

# Becoming influential as an L&D practitioner



## The Oxford Review

### Research Briefing

Whilst carrying out the research for my forthcoming book, *Fear to Flow*, I interviewed 231 L&D professionals around the world. People in L&D have a unique place in organisations. Because they are responsible for development often across an entire organisation, they tend to have a more objective and wider overview of the needs of an organisation than many other people.

However whilst I was interviewing these L&D professionals I also noticed something else. There is a distinct difference between three types of L&D functions and the people who deliver the service.

#### Three types of L&D functions

1. **Type 1 or 'pseudo L&D'**. These tend to be administrators with little understanding of learning to the processes underlying development. In effect their job is to stay in touch with what the organisational needs are and source and bring in people to meet that need. As such they are easy to replace.
2. **Type 2 or 'Delivery L&D'** are delivery experts. They are controlled, often through HR and are told exactly what to deliver and have little autonomy or influence within the organisation. The problem these L&D people face is that they are rarely listened to and their impact is minimal beyond the delivery service they perform. These L&D people are also easy to replace.

3. **Type 3 or 'L&D Experts'** are people who's views are sought out, they are often engaged in conducting learning analysis, are listened to and have influence. These are the people who have authority and impact, they are frequently sought out for guidance and are often found helping senior management and the leadership make decisions and plan the way forward. They are important and frequently vital to the functioning and growth of the organisation and as far as anyone can be, pretty indispensable at strategic and operational levels. Replacing L&D experts is costly as organisations tend to value their contributions and their service which is embedded in both their knowledge of the organisation, it's culture and networks and their professional knowledge, understanding and skill.

Now obviously in each of these three types of L&D situations there is a bit of a range. At first I assumed that the difference between the L&D staff with influence and impact and those without was more to do organisational structure and tradition. However as I developed a relationship with many of the people what I noticed was that the main differentiator had more to do with their thinking and knowledge and their ability to communicate and impact the thinking of others than organisational structure.

I found L&D people who had been on boards and had been removed and others who had gone in the opposite direction and were in positions of greater influence than people above them in the hierarchy. Comments from board members and others around the organisation I interviewed would report things like 'they always have something useful to say', or 'they really know their stuff', or 'practical and useful', 'a strategic thinker', 'continually adds value' and 'up-to-date thinking'.

## **2 distinguishing traits of influence**

It appears that two things distinguish influential L&D professionals:

1. Being up to date with the latest thinking and research, and
2. The ability to turn it into practical and useful solutions for their organisation.

indeed part of the the very definition of a professional is that they are right up-to-date with the latest thinking and knowledge and that they are an independent and critical thinker.

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