

KEEPING IT REAL

By Jennifer J. Salopek

RESEARCH CONFIRMS THAT ALTHOUGH THE COMPETENCY MODEL
CONTINUES TO BE CURRENT, THE CONTEXT IS SHIFTING.

In 2004, ASTD published *The ASTD Competency Study: Mapping the Future*, the landmark competency study that defines what workplace learning and performance (WLP) practitioners need to know and be able to do to be successful. The work resulted in new standards and directions for the WLP profession.

Based on broad and in-depth research, the new competency model unveiled in the book looked to both the past and the future, honoring tradition and experience while anticipating new trends and their ramifications for the WLP field. Its purpose was to enable individuals and institutions to remain ahead of the curve and equip them to better align with organizational strategies and goals.

The model set out a foundation of competencies in three areas—interpersonal, business and management, and personal. Resting on that foundation are nine critical areas of expertise (AOEs) for WLP professionals:

- career planning and talent management
- coaching
- delivering training
- designing learning
- facilitating organizational change
- improving human performance
- managing organizational knowledge
- managing the learning function
- measuring and evaluating.

At the top of the competency model are four roles, or lenses, through which WLP practitioners can view the model: learning strategist, business partner, project manager, and professional specialist.

ASTD continues to lead the WLP field and define the competencies necessary for success. To ensure that the competency model continues to be relevant and current, in 2007, ASTD worked with a team from The Pennsylvania State University to conduct qualitative and quantitative research to assess the model's continuing applicability. Incorporating an in-depth literature review, a survey, and interviews with practitioners and thought leaders, the research team found that the competencies and areas of expertise outlined in the ASTD Competency Model remain highly relevant today.

However, the context in which they are practiced is shifting, driven by two strong trends—technology and the increased expectations of WLP professionals to leverage technology effectively, and globalization. Furthermore, a foundational competency—applying business skills—and one of the areas of expertise—career planning and talent management—are increasingly relevant and merit further attention.

TECHNOLOGY

The effects of technology on the workplace are widespread and complex. WLP professionals are encountering technology advancements in the areas of delivering training, capturing knowledge, and working. Embracing and leveraging these advancements for true organizational benefit requires greater savvy, adaptability, and innovation on the part of WLP professionals.

Data from ASTD's *State of the Industry* report shows that organizations are using technology more than ever before to deliver learning. And as organizations deploy e-learning more frequently, the use of instructor-led learning has diminished. Discrete learning events in traditional classroom settings are gradually shifting to learning

experiences that occur at the workstation and at the pace of the worker.

Many organizations are using technology to effectively communicate with employees and to conduct business with clients and customers who are in disparate locations. This greater geographical distribution has placed an increasing emphasis on virtual collaboration, and WLP professionals must continue to understand and implement social networking tools to engage people and facilitate learning.

Technology is also being viewed as a method for capturing knowledge. WLP professionals are anticipating the fast-approaching retirement of many workers in all industries and must implement processes to retain their knowledge within the organization. They bear increasing responsibility for knowledge management systems, informal knowledge exchange networks, communities of practice, and more.

As a delivery method, technology is the Holy Grail. Everyone seeks the right method for the content and target audience. WLP professionals continue to search for the right mix of e-learning and traditional classroom training, while new tools including podcasts, mobile learning, social networking, and wikis are becoming popular methods of connecting learners to each other and effective methods for delivering content fast and at less expense.

The opportunity to use these tools is increasing. WLP professionals must better understand technology trends and use them in a way that serves individual and organizational learning, while meeting employee preferences for content that is easily accessible and available any time.

GLOBALIZATION AND DIVERSITY

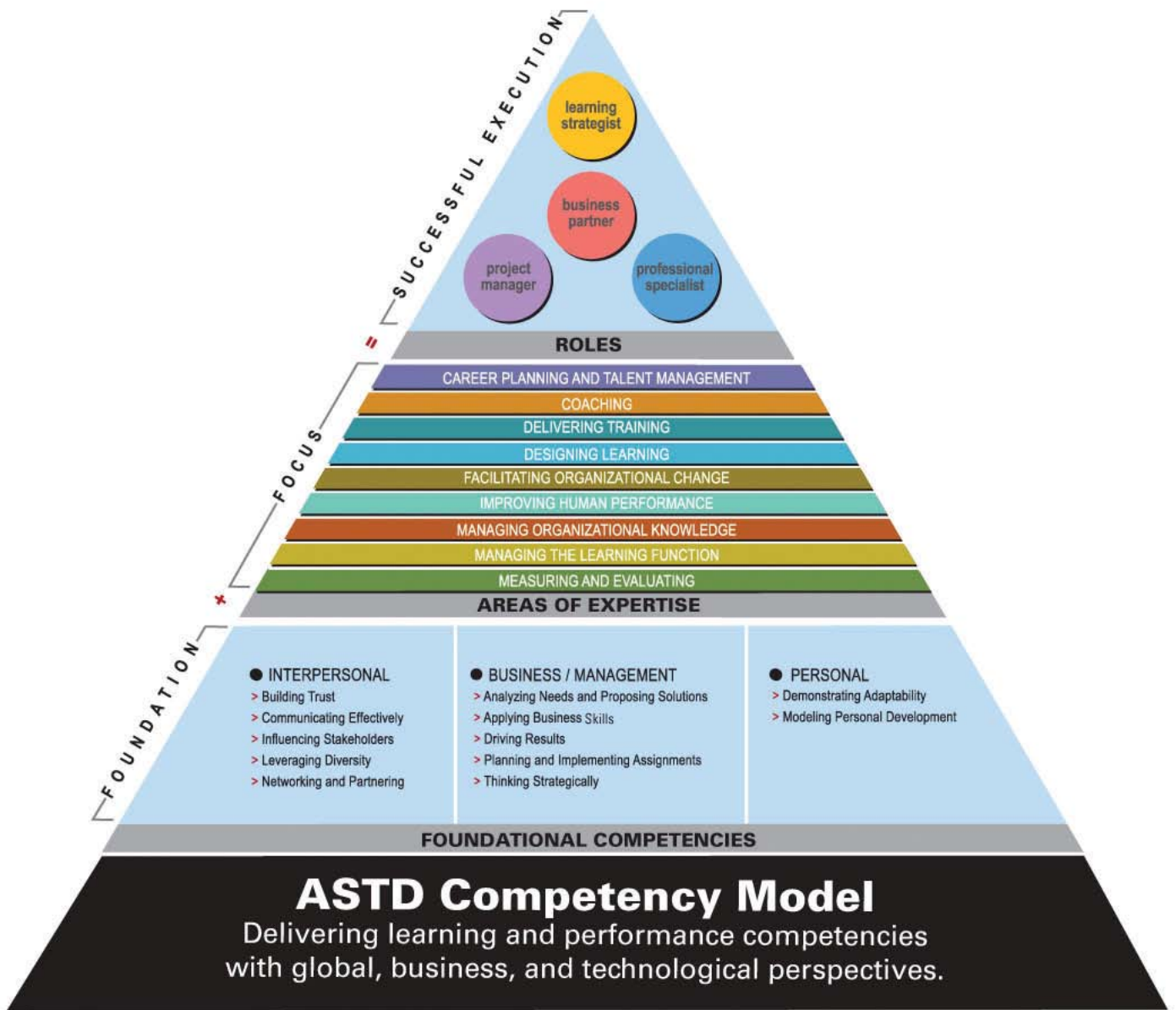
In today's global economy, WLP professionals are increasingly asked to train an organization's workforce anywhere and anytime, to provide relevant solutions for four generations in the workplace, and to train workers being relocated from one country to another.

A wide variety of methods, including translation and localization, are at their disposal. Again, the key is matching the right method to the content and audience. There is a critical need to understand other cultures and economies, both in terms of preparing expatriate workers and in terms of supplying learning to multinational employees.

Taken as a whole, the workplace is displaying extraordinary texture and richness. Learning professionals are dealing with diversity in cultures and generations. Addressing learners of varying generations and with varying backgrounds requires extreme sensitivity and awareness of such issues as learning styles. Ever greater customization is required to effectively reach all learners.



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TALENT MANAGEMENT

Within the career planning and talent management area of expertise, talent management is gaining prominence as organizations seek to place the right people in the right jobs at the right time, to achieve strategic goals. Talent management is no longer just a matter of identifying high-potential employees and developing them.

ASTD defines talent management as an organizational approach to leading people by building culture, engagement, capability, and capacity through integrated talent acquisition, development, and deployment processes that are aligned to business goals.

Talent management practices and processes will vary among organizations depending on industry, strategy, and workforce demographics, but will share a common focus on

developing and engaging talent strategically. In many organizations, WLP professionals already play key roles as talent management leaders and partners driving the integration and alignment of all the relevant components, and ensuring accountability for results.

Talent management affords a real opportunity to WLP professionals to be vital business partners in all areas of the enterprise that rely on know-how applied to performance. It is an area of expertise that promises to open new doors to the profession.

BUSINESS SKILLS

Many CEOs today understand the value of learning and can articulate how a better-skilled workforce helps the organization grow and succeed. They expect learning and

development to support the organization's strategies, and to prepare employees to implement the direction the company needs to take to grow.

Mapping the Future laid out applying business skills as a foundational competency for WLP professionals. As the workplace learning and performance profession has increasingly earned its seat at the strategic table and become a business partner, the need to develop that foundational competency has become more pronounced.

WLP professionals must understand key functions of the business, such as finance, marketing, operations, leadership, strategy, and talent, as these areas represent the core business knowledge that will allow them to take on broader leadership responsibilities and add value to their organizations.

An important part of building business skills is understanding learning's effects on the organization, and communicating those effects. Business leaders expect accountability not only for training and development budgets, but also for the results of learning initiatives.

Organizations use a much broader set of metrics than in the past to account for the influence of learning. CEOs are less likely to pay attention to activity-based numbers than to what they accomplish as a result of the training. While the indicators may vary from company to company, CEOs want to know how learning is affecting objectives such as customer satisfaction, productivity, profitability, and sales. The key for learning professionals is to understand how learning is making an impression on the metrics that matter most to the organization.

A STRONG FRAMEWORK FOR A CHANGING WORLD

As WLP professionals and their responsibilities are buffeted by worldwide economic, demographic, and social change, they can rely on the fact that, for them at least, the path is still clear and the guideposts are unchanged. The ASTD Competency Model unveiled in *Mapping the Future* is still the foundation and the framework for success in the WLP field. By paying attention to such trends as technology and globalization, by becoming deeply embedded in talent management and succession planning processes, and by shoring up one's business skills, WLP professionals can ensure that they are strategically influencing their organizations now and in the future.

As with the 2007 research that generated these findings, ASTD remains committed to leading the profession and helping members develop careers in learning and performance that are meaningful and rewarding. One way is through credentialing, awarded by the ASTD Certification Institute to those professionals who satisfactorily complete the certification exam and a work product

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assessment. Earning the Certified Professional in Learning and Performance (CPLP) designation demonstrates to employers, colleagues, and peers that an individual has achieved a high level of knowledge and skill in the WLP field.

This fall, ASTD will unveil a new resource that is an outgrowth of the ASTD Competency Model—an online career path tool called the “ASTD Career Navigator.” With this tool, individuals will be able to select a job profile in the learning profession, from specialist to executive, and assess their current proficiency levels against the target levels needed in key actions relevant to that job profile.

The tool will identify resources that will help professionals close the gap in proficiency levels and develop their careers. Unlike anything else available in the profession, this tool will be a useful resource for WLP practitioners and will help the competency model become more actionable than ever. **T+D**

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