L&D ROLES ARE CHANGING

How will you adapt?
“It is not the biggest, the brightest or the best that will survive, but those who adapt the quickest.”
Charles Darwin

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

The human species has an almost insatiable desire to create, destroy, rebuild, adapt and repurpose the materials at its disposal to make life on this planet easier.

This endless drive to improve and adapt to our environment - and to adapt the environment to us - means we have lived through periods of unparalleled creativity and invention: the Agricultural Age, the Industrial Age, and, most recently, the Information Age.

This last age is particularly noteworthy for the speed of its development. Never before in human history have we advanced technologically at such a rate.

One thing, though, has not changed. Every new age has made largely irrelevant the skills and crafts so prized in the previous age. Wheelwrights, carders, typesetters; once essential jobs that have been superseded by automation. The message is clear: adapt or die.

So, what of L&D? Teachers, students and tools of learning have existed from the very beginning but they are no longer immune to the effects of technological progress. How are these fundamental roles changing and what does the future hold for workplace learning professionals?

Read on...
15 YEARS IS A LONG TIME (IN L&D)

Many of us working in L&D today have witnessed the introduction of new technologies that have changed the way we approach our jobs. The arrival of writable CD's gave us the ability to store previously unimaginable quantities of data, helping to push forward computer-based training systems and video content. The arrival of the World-Wide Web in late 1991 meant we could link to resources around the globe from a single webpage. And the first social media sites gave us the means to interactively learn from other people, create communities and build personal brands.

But this seemingly rapid progress has been eclipsed by the sheer speed of technological development in the past 15 years. It’s astonishing to think that, in 2003 (a year notable for the twin tragedies of the start of the Iraq War and the Columbia Space Shuttle disaster), there were no updates on social media, no videos posted, no likes or emoji. In 2003, Facebook did not exist. YouTube did not exist. Even smartphones were still several years from mass adoption.

Yet once Facebook caught the public’s imagination in 2004, the social 'revolution' became the catalyst for an astonishing burst of innovation in learning, causing L&D professionals to re-think their roles almost daily.

So what did a 'typical' L&D job look like back in 2003? We asked Blue Eskimo, the LPI’s accredited and preferred recruitment partner, to sift through the archives and uncover what employers were asking for (and expecting) in a learning and development professional – and what they are asking for now.
L&D roles are changing

L&D: 15 years ago

- Identifying needs
- Responding to requests
- Designing learning based on needs ‘now’
- P&L focused on training delivery
- Conducting appraisals
- Organising training logistics
- Devising learning plans
- Producing training materials

Not reactive, but proactive

15 years ago, most employers were seeking candidates with what one might call “traditional” skillsets - expertise in areas that had been the bread-and-butter of learning professionals for decades, namely: tactical, operational and organisational skills such as identifying and responding to training requirements, organising training, creating in-house training materials and so on.

Many responsibilities were reactionary in nature, responding to requests (or orders) for training and - not surprisingly - minimal on the use of learning technology.

Returning to the present day and employer requirements for L&D skills have evolved significantly, in several areas. As one would expect, the explosion in technology platforms and devices has shifted the focus firmly towards a technology-led and technology-enabled approach.

But, perhaps not so obviously, there has also been a desire to recruit L&D people who can demonstrate a more strategic, consultative, and proactive skillset. The market today is seeking those who are able to convince the business of the value of learning, rather than those who are comfortable to merely meet training quotas.

The modern L&D professional must align with key business stakeholders to understand where the business is successful and how the L&D function can make it even more successful. Effective stakeholder engagement is more critical than ever, and roles for L&D Business Partners are now as prevalent as HR business partnering was a few years ago.
L&D: today

- Aligning learning to the company’s mission
- Embedding learning culture
- Collaborating with stakeholders
- Measuring learning ROI
- Informal learning, performance support
- Supporting multi-generational employees
- Implementing a blended approach
- Developing the organisation’s talent

Supporting learning, not enforcing it

The propulsive growth of technology in the past 15 years has had a profound effect on the way people learn. With so much competition for our time and attention, it has often been easier to learn in short, targeted bursts (micro-learning), simply accessing information at the point of need. With so much information available online via mobile devices, access to a wireless signal has become arguably more valuable than having a good memory.

But the sheer abundance of information available online is a double-edged sword. How can the consumer be certain that the information they are consuming is valuable, or even accurate? Content curation has become important - the ability to sift through the noise, find high-quality content and deliver it to learners. Yet even as this is becoming a new skill, competition is already appearing from new breeds of “micro-learning platforms,” and new AI-based systems that recommend, search for, and deliver learning.

As a result, the L&D job market is moving towards building progressive L&D functions that can really improve the learning capability of the workforce, in essence by ‘teaching them how to learn’ and making learning a value at the heart of the organisation.

The challenge for the L&D professional is how to objectively measure this new approach. Anyone who can demonstrate successful case studies may well find their CV at the top of the pile. Luckily, the technology explosion comes to the rescue here. Whilst Kirkpatrick and other models have been around for decades, the rapid evolution of digital learning content, assessments and platforms has made it less of a challenge to measure learning ROI.
The evolution of digital learning content has also helped bring the 70:20:10 model to the fore. The 70% ‘on the job learning’ is being enhanced by online performance support tools that provide the user with task-related content at their exact moment of need. Employers are seeking L&D professionals who have effectively implemented these types of solutions within organisations.

**From baby-boomers to millennials**

One notable change in the past 15 years has been the increase in the number of older employees in the workplace. More and more people are choosing (or having) to delay retirement. The result is that, for the first time, there are four distinct generations working together - and the challenge for L&D professionals is how to provide effective learning to this wider age range; how to address a huge array of different modal learning preferences e.g. virtual classroom, video, mentoring, etc. Again, job candidates who can demonstrate success in this difficult environment are likely to be shortlisted.

**Blended Learning**

The term ‘blended learning’ was not commonly encountered in the year 2003. In fact, it was not until 2006, when *The Handbook of Blended Learning (Bonk and Graham)* was released that progress in the field began to be reported. As such, job requirements for experts in blended learning were virtually non-existent.

Today, the situation is a polar opposite. It is almost certain that the requirement for skills in ‘blended learning’ will appear in an L&D job description, if not in the essential section then at least in the optional section.

**In Summary**

The days of L&D professionals only managing a training delivery function are well and truly numbered. While this skill remains the backbone of the L&D function, and is essential to its day-to-day running, it is now considered an expectation not an achievement.

There is now a real need for people who can foster and support a mobile, on-demand learning culture, align performance needs with business needs, and prepare employees and leaders for future responsibilities. In short, the role of the learning professional has become far more holistic; spanning multiple disciplines and areas of expertise.

This is more than changes in job titles, it’s a change in approach from the short-term delivery of classroom courses to the longer term view of skills development and the cultivation of emerging leaders.

Let’s look at how some typical L&D roles are evolving (and even being created) to deal with this brave new world.
CHANGING ROLES IN L&D

One thing is certain - roles and responsibilities within L&D are going to continue ebbing, flowing, changing and evolving, as organisations continue to assess and adopt different approaches to learning. Here are some examples of roles in flux.

**Instructional Design / Content Developer**

As web technology has improved, and the balance of processing power shifted from the server to the client, there is now a proliferation of frameworks and templating systems available to programmers and authors to speed up the design process. Now it is possible to incorporate pre-built components into applications and, in many cases, create entire applications without coding anything at all.

As a consequence, e-learning authoring tools have become a lot more intuitive and template-driven, giving subject matter experts (SME’s) the power to input content directly, without the intervention of instructional designers and/or content developers.

Frameworks and templates, coupled with mobile computing and client-side processing have also been the driving force behind many advancements in user-centric design. Much of the success of platforms such as Uber and Instagram is due to their high-quality user experience design.

While instructional design continues to play its part, there needs to be a shift from "instructional design" to "experience design", and for L&D to think more in terms of UX, user journey maps and data-driven workflows.
HR and Business Analyst

The roles of HR Analyst and Business Analyst have been around for some time, typically requiring skills such as data management, knowledge of systems and architectures, business analysis and strong communication skills.

But the rise of digital learning and the many tools and platforms that sit within this space has resulted in a staggering amount of data on user behaviour. No longer just a single function in the L&D Business Analyst’s remit, there are now full-time, dedicated Learning Data Analyst roles being advertised, borne out of the need for specific and advanced skills in the collection, measurement, analysis and reporting on data to optimise learning.

The HR equivalent is long established, as is the role of L&D Business Partner. However, this was not always the case. The L&D Business Partner role has evolved as a direct consequence of the importance of stakeholder engagement and taking a more company-wide and strategic view of learning, especially in light of an increasing number of learners wanting or needing ‘directed self-empowerment’.

L&D professionals are now, more than ever, expected to possess organisational development skills and capability. As L&D increasingly becomes less about formal delivery and more about enabling people to take ‘self-directed’ learning, the need to challenge and bring to the surface issues that block learning is on the increase. L&D needs to illuminate the paths that will help the organisation negotiate around blocks like resistance to change, resistance to mobile learning or lack of motivation to learn.

The L&D Business Partner is a key role for any organisation wishing to build a strong internal brand and culture of learning, and to bring to life employee development and enablement.

Trainer

So what of the trainer? Once confined to classrooms and the occasional webinar, the role of trainer has evolved significantly over the past 15 years to become the Talent Development Partner.

Coordinating stakeholder communications, spearheading Centres of Excellence, ensuring the right people are in the right programs at the right time, managing relationships with external consultants and internal clients, running assessments, business orientation programs, coaching/mentoring programs - the list goes on.

The modern trainer is a critical component in any strategy to demonstrate positive impact to the organisation. Acting as a bridge between the trainee and the L&D Manager, they are able to identify present and future talent development needs based on business needs, and influence the talent and development strategic plan.
L&D Manager

The L&D Manager role has undergone similar evolution to the HR and L&D Business Analyst roles, in that it now demands a greater degree of collaboration with the wider business in order to lead the delivery of proactive and customer focused Organisational Development services.

Once, a long time ago, the L&D Manager only needed to align with the IT Manager, to ensure the successful design and implementation of projects. Now L&D/OD/Change Managers must be able to influence, persuade and negotiate with managers across the entire business, assembling complex ideas, issues and observations into solutions that nurture and motivate the workforce.

It is a role that has evolved from a delivery focus to a strategy focus. The job of devising, implementing and evaluating complex organisational change programmes and OD projects simply cannot be achieved without orchestrating extensive support from senior level management and multi-disciplinary teams.

“Although you cannot predict the future, you can prepare for it. Today is already an exciting time to be in L&D, so imagine the possibilities for tomorrow.”

Edmund Monk, CEO, Learning & Performance Institute
NEW ROLES IN L&D

Much has already been written about the rise of machine learning and AI, and how these radical new technologies might affect future roles in L&D.

While it is likely that many current roles will evolve into something new, it is equally likely that completely new roles will be created as a result of our synergistic relationship with ‘the machines’.

There are early indications of new roles being created specifically to fill the gaps where artificial intelligence is weak, typically roles that involve monitoring the computer’s work or making high-level decisions about what to computerise. In essence, job functions that demand social and emotional intelligence.

While AI has progressed to a point where it is able to approximate various areas of human intelligence with reasonable accuracy, several other areas of human intelligence remain out of reach, and are likely to do so for a considerable time - namely, creativity. Although recent attempts in these areas have been promising, the human capacity to create art, beauty, innovation, surprise, excitement is still unmatched by AI.

It is likely that the jobs of the future will require at least some of these skills; in fact, we may already be there. Rita J. King suggests that we are on the cusp of moving from the Information Age to the Imagination Age - a new period where creativity, invention and artistry become the currency of economic success.

In The Singularity is Near, Raymond Kurzweil states that future combinations of AI, nanotechnology, and biotechnology will create a world where anything that can be imagined will be possible, raising the importance of imagination as the key catalyst for human progress.

Will you be the next Head of Imagination or Chief Envisioning Officer? Don’t laugh - those are real job titles.
ABOUT THE LEARNING AND PERFORMANCE INSTITUTE
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Written by Nick Bate, Blue Eskimo and Giles Hearn, The Learning & Performance Institute.