Life-based learning model – a model for strength-based approaches to capability development and implications for personal development planning
Maret Staron

Over 25 years ago as a teacher, Maret went on her first in-house training program to re-fresh her skills. She was so enthused by the practicality, support and enthusiasm of the trainers that then and there changed her career to staff development. Since then she has managed human resources, teacher education and more recently managed the TAFE NSW International Centre for Vocational Education and Training (VET) Teaching and Learning, and was director of TAFE NSW Workforce Development.

Currently, Maret is principal of a Sydney based consultancy 'Mindful Creations'. Her passion continues to be learning and development. She wonders about how we retain (or don't retain) our passion for learning, growth and change, and how we can acknowledge and value the interrelationship of head, heart and hope in organisations. Maret has examined these issues in her thesis for her Master of Science (Hons), from the University of Western Sydney, as well as through the many projects she has led in the Australian VET sector.

Maret is recognised for her skills in facilitation. She understands the demands of business, having managed multi-million dollar budgets and led many work groups through constant and disruptive change. She is used to working in large organisations - TAFE NSW has over 15,000 employees, 500,000 annual student enrolments and more than 130 metropolitan and regional campuses. Maret has worked in partnership with universities and private training providers and has managed national and state projects in e-learning, leadership development and workforce capability development. As project manager of the national research project 'Designing Professional Development for the Knowledge Era' (2006), Maret led the research team that developed the concept of life-based learning - a strength based approach to capability development. Maret has to admit that despite a working life focusing on learning and development, she believes that her deepest convictions about learning and development have formed through her personal life experiences

Introduction

What do I wonder about? I wonder about how we learn, how we change, how we live our values, how we create new ways forward and how we can live together more happily. I wonder about who I am, what my qualities are, where does my pain and fear come from and how can I heal it? I wonder about how we can work and relate with each other more authentically and what shifts are needed in organisations to do this.

I've journeyed through these questions for most of my adult life. I've discovered that when I make significant shifts it usually involves quite a lot of emotional, mental or spiritual pain. And then some respite until I again continue my life long journey of self discovery and healing. It involves shifting my mindset and looking at things differently. It involves letting go of some things I have held dear to my heart in the past and of some deeply held conditioned beliefs. I've finally accepted that there is no end point and that it's just a journey of ever-revealing expansion.

You may be asking yourself how is this relevant to personal development planning, to lifewide learning and to the higher education context? The relevance is through your own wondering – what do you wonder about for yourself and your students? Or have you stopped wondering? What are your core values and gifts, rather than your conditioned beliefs? How do you make the most authentic and appropriate decisions for yourself about your learning and your life at any point in time and how do you support others in doing this for themselves?

I've researched working, learning and pedagogy for many years primarily in the vocational education and training sector (VET) in Australia. I was project manager and one of the authors[1] of a research report on *Life-based learning: a strength based approach to capability development in VET[2]*. I've managed large budgets, large groups and lots of change. I've worked in an educational organisation of over 110,000 staff and I've worked in a VET institution with over 500,000 annual student enrolments. A highlight (tongue-in-cheek) of my working career is the amount of planning that I have done – strategic planning for areas that I have managed, planning new initiatives for organisational change and planning templates and strategies for learners. I've co-researched with, and facilitated many groups involving university academics. At heart, many of the issues and questions are similar though contexts can vary considerably.

This paper is about the research on life-based learning for capability development and the things I wonder about in relation to personal development planning and lifewide learning. I will initially provide a brief overview of life-based learning, its key characteristics and some suggestions for application. The congruence between the thinking that developed life-based learning and the thinking that developed lifewide learning will be easily observed. Then I will look at some issues and pose questions for personal development planning (PDP) in a lifewide learning framework in higher education.

I have not directly touched on pedagogy as this is covered by John Cowan in his paper and presentation on *Lifewide learning: the need for a radically revised pedagogy*. This paper aims to complement the debate on pedagogy.

Complex and changing environments and metaphors

As we move out of the information era and into what some are calling the knowledge era of the 21st Century, people are experiencing increasing complexity, diversity, uncertainty, contradictions and change. There is increasing tension between existing mechanistic processes *and* organic and fluid ways of working and learning; the desire for predictable outcomes *and* emergent outcomes; the collection of information *and* the generation of knowledge; the desire to have one way to doing things *and* ambiguity. Both the Australian concept of life-based learning and the British concept of lifewide learning acknowledge these complex and changing environments.

The **metaphors** such as 'bureaucracy' and 'networks' that suited previous eras are no longer adequate. The life-based learning research team chose the metaphor of 'ecology' for the knowledge era of the 21st Century. The ecology metaphor embraces the idea of contradictory forces in a sustaining and dynamic system, and of adaptability and 'opposites in co-existence'. The researchers extended the metaphor to that of '**learning ecologies**' (Siemens 2005) as a 'best fit' for the emerging, complex and changing needs within working and learning environments. A learning ecology metaphor is *dynamic* with ever-shifting relationships and interdependence informing learning and doing; *adaptive* which is a key survival capability within an ecology, *diverse* which is a core requirement in knowledge work (Staron, Jasinski and Weatherley 2006: 26). A learning ecology metaphor enables us to move away from seeking the 'one way to get it right' and move towards a more open

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[1] My co-researchers were Marie Jasinski and Robby Weatherley. We were supported by an international working group and national reference group.
[2] The research was jointly funded by the then Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and NSW Technical and Further Education (TAFE).

orientation to learning that includes multiple ways of working and learning. The researchers named this more open and adaptive orientation to learning: 'life-based learning'

While no-one would disagree with encouraging students to think about and recognise their learning needs, and plan how these needs might be met, the ecological metaphor for learning poses both challenges and opportunities for PDP practices (QAA PDP site). In particular, the ecological metaphor is incompatible with PDP practices that limit the scope of learners' thinking and imaginations by focusing their attention on very specific experiences - requiring them to explicitly declare in advance the nature of their intended learning, and then measure their achievement against these declarations. On the other hand, PDP is concerned with the development of self-awareness through reflective metacognitive processes. These are the essential capabilities that enable us to appreciate and value learning that emerges through unpredictable experiences so it should be possible to adapt PDP accordingly. This is consistent with the views expressed in John Cowan's conference paper and I will address the implications of life-based learning for PDP in the final section of my paper.

Life-based learning

Life-based learning proposes that learning **for** work is not restricted to learning **at** work. The premise underpinning life-based learning is that all learning is interrelated, so it is not easy to separate learning at work from the other types of learning that adults do.

The shift is from a perspective of seeing work and learning as separate from leisure, family and personal life, to one where more realistically they merge and allow for a more integrated or holistic approach that acknowledges the realities of adult learning (see figure 1). Learning is a multi-dimensional experience and individuals have knowledge, skills and attributes that may not always be visible or recognised by organisations, but that significantly contribute to organisational achievements and relationships. Lifewide learning also acknowledges this interrelated nature of learning.


Figure 1 Moving from segmented to integrated learning   **© TAFE NSW**

The need is for **multiple sources of learning** that open up opportunities for developing capability. The challenge is how to utilise this more open-ended approach for the benefit of both the learner and the organisation. As boundaries between work and learning increasingly blur, there is a need to have more positive and holistic approaches to learning. This includes the need for a greater balance between creativity and standardisation, innovation and uniformity, control and open self-organising systems.

Both life-based learning and lifewide learning differentiate themselves from *life long learning*. Life long learning is learning throughout the whole of a person's journey through life, while life-based or lifewide learning focuses on learning from the whole of a person's life at any point in time and the source of that learning.

Characteristics of life-based learning

In life-based learning there is a deliberate focus on characteristics rather than strategies. This recognises that individuals, groups and organisations will question and make their own decisions about how to proceed with embedding new ways of working, learning and knowing.
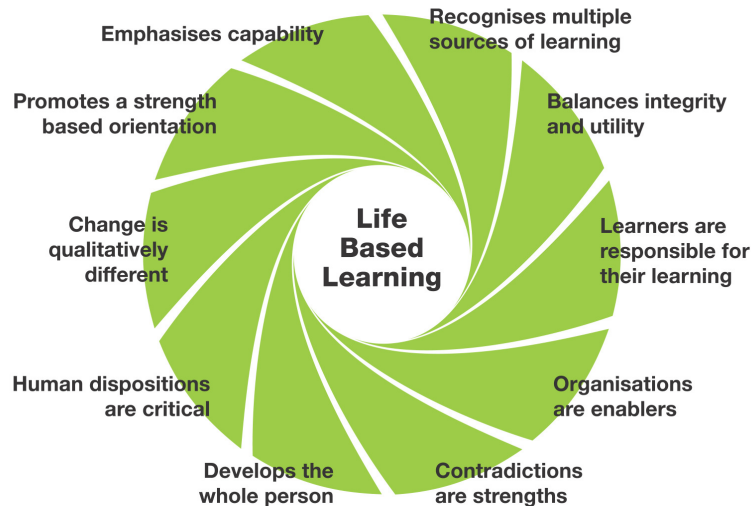
Figure 2 A holistic and interconnected perspective of the key characteristics of life-based learning   © TAFE NSW

While the characteristics can be shown in list form, the preference is to show them interrelated, as in Figure 2. The strength of the characteristics is in their relationship as an interconnected whole rather than as discrete units.

Many of these characteristics are shared with lifewide learning, for example developing the whole person, the importance of the human element, learners being responsible for their learning and recognition of multiple sources of learning. A characteristic that is foundational to life-based learning that could be strengthened in lifewide learning is a strength-based orientation.

A strength-based orientation

The researchers proposed that in a life-based learning context the adoption of a strength-based orientation rather then a deficit-based orientation to capability development is most effective for change. Cooperrider (2002) describes the *deficit-based emphasis* as one where the focus is on what is wrong and 'fixing it' through intervention strategies. Problems are identified and efforts are made to 'fill the gap' between where we are and where we want to get to. The changing paradigm for organisational change is based on a *strength or asset-based emphasis* that views organisations as mysteries to be embraced rather than problems to be solved (Cooperrider). The focus is on collaboratively identifying what is right and enhancing it. Core strengths and solutions that already exist are identified and the aim is to amplify what is working. The spotlight is on the forces that help people and organisations to thrive[3].

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[3] The research identified two underpinning theories that supported a strength-based orientation to capability development - positive psychology (Martin Seligman) and flow theory (Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi).

Moving towards a strength-based orientation is a shift that requires more than just wanting to 'think strengths'. It requires a shift in learning systems, processes, practice and mindset. Essentially a paradigm shift. Not always an easy thing to do.
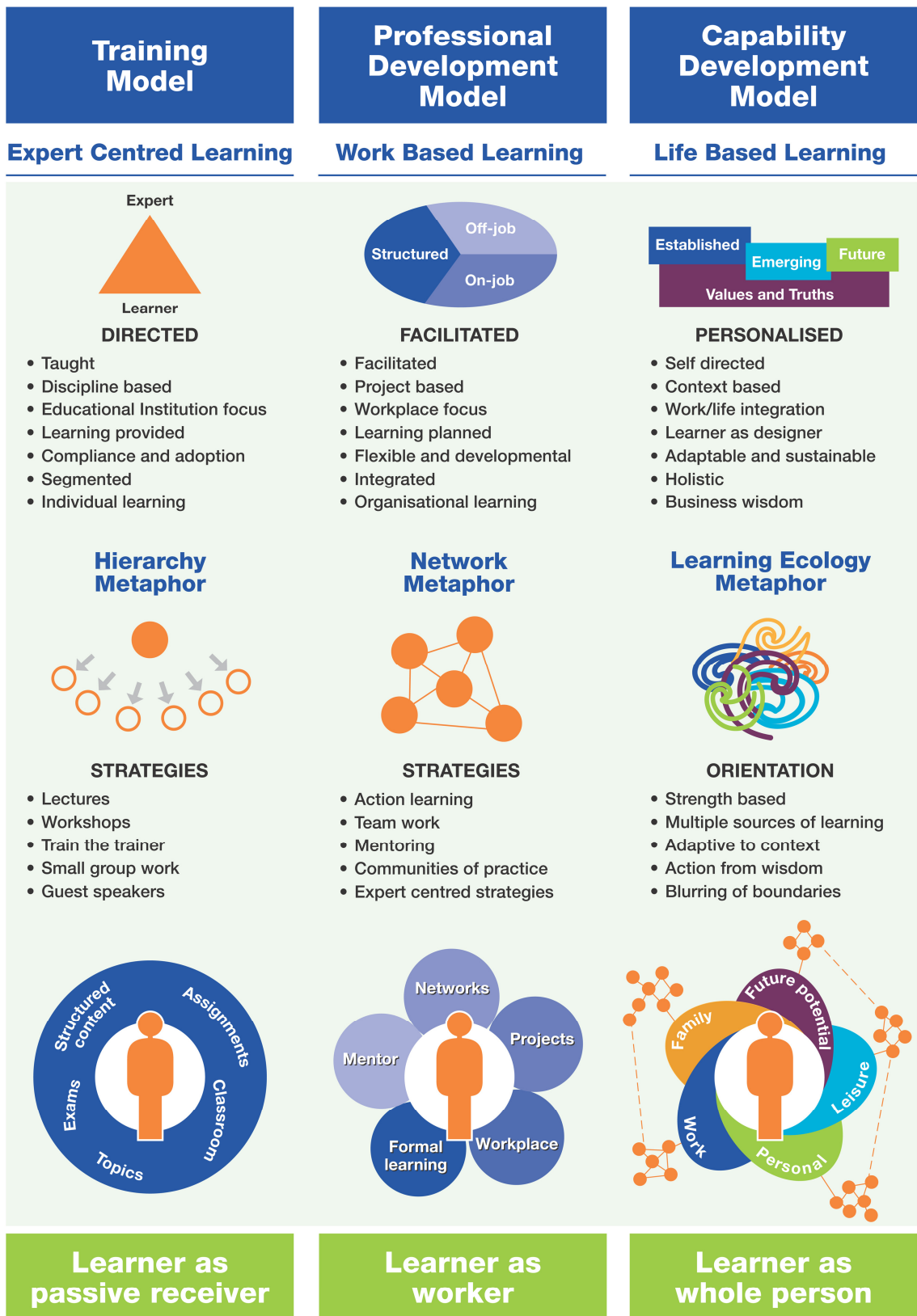
The life-based learning model – a strength based approach for capability development

Life-based learning does *not* discard the models of learning that have traditionally informed capability development ie the *expert centred learning* and *work-based learning* models. Life-based learning builds on them to *expand* the possibilities for learning for capability development. Strategies can be sourced from any model that works for the individual - whether expert-centred, work-based or through life experiences. The aim is to *integrate* the best of the three approaches. The preference may be for one learning approach over the other or all three may co-exist.

As a model for **growth and potential**, life-based learning is adaptive, self-facilitated, strength-based and uses any strategy appropriate to the task (figure 3). The three distinguishing features that a life-based learning model needs to retain are:
• an emphasis on *strength-based orientation* rather than strategy
• explicit recognition of underpinning *foundation truths and values* - for many in the national forums it included trust, mindfulness, generosity, consideration and tolerance
• acknowledgement of the *learner as a 'whole' person* who accesses many sources of learning and takes responsibility for their learning. (Staron et al 2006:49)

Like any model, life-based learning will morph and shift over time as people engage with it and re-shape it to fit their context.

Training Model	Professional Development Model	Capability Development Model
Expert Centred Learning	**Work Based Learning**	**Life Based Learning**

Expert / Learner (triangle)	Structured / Off-job / On-job	Established / Emerging / Future — Values and Truths
DIRECTED	**FACILITATED**	**PERSONALISED**
• Taught	• Facilitated	• Self directed
• Discipline based	• Project based	• Context based
• Educational Institution focus	• Workplace focus	• Work/life integration
• Learning provided	• Learning planned	• Learner as designer
• Compliance and adoption	• Flexible and developmental	• Adaptable and sustainable
• Segmented	• Integrated	• Holistic
• Individual learning	• Organisational learning	• Business wisdom

Hierarchy Metaphor	**Network Metaphor**	**Learning Ecology Metaphor**
STRATEGIES	**STRATEGIES**	**ORIENTATION**
• Lectures	• Action learning	• Strength based
• Workshops	• Team work	• Multiple sources of learning
• Train the trainer	• Mentoring	• Adaptive to context
• Small group work	• Communities of practice	• Action from wisdom
• Guest speakers	• Expert centred strategies	• Blurring of boundaries

Structured content / Assignments / Exams / Classroom / Topics	Networks / Mentor / Projects / Formal learning / Workplace	Family / Future potential / Work / Leisure / Personal

Learner as passive receiver	**Learner as worker**	**Learner as whole person**

Life Based Learning: a model for integration, growth and potentiality. © TAFE NSW ICVET

Figure 3: The life-based learning model

Application of life-based learning

Many have embraced the life-based learning model as providing them with a more realistic framework for how they learned – through both formal and informal learning. However the issue was in the *application* of the model. As with many paradigm shifts, there were no easy answers. There was no one-way forward. People continued to look for the 'how to' or the '10 easy steps of application'. Both the researchers and their advisory working group committed to *not* providing an 'application solution' or 'application formula'. The concern was that context comes before content. People would have to work it out for themselves in their own context.

However, to assist people with application the researchers did highlight areas that would be useful to focus on: guiding principles, enablers, strategies and evaluative approaches for life-based learning.

Guiding principles
The guiding principles were seen as providing the scaffolding on which capability development can be built. They were offered as a starting point and not as a prescriptive list. Possible guiding principles include: work with strengths, understand your learning ecology, learners design their own learning and acknowledge the whole person.

Organisational enablers
Organisations and groups were encouraged to examine enablers for life-based learning. Similarly to guiding principles, the organisational enablers were provided as a starting point and not a prescriptive list. They included: establishing more effective connections and networks; developing a culture that supports job reshaping for personal growth; creating more meaningful spaces for exchanging and sharing ideas; creating ways of gathering, interpreting, generating and applying new knowledge that is gained from formal learning or a more personalised learning journey.

Strength-based strategies
Strength-based approaches (figure 4) do not necessarily displace what has gone before. If *established practices* are fit enough to adapt to the changing environment they will survive. Established practices may have strengths that can be built on. This could require a fine adjustment or a significant shift in orientation. The advantage of building on established practices is their familiarity and immediacy.

Established professional development practices such as expert centred learning and work based learning (including action learning, mentoring, coaching, communities of practice)

Emerging strategies such as conversations, Appreciative Inquiry, talent management, disruptive technology and positive deviance

An openness to future potential - those that are still to emerge

Foundation age-old values and truths such as generosity, sensitivity, authenticity, integrity, trust and goodwill

Figure 4 Building new foundations for capability development   © TAFE NSW

At a number of national forums and workshops that the researchers conducted, the established strategies that teachers and managers identified as strength-based included action learning, communities of practice, coaching and mentoring. Even though these strategies are not always implemented with a strength-based orientation, they all have the potential to be 'refreshed' by an emphasis on strength.

There are a range of approaches that use a strength based orientation in their design, that are rapidly gaining recognition. Participants in the national research forums were not that familiar with these strategies, apart from 'conversations'. These *emerging strategies* align well with the life based learning model. They include, but are not limited to[4]:

- *Conversations,* being integral to daily organisational activity and a source of rich learning. Popular models are World Café (Whole Systems Associates 2002), Open Space Technology (Owen 1977) and Strategic Conversations (2nd Road).
- *Talent management* which is about identifying, valuing, guiding and nurturing the talents and aspirations of employees.
- *Positive deviance* (Crom and Bertels 1999) is about the people who function better and achieve more than others with the same set of constraints and resources as everyone else.
- *Appreciative Inquiry* (AI) is based on the premise that organisations change in the direction in which they inquire (Cooperrider 2002). AI amplifies what works well thereby building a future where the best becomes more common.
- *Disruptive technology* (Christensen 1997) challenges orthodox ways of doing things. It can occur through the introduction of a new technology, product, process or service that eventually overturns the existing dominant way of doing things.

As shown in figure 3, there will always be future strategies that are as yet unknown. An *openness to future potential* will assist in bringing these to our attention as they arise. Figure 3 also shows that the bedrock of strength-based strategies are people's *foundation truths and values.* These are the 'constants' on which capability development strategies are built.

Evaluation
Traditional methods of evaluation may not suit learning and capability development in changing and complex environments. They are often deficit-based rather than strength-based, trainer directed rather than self-directed, past rather than future focused, pre-determined rather than emergent, event focused rather then personalised. Evaluation approaches such as Kirpatrick's four levels of evaluation, Delivery and Evaluation (Armstrong), Strategic Training Evaluation Model (Unger and Rutter) and Program Logic may continue to be relevant for certain areas of learning and development, although how effective they will be when evaluating in increasingly diverse, uncertain and complex environments with high levels of innovation and knowledge sharing is questionable.

The research identifies two evaluative approaches that appear to more aligned to life-based learning for capability development. *Appreciative Inquiry (AI)* which embeds self-evaluation into the processes used to discover the core strengths and best practices within an organisation. Practitioners evaluate their own performance against that benchmark (Elliot cited in Andrews 2005). *Most Significant Change* (Davies and Dart 2005) which involves both participatory monitoring and evaluation through significant change stories that are collected from the field. The stories provide opportunities for discussion and enable whole teams to focus on program impact, values and unexpected shifts and changes.

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[4] The Research Report provides a more detailed description of each of these strategies.

The uptake of life-based learning

Initially, the greatest interest in life-based learning was from those involved in e-learning. They viewed the life-based learning model for capability development as more realistic and inclusive than previous capability development models. Life-based learning gave them a holistic learning context through which they could incorporate their extensive global networks. They could design when and how they learnt in both virtual and non-virtual learning environment.

Other groups that also responded enthusiastically to life-based learning were community and outreach groups that learnt off-campus or combined on-campus with off-campus learning. The teachers incorporated elements of the life-based learning model into their practice, particularly for groups such as refugees and those undertaking community projects. Some indigenous groups also welcomed the model as it aligned well with their formal and informal community and family-based learning. Teaching section-heads have used strength-based approaches such as Appreciative Inquiry for planning and supporting staff. The life-based learning model was also adapted to leadership development where potential leaders within an organisation were provided with multiple self-directed learning options.

During the last two years, anecdotal evidence suggests that managers and groups continue to take on board *certain aspects* of the life-based learning model rather then the whole model itself. Most interest is expressed in adoption of strength-based strategies such as Appreciative Inquiry and conversation-based learning. The methodologies of these strategies are often modified and adapted to meet local needs. Also, more people are starting to speak the language of learning ecologies, with particular reference to adaptability, diversity and multiple options.

Overall, the holistic life-based learning model has not been widely adopted in Australia in vocational education and training institutions, apart from aspects such as strength-based approaches. Life-based learning entails a paradigm shift so this is not surprising. The resistance can be seen in the form of people finding it difficult to sustain doing things differently or thinking differently within educational systems that are essentially bureaucratic, deficit-based or 'teacher-directed'. Management has a fear of self-organising systems as they equate it with a loss of control and power. Many enjoy rhetoric rather than the action and simply change the words - for example, from work-based to life-based learning, from deficit-based to strength-based, or from teacher-directed to student-directed, while there is little real change in systems, processes and practice. We also live in a society of 'instant results' or 'quick fix' solutions and when the change takes time, as real change usually does, resources, support and encouragement is frequently withdrawn and attention is turned to the 'next big thing'. Being unclear about your own core values can result in resistance or erratic behaviour. This can be through wanting to meet the needs of others at the expense of your own needs, 'sitting on the fence', swinging one way or another, or wanting others to tell you what to do. When operating from a level of conditioned beliefs rather than core values it is difficult to be authentic, consistent and to follow through on change because the driver is 'external' rather than 'internal'. In addition, people want certainty and funding bodies want to know outcomes in advance. There is little of no room for emergence of the unanticipated. The surprises are ignored and some of the important learning disregarded.

Despite the resistance, shifts keep occurring as people champion new ways of thinking and doing and support each other in finding their own paths of learning and development.

Questions and considerations for personal development planning (PDP) within a lifewide learning framework in higher education

It may be frustrating for the reader that I do not offer solutions for adopting a strength-based approach to PDP within a lifewide framework in higher education. Even though I have researched and supported hundreds of people in their understanding and application of life-based learning and strength-based approaches in vocational education and training, I really only have questions.

> "He who asks a question may be a fool for five minutes, but he who never asks a question remains a fool forever". Tom Connelly

I have identified the main areas that I think could be explored, that will make a difference to the way strength-based approaches are applied to PDP and lifewide learning. It is within these areas that I raise questions that I think need pursuing[5].

The questions are primarily strength-based. I suggest practice doing strength-based questions for yourself - or with others. The intent is that you are honest with yourself. There is not much point in embedding a strength-based approach into PDP if you do not actually believe in it or know what the process feels like. Hopefully you will enjoy the questions.

1. Core values
Values are the foundation or bedrock of any approach to lifewide learning and personal development planning. These are not our conditioned beliefs that shift and change over time as we mature. Core values (or gifts) are integral to our being. Both students and lecturers need to be clear on what their core value(s) is – it can be, for example: choice or creativity or beauty or security or transformation or friendship or travel or being in nature or knowledge or prosperity or service or physical strength or courage or faith or in my case being authentic.

Core values drive what we do – consciously or unconsciously. When strategies, plans or methodologies do not match someone's core values, then conflict or dissention arises. Values cannot be ignored – not the corporate values that hang on a wall, but your internal values that are part of your integrity. It is worth asking yourself and your students asking themselves:
- What is one value that you do your best to not compromise - ever? (keep paring it down until you come to one core value)
- Why is this value important to you – what does it tell you about your learning, career (or teaching) needs?
- How can you build your core value into the way that you approach PDP and lifewide learning?

The core value of one person can 'clash' with the core value of another. The aim is to have an environment of allowing and space for all.

2. Re-think goals and purpose
How clear are students (and lecturers) on their most important goals and purpose? Holistically, this can be at an emotional, mental, physical and spiritual level. A goal is what the student is aiming for, something that the student wants to happen in the future. The purpose is why the student wants to achieve the goal, the advantage or benefit to the

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[5] I wish to acknowledge one of my teachers Catherine Wilkins of Xpand Consulting and the understanding of many concepts that I have gained through her teaching.

student, what the goal will enable, or the direction it will take the student in. Goals are not set in concrete. It may be that when the initial goal is achieved, the purpose then becomes the new goal and a new purpose is identified. The cycle continues. In this way purpose can relate to continual expansion. If goals are in conflict it may be useful to:
• Clearly name each goal
• Ask: what is the purpose of *each* goal?
• Where is the congruence (or alignment) between *all* the different purposes?
• Think laterally and ask how can we meet *all* goals and purposes without having to discard any?
• Is your goal and purpose congruent with your core value?

3   Context before content
What is the *context* or 'container' like, that the *content* or learning goals/plans will sit within? This is relevant to both lecturers and students as the context may vary student to student, lecturer to lecturer, faculty to faculty and location to location. Questions to be asked include:
• What are the 'freedoms' in my context – the areas (people, resources, policies, attitudes, networks, behaviour, technologies, values etc) that allow me some 'stretch' or opportunity to expand and achieve my goals?
• What are the 'non-negotiables' or barriers in my context – the areas (people, resources, policies, attitudes, networks, behaviour, technologies, values, etc) that inhibit or block my expansion or achievement of my goals?
• How can I re-orientate myself to make better use of the 'freedoms' and avoid being blocked by that which is truly non-negotiable. (It is a bit like playing snakes and ladders – you want to find the 'ladders' that lead you to your goal and spend minimum time being blocked by the 'snakes' or find a way to go around them.)

Sometimes what one person sees as a non-negotiable another sees as a freedom, or vice versa. This is a reflection of a person's reality. And each person's reality is unique to them. At other times there is clear agreement between people about the non-negotiables and freedoms. Additional questions can be asked:
• What does my 'learning ecology' look like and feel like? (draw it)
• What kind of a match or mismatch is there between student and lecturer learning ecologies?

The aim is not to have 'sameness' or one way of being 'right'. The aim is one of acceptance and making room for both students and lecturers to meet their goals within their own context.

4   Applying strength-based approaches
PDP applies forward-looking, flexible and emergent thinking around the needs of students. However at the same time PDP is a structured process with components that are deficit-based. Students are encouraged to focus on where they are, where they want to get to and how to fill the gap (or lack) in-between. This can be re-oriented to a focus on core strengths and how the student will move forward with learning that builds on their strengths – some in higher education are already doing this. Focusing on strengths re-energises people. It can be a great learning experience to interview students or get them to interview each other around questions such as:
• What can I appreciate in the past that contributes to where I am today?
• What has been my best learning experience and why?
• If I could learn anything that I wanted to learn, what would that be?
• What do I enjoy doing the most?

- Think of a person who knows you well, whose opinion you respect and imagine they are telling you about your strengths – what would they say to you?
- When did I felt really capable? What was I doing?
- Do I notice any themes emerging?
- What do **I** believe are my key strengths?
- Do my learning goals and purpose align with my key strengths? If not, what do you want to do about it?
- Overall, what are the implications of this (all the above) for my learning and development?

From the PDP and lifewide learning perspective, lecturers can ask themselves (or interview each other):
- If you were to come back in 300 years and were thrilled with what you saw in higher education – what would you see, what you would feel, what would you be doing?
- If innovation, new technologies and new practices that benefit students can take up to 50 years to embed in educational institutions, does this matter to you? If yes, why and if no, why not? If yes, what do you want to do about it (or have already done about it)?
- How do you think that the concept of lifewide learning will be embedded in higher education in 10 years time?
- What is your own stance towards PDP and lifewide learning?
- What kind of strength-based questions do you want to ask your students?
- Imagine you are talking to someone who knows you really well and you ask what your main strengths are - what would they say to you?
- How can PDP be re-designed to have a strength-based orientation?

5   Designing your own learning – elements and principles
Lifewide learning and PDP support students taking responsibility for designing their own learning. An approach to *designing* learning could be quite different to that of *planning* learning ie. a shift from rules to that of responsibility. It may be useful to consider:
- *Elements* - in visual design there are *elements* such as shape, texture, form, value, size, direction, space – that is unique to each design. What elements would you like to see students address when designing their own learning?
- *Principles* – the principles of visual design oversee the relationship between the elements and inform the way the composition is arranged as a whole. Principles for visual design involve balance, unity, contrast, focal points, repetition and harmony. Successful design incorporates the elements and principles so that they serve the designer's purpose and goals. There are no rules. What principles would you like to see students address when designing their learning?

6. Content of PDP
I do not have a lot to say about the content of a personal development learning plan in a lifewide framework. I think this is because it is emergent and the natural outcome of the student's core values, goals, purpose, context and strengths - provided students are clear about these things. However I do have some questions:
- What range of multiple, lifewide learning options would you like to encourage?
- How will you assist students recognising and acknowledging the learning from multiple sources?
- What needs to be involved to maximise success?
- What strategies will enable learners to integrate their learning?

7. Organisational/faculty enablers

Enablers support students and lecturers in achieving the goals and purpose of PDP as part of a lifewide concept. Enablers are what makes it possible. Consider the following:

- What strength-based enablers already exist that can be modified or strengthened?
- What new strength-based enablers will need to be put in place?
- How would you go about this?

(note – evaluation can be considered an enabler)

8. Redesigning PDP

My final questions are in regard to redesigning PDP with a strength-based orientation in a lifewide concept:

- What elements, principles and enablers do you want to build into a re-design of the personal development plan? How would they appear?
- What is the one thing that you most want to see as part of this re-design?
- Topics can be strength-based. Would you rather contribute to a session on 'teaching methodologies' or 'magnetic learning environments'? Do the topics within the PDP enthuse and stimulate imagination or not? Do the topics align to the intent of PDP?
- How can you ensure that the PDP redesign is adaptable enough to accommodate a wide range of people's different realities and expectations about learning? What will tell you that you have succeeded? Or is this not your role?

In conclusion

Despite the frustration, there is a need to keep questioning, to accept that there is no one answer and to accept the ever-unfolding nature of new approaches, models and strategies. It requires astute, context-specific thinking and an openness to intuition and serendipity.

> Life-based learning seems initially a utopian/fantasy notion, but we live in a complex world. The notion is an honest attempt to capture the full breadth of our humanity, and apply it to our working and learning life.
> *Participant in an Australian National Forum*

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