Towards a Model of Learning and Development Practice

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It is widely acknowledged that learning and development (L&D) is key to well-being, innovation and success for individuals, organizations and societies (Delahaye, 2011). Learning and development practice involves application of distinctive knowledge, skills and techniques in distinctive contexts. The sheer range of contexts and kinds of expertise associated with this work produces a complex challenge to any attempt to model L&D practice. The Australian Institute of Training and Development (AITD) took up this challenge in the Australian setting. A team of researchers was engaged to produce a model of L&D practice that the organization could use to conceptualize the work of its members and refine organizational strategy in areas such as professional development services. Although there have been attempts to represent the work of L&D practitioners (e.g. the ASTD ‘Competency Model’), the research presented here focused on the Australian setting and was also guided by a commitment to recognizing the role of organizational contexts in shaping L&D practice. This focus on context distinguishes the model from others that are concerned with the expertise and attributes of individual L&D practitioners. The model presented here thus represents contexts of L&D practice as well as knowledge and skills applied within them. The article describes the research process used to develop the model, including analysis of existing models, interviews with senior L&D practitioners and a survey of practitioners. The result is a model that acknowledges the complexity of L&D practice in a contemporary environment.

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that learning and development (L&D) is key to well-being, innovation and success for individuals, organizations and societies (Delahaye, 2011). Human resource development (HRD), organization development (OD), and education and training literature offer numerous perspectives on the nature of the expertise and work of L&D practitioners. However, one challenge for researchers, professionals and organizations interested in L&D is how to conceptualize the work and expertise of L&D practitioners as a whole, as the field is so diverse. Examples of work that addresses this challenge can be found in the competency models of the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD – now the American Society for Talent Development) and perspectives on L&D practice presented in textbooks such as those by Werner and DeSimone (2011), Delahaye (2011) and Gibb (2011). Challenges addressed by these works include identifying the range of knowledge, skills and techniques characteristic of L&D practice, and conceptualizing the factors that determine when and how to apply them. Modelling L&D practice must grapple with these challenges, and also take into account societal and national differences that shape and constrain implementation. The task of modelling L&D practice must contend with the diversity of disciplinary and practice perspectives related to the field.
Until recently no Australian model of L&D practice was available to inform the work of providing support to professionals in the field in that country. The Australian Institute of Training and Development (AITD) funded a research project in 2012 to address this gap. The AITD is a member-owned organization that aims to represent and promote the interests of L&D practitioners in Australia. At the time of the research it had around 2,600 members and its main activities were networking and professional development events. The research was commissioned to develop an understanding of the work and expertise of L&D practitioners to assist in organizational strategy. The model developed through this research is presented in this article. The research was designed to answer three questions: what are the roles and skills of learning and development practitioners?; what are their current challenges?; and what professional learning do they require? The model of L&D practice based on this research is distinctive in its attempt to balance contextual and individual factors. In contrast, the ASTD model focuses on mapping the expertise and attributes possessed by individual professionals. The more interactive model presented here addresses the constellation of skills, knowledge, techniques, dispositions and experience brought to bear by L&D practitioners, but also identifies key contextual factors, such as organizational settings and roles, which mediate the application of expertise.

The process and sources used to build the model of L&D practice are presented below. The literature review considers the 2004 ASTD model (Bernthal et al., 2004) and some established conceptualizations of L&D practice. The next section presents data from interviews with senior L&D practitioners operating in Australia. Following this discussion, the draft model that drew on the literature and interviews is described. A survey of Australian L&D practitioners that was used to appraise the draft model is considered next. The survey data led to some refinements to produce the model of L&D practice presented here. It should be noted that the research undertook to map AITD membership characteristics and professional development needs as well as produce a model of practice. Only the modelling is considered in this paper.

**Literature Review**

The potential literature available to inform L&D practice model building is extensive. An initial challenge is posed by the variety of disciplinary and practice perspectives on the field (O’Toole, 2010). In turn these perspectives demand different sets of skills, knowledge and techniques. O’Toole (2010), in the Australian context, posits four different types of practice: training, learning and development, organization development (OD) and human resource development (HRD). He claims that the latter is the ‘broadest of all these concepts’ (O’Toole, 2010: 424), maintaining that it builds both organizational and individual capacities.

The bulk of the research literature drawn on for the project was located in the HRD field, although OD and training research literatures also informed the project. Within this diverse literature, three types of contribution were consulted for the project. The work of the ASTD to develop and refine a model of training and development competencies has produced its own literature and a set of models that began to appear in 1978 (Estep, 2008), with the most recent iteration released in 2013 (Arneson et al., 2013). The ASTD models explicitly address the skills, knowledge and techniques of L&D practice, providing a coherent reference point for modelling L&D practice. Another body of literature includes the textbooks produced for HRD, OD, education, training and development professional preparation programmes typically offered by universities. For example, Werner and DeSimone (2011) present an overarching framework for L&D practice.
Finally, the broader research literature touching on L&D tools and work offers an additional resource for model building.

A holistic approach to L&D practice was adopted in this research for the purpose of modelling L&D practice. Research on cognition, professional practice and learning in recent decades (Bateson, 1989; Boud and Walker 1992; Brown et al., 1989; Kegan, 1994; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Schön, 1987; Wilson, 1993) has stressed the need to take context into account when understanding individual activity. Organizations and workplaces shape and constrain individual practice through both the socio-material culture of the setting and the formal systems and roles to which practitioners respond (Smith and Sadler-Smith, 2006). Given the significance of practice settings for understanding practice, our model building research explicitly sought to encompass the contextual dimension of L&D in addition to the knowledge, skills, techniques and underpinning capabilities that are more appropriately conceptualized as possessions and attributes of individual practitioners.

The 2004 ASTD competency model (Bernthal et al., 2004; Davis et al., 2004) was a major reference point for the modelling work of this project, which took place in 2012-13. The ASTD model (Figure 1) takes a hierarchical approach, with three levels of ‘foundational competencies,’ ‘areas of expertise’, and ‘workplace learning and performance roles.’ It is assumed that the four roles of learning strategist, business partner, project manager and professional specialist draw on areas of expertise, whether individual areas of expertise or a combination of areas. The nine areas of expertise in the model — designing learning, improving human performance, delivering training, measuring and evaluating, facilitating organizational change, managing the learning function, coaching, managing organizational knowledge and career planning and talent management — are L&D specializations that are thought to ‘focus’ underlying competencies. The 12 foundational competencies are grouped into three clusters: ‘interpersonal’, ‘business/management’ and ‘personal.’ The foundational competencies underpin areas of expertise and roles, although not all are activated in any given situation.

A possible source of confusion in the following discussion is our decision to use the term ‘areas of expertise’ to refer to the distinctive knowledge and skills associated with L&D practice. As noted above, the ASTD model uses the term ‘areas of expertise’ to identify specific undertakings such as ‘designing learning’ and ‘coaching’ that are conceptualized as ‘focusing’ the foundation competencies. In the model presented in this paper, the term ‘area of expertise’ is retained but as a result of the research the actual areas do not completely coincide with the set itemized in the ASTD model.

The ASTD model (Bernthal et al., 2004) is an obvious starting point for the task of modelling L&D practice. However, the ASTD model represents an approach that foregrounds individual practitioner skills, knowledge and techniques. Although many of the components of the model have a clear contextual orientation (e.g. the foundational competency of Influencing Stakeholders, the area of expertise of Facilitating Organizational Change or the role of business partner), they are conceptualized as the competencies, expertise or roles of individual practitioners. However, the ASTD model does offer an integrated inventory of L&D activities. The areas of expertise explicitly reference the skills of designing learning, training delivery, measurement, evaluation, managing learning and knowledge, coaching, and career planning. The roles also imply skills such as learning strategy and project management, while the foundational competencies incorporate the skills of analysing needs and ‘leveraging diversity’.
HRD textbooks frequently attempt to conceptualize the work of practitioners in this field. Several authors (e.g. Werner and DeSimone, 2011; Delahaye, 2011; Gibb, 2011), describe a range of L&D functions and group them according to a particular conceptualization of practice. These authors consistently base their conceptualization of the interrelationships of areas of expertise on a ‘systems’ approach (Jacobs, 1990). This approach was originally adopted and refined by researchers and practitioners involved in instructional systems design (ISD) which highlights three key phases of analysis, design and evaluation (Reiser, 2001). A systems approach views L&D as a component in a broader organization or sectoral system, and envisages the application of L&D functions as such in terms of a system. Werner and DeSimone (2011), for example, present a systems-based ‘framework’ for HRD with four main elements: assessing HRD needs; designing effective HRD programmes; implementing HRD programmes; and evaluating HRD programmes. Within each of the four categories, specific knowledge, skills and techniques are described that allow the demands of the particular phase to be met.

Although conceptualizations and emphases vary among frameworks of L&D expertise proposed by different authors, surveyed above, there is consensus about what might be called ‘core’ components of L&D practice. That is, the clarification of L&D needs, design and development of L&D programmes, knowledge of learners and techniques for facilitating learning (including learning technologies and one-to-one support), and techniques for measuring and demonstrating the impact of L&D are regarded as common to L&D practice.
The role of context in L&D practice

As mentioned earlier, the model of L&D practice developed through this research incorporates a distinction between the expertise and attributes of individual practitioners on the one hand, and the contexts of their practice on the other. The impact of context on the work of L&D professionals is widely acknowledged in the literature (Smith and Sadler-Smith, 2006). A key dimension of this kind of impact on L&D practice is the scale of organizational setting. For example, in his analysis of ‘dimensions of organization’, Price (2007) traces the relationship between organizational scale and HRD practices, noting that larger organizations have traditionally been more attuned to the potential benefits of L&D, although Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) are placing more value on L&D in their business strategy. Earlier research by Hill and Stewart (2000) indicated that smaller organizations tended to neglect the potential of HRD for growth. The scale of the organizational setting of L&D thus suggests a dimension of context with implications for L&D practitioner work.

Organizational engagement with L&D may vary along another dimension defined by the extent to which an organization adopts a ‘strategic’ versus ‘traditional’ approach. The emerging consensus in HRD and OD theory is that a strategic approach to L&D — one that seeks ‘alignment’ between different L&D initiatives and programmes within an organization — is the most effective way to activate human potential for organizational growth (CIPD, 2015). Garavan and Carberry (2012: 24) explain that a strategic approach

requires that specialists with responsibility for L&D in organizations think differently about the functional requirements and activities of HRD as a set of organizational practices.

An implication of this approach is that L&D professionals may need to give up

the more operational, low-value training and development activities and [find] more time to develop the competencies to perform a variety of strategic roles (2012: 24).

Application of the strategic approach in practice, however, can be variable. Kearns (2004) introduced an ‘organizational maturity scale’ to represent the range of approaches adopted in firms from ‘strategic’ to ‘reactive’. A reactive approach regards L&D as something drawn on to address problems as they arise and it may be applied in an ad-hoc fashion. A larger organization may also exhibit a range of approaches, with varying or conflicting attitudes to L&D evident in different units (Sambrook, 2007). The extent to which the organizational setting is characterized by more strategic or more traditional attitudes to L&D presents another dimension of context.

Werner and DeSimone (2011) identify a set of operational roles that draw on particular knowledge, skills and techniques of L&D practice, and separate them from an executive role type that is concerned with strategic L&D. If broad role types from operational through to executive can be regarded as a feature of L&D practice, then a contextual dimension can be proposed that varies according to extent the practitioner is required to implement strategic or operational L&D skills and knowledge.

Two further dimensions of organizational context that shape the work of L&D practitioners concern use of standardized versus customized solutions, and whether ‘Nationally Recognized Training’, or qualifications-based, training is used. The latter dimension is highly relevant to the Australian context. In Australia around 80% of occupations are covered by sets of industry-developed ‘competency standards’ (Hoeckel et al., 2008) that form the basis of nationally
recognized qualifications. These standards are widely used for training design, facilitation and assessment in Australian organizations (Smith and Smith, 2007). Whether organizations align their training and development activities to qualifications or not can impact significantly on L&D practice in those organizations due to the complex demands of the Australian system. A related contextual dimension is the extent to which customization of L&D characterizes the approach of an organization (Noe, 2010). If qualifications are used, training must conform to national standards and content, although nationally recognized training does offer some scope for customization.

Another contextual dimension is suggested by Gibb (2011: 410) in a discussion of different HRD ‘provision contexts’ (different environments in which HRD is applied) that distinguishes single employer and multi-employer organizations. Gibb (2011) also discusses a shift in organizational practices from reliance on internal training functions to the use of external consultants, indicating a fourth dimension of context: L&D practice undertaken as part of an internal function or in an external consultant role. This is an important point in the Australian context and the context of this research project. The contextual dimensions highlighted by the literature review are listed in Tables 2 and 3 below.

For modelling L&D practice, the literature thus offers material for constructing a model with distinct individual and contextual dimensions. Much literature (Delahaye, 2011; Gibb, 2011; Werner and DeSimone, 2011) presents a systems perspective on L&D expertise, consistently identifying groups of skills focused respectively on identifying L&D needs, designing L&D, implementing L&D, and assessing L&D. The ASTD model (Bernthal et al., 2004) confirms this core structure, but conceptualizes L&D practice explicitly from the standpoint of the individual practitioner. ‘Foundational competencies’ — personal and idiosyncratic traits and abilities — are attributed to practitioners that form the basis of areas of expertise which reference forms of knowledge, skills and techniques described in authoritative literature. The individual dimension of a model of L&D practice may accordingly incorporate the knowledge, skills and techniques of L&D practice, and also indicate a more distinctively personal level. A context dimension can also be proposed that identifies dimensions including organizational scale from large to small (Price, 2007), organizational ‘maturity’ from adopting a strategic to a more traditional approach to L&D (Kearns, 2004), working within a single through to multiple organizations, and within an internal unit through to work as an external consultant (Gibb, 2011), strategic versus more operational roles (Werner and DeSimone, 2011), whether NRT is employed or not (Smith and Smith, 2007) and finally the extent to which L&D programmes are customized in organizations (Noe, 2010).

**Research Methods**

Figure 2 below shows the steps in the development of our model (represented in Figure 3). Interviews with senior practitioners were undertaken after Human Research Ethics Committee permission was secured for the research. The data from these interviews were used to supplement the findings from the literature review to develop a draft model. A survey of Australian L&D practitioners was then used to appraise the draft model and generate data for AITD about membership demographics and professional development needs. We do not report on demographics and needs in this paper. The final phase of the project employed the survey results to refine the model. In this section, the interviews and survey phases of the research are presented.


Interviews

Sixteen senior L&D practitioners operating in Australia were interviewed. The interviewee sampling strategy was designed to secure contributions from practitioners working in a wide range of settings and employed a combination of purposive and convenience modes of sampling. Recruitment thus involved segmenting the field of enterprises into government and private types, and a third group comprising training providers (purposive sampling). Within each of these types organizations were differentiated according to area of operation. A further three interviewees were identified and recruited on the basis of their contribution to the development of the field of L&D. Two of them were suggested by the project steering committee and another by the research team (convenience sampling). Within the categories, senior practitioners were shortlisted and approached to participate. Table 1 identifies the job role, organization types and areas of operation from which interviewees were recruited.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job role of interviewee</th>
<th>Organization type</th>
<th>Area of operation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Manager, Capability Development</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Mining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Development Manager</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Retail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Development Manager</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Construction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Development Manager</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Not-for-Profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Learning &amp; Development</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Community Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Consultant, People &amp; Development</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Manager, Learning &amp; Development</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Public Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Consultant</td>
<td>Training Provider</td>
<td>Leadership and Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
<td>Training Provider</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Development Consultant</td>
<td>Training Provider</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
<td>Training Provider</td>
<td>Safety &amp; Compliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
<td>Training Provider</td>
<td>eLearning design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal Training Consultant</td>
<td>Training Provider</td>
<td>Mining</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRD Researcher</td>
<td>Higher Education Provider</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Development Consultant</td>
<td>Higher Education Provider</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Researcher &amp; Consultant</td>
<td>Consultancy</td>
<td>Learning &amp; Development</td>
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Table 1. Interviewee Characteristics
Twelve questions were asked to each of the participants. Interviews lasted between 28 and 48 minutes and were recorded and transcribed, with permission. The questions were:

1. Describe your current role(s).
2. What are the major challenges you face in your L&D practice?
3. What professional development (PD) activities do you engage in to develop your L&D career?
4. What PD activities would you like to engage in to develop your L&D career?
5. Describe the range of work roles of other L&D professionals who you currently work with/have worked with/who you know.
6. What would you say are the development needs of L&D professionals you currently work with?
7. What development activities and networks do these L&D professionals participate in?
8. What makes for a good PD activity? What makes for a poor PD activity?
9. What makes for a good PD network/organization? What makes for a poor PD network/organization?
10. What are the most significant challenges faced by L&D professionals?
11. How is the work of L&D professionals changing?
12. Imagine the ideal L&D professional in five year’s time. What development activities will they need to engage in to get to this point?

These questions were not systematically derived from the literature review. The intent of the interviews was to describe actual L&D practice rather than gauge the extent to which participants agreed with or understood concepts identified in the review. We were interested in gaining a ‘snapshot’ of Australian L&D practice from the senior practitioner perspective. Another goal was to learn about L&D practitioner needs and practice trends — topics that lie beyond the scope of this paper.

Data from the interviews were analysed thematically, with transcripts read and compared by the research team. Shared themes were described and grouped without explicit reference to the literature review findings through the process. This strategy was adopted to maintain a focus on Australian contexts and practices. The findings from this analysis were then compared with findings from the literature review to inform the process of drafting a model of L&D practitioner work.

Survey

A survey of Australian L&D practitioners was conducted to appraise and refine the model and also to garner information about possible professional development needs. The bulk of the questions were formulated against the components of the draft model. Thus the survey included questions about the respondent’s current position (e.g. whether they work for one or a number of organizations, work team details, size of organization(s)), the L&D knowledge, skills and techniques employed in their current role (i.e. the areas of expertise in the draft model), and the relevance of personal attributes to the role (e.g. business acumen). Most questions invited a rating using a Likert scale and a small number required short written responses. The 99-item
instrument was formatted into Survey Monkey and a link to the questionnaire was distributed to AITD membership. Links to the instrument were distributed to non-AITD L&D networks during the same period. The AITD took responsibility for distributing the link to its members, while the non-AITD L&D networks were identified by interviewees and distribution of the survey in these cases was undertaken by the research team. Altogether, 2825 practitioners were invited to participate and 796 responses were returned. Of these, 165 responses were from L&D practitioners who did not identify as AITD members. In terms of the goal of testing the model, the quantity of responses allowed questions about the relevance of the model to be provisionally answered. Data were analysed descriptively to identify frequencies and averages across demographic variables. Qualitative responses were analysed by coding key words and determining frequencies. Data relating to areas of L&D expertise were submitted to a principal components analysis (Johnson and Wichern, 1998; Hair et al., 1998) to allow a nuanced picture of the clustering of expertise types in L&D practice. This latter methodology and analysis is detailed in Hodge and Harvey (2015).

Findings from the Interviews

Data were mainly consistent with the literature about L&D practice, although additional content and different emphases were highlighted by the interview data analysis. A core of L&D areas of expertise was acknowledged by 11 of the interviewees. For example, one explained that, “you’re still going to need to know how to do a needs analysis or a skills forecast” (Government/Community Services). Another said,

I think everyone needs some broad understanding of the principles and practices and philosophy [of L&D]. I think that’s really important. The nitty-gritty-bitty detail around how do you go about, for example as a designer or a developer of learning programmes, you know, what a learning objective is and some real specifics around that (Government/Public Service).

Comments like these indicate that contemporary L&D practice in Australia continues to draw on well-established knowledge and techniques associated with training and HRD. That is, learning analysis, design, implementation and assessment or evaluation continue to be valued and exercised in L&D practice.

Additional L&D areas of expertise were identified by the interviewees. A strong theme to emerge from analysis of the interview data was about the role of technology in L&D practice, with nine interviewees identifying this theme. For instance,

I think they will need more of technology-enhanced learning. Definitely. Because, especially in Australia the companies are remote from each other. The two-hour time difference between Perth and Sydney actually is a bother. So how do you deal with that? So technology solutions is a real key (Private/Mining).

A component of the draft model that clearly reflects the Australian context of L&D practice is expertise in Nationally Recognized Training. Australian firms and L&D practitioners can draw on a national competency-based system of Vocational Education and Training (VET) to guide training efforts. It is a well-established and sophisticated system that requires considerable expertise to utilise effectively. Seven interviewees discussed the significance of Nationally Recognized Training for L&D practice and identified the ability to apply it to L&D challenges as an important skill for practitioners:
I think they need to understand very closely how the contemporary training system [Nationally Recognized Training] works which is complicated, but they I think need to — I think they need to understand the ins and outs of national training policy more effectively (Higher Education Provider/HRD Researcher).

Five interviewees also drew attention to the role of other systems and packages in L&D, such as Myers-Briggs profiling used to promote awareness of the diversity of personalities in workplaces. For some interviewees, expertise in proprietary systems used in particular settings was basic to L&D practice.

Other additions to the draft model prompted by the interviews included personal networks and practitioner learning preferences. A common message from the interviewees was that personal networks were an important resource for the L&D practitioner. Eleven of the interviewees regarded networks as ways to stay abreast of industry-specific trends, emerging organizational practices and new techniques. Five interviewees identified learning preferences as a characteristic of individual practitioners that has a substantial impact on practice. These two aspects of L&D practice were included on the individual side of the model. Other components of this sphere identified in the literature were also stressed by interviewees. These were industry knowledge (three interviewees) and business acumen (eight interviewees). Interviewees emphasized the value of close ties with industry associations as a way to remain current with industry knowledge. The importance of an effective knowledge of business was also identified.

**Bringing Together the Literature and Interview Findings**

This section explains how the model was developed. Starting with a distinction between contextual and individual aspects of L&D practice, and guided by the literature review and findings from the qualitative interviews with senior L&D practitioners, a ‘draft’ model was prepared. Part of the model building process also involved settling on terms or labels for different components of the structure. The contextual and individual ‘aspects’ of L&D practice were named the ‘Practice Domain’ and ‘Individual Domain’ respectively, reflecting the fact that the context of L&D is the context of practice while L&D-specific expertise is brought to bear on practice by individuals whose activity is shaped by personal dispositions and a unique fund of experiences.

As part of the model development, basic divisions within each domain were introduced in the light of the literature and interviews. Within the Practice Domain, ‘roles’ and ‘settings’ were distinguished. Settings refer to features of organizational context that shape L&D practice. Roles refer to pre-existing positions or jobs that are occupied by people who undertake L&D tasks within organizations. Settings and roles await the L&D practitioner, although through their work, L&D practitioners influence their settings and shape the roles they occupy. Within the Individual Domain, personal characteristics and areas of L&D expertise were separated. The model adopts the term *Areas of Expertise* (AOEs) to refer to the knowledge, skills and techniques specific to L&D practice. As noted above, the ASTD Competency Model (Bernthal et al., 2004) also used the term ‘areas of expertise’, but the content of the AOE’s in our model does not follow the ASTD model, deriving instead from the literature review and interviews. Our model includes a Personal Sphere alongside AOE’s within the Individual Domain. The Personal Sphere gathers more idiosyncratic components of practitioner work, including learning preferences, industry knowledge, personal networks and business acumen. The basic structure of the draft model is shown in Table 2 below.
Each of the main divisions of the model was populated with content identified through the literature review and interviews. Within the Practice Domain the components are represented in dimensions, some of which are continua (i.e., can vary between extreme points) and others dichotomies (i.e., discrete types such as single or multiple organizations). Five dimensions were identified as characterizing key variations of organizational settings that shape L&D practice. One variation concerns the size of the organizational setting, with the literature and interviews indicating that organizational scale plays a role in the kinds of demands placed on L&D practitioners. A second variation relates to whether the practitioner works across multiple organizations or is employed within one. Another variation derives from the unit or organizational approach to L&D. Strategic and traditional approaches can be distinguished, and within organizational settings either or both approaches may be evident. The extent to which Nationally Recognized Training (NRT) is used in particular settings affects practice, while the use of standardized or customized learning solutions constitutes another dimension. Table 3 summarizes the dimensions within Practice Domain settings that shape L&D practice.

| Larger organization | Smaller organization |
| Multiple organizations | Single organization |
| Traditional approach to L&D | Strategic approach to L&D |
| Uses Nationally Recognized Training | Uses non-Nationally Recognized Training |
| Uses standardized programmes | Uses customized programmes |

Table 3. Dimensions of ‘Settings’ within the Practice Domain

Four dimensions of L&D role in the Practice Domain were identified. The first relates to whether an L&D practitioner works independently or as part of a team. The second dimension represents the difference between a consultant L&D practitioner whose base is external to the organizational setting and one located internally. Whether the practitioner occupies a strategic role or an operational one is another key variation, while the extent to which the role is dedicated to L&D or one which includes L&D practice as a secondary function creates the fourth continuum. These dimensions are presented in Table 4 below.

| Individual operation | Team operation |
| External role | Internal role |
| Strategic role | Operational role |
| Dedicated L&D role | Secondary L&D role |

Table 4. Practice Domain ‘Role’ Dimensions
Within the Individual Domain, the representations of AOE$s and elements of the *Personal Sphere* comprise discrete components rather than dimensions (i.e. the items in this sphere are distinct areas and do not relate in terms of continua or opposites). The AOE$s are the skills, knowledge and techniques that are peculiar to L&D practice. Different AOE$s identified in the draft model were:

- Strategic L&D
- L&D Needs Analysis
- Nationally Recognized Training (NRT)
- Proprietary/licensed systems
- Personality Types
- Learner Characteristics
- Designing and Developing L&D
- Learning Technologies
- Selecting and Sourcing L&D
- Facilitating
- Coaching
- Assessing Learning
- Evaluating Programmes
- Demonstrating the Value of L&D (or demonstrating return on investment, ROI)

The Personal Sphere — the dispositions, attributes and experience of the individual practitioner — included six components:

- Identity and Aspirations
- Personal Networks
- Industry Knowledge
- Business Acumen
- Communicative Competence
- Learning Preferences

The model described above was largely validated by the practitioner survey, a conclusion supported in three ways. First, the relatively low number of ‘Strongly disagree’ and ‘Disagree’ responses to items that asked whether particular components were perceived to be ‘important’ to L&D practice indicate that there was broad agreement with the relevance of the content of the model. Second, when respondents were asked to identify features of their L&D practice that were not referenced in the model, very few additional components (e.g. techniques or contexts) were suggested. Finally, items that invited respondents to position themselves on the dimensions of the Practice Domain (Settings, Roles) returned relatively low levels of ‘skipping’, indicating that respondents could position themselves in terms of the model’s representation of L&D context.
With respect to the Individual Domain, results indicated that the Personal Sphere presented relevant characteristics of L&D practitioners. Results for the AOE suggests that the set presents a comprehensive representation of the skills, knowledge and techniques of L&D practice. The fact that the question asking whether there are other areas not presented in the survey was among the most skipped in the survey — 80.2% of respondents skipped the question — supports this conclusion. Of the responses of those practitioners who indicated there were AOE other than those identified in the survey, there was some agreement about additional areas. Research skills, project management skills, and understanding of budgeting and recruitment were identified by respondents as additional AOE used in their L&D practice. These areas were identified by some senior practitioners but not by enough to justify inclusion in the first draft of the model. However, the interview data combined with the survey results suggested that a sphere of supplementary AOE could be included in the model alongside the L&D-specific AOE and the Personal Sphere within the Individual Domain. Accordingly, the refined model incorporates an ‘Allied Skills’ sphere that include AOE identified by a subset of practitioners as important to their L&D work as detailed below.

The results of the survey suggest that the model’s representation of the set of AOE is valid, at least for the Australian context. However, the aggregated results did not suggest patterns of deployment of expertise. That is, the respondents as a set uniformly rated most of the 13 components as important to L&D practice, and also indicated, with few exceptions, that they wanted to improve their understanding and abilities in relation to each of the components. It was proprietary systems and programmes (e.g. Meyers-Briggs systems) that most respondents did not agree were important to their work or wish to further develop their understanding of them — a result that is not surprising given the niche status of such expertise. However, scrutiny of individual results for the AOE questions showed that respondents often found certain of the AOE to be more important than others. A principal components analysis (Johnson and Wichern, 1998; Hair et al., 1998) of these data was thus undertaken to determine whether attributions of importance of AOE followed a pattern or were unique to individual survey respondents. This analysis revealed that there are three distinct clusters of AOE that different respondents identified as more important to their work:

- Learning Facilitation
  - Facilitating
  - Personality Types
  - Learner Characteristics
  - Coaching
- Systems and Design
  - Assessing Learning
  - Learning Technologies
  - Nationally Recognized Training
  - Proprietary Systems
  - Evaluating Programmes
  - Selecting and Sourcing
  - Design and Development
- Strategy and Analysis
  - Strategic L&D
  - L&D Needs Analysis
• Demonstrating the Value of L&D
• Evaluating Programmes
• Selecting and Sourcing

There is some overlap between the clusters, with Evaluating Programmes and Selecting and Sourcing appearing in both the Systems and Design cluster and Strategy and Analysis cluster. These three clusters make intuitive sense. Practitioners who indicated that facilitation is most important to L&D practice also tended to find that the skills and understanding of coaching, personality types and learner characteristics are important. This suggests a trainer-role oriented cluster. The next cluster associates assessment and evaluation with specific systems and models, technologies and design and development, suggesting roles away from face-to-face delivery and specializing in resource and systems development and measurement. The third cluster revolves around strategy and identifying and justifying L&D options.

We have explained that the survey results suggest that the basic structure and components of the draft model were valid. However, open ended responses from practitioners, in conjunction with suggestions made by some of the interviewees, prompted a rethink of the Individual Domain components. It became clear that apart from a Personal Sphere (unique combinations of experience and dispositions) and the AOE's it is possible to identify a sphere of ‘Allied Skills’ that contemporary L&D practitioners are increasingly drawing on in their work. Management skills, project management skills, research skills, sales and marketing skills and financial skills are among the most commonly identified forms of expertise that L&D practitioners are employing to complement ones more specific to L&D. These skills were included in the Allied Skills sphere added to the final version of the model.

A second refinement was to introduce a structure within the set of AOE's derived from the principal components analysis that identified partially overlapping clusters of AOE's that different L&D practitioners rated as important to their work. The three clusters — the Strategy and Analysis, Systems and Design and Learning Facilitation clusters — are represented using a Venn diagram format within the boundary of the AOE's. The introduction of this structure does not alter the content of the sphere.

The Practice Domain of the draft model was not challenged in any substantial way by the survey results. The refined model therefore preserves the original Practice Domain structure and component dimensions and modifies the Individual Domain, producing the structure presented in Figure 3 below.

**Conclusion**

The model presented in this paper has implications for practice and also raises a number of conceptual issues that warrant further research and reflection. Practical implications can be divided into those for professional bodies, for organizations and individual L&D professionals. We consider these implications before passing to conceptual issues.

**Implications for professional bodies**

The research presented above was undertaken for Australia’s peak L&D professional body, the AITD. The organization wanted the practice of L&D professionals to be modelled for the purpose
of aligning service delivery to current practice determining professional development priorities and refining provision. The research thus sought to comprehensively represent the terrain of L&D practice in Australia and ascertain professional development needs in the L&D community. For professional bodies that represent L&D practitioners (like AITD) the model in this paper can highlight dimensions of roles and practice settings in which L&D expertise is deployed, potentially informing recruitment strategy and organizational engagement strategy. For example, understanding more about variations in roles could facilitate targeting of marketing campaigns while knowledge of features of L&D settings can inform relationship building between professional bodies and employers of L&D professionals. Understanding more about the complexity of the individual domain of L&D practice could allow professional bodies to refine service provision to existing members. Professional development programme design may be improved by taking into account distinctions within the Areas of Expertise and new provision may take into account non-traditional expertise identified in the Allied Skills sphere. Networking events and career development advice may derive insights from attributes set out in the Personal Sphere.

Implications for organizations

Organizations may refer to the model to reflect on fundamental questions concerning L&D. Whether organizations are traditional or strategic in their approach is a question highlighted by the model. This important dimension of L&D organizational approach can be posed as a question for organizational strategy while informing literature (e.g. Garavan and Carberry, 2012) may be consulted for detailed strategy development. The question of the potential benefits of national training systems and the affordances of national lifelong learning policies and programmes is also raised, alongside the related issue of the use of standardized versus customized L&D solutions. Apart from informing assessment of organizational orientation to L&D, the Roles domain may prompt questions about optimal deployment and development of L&D expertise within the organization. Whether these roles are dedicated or secondary, or strategic or operational are examples of considerations for organizational L&D strategy prompted by the model. For organizations with internal L&D functions, the Areas of Expertise sphere of the Individual Domain may inform skills gap analysis and development initiatives that may be aligned with performance review mechanisms. A complementary use of the model would be for recruitment strategy and planning. The three clusters within the Areas of Expertise identified by analysis of the survey results present a way to assess ways L&D expertise is grouped within organizations. For example, the Systems & Design cluster suggests that L&D design, technology and assessment/evaluation are functionally related with implications for the composition of ‘back room’ L&D teams.

Implications for individual L&D professionals

Individual L&D professionals may use the model presented in this paper as a self-assessment and career planning framework. The Individual Domain of the model presents a comprehensive inventory of knowledge, skills and attributes associated with contemporary L&D practice. The inventory contains items that are specific to the Australian context (Nationally Recognized Training), although this can be substituted in other countries with skills relating to national systems that are in place for post-compulsory or lifelong learning. The clusters within the Areas of Expertise offer another point of reflection. L&D professionals may wish to consider developing their own knowledge and skills within individual clusters as these appear to represent functionally related types of expertise in contemporary practice. Again, the Allied Skills sphere
includes non-traditional types of expertise that appear to be increasingly valued in practice. In
terms of career development, the Practice Domain represents roles and contexts of L&D practice
and thus suggest possible types of work and employment settings. Individual practitioners may
compare their own scope of practice with what is possible in the broader L&D practice domain
to identify areas to target for career development. Obviously, for L&D consultants who offer
professional development services to other practitioners the model presents a framework for
service provision.

Conceptual issues raised by the research

In addition to implications for practice, the model raises conceptual issues. As noted at the
beginning of this paper, a number of fields contribute to the theory and practice of L&D. There
is the broad training and education literature, the organizational development (OD) literature and
the human resource development (HRD) literature. For the purposes of our model building we
consulted these literatures to identify techniques and applications that relate to L&D. However,
a conceptual challenge is created by this strategy because these different fields retain their
distinctiveness in organizational settings, raising the question of how the modelling itself can
be recontextualized for these different types of practice. In other words, how can the model
be usefully deployed in HRD, OD or training contexts? How can it be conceptualized within
these different fields? We suggest that additional research and conceptual work be undertaken to
assist in the work of translating the insights of the model into the language and ways of thinking
specific to these different fields.

A particular challenge in this regard is the conceptual underpinnings of possible strategic use
of the model. A practical implication highlighted above is the potential of the model to inform
organizational strategy. However, there is scope for more conceptual work to tease out the broad
implications of such a model in the context of the push to realize the strategic potential of L&D
for organizational performance and effectiveness. Certainly individual organizations could
elaborate uses of the model, but there is the broader debate about strategic L&D and how a
model of L&D practice can contribute to this debate. More research and conceptualization would
be an appropriate way to build on the work presented in this paper to clarify such a contribution.

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