and collaboratively apply increasingly available knowledge. Kauffeld et al. (2025) underpin this orientation when they argue: "Fostering strong networking and social exchange behaviour within organisations can accelerate transformative efforts and facilitate the integration of learning outcomes into broader change processes." The study directly addresses this challenge by providing a structured organisational framework through which these capabilities can be developed collectively.

This interpretation is also consistent with the broader development of knowledge management research. Since the work of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), the field has progressively extended its attention beyond managing explicit and tacit knowledge towards the organisational processes through which knowledge is created, shared and applied (Hamzah et al., 2025). Recent contributions further emphasise the human and organisational conditions that enable knowledge to become effective in practice. Kucharska et al. (2025) similarly shift attention from knowledge resources towards collaborative organisational capabilities by relating the absorption of tacit knowledge to agile mindset and organisational experience. Building on this perspective, Nakash (2026) conceptualises contemporary knowledge management as an organisational architecture that provides coherent orientation rather than a collection of isolated practices. The Learning Architecture proposed in this study operationalises this perspective through a learning-oriented design that systematically connects individual learning processes with organisation-wide capability development. The pilot findings provide initial empirical support for this theoretical interpretation. Although the exploratory design and reliance on self-reported perceptions do not permit conclusions about sustained behavioural or cultural change, the findings provide initial empirical support for the proposition that an organisation-wide orientation architecture can create the conditions under which collaborative capabilities may gradually develop.

6. Limitations

As this was an exploratory pilot evaluation based on a limited sample, the findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution. The questionnaire was developed specifically for this study and has not yet been independently validated, and the response rate of 52% means that self-selection bias cannot be excluded.

Furthermore, the study relies on participants' self-reported perceptions and therefore cannot demonstrate behavioural change, organisational outcomes or causal effects. The Learning Architecture was also developed through an action research process in which the author participated throughout the project and subsequently became a partner in the spin-off organisation responsible for its implementation. While this close involvement enabled continuous refinement of the Learning Architecture, it may also have introduced researcher bias.

Consequently, the findings should be understood as initial evidence supporting the coherence and perceived relevance of the proposed Learning Architecture rather than its long-term effectiveness. Future research should therefore examine the Learning Architecture using longitudinal designs and validated behavioural measures. Such studies would provide a stronger basis for evaluating whether the Learning Journeys contribute to sustained collaborative capabilities, organisational routines and, ultimately, organisational culture.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to identify a Learning Architecture capable of systematically developing ownership, collaboration and related human capabilities while combining effectiveness, sustainability and scalability. The proposed Learning Architecture provides a possible answer to this challenge by integrating collaborative peer learning, a structured didactic process, a shared curriculum and an organisation-wide implementation framework.

The discussion suggests that this contribution addresses a growing challenge within contemporary knowledge management. While explicit knowledge and increasing parts of professional tacit knowledge can be documented, organised and made accessible through digital systems and generative AI, the collaborative capabilities required to interpret, evaluate and responsibly apply this knowledge remain inseparable from human practice. They develop through repeated social interaction and become embedded in the routines and shared orientations of organisational members.

This is where the proposed Learning Architecture becomes relevant. By systematically linking individual collaborative learning to organisation-wide capability development, it provides a practical approach through which knowledge management and organisational learning can reinforce each other. At the same time, the architecture addresses a limitation of many existing learning approaches by combining the conditions required for capability development with organisational requirements such as orientation, sustainability and scalability. Collaborative capabilities can be developed systematically across large numbers of participants through shared content, recurring collaborative practice and decentralised self-organisation, without reducing learning to standardised training.

This exploratory pilot study provides initial empirical support for the conceptual proposition. Further longitudinal research is required to investigate whether these patterns lead to sustained collaborative capabilities, organisational routines and, ultimately, organisational culture.

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Ethics Declaration: Companies joined voluntarily and approved the programmes with their employees as part of their organisational development activities. Employees were invited to participate by their respective companies and were informed that completion of the questionnaires was optional. Where employee representation bodies (works councils) existed, the questionnaire was reviewed and approved prior to its use. According to the applicable institutional regulations of Aschaffenburg UAS, no formal ethical approval was required for this anonymous voluntary evaluation study.

AI Declaration: AI-tools (DeepL and ChatGPT) were used for language refinement, grammar checking and design of figures. All scientific concepts, methodological decisions, data analyses, interpretations, figures and editorial decisions were developed, verified and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for the content of this manuscript.

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