Life Based Learning:
Designing Professional Development for the Knowledge Era
Debra R. Miller
A wealth of resources are available online

- A large amount of resources related to this research can be found online at the International Center for Vocation Education and Training (ICVET) - Australia

- All of the resources can be reproduced and used for study or training purposes

- Downloads include:
  - The full research report (84 pages)
  - A 52 page report showing practical business usage
  - A compilation of 5 “think pieces”
  - Articles, interviews, and podcasts
  - Case studies

- URL for the research project:
Characteristics of the Knowledge Era

The research project found that the “Knowledge Era” is often characterized by:

- Multiple and competing agendas and priorities
- Diversity in ideologies
- Ambiguity
- Multiple roles
- Uncertainty
- Contradictions
- A great amount of energy and creativity

It is also the “Intangible Era” where the growing economic commodity is knowledge itself instead of goods and services.
Characteristics of the Knowledge Era

The form of work in the “Knowledge Era” is characterized as:

- Non-linear
- Non-routine
- Intuitive, opportunistic and networked
- Less driven by allegiance to a pre-planned critical path or mindset
- More innovative

Workers reflect these “Knowledge Era” abilities when they:

- Balance work, learning and knowing
- Rapidly acquire new skills
- Problem-solve and make sense in new contexts
- Maintain a balance between productivity and creativity
- Collaborate in both face-to-face and virtual environments
Values and the Knowledge Era

The research identified a set of values that are emerging as fundamental to living and working in the Knowledge Era, values that need to be reclaimed in the workplace.

• For the self:
  – trustworthiness, honesty, integrity, engagement, selflessness, equanimity

• With others:
  – generosity, collaboration, humility, openness, tolerance

• Together as a group:
  – taking responsibility instead of blaming others
  – planning and implementing wisely
  – being positive and looking beyond the immediate impact
  – balancing personal and work needs
  – being supported in taking risks
  – supporting community.
Four key concepts emerged from the research that can be applied to building a culture for knowledge, developing knowledge leadership, and evolving knowledge competencies:

1. Emphasize capability development
2. Evolve to a life based learning model
3. Use a strength based orientation
4. Develop business wisdom
1. Emphasize capability development

The research identified a need to move beyond “training” and “professional development” to “capability development.”

Creating capability was defined as:

- Moving away from segmented activities to holistic activities that have more meaning and purpose
- Positive appreciative mindsets and approaches
- Creating balance and integration, with a seamless connection between work, learning and knowing
- Empowering people to apply their expertise as people – rather than procedures or information – as the best source of deep expertise
- People taking responsibility for their own self-directed learning and organizations creating environments that support learning
1. Move beyond training and professional development to capability development
The research clarified that life based learning has a different focus from lifelong learning in that it is more about the source of learning, acknowledging the whole person’s learning contribution and recognizing different ways in which learning is significant to the individual.

Life based learning recognizes that individuals have knowledge, skills and capabilities that are not always visible or recognized by an organization even though they can significantly contribute to organizational life.
2. Evolve to a life based learning model

Life based learning acknowledges that what we experience and learn outside a work environment can be as important to our work as what we experience and learn at work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leisure</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Personal</th>
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Learning as a separate activity

Learning as an integrated and interconnected activity
2. Evolve to a life based learning model

The ten key characteristics of life based learning identified by the research are that it:

- Emphasizes capability development
- Promotes a strength based orientation to learning
- Recognizes multiple sources of learning
- Balances integrity and utility
- Shifts responsibility for learning to the individual
- Shifts the role of organizations to that of enabler
- Acknowledges that contradictions are strengths
- Invests in developing the whole person
- Acknowledges human dispositions as critical
2. Evolving to a life based learning framework

Life based learning honors the legacy of “Expert centred learning” and “Work based learning,” and draws from their potential as it evolves to a capability development framework.

- Self directed
- Continuous enquiry
- Adaptability and sustainability

- Facilitated
- Project based
- Flexibility and development

- Taught
- ‘Classroom’ based
- Compliance, adoption and implementation
2. Evolving to an “ecology” metaphor for learning

“Ecology” embraces the idea of contradictory forces within a sustaining and dynamic system. The research adapted an ecology metaphor (meaning they are dynamic, adaptive and diverse) as an appropriate way to view learning in the Knowledge Era.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Model</th>
<th>Professional Development Model</th>
<th>Capability Development Model</th>
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<tr>
<td>Expert Centred Learning</td>
<td>Work Based Learning</td>
<td>Life Based Learning</td>
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<td><strong>Hierarchy Metaphor</strong></td>
<td><strong>Network Metaphor</strong></td>
<td><strong>Learning Ecology Metaphor</strong></td>
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**STRATEGIES**
- Lectures
- Workshops
- Train the trainer
- Small group work
- Guest speakers

- Action learning
- Team work
- Mentoring
- Communities of practice
- Expert centred strategies

**ORIENTATION**
- Strength based
- Multiple sources of learning
- Adaptive to context
- Action from wisdom
- Blurring of boundaries
Deficit based models of learning are a legacy of the Industrial Era. Their language includes “interventions” and “diagnosis.” They are mechanical and linear and characterized by activities such as:

- Gap analysis
- Strengths vs. weaknesses
- Opportunities and threats analysis
- Benchmarking
- Performance indicators
- Process re-engineering.
3. Use a strength based orientation

Strength based philosophies, models and methodologies are participative, integrated, flexible, organic, and based on conversations.

The focus of strength based models is to collaboratively identify what’s right and what’s working well and then invest in that.

Strength based models of capability development do not disregard or displace existing practices; they take the best of what is working well and integrates it into the new.
3. Positive psychology as a discipline

The research found that positive psychology was a key theory that supported asset or strength based approaches to capability development.

Positive psychology is the science of human strength. It seeks to understand and build the strengths and virtues that improve wellbeing and enable individuals, organizations and communities to thrive.

Psychologist Mart Seligman, regarded as the founder of positive psychology, contributed two key ideas to the research: authentic happiness and signature strengths.

Seligman found that knowing our signature strengths and using them every day in the main realms of our life could bring abundant gratification and authentic happiness.
3. Flow theory - the perfect match between challenge and skills

The research found that the work of Dr. Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi supported a strength based approach to capability development.

Dr. Csikszentmihalyi determined that “flow” occurs when a person’s skill level is perfectly matched to the challenge level of a task that has clear goals and provides immediate feedback.
The research determined that a focus on business wisdom is particularly relevant to capability development in the Knowledge Era as it affirms the central role of human development, life management and striving to be the best that we can be for the benefit of others and ourselves.

The research argued that wise thinking and wise actions are the glue that connects the different elements of a learning organization into a more integrated and productive whole, strengthening what is already working.
4. Develop business wisdom

The researchers felt that the concept of “wisdom” was central to all aspects of the research project. They defined wisdom as having the following characteristics:

- Wisdom is strength based – it contributes to human wellbeing and the common good
- Wisdom contributes to synthesis – wise thinking and actions pull components together into an integrated whole
- Wisdom is achievement-oriented – it has a very practical orientation which serves to guide thinking and action
4. Develop business wisdom

Baltes, founder of the field of “lifespan psychology,” identified seven qualities of wisdom based on both modern and ancient literature:

1. Wisdom addresses important and difficult questions and strategies about the conduct and meaning of life
2. Wisdom includes knowledge about the limits of knowledge and the uncertainties of the world
3. Wisdom represents a truly superior level of knowledge, judgment and advice
4. Wisdom constitutes knowledge with extraordinary scope, depth and balance
5. Wisdom involves a perfect synergy of mind and character.
6. Wisdom represents knowledge used for the good or wellbeing of oneself and others
7. Wisdom, though difficult to achieve and specify, is easily recognized when manifested
4. Develop business wisdom

The first level is data – simple facts and figures.

Next we have information. Information is data that's been collected and organized. It is a reference tool, something we turn to when trying to create something else.

The third level is knowledge. This is information that we have digested and now understand. Organized as knowledge, the information we have collected is given a context.

The fourth and final level is wisdom. Wisdom is the proper use of knowledge. Wisdom is knowledge that has been applied in a way that takes into account all its pertinent relationships and that is consistent with universal laws.

Article: Where is the Wisdom we have lost in Knowledge?
www.foundationsmag.com
Organizational enablers were identified by the research. We can use these to help build a culture for a knowledge organization:

1. Valuing connections and networks
2. Developing a culture that supports job reshaping for personal growth
3. Creating space for exchange and sharing of ideas (informal learning)
4. Supporting learners as designers of their own development
5. Balancing control and creativity
6. Modeling wise leadership
7. Capitalizing on the benefits of an intergenerational workforce
Guiding principles for action

Six guiding principles for action were identified by the research that we can use to empower our organizational leaders:

1. Believe that relationships really matter
2. Work with strengths
3. Be reflexive as well as reflective
4. Think and act wisely
5. Acknowledge the whole person
6. Move beyond professional development as an activity
## Being a champion for the Knowledge Era

What concepts and language are you willing to be a champion for as we work together to bring the Knowledge Era to its full maturity?

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