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# The job of a performance consultant: a qualitative content analysis of job descriptions

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to explore the competencies needed by performance consultants, a particular role identified for training and development professionals. The role was formally named and promoted nearly two decades ago. Two ongoing discussions in the field are the competencies needed by training and development professionals and the role of consulting within the field.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study identifies the general competencies needed by a performance consultant as reflected in job descriptions for the position. It accomplished this goal by collecting job descriptions for the position from organizations in Canada (the result of a practical arrangement with an organization that would collect the descriptions and remove identifying information before the research team analyzed them), systematically analyzing them using qualitative content analysis techniques and generating a profile of the position, which can be used as a basis for further analysis of the position.

**Findings** – The job title and competencies sought in the job descriptions differ from those proposed in the literature. Specific areas of difference include the title (none of the job descriptions analyzed explicitly used the title performance consultant), role in needs analysis and client relationships, technology competence (the job descriptions sought little, if any, while the literature suggests broad conceptual knowledge) and qualifications (most job descriptions only require a bachelor's degree; many training and development professionals have more education).

**Research limitations/implications** – The profile presented in this paper only represents that used in job descriptions (typically an idealized version) and in a particular national context. But if the results

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are validated with other methodologies and in other contexts, they suggest that the actual consulting role significantly differs from the one conceptualized in the literature.

**Practical implications** – The findings suggest that the consultant role conceived in the literature differs from the actual job expected by employers, at least as reflected in job descriptions. Research with incumbents in the job is needed to assess whether the inconsistencies are also reflected in the day-to-day work.

**Social implications** – Social implications validate the broad concern that trainers have skills and talents to offer organizations that those organizations do not fully utilize.

**Originality/value** – The paper provides one of the few empirical studies of the job responsibilities of a performance consultant.

**Keywords** Competencies, Job description, Learning consultant, Learning relationship manager, Performance consultant

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

An ongoing topic of discussion within training and development is the competencies needed by professionals in the field (such as Munzenmaier, 2014; Nilsson and Ellström, 2012; Shepherd, 2008). Some of those discussions focus on general competencies, while others focus on those needed within particular positions, such as chief learning officer (Gordon, 2005), instructional designer (Munzenmaier, 2014; ATD, IACET, & Rothwell and Associates, 2014; Tucker, 2008) and performance consultant (Robinson and Robinson, 2008, 1995). In response, several professional associations have devised competency models to inform those conversations including the Association for Talent Development (ATD) (formerly the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD)); the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) in the UK; and the Canadian Society for Training and Development (CSTD). All three first introduced their competency models in the 1970s and have updated within the past three years: ATD in 2013 (Arneson *et al.*, 2013); CIPD in 2012 (2013); and CSTD in 2010 (CSTD, 2010).

All of the competency models envision a role for instructors and instructional designers. For example, ATD (2013) includes competencies for instructional design and training delivery in their newest competency model. CIPD (2013) includes designing solutions (programs) and delivery in their competency model. Assessing needs, designing programs and facilitating programs represent three of the five competency areas in the CSTD (2010) competency model. The ASTD and CIPD competency models also acknowledge roles for managers of training and development groups.

But the models provide less guidance for other common training and development roles. For example, only the CIPD competency model addresses the role of the training administrator, who coordinates the logistics of training programs and oversees much of the record keeping related to training, such as enrollments, completion records and collections of evaluations.

Another overlooked role is one that the literature calls performance consultants (Robinson and Robinson, 2008). Workers in this role are responsible for building relationships with internal and external clients, assessing their needs and determining how to address those needs through training, other interventions or some combination of the two (Stoloitch and Keeps, 2006). Performance consultants are also responsible for working with stakeholders to ensure that the resulting solution ultimately addresses the problem the client initially faced.

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Although the ATD, CIPD and CSTD competency models suggest consulting responsibilities, neither has a competency specifically labeled "consulting". Furthermore, the scope of the consulting role differs among models. The CIPD model envisions consulting as either an executive function within training and development or a more broadly based within the field of Human Resources Management. In contrast, the ATD and CSTD competency models integrate particular aspects of consulting into their broader models of training and development practice.

This ambiguity suggests some deeper issues regarding the consulting role. One of the most basic is whether consulting is actually a distinct job role, as suggested by the CIPD model and several authors (Donaldson *et al.*, 2007; Stoloitch and Keeps, 2006; Robinson and Robinson, 2008, 1995) or a set of competencies that are integrated into other roles, as implied by the current ATD and CSTD competency models. A related issue pertains to the specific competencies required for consulting. The literature and competency models vary on when in the process of designing and developing interventions that consulting occurs and the specific responsibilities that consultants assume during these phases of the process. The literature (such as Robinson and Robinson, 2008, 1995; Stoloitch and Keeps, 2006) suggests a role rooted in the design process while some of the competency models (such as CIPD) suggest a role rooted in the client intake process. Such gaps between roles as conceptualized in the literature and actual responsibilities have been observed in other roles, such as instructional designers, where empirical research suggests that a gap exists between the conception of the job and actual practice (York and Ertmer, 2011; Wedman and Tessmer, 1993; Rowland, 1993; Zemke and Lee, 1987). A third issue is the name of the role. Although the training literature primarily focuses on the term performance consultant (Robinson and Robinson, 2008, 1995 and Stoloitch and Keeps, 2006), other names appear for the role. For example, the 2004 version of the ATD competency model specifically mentioned four job roles (Bernthal *et al.*, 2004). Although neither used the name performance consulting, two implied consulting responsibilities: learning strategist and business partner. Before Robinson and Robinson (1995) introduced the term performance consultant, the literature used the terms consultant and learning consultant (Bollettino, 1980; Mitchell, 1975).

This program of research is intended to address these gaps. It is guided by these research questions:

*RQ1*. What competencies are sought in a performance consultant?

*RQ2*. What is the appropriate job title for the position?

*RQ3*. How do these competencies align with one or more of the competency models proposed by professional associations in the field?

The program of research has three parts:

(1) an analysis of job descriptions for people holding this position with the goal of creating a composite job description;

(2) an identification of the job responsibilities of people in this role through interviews or focus groups with people working as relationship managers and performance consultants; and

(3) with people who manage these professionals.

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This article reports the first of the studies. After situating the study in the literature, this article describes the methodology used to conduct the study and the results of the study. The article closes by describing the implications of the study, its limitations and suggestions for future research.

## Literature review

This section situates the study within the larger discussion in the fields of educational technology and Human Resource Development. It first presents the theoretical framework underlying the study, and then reports key themes in the literature relevant to this study:

- the proposal of a consulting role for training and development professionals;
- the proposal of performance as the mission of training and development;
- the emergence of a performance consulting role; and
- the empirical evidence that currently exists for the performance consulting role.

To identify literature for this review, we conducted a formal search of the peer-reviewed literature on training and development using the ERIC and ProQuest databases between 1970 and 2014, as well as books on the subject of performance consulting. We included, too, the official competency models and underlying studies of organizations offering certification in training and development and articles and books that were widely cited in the literature reviewed.

### *Frameworks underlying this study*

Two frameworks underlie this study. The first is theoretical; the general theoretical framework guiding this study is Strategic Human Resource Development (HRD). Garavan (1991, p. 17) defines Strategic HRD as:

> The strategic management of training, development and of management/professional education interventions, so as to achieve the objectives of the organisation while at the same time ensuring the full utilisation of the knowledge in detail and skills of individual employees. It is concerned with the management of employee learning for the long term keeping in mind the explicit corporate and business strategies.

McCracken and Wallace (2000, p. 286) describe strategic HRD as an open system with leadership from top management and that encompasses these activities:

> […] shaping organizational missions and goals, [placing an] emphasis on cost-effectiveness evaluation; [demonstrating] an ability to influence corporate culture; [promoting] trainers as organizational change consultants; [forging] strategic partnerships with Human Resource Management [and] […] line management; [shaping] HRD strategies, policies, and plans; and senior management [scanning the environment] in HRD terms.

Several issues arise when considering strategic HRD: do professionals in the field participate in establishing the strategic direction of the organization or merely align HRD strategy with an already established vision (McCracken and Wallace, 2000)? Furthermore, how can an organization or an HRD group plan for the future with certainty (Chermack, 2011)? Chermack (2011) responds to this concern by suggesting the use of scenarios as a tool for preparing a strategy.

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Central to all of these visions of strategic HRD is the role of the professionals in HRD organizations as consultants. In these consulting roles, HRD professionals advise on and promote change in organizations rather than merely reacting to requests for training programs associated with change management efforts (McCracken and Wallace, 2000; Garavan, 1991; Swanson and Holton, 2009).

The second framework guiding this study is practical; competency models underlying the work in the field. A competency represents "clusters of interrelated knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for performing effectively in a particular area" (CSTD, 2010, p. 7) and a competency model (also called a competency framework by some) identifies the specific competencies needed to effectively perform in a job, as well as the relationship among those competencies.

As noted in the previous section, several competency models exist. Some of the competency models focus on the general competencies needed by all training and development professionals; others focus on competencies specific to a particular role. Many of the organizations who have developed competency models also use them as the basis for certification programs. For example, CIPD uses its competency model for its four-level certification scheme, which grants members a broader certification as their skills, knowledge, experience and scope of responsibilities expand. ATD uses its competency model as the basis for its Certified Professional in Learning and Performance™ (CPLP) program. The certification is a general one intended for all people working in the field. The competency model, in effect when ATD developed this certification, identified four specific job roles (Bernthal *et al.*, 2004) – professional specialist, project manager, business partner and learning strategist – but certification never addressed role specific responsibilities. Furthermore, perhaps because these roles were not central to the certification or perhaps in preparation for its shift in focus as a professional association from training and development to talent development, the job roles disappeared from the 2013 revision of the model (Arneson *et al.*, 2013). CSTD uses its competency model as the basis for its two certifications: Certified Training and Development Professional (CTDP) (a training generalist) and Certified Training Practitioner (CTP) (an instructor). The certification for an instructor focuses only on the facilitation competency (CSTD, 2010); the generalist certification focuses on all five competencies in the CSTD model.

The most specific competency models were developed by the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction (IBSTPI). IBSTPI has developed several competency models, each focusing on specific job roles, including training manager, instructional designer, instructor and evaluator (IBSTPI, no date). IBSTPI does not offer a specific set of competencies for a performance consultant, however.

Because no specific competency model exists for a performance consultant, we needed to choose a competency model that applies more generally to the field: CIPD, ATD or CSTD. Perhaps the broadest of the three is the CIPD competency model (CIPD, 2013), which encompasses the entirety of Human Resources. Part of the reason for that breadth is that the CIPD is a single organization serving professionals in Human Resource Management and Human Resource Development, including Learning and Development. Such a broad competency model can address the needs of all its members. The other competency models primarily focus on training and development. The 2013 competency model of ATD (Arneson *et al.*, 2013) is perhaps the more expansive of the two, encompassing ten competency areas. Of those, five are directly related to training

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(instructional design, training delivery, learning technologies, evaluating learning impact, and managing learning programs), one is closely related to training (coaching), and training plays a significant factor in two more (change management and performance improvement). With just five competency areas that primarily align to the widely used Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (ADDIE), the CSTD competency model is perhaps the simplest, focusing on competencies in analysis, design and development, facilitation, transfer and evaluation. Partly because of its simplicity and partly because this project was conducted in Canada, we specifically chose the CSTD competency model to guide this study.

*A consulting role for HRD professionals*

Assuming a consultative rather than a reactive role is an ongoing theme in the discussions of HRD and the key fields that inform it. As far back as 1975, for example, Mitchell (1975) suggested the first responsibility of a training and development professional was to serve as a learning consultant. Williams (1980) likened this role to a linking agent.

Bolletino (1980) added that these training and development consultants need not have subject matter expertise; their limited familiarity with a situation could benefit the process of developing effective programs to address those situations. With the rise of Human Resource Development in the 1990s and 2000s, the emphasis on this consulting role grew (Gilley, 1998; Swanson and Holton, 2009) and is implied by the 2013 update to the ASTD Competency Model.

Consultants should place their clients at the center of their work (Moller, 1993; Lewis, 1991) and need to provide leadership in their engagements (McLagan, 1996). Gilley (1998) specifically envisions the consultant as an extension of a training and development role. In his view, consultants play a role in designing performance evaluation systems and help to implement them, design training programs that address performance issues and promote the transfer of learning. Gilley also sees marketing the profession and its services as a responsibility of the consultant.

In contrast, Rummler and Brache (1995) see a more broadly focused role for the consultant in HRD, suggesting that the consultant should focus on improving measurable results, use a strong methodology to identify, implement and evaluate issues posed by clients, and bring a broad repertoire of strategies to a situation to help address the issue identified. On the one hand, Rummler and Brache neither limit HRD consultants to providing training and development services nor do they see consultants as the ones providing these training and development services. Through this consulting role, HRD professionals can provide value to the organizations that employ them beyond training and development.

*An emphasis on performance*

While proposals for trainers as consultants emerged, others proposed that the primary mission of training and development professionals was to improve performance within organizations. Gilbert (1978) proposed the behavioral engineering model. He explained that training alone often fails to produce the desired results because it can only address a lack of skills and knowledge; in many instances, the issue that initiated a request for training results from either a lack of resources or motivation or from an organizational issue at a higher level in the organization than the worker. If trainers want to produce

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desired results, they have to broaden their focus from instruction to performance (Gilbert, 1978; Rummler and Brache, 1995).

Stoloitch and Keeps (2006, p. 8) define performance as the accomplishment of a worthy goal, noting that performance is:

> […] a function of both behavior and accomplishment of a person or a group of people. Performance includes the actions of a person or people and the result of the action or actions.

At first, the discussion of performance primarily occurred within the instructional design community and the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) adopted performance as its approach to the field in the 1980s (when the organization was known as the National Society for Performance and Instruction) and is reflected in textbooks on instructional design such as Dick *et al.* (2008). The view expanded in the 1990s. The American Society for Training and Development adopted the performance focus and many argued that performance is central to HRD (Swanson and Holton, 2009). According to Sanders and Ruggles (2000), the performance approach is characterized by systems thinking rather than a singular focus on training.

### *The performance consultant*

Although Gilley (1998) believes that consulting forms part of the job responsibilities of every training and development professional, many see it as a distinctive role and, Robinson and Robinson (1995) provided a formal definition of the role and named it *performance consulting*. They describe performance consulting as a relationship "in which a client and consultant partner to accomplish the strategic outcome of optimizing workplace performance in support of business goals" (Robinson and Robinson, 2008, p. 1).

They see it as a leadership role, as do Stoloitch and Keeps (1999, 2006), Pershing (2006), Rummler (2007); Rothwell *et al.*, 2007). The presence of such a consulting role in a training group represents tangible evidence of the central role of human performance technology and human performance improvement (Pershing, 2006, Stoloitch and Keeps, 1999) in the work of training and development professionals and facilitates the strategic role of HRD (Swanson and Holton, 2009). Although some insist performance consulting is rooted in science because performance consultants make recommendations based on data – and only on data (such as Hale, 2007, and Stoloitch and Keeps, 1999, 1992), others see it as a craft (such as Rummler, 2007).

Sanders and Ruggles (2000) get more specific, suggesting that the general focus of the performance consultant's role include identifying business goals, determining the gap between current and desired performance, explaining the reason for that gap, suggesting measures to bridge the gap and evaluating the results. Hale (2007, p. 6) provides perhaps the most in-depth description of the job of a performance consultant, suggesting that performance consultants "are experts in analysis and measurement and provide expert advice", take on several roles, help client's determine their most important priorities and "focus on outcomes and results". In her example of a job description for a performance consultant, she identifies specific skills for the job (Hale, 2007, pp. 133-135). Some pertain to analysis, such as "conducting feasibility studies" and "assessing and evaluating individuals, processes and programs". Some pertain to customer relationship management, such as "establishing credible relationships with other home office personnel", "communicating with clarity and vision" and "Confronting and negotiating". Some pertain to project management, such as

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"Estimating costs" and "Working within budget". Some pertain to personnel management, such as "managing staff and other resources" and "controlling group dynamics".

Garavan *et al.* (1995) also note the need for competence in technology as sophisticated technology drives the need for this position. They specifically mentioning the impact of technology on processes and naming decision support systems.

*Empirical evidence of performance consulting in practice*

Despite the presence of literature on performance consulting and descriptions of the role, few studies validate assumptions about its roles and responsibilities, much less impact on the organization. That contrasts with several studies of the competencies of training and development professionals (Arneson *et al.*, 2013; Bernthal *et al.*, 2004; McLagan, 1996, 1989) and instructional designers (ATD, IACET, & Rothwell and Associates, 2014; York and Ertmer, 2011; Wedman and Tessmer, 1993; Rowland, 1993; Zemke and Lee, 1987). Most of those studies, however, rely on self-reported data about job responsibilities or about the expectations of executives (Van Rooij, 2013). None has focused on the expectations stated in the job description.

Some of the empirical evidence about performance consultants does not fully support the proposition that such a role exists. For example, a popular starting point for empirically focused searches for job descriptions is O*NET Online *(U.S. Department of Labor, 2012), the repository for all job descriptions and occupations listed by the U.S. Department of Labor (no comparable source exists in Canada). A search of "performance consultant" lists training and development as the sixth most relevant occupation category, behind management analysts, industrial-organizational psychologists, energy auditors, first-line supervisors of administrative office workers and aerospace engineers. A related term, performance technologist – the term used with the ISPI certification – is not available in the O*NET database. Within the training and development occupation, O*NET Online did not have a separate job category for the performance consultant. The responsibilities are considered to be included in the jobs of:

> Corporate[s] Trainer[s], Computer Training Specialist[s], Job Training Specialist[s], Management Development Specialist[s], Trainer[s], Training Coordinator[s], Training Specialist[s], E-Learning Developer[s], Technical Trainer[s] (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

This situation, along with the anecdotal evidence collected by simple searches of several popular job search databases of available positions, raises questions about whether the performance consultant is a distinct job or whether the responsibilities are associated with traditional roles in the field, as well as whether the job title performance consultant is used in practice for the role.

*Methodologies for studying competencies*

Although the question about the role of performance consultants is unique to our field, the question about competencies needed in particular jobs has emerged in several other disciplines. Researchers use several empirically-based methods to identify competencies. Some are intended to identify what should be the content of a job, such as the Developing a Curriculum (DACUM) method and nominal group techniques, both of which ask incumbents in a job role and, often, their supervisors to identify the responsibilities of particular job roles. Similar methods are used to generate competency models underlying certification programs, which are then validated through surveys of

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practitioners in the field (Carliner *et al.*, 2014). Surveys are also used to assess the gap between recommended and actual practice, often presenting a list of competencies and asking participants the extent to which they perform them (York and Ertmer, 2011; Wedman and Tessmer, 1993; Rowland, 1993; Zemke and Lee, 1987).

Although these methods obtain data about jobs from the people who hold them, they often rely on self-reported data provided outside of the immediate job context. They neither provide insights into the ways that individual organizations conceive of the jobs nor the competencies required to perform the jobs and that provide the basis for hiring, developing performance plans and conducting performance appraisals. Job descriptions fulfill that purpose. A job description is a broad statement of responsibilities of someone holding a particular position and is used to write job advertisements and evaluate job candidates, as well as to establish a performance plan (the specific objectives and responsibilities expected of a worker in a given time, such as a year) for the person hired for that position (Carliner, 2012). Job descriptions also suggest how the organizations conceive of particular jobs. Some researchers systematically collect and mine these descriptions as a means of identifying the formally stated expectations that employers bring to a job role (such as Lanier, 2009) and provide broad insights into the general concepts of a particular role within a profession.

## Methodology

As noted earlier, this article describes the first study in a program of research that attempts to answer the questions:

*Q1.* What competencies are sought in a performance consultant?

*Q2.* What is the appropriate job title for the position?

*Q3.* How do these competencies align with one or more of the competency models proposed by professional associations in the field?

This study attempts to answer the questions by using the last methodology mentioned in the literature review: an evaluation of job descriptions of people holding these jobs.

This section describes the methodology used to conduct this study. We first place this study within the larger program of research and explain the choice of research methodology. Then we describe how we chose, collected data from and analyzed the job descriptions. We close this section by explaining how we assured the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

### *Placing this study within the broader program of research*

The practical goal of this program of study is identifying the job responsibilities of a performance consultant. But because we can collect ancillary information during the process, we also hope to provide a broader perspective on the role of the performance consultant.

As suggested in the previous section, a major source of information about the expectations of a particular job is the job description. A job description often places the role within the larger organizational context by providing information about the reporting relationships. So, although methodologies such as DACUM, observation and nominal group techniques exist to identify what people actually do in their jobs, we felt that, first, we ought to identify what employers ideally expected of people in this position. Specifically, we wanted to collect job descriptions from organizations, analyze

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them and, from that analysis, develop a generic job description for the performance consultant that reflects the general tendencies in the job descriptions. This generic job description would provide us with the basis for providing a preliminary response to the research questions. Subsequent studies would provide us with a more definitive response.

*Selection of research methodology*

Because we intended to analyze documentary evidence, we needed a methodology that allows us to systematically do so. Content analysis (Boettger and Palmer, 2010) is such a methodology.

Because we are trying to describe a phenomenon rather than confirm it, our approach to the research agenda is, in general, qualitative. Qualitative content analysis:

> […] emphasizes an integrated view of speech/texts and their specific contexts […] goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text. It allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009, p. 308).

Among the central characteristics of qualitative content analysis (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009) are purposefully selected samples, an inductive approach to analysis and the production of "descriptions or typologies". In this instance, such a study could yield a general job description that represents a collective view of the position based on the formal, official presentation of the position in a job description, as opposed to a presentation based on observations of actual work practice.

*Selection of samples to evaluate*

We planned to analyze actual job descriptions for people working in consulting positions. A professional association serving training and development professionals in Canada, where this research was conducted, offered to assist the research team in recruiting and collecting the job descriptions.

After reviewing the job titles in the database for the organization, we determined that few had the job title of performance consultant. To confirm whether the lack of jobs with the title performance consultant was limited to this database or was a broader phenomenon, we informally searched several popular job search databases, including the general job search databases monster.com and Workopolis.com, and specific job search databases for training and development, including the job banks of ATD and CSTD. The largest number of jobs found was in the ATD job bank, which only listed 2 positions out of 122 possible jobs. So we started looking for alternate titles. From the membership database of the organization with whom we were partnering for the study, we identified several other potential job titles, including Learning Relationship Manager, Account Executive and Senior Trainer, among others. So we decided to broaden the terminology of our search when soliciting job descriptions.

On our behalf, the staff of the partner organization recruited job descriptions from employers for five weeks in the first quarter of 2012. They sent two recruiting notes that we had written to all members who are managers or executives. The partner organization also placed notices in two bi-weekly e-newsletters sent to its entire membership. People responded by sending job descriptions to the organizational office. The office staff stripped the job descriptions of information that identifying the

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employer, thus reducing bias. The office staff sent the "anonymized" job descriptions to the researchers for further analysis.

Although we worked exclusively with documentary evidence that a third party collected in this part of the study because later parts would involve interviewing consultants and their managers, and the possibility existed that we might be able to link a job description with an individual, we sought and received approval from the Research Ethics Committee at the university where we conducted this study. One of the reasons the research team asked a third party to collect the data on our behalf and remove all identifying information before forwarding it to us was to minimize the likelihood of linking individuals with their job descriptions and thus compromising their privacy.

*How we collected data*

Using the methods of content analysis (Boettger and Palmer, 2010; Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009), the primary investigator worked with a research team to analyze the job descriptions:

(1) After receiving the descriptions, the research team verified that the position described in the job description matches that of a performance consultant as we understood the job from the literature: a person who initially works with an internal or external client to identify projects. After a norming session involving the entire research team, in which we evaluated the first 20 job descriptions, two people from the research team and the principal investigator reviewed each of the remaining job description to determine their appropriateness for the study.

(2) Next, the team recorded specific characteristics in each of the job descriptions that remained. To determine which terminology people used for the job title and the role of the position in the organization, we recorded the job title, function, and reporting relationship. To determine the competencies required in the position, we tracked two general categories of competencies: the key competency areas listed in the CSTD *Competencies for Training and Development Professionals* (the competency framework guiding this study) and the specific responsibilities of a consultant that were suggested or implied by the literature, especially those suggested by Hale (2007) and the additional competencies with sophisticated technology suggested by Garavan *et al.* (1995). To determine whom employers sought for the position, we tracked the job requirements, including the education and experience sought, as well as specialized skills such as technology and language skills. The following shows the characteristics of job descriptions that we tracked:

- General information, including job title (is the job title really "performance consultant" or something else) and reporting information.
- *Job responsibilities*: We identified:
  - Responsibilities related to the five competency areas of the *Competencies for Training and Development Professionals* (assessing, designing, facilitating, assisting with transfer, and evaluating).
  - Responsibilities assumed to be a part of this position based on the literature and our conversations with other stakeholders:

    Serving as the primary interface with clients.

    Having an internal or external focus.

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Marketing the services of the training group (both basic training services as well as value-added services, like consulting and development of non-instructional interventions).

Planning and managing projects (as consultants, they might oversee the projects).

Managing people (is this person an individual contributor or a manager).

- Job requirements, including education, previous experience, technology knowledge and other qualifications (like language proficiency).

To establish a basis for tracking this information, we conducted a norming session with six job descriptions, To code the characteristics of the rest of the job descriptions, we evenly distributed the remaining job descriptions among the team. Two members of the team recorded the specific characteristics of each job description assigned to them. The principal investigator reviewed the results to ensure consistency across all coding.

*How we analyzed data*

After recording the characteristics of each job description, we looked for recurring patterns across job descriptions in each of the characteristics that we recorded. To provide readers with a sense of the prevalence of the patterns in the data, we classified the patterns as follows:

- Dominant pattern, that characterizes all or nearly all (more than 95 per cent) the job descriptions in the data set; that is, a pattern found in 53 or more of the job descriptions.
- Strong pattern that characterizes the majority (51 to 95 per cent) of the job descriptions in the data set: that is, a pattern found in 29 to 52 job descriptions. Such a pattern strongly characterizes the data, though differences will exist.
- Weak pattern that characterizes a sizeable minority (33 to 50 per cent) of the job descriptions in the data set; that is, a pattern found in 19 to 28 job descriptions. Such a pattern partially characterizes the data, but significant variations – including similar or stronger patterns – exist.
- Interesting pattern, that characterizes a notable minority (22 to 33 per cent) of the job descriptions in the data set; that is, a pattern found in 11 to 18 job descriptions. The pattern is worth noting but is not necessarily representative of the data.

Using these patterns as a guide, we prepared a composite job description from the summary of each characteristic.

We then compared the composite job description with the CSTD *Competencies for Training and Development Professionals* to determine the extent to which the *Competencies* addressed those needed by consultants.

*How we assured the credibility and trustworthiness of the data*

To ensure rigor, all job descriptions were analyzed by two coders; the primary investigator validated all coding. To ensure consistency among coders, the entire research team began with an initial norming session. Each team of coders then had a second norming session, and the results were shared among all of the coding team.

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The principal investigator conducted the initial analysis of the job descriptions, determining the strength of each pattern reported. One of the members of the research team verified this analysis.

The entire research team reviewed the resulting report for completeness and accuracy.

## Results

This section reports the results of our analysis. First, we describe the samples studied. Next, we describe conclusions about general information about the job and the job title and then we describe conclusions about job responsibilities, and requirements.

### *About the samples studied*

We received 129 anonymized job descriptions from the partner organization. All identifying information about the employer, its size and location, were removed. Because we recruited the job descriptions through a Canadian organization, we assume that they only pertain to jobs in Canada.

We determined that only 56 were appropriate for this study after our initial review of the job descriptions. The rest described training coordinators (a para-professional position covered by the CIPD competency model), training managers, instructors and a few sales representatives.

### *General information about the job and the job title*

The first set of characteristics that we analyzed provided general information about the job. We wanted to analyze data to determine which terminology people used for the job title and the role of the position in the organization.

The first characteristic we analyzed was the job title. None of the job descriptions in the study used the term Performance Consultant. None even used the term Performance. Instead, we saw job titles like Learning Consultant, Learning and Development Consultant and Relationship Manager. Although no single title dominated, several terms recurred among them, including *learning* (in our classification scheme, with mentions in just 28 job descriptions, this was a weak pattern, observed in 33 to 50 per cent of all job descriptions studied), *manager* (a weak pattern with 20 mentions) and *consultant* (10 mentions). Next we explored the reporting relationship. Like the job title, we found no strong patterns in our initial analysis. Twenty of the job descriptions did not suggest any reporting relationship. Of the remaining job descriptions, 16 (in our in our classification scheme, that was an interesting pattern – one found in 20-32 per cent of all job descriptions studied) reported to management outside of HR or Training. The remaining 20 (an interesting pattern) reported to Human Resources Management (some were management level; others were senior management level, such as Vice-Presidents and Directors). Thirteen of those HR management positions (an interesting pattern) specifically mentioned training. This analysis nominally suggests that the position reports to HR management, but given that almost as many consultants (the generic term we will use throughout the Results section to identify the position) report to management outside HR or did not mention a reporting relationship, we qualify this conclusion.

The third general characteristic of the position that we analyzed was the focus of the position: on internal clients, external clients or both. As suggested by the reporting relationship, some training groups serve the others in the same organization (employer,

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not training and development group), as might likely be the case of those reporting to HR. Others serve external clients, either because the training groups sell services to third parties (such as contractors and providers of off-the-shelf courses) or because they support marketing efforts within the organization, as suggested by the number of consultants who report to a group other than HR and specifically to Sales. Although we could not make a determination in four job descriptions, we found a strong pattern for an internal focus (a strong pattern is one observed in 51 to 95 per cent of the job descriptions studied; in this case, it was observed in 35 job descriptions) with an interesting pattern of both internal and external focus (17 job descriptions). We concluded that the primary focus of consultants is internal, but might occasionally focus externally.

Table I summarizes the general information about the job.

*Responsibilities of the job*

The second set of characteristics that we analyzed provided the job responsibilities. As noted earlier, we wanted to analyze these data to determine the competencies required in the position and specifically tracked two general categories of competencies:

(1) the key competency areas listed in the *Competencies for Training and Development Professionals*; and

(2) the specific responsibilities of a consultant that were suggested or implied by the literature.

In addition, the job descriptions included some responsibilities that we had not anticipated in our coding scheme. This analysis would also provide insights into the disagreement in the literature about whether design and development responsibilities play a central (Gilley, 1998; McLagan, 1996) or ancillary (Rummler and Brache, 1995) role in the job of the consultant.

*Key competency areas of the competencies for training and development professionals.* The first set of responsibilities that we analyzed corresponded with the five key competency areas listed in the *Competencies for Training and Development Professionals*: analyze, needs, design and develop programs, facilitate programs, assist with transfer of programs, and evaluate programs.

The analysis of the job descriptions suggested that analyzing needs is probably a job responsibility. It appeared in 42 job descriptions (a strong pattern). We note, however, that 14 job descriptions did not mention this responsibility (an interesting pattern).

As analyzing needs is probably a job responsibility, we concluded that designing programs is a job responsibility. It, too, appeared in 42 job descriptions (a strong pattern). And like analyzing needs, we note, that 14 job descriptions did not mention this responsibility (an interesting pattern).

Related to design is development and developing programs, too, is probably a job responsibility. It appeared in 43 job descriptions (a strong pattern and slightly stronger than analyzing needs and designing programs). Thirteen (13) job descriptions did not

**Table I.** General information about the position

| Job title | Learning consultant |
|---|---|
| Reports to | Possibly human resources |
| Focus | Internal (possibly with some interactions externally) |

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mention this responsibility (an interesting pattern). One job description specifically mentioned developing materials to conform to regulations. In other words, the data suggest that the view of the job is closer to views proposed by Gilley (1998) and McLagan (1996), who posited that performance consultants design and develop programs, than of Rummler and Brache (1995), who proposed that design and development activities as more peripheral to the job of the consultant.

The analysis suggests that facilitating programs (presenting the instruction in the classroom or online) may or may not be a job responsibility. Although listed in 31 job descriptions (a strong pattern) it is not mentioned in 25 (a weak pattern).

Assisting with transfer of training is probably a job responsibility. It appeared in 39 job descriptions (a strong pattern).

Like facilitating programs, evaluating programs may or may not be a job responsibility. Thirty-four job descriptions mention it, a strong pattern. Of the 34 however, 23 job descriptions do not mention the type of evaluation. Of those that do, the most common type of evaluation is employee performance reviews rather than program evaluation. Furthermore, 22 job descriptions (a weak pattern) do not mention this responsibility.

*Specific responsibilities of a consultant in the field.* The second set of responsibilities that we analyzed corresponded with ones that were either suggested or implied by the literature. The first of these pertained to serving as the interface with the client – that is, the key person that the client interacts with when initiating a project or has an issue with the project. We concluded that this is a job responsibility. It was mentioned in 47 of the job descriptions (strong pattern). Of the 47, most indicate that serving as the interface with the client is a primary responsibility (35 responses, strong pattern); the rest (12 responses, an interesting pattern) suggest it is a secondary responsibility. One job description specifically mentions negotiating on behalf of the training organization.

A related responsibility, client relationship management, is probably a responsibility of this position, too. Client relationship management involves ensuring that the client remains satisfied with the services of the training group. Whenever a problem arises (and from whomever), the consultant has the responsibility for addressing and resolving it. Thirty-seven job descriptions (a strong pattern) mention this responsibility; 19 (an interesting pattern) do not. Of the mentions, one job description specifically identifies managing the expectations of clients.

Developing a project plan is probably a job responsibility. Forty-two job descriptions (a strong pattern) mentioned it; 14 did not (an interesting pattern). A few job descriptions (not enough to constitute a pattern as defined by our analysis process) specifically mentioned developing budgets.

Project management, too, is probably a job responsibility. Thirty-nine job descriptions mentioned it; 18 did not (an interesting pattern).

In contrast, personnel management is probably not a responsibility. Thirty-three job descriptions (a strong pattern) did not mention it. Note, however, that 23 job descriptions (a weak pattern) did mention this responsibility.

Although the literature specifically mentioned this, promoting or marketing the services of the training group is probably not a responsibility of the consultant. Thirty-nine job descriptions do not mention it (a strong pattern); only 17 job descriptions (an interesting pattern) do.

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*Other responsibilities mentioned.* The job descriptions listed several responsibilities that we had not anticipated, including these:

- *Manage vendors*. Although the literature suggested that this is a responsibility, we only encountered it in seven job descriptions.
- Share best practices.

Table II summarizes the responsibilities of the job.

*Requirements for the job*

The last set of characteristics that we analyzed were the job requirements. We wanted to determine the qualities employers sought for the position. So, as noted earlier, we tracked the education and experience sought, as well as specialized skills such as technology and language skills. The list mentioned above shows the characteristics of job descriptions that we tracked.

*Education sought.* Employers probably seek particular educational backgrounds for consultants. Thirty-nine job descriptions (a strong pattern) list educational requirements; 17 do not (an interesting pattern).

No consensus exists on the type of education sought. Only three employers listed a master's-level education. Twenty-seven (a weak pattern) mention a bachelor's degree and 11 (an interesting pattern) mention a diploma (Associate's degree). Four employers also sought a certificate in addition to a degree. Note that some employers listed more than one level of degree in the job descriptions.

Of the degrees sought, the most commonly mentioned (22 job descriptions, a weak pattern) suggested an education-related discipline, such as Adult Education, Education or Training. Two mentioned performance consulting degrees and one required teacher

| Job responsibilities | |
|---|---|
| Responsibilities related to the *Competencies for Training and Development Professionals* | Analyzing needs (probably a responsibility) |
| | Designing programs (probably a responsibility) |
| | Developing programs (probably a responsibility) |
| | Assisting with the transfer of programs (may or may not be a responsibility) |
| | Evaluating programs (may or may not be a responsibility) |
| Specific responsibilities related to consulting | Serving as the interface with the client (a responsibility; probably a primary responsibility but possibly a secondary one) |
| | Managing client relationships (probably a responsibility) |
| | Developing a project plan (probably a responsibility) |
| | Project management (probably a responsibility) |
| Not a responsibility | Personnel management |
| | Marketing the services of the Training group |
| | Analyzing performance |
| | Recommending non-instructional interventions |
| | Designing non-instructional interventions |
| | Developing non-instructional interventions |

**Table II.** Responsibilities of the position

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certification. Eleven (an interesting pattern) job descriptions mentioned a business-related discipline, such as general business, finance or Human Resource Management (HRM). Other fields mentioned included Agriculture, Arts and Project Management.

*Experience sought.* Consulting is probably not an entry-level job. Forty-six job descriptions (a strong pattern) required previous experience. Only ten job descriptions did not list any experience requirements.

But the job is probably not a senior-level job, either, based on the amount of job experience required. Twelve job descriptions (an interesting pattern) required three to four years of experience; 13 job descriptions (an interesting pattern) required five to nine years of experience; and 10 job descriptions required 10 or more years of experience. We concluded that the job is probably an intermediate-level job and requires between three and eight years of prior experience.

Employers were vague about the type of experience they sought. None of the job descriptions required company experience (a dominant pattern; not mentioned in any job description). The majority (34 job descriptions, a strong pattern) did not mention other types of experience. The 22 job descriptions (a weak pattern) that did get specific sought industry-specific job experience, such as experience in the agriculture, finance, and hospitality industries. Some of the job descriptions specifically mentioned training, but not enough to be classified as an interesting pattern.

*Other skills sought.* In addition to education and years of experience, some employers sought other specific skills. Of those, technology skills were the most commonly requested. But they are not required; 32 job descriptions (a strong pattern) do not mention them. Of the 24 that do (a weak pattern), employers primarily sought skills in Microsoft Office (23, a weak pattern). The few that mention a specific application within Microsoft Office specifically mention Powerpoint. In addition, some job descriptions (but not enough to constitute an interesting pattern) requested familiarity with educational technology, but did not define the term more specifically.

Because this study emerged from a competency model used for certification, we also wanted to see the extent to which employers sought certification. Certification is the validation of expertise by a third party (Carliner and Hamlin, 2014). Because certification is a voluntary credential, it can only legally be listed as preferred, rather than required, qualification (Carliner and Hamlin, 2014). Forty-one job descriptions do not mention it; we conclude that it is probably not an expectation.

Of the 15 job descriptions (an interesting pattern) that requested certification, three requested one of the two CSTD certifications, three requested the ATD certification, two requested the Certified Human Resource Professional (CHRP) certification offered by Human Resources orders (professional associations recognized by provincial legislatures) throughout Canada, one requested the Project Management Professional certification and one requested HR or learning designation, but did not say which ones. Other job descriptions requested certifications that do not exist, such as Adult Learning, Train the Trainers, Human Performance Technology and Instructor Development (although certificate programs – educational programs that award certificates of completion (Carliner and Hamlin, 2014) – exist in these areas). One requested an Organizational Development certification; none existed at the time of this study although the first Canadian certification launched in the fall of 2013.

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Because Canada has two official languages, and some organizations, like the Canadian Federal Government, require skills in both official languages, we also identified language requirements for the job. All of the job descriptions we received were in English and none was translated prior to our receiving them. Only six job descriptions – not enough to comprise an interesting pattern – required French. One additional job required Portuguese. No other job descriptions mentioned languages.

In addition, we noted that five job descriptions required interpersonal and relationship management skills, with one specifically requiring "tact when dealing with clients".

Table III summarizes the requirements of the job.

## Conclusions, limitations and suggestions for future research

This section closes the article. We start with the conclusions of the study, then identify the limitations of it, and close with suggestions for future research.

### *Conclusions*

These conclusions have two parts. In the first, we answer the research questions. In the second, we suggest some broader implications of our findings.

*Answers to the research questions.* Before answering *RQ1*, we would like to answer *RQ2*: What is the appropriate job title for the position? Answering this question first provides more precise terminology for the rest of this discussion. As noted in the Results, the data show that performance consultant is not the name of the job but also suggested that no other name dominates for this role, either. Among the most common terms used across organizations for the job title were Learning, Manager and Consultant.

For practical reasons, we concluded that the job title is learning consultant. Although the term manager appeared more frequently, we chose the term consultant because it seemed to more aptly match the responsibilities than manager and would lead to less confusion. One possible point of confusion is with the job of training manager, which the IBSTPI Competency Model (IBSTPI, n.d.) identifies as people who oversee a training group and supervise the people in it. Our data indicate that the majority of learning consultants do not have responsibility for supervising people. Similarly, we did not want to confuse this role with project manager, a role that was identified in the 2004 ATD competency model (Bernthal *et al.*, 2004), and that is responsible for overseeing training projects and completing them on schedule, within budget and at the agreed-upon level of quality (Project Management Institute, 2015).

With terminology clarified, we now consider the answer to *RQ2*, What competencies are sought in a performance consultant? In terms of the responsibilities related to the *Competencies for Training and Development Professionals*, these probably include

**Table III.** Requirements of the position

| Job requirements | |
|---|---|
| Education | A bachelor's degree is valued, possibly in an education-related discipline but possibly in business or in the subject area of the training |
| Experience | Three to eight years of experience; relevant industry experience valued, perhaps in training but perhaps in another industry area |
| Other skills sought | MS Office skills are valued |

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analyzing needs, designing programs and developing programs, and might include assisting with the transfer of programs and evaluating programs. In terms of specific responsibilities related to consulting, these competencies include serving as the interface with the client and, probably, managing client relationships, developing project plans and providing project management to projects.

A learning consultant could report to management in Human Resources (HR), but a significant percentage probably report to someone outside of HR. The role is internally focused but might also involve contact externally to the organization. The ideal candidate has three to eight years or more of work experience; industry experience is particularly valued. A bachelor's degree is valued, especially in a discipline related to education. MS Office experience is also valued.

*RQ3* asks how do these competencies align with the one or more of the competency models in the field. As noted earlier, we limited our focus to the CSTD Competency Model. Except for facilitating programs, the remaining four competency areas in the CSTD Competency Model are job responsibilities of Learning Consultants.

Although no single competency area within the CSTD model addresses the additional responsibilities of a Learning Consultant – serving as the interface with the client, managing client relationships, developing project plans and providing project management to projects – specific competencies within the five competency areas address them, at least in part. In terms of planning and managing projects, the CSTD Competency Model follows a traditional (though linear) approach to designing projects – starting with analysis and concluding with evaluation. The second- and third-level (more detailed) competencies address specific aspects of project planning and management. For example, Competency 3a in the Designing competency area is "Negotiate additional requirements to support learning activities with training sponsor(s)".

But the competency model studied – the CSTD Competency Model – lacks specific project management competencies, such as estimating the schedule and cost of projects, and assembling a team to design and develop projects.

Similarly, in terms of serving as the interface with the client and managing client relationships, for example, the CSTD Competency Model advises training and development professionals to prepare reports for customer approval and to manage review and revision with clients as part of the second- and third-level (more detailed) competencies. The competency model also describes the deliverables (called outputs) that training and development professionals should prepare for clients and identifies the criteria for evaluating their quality. But this competency model does not address more complex competencies related to serving as the interface with clients and managing client relationships, such as placating a dissatisfied client. Other competency models face the same challenge.

Some of these competencies might go beyond the scope of generalized competencies in the CSTD competency model. For example, project management competencies are the domain of the discipline of project management. Organizations developing competency models must decide whether the need a unique set of competencies for planning and managing training and development projects, whether it refers people who need those competencies to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK®) (Project Management Institute, 2013) or whether it mixes the two – adding some project management competencies to the *Competencies for Training and Development*

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*Professionals* while also referring learning consultants to the PMBOK® for in-depth competency development.

In terms of client relationships, the *Competencies for Training and Development Professionals* note that the more advanced competencies go beyond its scope, including:

> Adaptability, analytical thinking, building partnerships with stakeholders, change management, conceptual thinking, consulting orientation, dealing with ambiguity, leadership, listening and responding, organizational awareness, relationship building, self-confidence, service orientation, strategic business sense, and synthesis of disparate facts into a coherent whole (CSTD, 2010, p. 1).

In light of this, organizations developing competency models might consider whether those competencies remain beyond the scope of the model or whether to add in some or all of those competencies. Such competencies are central to the most recent CIPD competency model (CIPD, 2013) and some, like change management, are included in the most recent ATD competency model (Arneson *et al.*, 2013).

*Broader implications of our findings.* Beyond some of the specific implications for specific competency models, this study has broader implications for the field. In fact, the results raise some vexing questions.

The first is the job title, Learning Consultant. Although some have tried to use the term "performance" in the job titles for training and development professional, such as ISPI, the evidence from the job descriptions studied does not suggest that the term has taken root.

A second and related issue is that a set of job responsibilities was conspicuous by its absence: responsibilities related to promoting performance. The literature also led us to expect certain responsibilities that we did not encounter in any of the job descriptions. One was analyzing *performance* (Gilbert, 1978; Rummler and Brache, 1995; Stoloitch and Keeps, 1999, 2006). Given the strong emphasis on performance in literature on the roles of consultants in general, the roles of performance consultants in particular and, moving beyond the scope of this study, the literature on HRD, training and development, and educational technology, we expected, at the least, more mentions of the term, performance. The number of mentions in all of the job descriptions barely comprised an interesting pattern.

More specifically, we expected to see performance woven into the individual responsibilities of the job, such as analyzing *performance* – rather than *training* – needs, recommending interventions other than training when appropriate and designing and developing these non-instructional interventions (Gilbert, 1978; Rummler and Brache, 1995; Stoloitch and Keeps, 1999, 2006). This limited adoption of the term performance and of performance-related responsibilities into the job is consistent with other studies exploring the name and work portfolios of training and development groups (Carliner and Price, 2015).

Given the centrality of evaluation to strategic HRD and the emphasis on evaluation in the literature on performance consulting, we expected that evaluation would play a more significant role in the job responsibilities of a Learning Consultant, a third issue that arises from this study. But this finding corroborates other empirical evidence suggesting that training and development professionals only engage in a limited amount of evaluation, especially complex evaluations of transfer and impact (Tharenou *et al.*, 2007). The few job descriptions that mention the evaluation of performance involved conducting individual performance evaluations, probably as part of people

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responsibilities associated with a particular position rather than a broader evaluation of performance.

In addition, given that the literature emphasizes the importance of establishing a strategic presence in organizations (Garavan *et al.*, 1995; Garavan, 1991) and also given that this literature advises that training and development is not always viewed strategically, we expected that this consultant might need to promote that message and generate business for the group, a fourth issue raised by this study. At the least, because some of the Learning Consultants worked for external providers, we expected that consultants working in those situations would be expected to generate business. So we were surprised by the lack of promotion and marketing responsibilities in the job descriptions.

As a result of the evidence in these 56 job descriptions, we conclude that these jobs are training-focused rather than performance-focused.

The evidence also suggests that Learning Consultants have a more tactical focus than suggested by the literature, which suggests that the role is more strategic. The analysis determined that traditional training activities – assessing needs, designing and developing programs and assisting with the transfer of training – are major responsibilities for Learning Consultants.

The evidence also suggests limitations to the consulting responsibilities of Learning Consultants. For example, although the literature suggested that Learning Consultants play a major role in promoting the services and strategic value of their training and development groups (such as Robinson and Robinson, 2008, 1995; Stoloitch and Keeps, 2006, 1999), the analysis of their job descriptions suggested that promotion and marketing is not a job responsibility of Learning Consultants.

Similarly, given that 39 per cent of all training is provided using technology (Miller, 2012) and the number of articles about the growth in learning and performance-related technologies – not just technologies for developing and delivering individual training programs but also enterprise-wide technologies for managing talent and learning operations – we thought employers might require more technology expertise than MS Office.

Equally surprising were the education requirements. The preference (when stated) in the job descriptions for a bachelor's degree as well as the limited number of mentions of master's degrees contrasts with the demographics of some of the professional associations serving our field. For example, more CSTD members have a master's degree than a bachelor's degree. In addition, some certification programs essentially demand post-graduate education, such as the CIPD. Achieving mid- and upper-levels of its certification process requires such education.

In other words, these results imply that the performance consultant proposed in the literature differs significantly from the learning consultant discovered in the job descriptions. The learning consultant is more focused on training and the tactical rather than on performance and the strategic. The learning consultant might not consult full-time; the prevalence of traditional training responsibilities in the majority of the job descriptions suggests that the primary focus of the job is on training and that consulting is a secondary focus. More fundamentally, the learning consultant does not realize the envisioned role of a broadly focused HRD professional providing value to employers beyond training and development programs.

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Although broader implications that go beyond this one context might also be drawn, we caution that this is just one of the three studies in this program of research. If the related studies yield similar results, managers and supervisors of performance consultants might reconsider how strategically they have fashioned the job of this highly visible staff member and, in doing so, make sure that the job truly reflects the vision underlying it.

*Limitations*

Certain issues limit this study. Some are methodological. Although we tried to word the announcement recruiting job descriptions broadly enough that it would generate many samples – focusing more on responsibilities and naming several job titles identified in consultation with others and job search databases – perhaps we wrote the announcement too broadly because 56.9 per cent of the job descriptions received in could not be used in the study suggests. Perhaps that suggests some broader confusion exists around this particular job role. Although the results of the study might eventually clarify understanding of the job, perhaps the broad wording of the recruiting announcement resulted in the large percentage of unusable job descriptions and might have even prevented people who had relevant job descriptions from submitting them.

Although anonymizing the job descriptions protected the participants, lacking information about the size, location and industry of the employers prevented some deeper analysis of the job descriptions, such as an assessment of differences in responsibilities across industries.

One of the possible reasons that the job descriptions were training-focused and none descriptions addressed performance might be the unintentional byproduct of exclusively recruiting job descriptions through a training and development organization. Perhaps had we recruited through a performance improvement organization, like the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) or a broader Human Resource Management organization, such as the Canadian Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA), we might have received a different mix of job descriptions.

Similarly, this study only included job descriptions from Canadian employers. The descriptions might differ in other jurisdictions. Furthermore, because similar studies have not been conducted in other national contexts, we have no point of comparison for this data.

Perhaps the most significant limitation, however, is that we only analyzed job descriptions. Job descriptions merely document the official or idealized expectations of the position; they may or may not match the actual responsibilities of the job.

*Suggestions for future research*

Because of the last limitations, identifying the actual responsibilities of a learning consultant and determining the extent to which the two sets of responsibilities match one another – are essential future studies. These studies are part of the research program that includes this study. Organizations should also wait for the completion of other studies in this program of research before drawing broader conclusions about the position.

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Furthermore, because the study was only conducted in Canada, future studies might analyze descriptions of learning consultant positions in other countries to asses the extent to which the conclusions of this study apply in other jurisdictions.

## Note

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