

The Learning and Development Handbook

The Learning and Development Handbook

A learning practitioner's guide

Michelle Parry-Slater



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First published in Great Britain and the United States in 2021 by Kogan Page Limited

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2nd Floor, 45 Gee Street
London
EC1V 3RS
United Kingdom
www.koganpage.com

122 W 27th St, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10001
USA

4737/23 Ansari Road
Daryaganj
New Delhi 110002
India

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ISBNs

Hardback 978 1 789663 341
Paperback 978 1 7896 6332 7
Ebook 978 1 78966 333 4

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

[*****]

Typeset by Hong Kong FIVE Workshop, Hong Kong
Print production managed by Jellyfish
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

*To my niece, Rosalind Irene Boxall
8 May 2015 to 1 November 2019*

*You lived your short life as an example to us all;
always smiling, willing, fearless, feisty and brave.*

Shine bright like a firework, Rosie.

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FOREWORD

To come

PREFACE

Generally it is fair to say that people like comfortable shoes. We might try new shoes, but there is nothing like the familiarity of comfortable shoes: they feel nice, easy, warm, reassuring. The problem is they eventually wear out and don't serve their purpose. I see L&D in comfortable shoes in many places I look. Coasting along; we need to change our shoes. Our organisations need to demand more of us, indeed we need to demand more of ourselves. The call to action has been laid down for us (see the 2019 CIPD report – www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/development/professionalising-learning-development-function (archived at <https://perma.cc/9DVJ-JRNR>)) and we need to rise to the challenge to offer more effective, efficient, enjoyable and engaging L&D.

Sukh Pabial, a friend and fellow L&D practitioner, sparked me thinking in a blog he wrote, *L&D is not about simplicity* (<https://pabial.wordpress.com/2019/04/09/ld-is-not-about-simplicity> (archived at <https://perma.cc/YX42-QVRE>)). That L&D is complex, indeed that life is complex, is the reason I wanted to write this book. L&D is complex because organisations are complex, people are complex. As practitioners how will we ever get to grips with the complexity and provide learning which is simple enough to be understood, yet sophisticated enough to be, well, enough?

To simplify the complexity, I find it useful to understand it more. I encourage you to really get to know your businesses before you even consider what you can do in L&D for your organisation. As an L&D practitioner looking to simplify the complex, to be effective in your practice, and to modernise your L&D offer, I offer you this book to help you know where to start.

Many books you read, conference speakers you see or TED talks you watch will tell you their model, their way, their answers. They make you feel their way is the only way: within the walls of their book lies the one true answer to all the problems, follow these top ten rules on how to do this thing and there will be nirvana. As one practitioner to another, I can reassure you this book will not do that. There is no one way to navigate the complexities. There is no one nirvana. There is no one person who can influence the right answers for you and your organisation – this book has too many

influences from so many people I couldn't name them all. There is a way forward for you, for your organisation and for the people whose learning you are responsible for, but there is no one way for everyone. Wouldn't life be boring if there was?

I am an L&D practitioner, like you. I am responsible for making L&D happen, like you. Over the years of experience I have gathered some thoughts and ideas. I have shared them via Twitter, via blogs, via the conference circuit, via Learning Now TV, and now here in this book to reach more L&Ders who may feel alone or frustrated at trying to achieve better L&D outcomes. I have been practicing my craft of helping adults learn for twenty years. I have been writing this book for one. We can but do our best. I therefore bring you my truth, what I know and have experienced in my context. I hope that it resonates with you and your context.

Within the walls of this book there are things to consider, to think about and to try. There are some frameworks, ideas, experiences and stories shared. But there is no one way. There is only your way for your setting. This book (and indeed any you read) needs to be considered only in light of supporting you to create your own way. This book is practical and will encourage you to be practical in its application. This book is not academic, nor massively researched, though I have tried to be evidence based. It is a book written for L&Ders who are looking to move to a more modern workplace learning approach. This book is to encourage you to step outside of your mindset and what you may know as truth. This book is simply here to help you to get curious, to help you try things, to help you feel brave, to be your cheer-squad, to help you move towards more effective, efficient, engaging, and enjoyable workplace learning. This book is not the only way to climb your metaphorical L&D mountain, but I genuinely hope it encourages you to have a go.

AN ASIDE: A QUICK WORD ON THE WORD 'LEARNERS'

I don't like the word 'learners' really. People are people. However calling people people in some contexts doesn't identify them sufficiently enough for you to know which people I am talking about. So for want of a better descriptor, in this book I will call people who are undertaking some type of learning, learners. Forgive me, I know you are all unique, individuals and worthy of more than a generic descriptor.

PROTECTING IDENTITIES

On occasion in this book I cannot be specific in my examples or evidence of former clients who don't want to be named, for a variety of reasons. I respect that choice and make no apologies for respecting their confidence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When writing a book, we really have to be grateful first and foremost to those who choose to read it. Thank you for putting your hard-earned cash into this relationship. I trust it brings you useful value.

Big thanks to my family who enable the eclectic life I lead, of my business, my job, my volunteering and dog owning. To Jamie, Beth, David, Amy and my parents, Irene and John I am profoundly and always grateful for all you support me with and do for me, for believing in me and for loving me.

A special shout out my daughter to Amy Slater for her diagrams used in the book, which sit proudly alongside Federico Gaggero's illustrations.

To all my wider family, I thank you for shaping me. Special thanks to Samantha for your work for Kairos Modern Learning, and Annette for being simply amazing.

There were some people who helped turn me into an author – Lucinda Carney, David Hayden, Alison Jones, Francis Miller, Laura Overton, Phil Willcox, and Roisin Woolnough. Book experts, cheersquad, generous knowledge sharers, thank you.

There are many colleagues and clients without whom I could not have learned my craft. Thank you sincerely to you all (many of whom don't want to be named as the world thinks they were doing this modern learning stuff already!). A special call out to Katherine Marlow who first believed in me, to Andy Lancaster and the CIPD Learning team, to the Curiosity Team at Virtual College and to Ed Parsloe at The OCM, plus so many fab clients who taught me as much as I taught them.

Thank you to the original readers, sharers, supporters and beneficiaries of my 2015 #NoPlasters Twitter campaign of tips on better ways of how to do L&D. Particular thanks to Kevin Maye and Katherine Chapman, who I only knew through Twitter, and yet they stepped in and stepped up to cover a holiday during the year of Tweets.

An enormous thank you to Girlguiding. I love facilitating weekly meetings with my amazing Guides who inspire me with their energy, creativity and thinking. Sincere thanks for the honour of being Lead Volunteer for L&D, enabling the evolution of learning within our Movement through a fabulous team of staff and volunteers.

Thanks to my Personal Learning Network, my #PLN, whom I adore for their thinking, their challenge, their engagement and their push. Tweeps, I am deeply indebted to you all.

And finally, thank you to fellow founder Fiona McBride and all our volunteer hosts at #LnDcowork. You are an awesome community for all who work in L&D/OD/HR. We started #LnDcowork to avoid working alone in the freelance world; feel free to join in. You can check for dates at <https://about.me/lndcowork> (archived at <https://perma.cc/4KNQ-KKBZ>).

How to use this book

This handbook is for the busy L&D'er who needs a quick read. It is arranged in three parts. Within these parts, each chapter follows a formulaic approach to make it easy for you to pick the book up and put it down as you need.

This is the structure:

Part One

Practical L&D tips

Part One is in eight chapters. Each one forms part of your practitioner's guide. Each chapter is a topic that can be considered independently and as a whole, built on each other to form a loose framework for workplace learning.

Part Two

Frameworks

Part Two is in three chapters. Each one offers a framework for you to consider and hang your work upon for efficient, effective, engaging and enjoyable L&D. These frameworks are not learning design models; they are more overarching concepts to consider in L&D. Illustrations and client stories bring these frameworks to life.

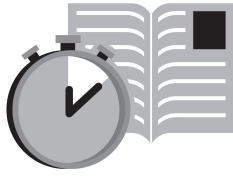
Part Three

Strategies

Part Three is in three chapters. They are intended to help you understand your context and how that impacts on the L&D you offer. This part is more than topics, tips and frameworks. Rather, the focus here is to offer ways of considering your overall approach to L&D to ensure a sustainable future.



Each chapter contains eight sections. Each one is explained on the next pages.



THE SHORTER READ

An introductory topic précis, **the shorter read** will give you enough to spark your thinking and help you get started. If you are busy you can get the gist of the whole book with these 14 chapter five-minute (-ish) reads. Or if you are not sure how interested you are in a chapter's topic, the shorter read is a taster. Or if you want a refresher of the chapter later on, you don't have to read the whole chapter again.



THE LONGER READ

The longer read is the deep dive into the topic, broken down into subheadings to enable you to get straight to what you are looking for. Although it's designed to be read in its entirety, I know people like to bob in and out. Occasionally you will see examples in boxes to help bring the topic to life.



THE CASE STUDY

In each chapter I have tried to bring my thinking to life with a **case study** to share a story or interview so we can learn from others. It is comforting to know you are not alone with challenges you face. It can be a useful spark to hear how others handled their challenges, and came out the other side. I have offered my reflections on each case study, but these are merely my thoughts. The real value of the case studies is when you reflect on them within your own context.



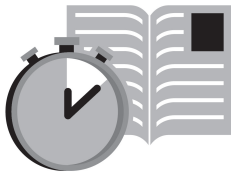
THE —SET LIST

The success criteria for the topic are focused around mindset, skillset, toolset and dataset. Hence... **the —set list.**



THE TWEET TIPS

The tweet tips are from my #NoPlasters campaign to reduce sticking plaster solutions in L&D alongside a tips checklist to encourage your thinking and how to use the ideas.



THE THINKING QUESTIONS

The thinking questions are a suggested list of questions to reflect on the chapter's topic within your own workplace context. Perhaps mull them over with a colleague.



THE ACTION PLAN

The action plan is a suggested set of the next steps as your call to action. Be sure to add your own and take action!



THE LIBRARY LIST

More than a simple bibliography, **the library list** points to resources such as books, blogs, web articles, research, podcasts, Learning Now TV interviews, conference sessions, and other resources which have informed my thinking and have influenced the chapter. They are somewhere for you to head to for further exploration and learning.

