

Continuing professional development

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Continuing professional development (CPD), when provided formally, is something that is easy to recognize but perhaps rather more difficult to define. Theoretical and empirical controversy surrounds the scope and understanding of the concept. Definition is made more elusive by the different conceptualizations in use but the common denominator is that CPD concerns practices aimed at employees' development beyond that derived from their initial training. Moreover, there can be informal as well as formal practices intended to develop professional expertise as well as professional experience which generates learning without learning being an express objective. This variety of forms makes conceptualization of CPD even more difficult, as it does the conceptualization of training and development more generally. In addition, current policies and practices in CPD are frequently based on assumptions about learning and practice that are in urgent need of more empirical research (see Kilminster *et al.*, 2012).

The starting point for this editorial, therefore, is the meaning and importance of CPD. First, we enter into a conceptualization of CPD and discuss its importance in current working life. Next, we consider the current practice of CPD. Subsequently, the papers that form part of this special issue are summarized and reflected upon. We end with some ideas for future research into CPD, briefly touching on the notion of CPD as an academic subject.

The meaning and importance of CPD

Effective participation in contemporary, technology-based, knowledge society implies an increasing importance for voluntary learning and development by employees (Evers *et al.*, 2011a; Maurer, 2002). This has been recognized by, for instance, the European Union which has promoted life-long learning and the necessity of continuing development of knowledge and skills of workers since the acceptance of the Lisbon Agreement (Council, 2000). Life-long learning has been defined by the OECD (2000, p. 403) as: 'All organised systematic education and training activities in which people take part in order to obtain knowledge and/or learn new skills for a current or a future job, to increase earning and to improve job and/or career opportunities in current or other fields.'

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Life-long learning or CPD is the means by which people maintain the knowledge and skills related to their professional lives. CPD can manifest itself in various forms from formal educational courses to learning through everyday work practices. In its most easily recognized form CPD is perhaps the updating of professional knowledge by means of formal, short courses by occupational groups such as, for instance, doctors, lawyers and teachers. Usually these groups have their own professional body or institute and it may be that membership and a practising certificate issued by this body is a prerequisite for practising the profession. There may be national or even international law regulating the practice, but control may, in effect, be delegated to the professional body, a system that has become known as self-regulation. In these sorts of contexts, CPD is often compulsory and monitored by the professional body. CPD may even be quantified, as in the legal profession in England.

On the other hand, many professionals belong to professional institutes where membership is not a condition for practising the profession. CPD may still be compulsory for members, however, and may be monitored. These professional areas may include some occupational groups that are more diverse and less well-defined, for example, managers. An important conceptual issue is where to draw the boundary as to what is meant by professional. At its most liberal, professional could mean anyone paid to do a job, in which case CPD is concerned with the ongoing learning of all paid workers. Indeed, it could even encompass the unpaid worker, for example, a retired qualified professional working voluntarily for a charity. The narrow definition would restrict professional, and thus CPD, to what we regard as 'the professions', that is, relatively well-defined occupational groups sharing certain characteristics, for example, a body of accepted practice and self-regulation by a professional institute. It might be argued that the training and development context implied by this narrow view of profession is very different from that implied by the more liberal model, particularly where the narrow view assumes that the worker needs to have a licence to practice.

In terms of importance, it may be said that the professions, using the narrow conceptualization, tend to deliver services rather than supply products, and the quality of service is heavily dependent upon the professional possessing and properly using high-level skills. Moreover, the potential impact of an inadequate service may have serious consequences for the service user. This is obviously true for health services and education but may also be true for other groups, for example, engineers, since the quality of the service they provide is important for public safety.

Traditionally, further professional development was focused on education and training, in more or less formal classroom-based settings. Although problems regarding the transfer to the workplace of skills learned during training have been recognized (Baldwin & Ford, 1988), training is still assumed to be highly important for organizations (Smith *et al.*, 2006).

Partly in reaction to the problem of transfer, the range of possible learning activities has been broadened over time and currently includes informal learning activities in the workplace as well as formal ones (Cheetham & Chivers, 2001; Eraut, 2004; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Marsick and Watkins (2001) defined informal learning as: '[...] not typically classroom-based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner'. The workplace is a typical place where informal learning can occur, as the workplace context entails a wide range of more or less structured environments, which are only rarely organized with learning in mind (Evers *et al.*, 2011b). The existence of informal learning opens up new avenues in research into learning (Eraut, 2004).

Cheetham and Chivers (2001) emphasized the key contribution of informal learning to the acquisition of full professional competence. They saw CPD as a complex process and thought that, often, employees are not aware of how and what they have learned. A number of learning theories guide our understanding of informal professional learning, including behaviourism, cognitive approaches, mixed approaches (a combination of behaviourist and cognitive principles), constructivism, discovery learning and theories of adult development (see Cheetham & Chivers, 2001, for elaboration).

Moreover, life-long learning or CPD is only possible where employees have systematic and valid information about their capabilities, that is to say, if they are able to form accurate self-perceptions, to carefully identify the qualities they need for future career success, and if they are able to adapt their behaviour accordingly (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009a). For this to happen, more empirical research using reliable and valid measures of CPD is of vital importance. Therefore, in editing this special issue, we seek to disseminate knowledge stemming from academic practices in the field of CPD, using sound empirical work in combination with knowledge emanating from innovative practice. We see critical reflection upon the practices employed as important in increasing our knowledge base and further illuminating promising approaches to supporting employees' CPD (see Appleby & Hillier, 2012, for an exemplary outline of the benefits of 'practice-research networks').

CPD in practice

The subject of CPD is mixed and multifaceted. Almost everything which is going on in terms of learning at the workplace can be CPD. However, it depends on the specific profession what kinds of CPD options are available and how they are utilized in different workplaces, as we will see in the contributions that follow. For some professions, continuing education and training are likely to be based on law and official instructions (e.g. nursing and teaching). However, for most vocations in the labour market CPD practices can have various forms depending on the current needs of individual employees and employers.

There are a variety of CPD practices and tools including formal training courses and coaching and mentoring. These are usually linked with human resource development (HRD) practices, but some of them may also be conducted based on external funding. An example of a successful mentoring program for the teaching profession is Osaava Verme in Finland (<http://ktl.jyu.fi/ktl/osaavaverme/mainenglish>). It comprises a collaborative network consisting of the Finnish teacher education institutions, the vocational teacher education institutions and the teacher education departments of universities. The main aim of this network is to promote a life-long continuum of teachers' professional development by building bridges between pre-service and in-service teacher education (Heikkinen *et al.*, 2012).

CPD practices may be directed, for example, by an employer or a professional body, or be self-directed. Examples of the latter might be the reading of professional journals in order to keep up to date with technical developments and the selection of and attendance at short courses which meet the training needs that the professional himself or herself has identified. Increasingly, it is expected that professionals will reflect on their own practice and try to achieve continuous improvement. In some situations, there may be human resource management policies in place which encourage CPD, for example, peer observation of practice and developmental appraisal schemes. Feedback from customers, clients, patients or students may also inform professional practice and CPD.

Recent literature on workplace learning emphasizes that both individual learning needs and collective prerequisites for learning should be taken into account simultaneously if the learning is to be successful (Collin, 2006; Fuller & Unwin, 2004; Hodgkinson *et al.*, 2008). Consequently, individual motivation and the will to learn or develop oneself alone do not guarantee CPD. Or the other way around, opportunities for development offered by the employer and one's working organization do not necessarily lead to sought outcomes (Collin, 2009). This is also shown in the contribution below by Lambert, Vero and Zimmerman. The most recent developments in the area also address the importance of balancing one's working life and other spheres of life in order to enable employees to construct professional identity (see Billett *et al.*, 2008; Paloniemi & Collin, 2010).

In addition to formal training activities, work organizations can facilitate employees' CPD by providing a climate that encourages individual development and change and by providing ample opportunities for informal learning (Bartram *et al.*, 1993;

Malcolm *et al.*, 2003; Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Rowold & Kauffeld, 2009; Tannenbaum *et al.*, 2009; Watkins & Marsick, 1996). In a similar vein, Wexlberger (1993) proposed an organizational structure which allows experience-based learning at work.

Previous research has shown that both types of learning – formal and informal – reinforce each other, underlining the importance of including different forms of learning activities when aiming for CPD (see also Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009b). Nauta *et al.* (2009) found that an organizational culture that strongly supports workers' further development is positively associated with employability (career potential), orientation (operationalized as the workers' receptivity towards employability within their current organization) and, subsequently, with the employees' future career success (Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009a).

Professional learning and further development of competencies is inevitably an individual process (Baitsch, 1998). However, individual development of competencies is also linked to an organizational background and to social learning processes (Olbert-Bock, 2002; Weiß, 1999), which suggest management in work organizations should pay attention to promoting a sound and active learning climate (see also Bartram *et al.*, 1993). An active learning climate may be defined as a climate that stimulates employees to ask questions, seek feedback, reflect on potential results, explore and experiment (Garvin *et al.*, 2008; Sessa & London, 2006), with the aim of increasing their learning or making use of what is learned on the job (Noe *et al.*, 2010). Spieß *et al.* (2002), in their longitudinal study, found that in cases where organizational culture allows employees to make errors and learn from them, effective employee development is more likely to be possible.

Moreover, at a managerial level, leaders have to create a climate in which employees are allocated time, support each other in all kinds of daily tasks and are provided with ample opportunities for learning. Such climates generate situations that encourage employees to continuously renew and/or update their existing knowledge and skills and consequently contribute positively to their own employability (Ouweneel *et al.*, 2009; Taris & Kompier, 2005; Taris *et al.*, 2003). Previous empirical research has shown that, in the short term, learning climate contributes to the development of competencies of individuals, and consequently their employability, as indicated by career success (Nabi, 2001; Ng *et al.*, 2005; Parker *et al.*, 2004). An organizational climate that promotes active learning is important in the light of employees' requirements for CPD.

The papers making up this special issue of the IJTD

Following the need for both theoretically strong foundations and methodologically sound data, one of the aims of this special issue is to report empirically founded CPD research as well as insights flowing from innovative practice in the field. The editors have selected seven pieces of work for inclusion here. Three of them report original empirical research and the others report innovative practice. The latter are not put forward or being judged as research. Rather, they are included because they make a contribution by signalling good practice or some innovative development in practice. The occupational groups covered by the research and practice reported here include teachers (of various types), health workers, engineers and entrepreneurs. The countries from which the papers are drawn are Canada, France, Thailand, UK (2) and the United States (2).

Research articles

In reporting the three research papers, we start with a study by Lambert, Vero and Zimmermann who made use of major national qualitative and quantitative survey material in France and developed a capability-based conceptualization of CPD. In their view, the responsibility for CPD should be shared among employees, employers and public institutions, being important stakeholders. The outcomes of their empirical work showed that the employee's company environment is more decisive in determining the employee's CPD than the employee's previous training and career paths.

Shanks, Robson and Gray, using a sequential mixed methods approach carried out in the UK, explored the importance of the teacher's individual learning dispositions and argue for their inclusion in the design of induction training for new teachers. The outcomes of their work suggest that a policy-driven formal programme of induction for new teachers should be combined with an expansive learning environment with supportive colleagues, herewith acknowledging the new teachers' individual learning dispositions (their learning biography, attitude towards learning opportunities and engagement with learning opportunities).

St-Jean's Canadian study focuses upon 360 entrepreneurs who took part in mentoring arrangements. The aim of the study was to determine factors associated with the effectiveness of mentoring of entrepreneurs. The mentor's role relating to career enhancement emerged as a major factor predicting employee learning, followed by psychological functions and the function the mentor had as role model. Moreover, the author reported the importance of trust and perceived similarity being important mediators.

Reports of innovative practice

The four reports of innovative practice start with Helyer and Lee's paper on the mentoring of university teachers in the UK in order to improve their ability to engage with business. The context is criticism of the extent to which UK universities engage with business. Much CPD in universities is related to three core functions: teaching, research and administration. In the light of the increasing need for collaboration between universities and business, the authors advocate the continuing development of business skills, and suggest a promising mentoring model.

Chio's study of how to train health services leaders in countries with limited resources, and particularly the absence of broadband, continues the sharing of knowledge on innovative practice in CPD. The focus is upon effective practices in providing online, in-service training. Moreover, Chio reminds us that CPD is responsible for the delivery of management and leadership skills, over and above the professional expertise that is needed for clinical work. These are not usually taught in the initial training of professionals.

Sooraksa attempts to link training and development expertise among professionals involved in developing online courses to the alleviation of poverty in the North of Thailand. The policy aim is to develop e-learning among those involved in small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), and the author reports how information and communication technology, in particular Moodle software, was used to train the people involved in training those in the SMEs.

Finally, Baukal reports from the United States on good practice in determining appropriate sourcing of CPD for engineering professionals. In particular, he distinguishes internal (the organization itself), external (university, professional/trade organizations, commercial education providers, government, equipment manufacturers and engineers' clients) and hybrid suppliers (a combination of internal and external). The aim of his contribution is to consider the relative merits and demerits of each and to arrive at framework within which organizations can develop their continuous engineering education programs.*

* Note: the paper by Baukal, which was mentioned in the Editorial of IJTD 16:3, will be published in IJTD 16:4. We apologise for any confusion caused by inclusion of the paper in this editorial.

Issues arising from the papers

The contributions that have been reported in this special issue lead to some important insights. First, the empirical work by St-Jean and the report on innovative practice by Helyer and Lee might be seen as confirming the importance of mentoring in occupations with high-level skills, and St-Jean reminds us that mentoring, like other forms of training and development, requires evaluation and can be made more effective if 'success' factors can be identified. Second, Shanks *et al.* highlight the problem of reconciling the development needs of the professional with the learning needs as defined by others, particularly employers, who in any case may be operating within a frame-

work laid down by government. This is a potentially universal problem which may be growing as governments lay down what they require from, in particular, health and education suppliers and their staff.

Third, the issue of shared responsibility for CPD is also stressed by Baukal, and by Lambert and colleagues who reported that the employee's work environment (the role of the company) is a stronger predictor of future learning and growth than the employee's learning and career background. Fourth, the papers by Sooraksa and Chio emphasize the importance of e-learning in permitting access to training in poorly resourced situations, herewith opening and further shaping the avenue for CPD, for example, in remote areas.

Fifth, St-Jean's focus on mentoring novice entrepreneurs, Helyer and Lee's concern with making academics more 'business-facing' and Sooraksa's training aimed at developing SMEs and reducing poverty remind us that CPD is not solely about improving the quality of professional services: it also has a role to play in economic development. A corollary of this is that where CPD objectives go beyond the profession itself the evaluation process may have to be wider, perhaps becoming more like academic research than an organizational training evaluation.

Last but not least, the contribution by Chio alerts us to the increasing need in many professions to develop management and leadership skills alongside expertise that is inherent to the specific occupational field. Employability and career potential of workers may be further enhanced by more generic knowledge and skills, such as managerial and leadership expertise, herewith opening up the possibility of job change in case of need. Given the fact that job qualifications are continuously changing at an ever-increasing rate, employees who have the capability to develop, cultivate and maintain fundamental qualifications are the ones that are able to perform optimally in today's labour market. CPD is the key to staying in the race as the qualifications that are required for a job are becoming increasingly complex while, simultaneously, the 'shelf life' of these qualifications is becoming increasingly shorter.

Future research in CPD

A normal starting point for any discussion of future research needs is the state of the existing literature. Here we can comment on this only in a broad-brush sort of way, recognizing that we are raising the question of the nature of CPD as an academic subject. What we observe is a body of empirical research which is heavily structured by profession and by country. The research seems to deal mostly with the practice of CPD in a specific profession in a particular country. There does not appear to be much work comparing a particular profession between countries or comparing different professions within a country. Clearly different contexts will need to be taken into account when making comparisons but it does seem that this kind of research could generate useful benchmarking and other results. Moreover, the current literature is dominated by health services and teaching, yet we know that there is a massive amount of CPD going on in other professions, seemingly without being underpinned by empirical research.

In most papers that are reported in this special issue, CPD involves formal training and education taking place at work and located in promotion of professional expertise. CPD is thus largely understood 'traditionally' focusing on different kinds of educational and training efforts. However, simultaneously, many papers elsewhere suggest that more studies are needed in order to determine and understand the multifaceted nature of CPD. Qualitative methodology, especially, is called for in order to generate in-depth conceptualizations and a better understanding of current forms of CPD. Consequently, there seems to be an implicit need for approaching CPD more informally, incorporating the full range of practices that are used in order to operationalize CPD.

Defining CPD broadly is not only a question of how to organize training and education for professionals to develop their professional skills and competencies, but also how to identify competent and skilled professionals as part of their working commu-

nity (Billett *et al.*, 2008). Once we have a better understanding of CPD, quantitative approaches using psychometrically sound (reliable and valid) measures can be used to determine CPD practices, determinants and outcomes, in terms of both individual career success and organizational performance.

CPD could be defined as learning which takes place in workplaces and organizations but we enter a caveat here because so much of the research appears to be in the health services and teaching and these professions may not necessarily be an accurate paradigm for professional work more generally. They are often characterized by large, hierarchical organizations in the public sector operating within quite detailed government policy guidelines. Moreover, the professionals are mostly, although not universally, employees. The scenario found in, for example, law and accountancy, is quite different. There are, increasingly, large organizations, mostly in the private sector, but in addition there is a preponderance of small firms, and many professionals are self-employed or partners. The role of externally supplied CPD, which may also be delivered outside the workplace, may be stronger in these professions. As Baukal shows in his paper on CPD in engineering, CPD occurs in widely differing contexts: the definition needs to be broad enough to allow for this.

CPD aims to increase professional expertise, professional competence and individual well-being as well as to increase the competitiveness and effectiveness of organizations and professions. It should take place continuously regardless of the given occupation or profession, thus being a process as well as an outcome. Therefore, CPD needs to be more strongly linked with organizational HRD practices and organizational learning as a whole as well as with developments at the level of the profession. Thus, more studies and practical innovations are needed to build on workplace learning pedagogies or even a workplace curriculum (Billett, 2001) as part of organizations' HRD practices and to examine how these relate to developments at the level of the profession. It is a huge contextual and methodological challenge for CPD to take the individual worker's learning and agency and the needs of the organization and the profession into account at the same time, and to promote learning and development that benefits all parties.

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