

## Chapter 2

# Continuing Professional Development: Work and Learning Integration for Professionals

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Organisations promote their services by stressing that their professional staff are members of the relevant professional association and by listing the certifications/credentials they hold. Practice alone is generally insufficient to ensure knowledge is effective and up to date. Continuing professional development (CPD) is a requirement for professionals to develop knowledge to enable them to competently and adequately provide services to clients or employers. Professionals work in environments where technical, legal, conceptual and/or social change mandates that processes, practices, knowledge and understanding need to evolve. Individual professionals, professional associations, and the employers of professionals may have differing objectives for CPD and have vested interests to ensure that CPD is designed to, and meets actual objectives. Integrating work with learning is fundamental, i.e. if learning is not seen as having practical application, it is not valued. The knowledge development of professionals can be enhanced through Work-Integrated Learning which takes into account that they: hold a body of knowledge, are adults, and operate in positions in which learning and work can be related. Informal learning, in particular communities of practice, is significant in the transfer of learning to professionals.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The learning necessary for a professional is more than just intellectual endeavour. Professionals "... must learn not only to think in certain ways but also to perform particular skills, and to practice or act in ways consistent with the norms, values, and conventions of the profession". (Shulman, 2002 p.2) Learning through context provides a framework for professional practice. Professionals solve real world problems through constructing meaning in a given situation using both domain knowledge and experience (Brown & Duguid, 1991). The concept of standard solutions to standard problems does not fit the needs of professionals in practice (Lambe, 2002). Shulman (2002) argues that "...we need to go beyond teaching and assessing for understanding in order to foster judgment and design". (p.6) Continuing professional development (CPD) needs a focus beyond competency, otherwise professionals' knowledge and understanding is likely to be at a surface level (cf. Beach, 1999; HRSDC, 2005; Perkins & Salomon, 1992; Shulman, 2002)

It is a theme of our research that learning needs to be in context and that the philosophy of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) provides a means for effective transfer of learning. HRSDC (2005) defines transfer of learning in the context of the workplace "...as the effective application by trainees to their jobs of the knowledge and skills gained as a result of attending an educational program" (p.1). Transfer of Learning is positive when learning in one context impacts on performance in another context.

Much of WIL literature has focussed on either undergraduate programs or on non-professional work-based learning. CPD for professionals can and should focus on integrating work and learning.

Professional associations are often guardians of professional standards; as such they require members to engage in continuing professional development (CPD) in order to retain membership; and for some professions, by government

regulations, to maintain practicing certificates. CPD is necessary for professionals to keep up to date within their profession in areas of technical, legal, conceptual and/or social change. Professional recognition (accreditation) is usually based on a body of knowledge (BoK) specified by a professional association (e.g. Professions Australia, 2006). Individual professions have differences in the quantity and quality they specify and monitor for CPD.

CPD programs should also develop learning cultures which encourage continual growth of knowledge and professionals' ability to apply that knowledge. Professional associations and the academics in these associations can play a role to ensure that professional standards are both maintained and improved.

Learning may be designed for Knowledge (traditionally university based); or for Vocational Practice (Praxis); or for competency. Praxis is more than application of applying knowledge to given situations. It involves interpretation, understanding and application in a process involving a continual interplay between end and means rather than following a predetermined process (competency) (M. K. Smith, 1996a). We argue that CPD should not be driven just by risk minimisation strategies and compliance measurements.

CPD programs should incorporate learning theories and methodologies which are appropriate for adult learning and for the needs of the participants. We recognise that the term pedagogy is used in a generic sense in many educational papers but we would like to draw attention to the need for CPD programs to be developed using appropriate adult learning frameworks i.e. andragogy. Andragogy concentrates on specific issues related to adult education and it is concerned with facilitating the acquisition of the content (Clark, 1999).

In this chapter we will use the terms: *professional* to refer to professionally qualified practitioners; *organisations* to professional organisations/practices who employ professionals and offer their services to business/government/the public; and

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