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In our work, people are an organisations most vital resource. Most organisations in the community sector spend over 50% of their budget on wages, making their staff their most valuable asset. Alongside this expenditure, volunteers provide thousands of hours of their time in all kinds of roles that support the organisation to achieve its purpose.

Learning and development opportunities have two objectives:

* To build the capabilities and competencies of staff to ensure the organisation will progress into the future.
* To engage, motivate and retain staff

Learning and development is interrelated with recruitment, succession & workforce planning and performance management and is most effective when these elements are integrated.

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# Learning Organisations: The Context of L&D

The ACT Community Sector is vibrant, diverse and skilled. As the needs of people in the community change and government policy shifts priorities, organisations need to be adaptable and responsive.

In order to build the capacity of organisations to adapt and respond, Peter Senge, in his book *the Fifth Discipline* (1990, 4) argues that organisations need to ‘discover how to tap people’s commitment and capacity to learn at *all* levels’. This means that organisations need to foster individual and organisational learning not only as planned activities but through the organisational culture itself.

A ‘learning organisation’ is intentional in creating knowledge through the collective experience of its members, and harnessing this knowledge to improve performance (Kirwan, 2013). Learning organisations want to continually grow and evolve.

Senge (1990, 3) suggests learning organisations are *‘where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together’*.

Put yet another way, Garvin (1993, 80) describes it as *‘an organization skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights’*.

Learning organisations approach learning and development holistically and see it as a vital element within organisational culture and recognise that the workplace forms the context for ongoing learning and development.

# The Positive Impact of Learning and Development

[Recent research conducted by the University of Western Australia](http://www.business.uwa.edu.au/school/csi/research/learning-for-purpose) (UWA) has established an evidence base for the impact of learning and development on improving organisational capacity and capability. 697 Australian Not-for-profit (NFP) organisations participated in the study.

The research supports the widespread assumption that “organisational human resource development practices and policies positively affect organisational competence and capability.” Learning and development of staff and volunteers is only one aspect of building organisational capacity and needs to form part of an overall human resources strategy. For further information, take a look at the Human Resources Strategic Framework section of the OIK.

Unsurprisingly to those in the sector, the research also found that insufficient financial and structural support present significant barriers to the Australian NFP sector and its people in engaging with more professional development. This is particularly the case for members of governance boards, volunteers and those in smaller NFP organisations more generally.

Nevertheless, the UWA research supports and demonstrates that professional development experiences that lead to new knowledge, skills and abilities facilitates improved leadership, saves funds, increases performance and achieves greater wellbeing for the staff; all of which contribute to improving the organisational capacity, viability and capability to affect social change. For more information, look at the [Research Report](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1--xR9XdxCEZ0lRaGZ1S1BHT2c/view?pref=2&pli=1).

Sung and Choi (2014) write that research into organisational innovation has highlighted the role of pursuing learning and new knowledge in innovation through the processes of “problem identification, idea generation, idea promotion, and implementation”. These kinds of learning and knowledge development processes can be supported through formal training and development opportunities that expose workers to a wide range of perspectives, skills and experiences (Sung and Choi, 2014).

So while the sector generally experiences a number of barriers in engaging in learning and development activities, it is an investment in your organisation and in the future of the industry.

There are a range of training workshops that are provided at subsidised cost made available to the sector and can be found on our learning and development page. There are also a number of other peak bodies and organisations that provide non accredited training opportunities to the community sector:

[Youth Co-alition ATODA Calendar](https://www.youthcoalition.net/sector/trainingcalendar.html)

Opportunities are also regularly advertised through CDNet, an email list providing subscribers with information relevant to working in the sector. You can subscribe through their website, [here](http://www.cdnet.org.au/index.php/cdnet-list-management).

**Further Reading**

Sung, S. Y., & Choi, J. N. (2014). Do organizations spend wisely on employees? Effects of training and development investments on learning and innovation in organizations. *Journal Of Organizational Behavior*, *35*(3), 393-412. doi:10.1002/job.1897

# Learning and Development: A Framework

The 70-20-10 framework outlines a blended approach to learning and development. While not empirically based, the 70-20-10 framework resonates with the learning experience of many workers.

The framework is:

* 70% of learning occurs through ‘informal’ on-the-job experiences,
* 20% through learning from other people and
* 10% from more formally structured training through workshops or resources.

While the actual percentages will shift depending on the organisation and the kind of work the employee is undertaking, using the 70-20-10 framework as a guide or a reference point is helpful. The focus of this framework is to support organisations and individuals to approach professional development and learning with a broad perspective.

Professional Development that effectively contributes to organisational learning is:

* Driven by the individual
* Supported by HR practices and organisation policies
* Integrated with social learning and formal learning
* Aligned to organisational strategy

 ‘Informal’, on-the-job experiences include:

* New experiences or tasks
* Observation
* Problem-solving
* Improving processes
* Reflective practices

Social Learning (learning from others) includes:

* Networks (in-person and virtual)
* Mentoring and Coaching
* Staff meetings

 ‘Formal’ Learning includes:

* Recognised training/qualification
* Non accredited workshops
* Seminars or Conferences
* Resources like books, journals, etc.

# Training: A Theoretical Perspective

The field of Adult Learning contributes to and influences our thinking about workplace learning. Influenced by psychology, philosophy and sociology, terms and ideas such as life-long learner, self-directed learning, learning contracts and the like are widely accepted.

At the heart of adult learning theory is our understanding of knowledge and how it is constructed and transferred to others. There are a range of theories that influence this discussion, though all of them remind us that teaching, learning and workplace training are considerably more than a set of training tips or attending a course here and there.

Workplace learning and vocational training enables individuals to increase their skills and perform their roles with increased capability and efficiency and this builds the capacity of the organisation to achieve its mission. As the context of our work continually evolves, it is essential to have a workforce that is consistently learning and adapting to meet the needs of the community. Organisations that take a strategic approach to workplace learning provide support to their workers and ensure the longevity of their organisation in a complex and constantly changing environment.

The Australian Government has pursued a reform agenda in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector with the aim of improving the quality of training in order to ensure a more skilled and adaptable workforce into the future. For further information: <http://www.vetreform.industry.gov.au/>

Ledwith (2001) has suggested that community work, youth work, social work, community education, adult education and schooling is where critical pedagogy is/should be happening - thus moving learning out of the institutions.

For a good practice organisation considering training - one suggestion is to consider a training needs audit or a skills audit - to consider what the training needs of the organisation are into the next few years and with a large array of training organisations around, prepare a list of possible providers and ways in which learning can be maximised. The National Training Information Service can provide a list of accredited courses and providers. <http://www.training.com.au/portal/site/public/menuitem.bf7b1d8a09175b80f9fa5a1017a62dbc/>

#### Further Reading

Brookfield, Stephen. (2001). Repositioning Ideology Critique in Critical Theory of Adult Learning. Adult Education Quarterly, Vol 52 No1, Nov 2001 pp.7-22

Freire, Paolo. Pedagogy of the Opressed

Kilgore, Deborah. (1999) Understanding learning in social movements: a theory of collective learning International Journal of Lifelong Education, Vol.18, No. 3 may-June 1999 pp.191-202

Ledwith, Margaret. (2001), Community Work as critical pedagogy: re-envisoning Freire and Gramsci. Community Education Journal Vol 36 No3 July 2001 pp.171-182.

Thompson, Kelvin. (2001) Constructivist curriculum design for professional development: A review of the literature. Australian Journal of Adult Learning Volume 41, Number 1, April 2001

Townsend, Rob. (2006) Adult, community and public education as sites for the development of social capital Australian Journal of Adult Learning Vol 46, No2 July 2006

# Developing a Professional Learning Plan

# Networking in the Community Sector

While there are opportunities for workers and managers alike to network with their peers in the Community Sector there is, however, an often heard lament that there are simply not enough hours in the day to allow for time away from our fundamental responsibilities. Understandably, most of us are reluctant to take time off from our work – the community – so as to mingle with our colleagues. So what value is to be had in networking and is it reasonable to include the time taken to network into our central work?

The Benefits of Networks:

* An effective forum for sharing information between organisations, and indeed sub-sectors, within the Community Sector.
* Built around a common theme or purpose can assist workers from diverse organisations in learning what others are doing, what is new and what is considered good or leading practice.
* Foster the development of good relationships between individuals and their organisations, and leads to collaboration between services.
* Organisations that network effectively will know of other organisations with similar or complementary philosophies, consumers or services, and through good relationships with these organisations the desire to share or collaborate becomes a real possibility.
* Partnerships, collaborative projects and the sharing of services can be identified and implemented through networking.
* Networking can save your organisation duplication, money and time thereby allowing you to provide more cohesive and targeted services to those that use or need your organisation.

In short, effective networking can benefit your organisation and more importantly can benefit the people that rely on your organisation. With the promise of spreading limited resources further for your organisation, and improved service delivery for those that use your organisation, it becomes a little easier to see how networking and networks are in fact a pivotal part of the work that we do.

While it is sometimes difficult to block out two hours of one’s day for a network meeting it might be worth remembering that the strength of our organisations, and the Community Sector as a whole, relies on our ability and willingness to work together towards a common goal.

The ACTCOSS Networks and Working Groups webpage has a number of community sector networks you might like to join.

The Community Development Network (CDNet) is a large e-mail network that keeps you up-to-date with events in the ACT; you can sign up to receive e-mails from the network by visiting the [CDNet website](http://www.cdnet.org.au/)