



ELLI

The Seven Dimensions of Learning Power

Using the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory to improve personal learning, guide organisational learning design and create powerful learning environments



Engage learners and inspire personal, team and organisational change



working with
and on behalf of

ViTaL 
Partnerships
Values in Teaching and Learning

ELLI: THE EFFECTIVE LIFELONG LEARNING INVENTORY

Enhancing Learning Power



ELLI Overview

The Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) research first identified, then devised a scientifically rigorous way of assessing, the essential characteristics of effective lifelong learners. ELLI is three things in one:

1. A theory of learning
2. An instrument for self-assessing learning capacity and dispositions
3. A set of strategies for developing learning capacity: referred to as 'Learning Power'

At a time of constant and accelerating change, to organisations, roles and technologies, we need, more than ever, to be effective learners.

This need for life-long learning is widely recognised. However, the reality of our modern world, with its emphasis on data, accountability, controls and compliance means that for many, formal education and training fail to produce willing, confident and creative learners.

The research and validation work that has gone into ELLI has given us a means of exploring personal and organisational learning that is proving remarkably successful in creating and maintaining learning environments within which individual learners can thrive.

Research Background

The ELLI Research Programme at the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol was led by Research Fellow Dr Ruth Deakin Crick and funded by the Lifelong Learning Foundation.

Through an exhaustive investigation of literature on learning and what impacts upon it, followed by extensive consultation with academic experts, learners and practitioners, the ELLI research team generated a huge amount of verbal data on what factors affect an individual's 'Learning Power'. These factors embrace not only the psychology of the learner, but also external factors such as social psychology, the management of the learning environment, how the learning is delivered and an individual's past history of learning.

Seven dimensions of 'Learning Power' emerged, via factor analysis, each with elements of 'thinking, feeling and doing', making the ELLI Inventory more holistic than some other approaches which treat individual learning in a more limited way.

Once these seven factors were established and statistically validated, a seventy-two item questionnaire was created and also validated through further research. On-line completion of this questionnaire produces an individual profile of the learner. This profile then becomes the starting point for coaching and mentoring conversations and can be used as a basis for establishing strategies that will develop learning power.

When used collectively in groups, teams and organisations the profiles can offer insights into a wide range of learning and development issues related to learning design, learning support and long term application.

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The Seven Learning Dimensions

The seven dimensions of 'learning power' which emerged from the research, each with elements of 'thinking, feeling and doing' are:

- changing and learning - a sense of myself as someone who learns and changes over time
- critical curiosity - an orientation to want to 'get beneath the surface'
- meaning making - making connections and seeing that learning 'matters to me'
- creativity - risk-taking, playfulness, imagination and intuition
- learning relationships - learning with and from others and also able to manage without them
- strategic awareness - being aware of my thoughts, feelings and actions as a learner and able to use that awareness to manage learning processes
- resilience - the readiness to persevere in the development of my own learning power

In combination, these dimensions illustrate an individual's learning power. This can offer powerful insights into how individuals learn and how they can enhance their learning capacity.

The ELLI Instrument

One of the most important aspects of ELLI is that it is a 'self-report' inventory: in other words, it is a tool that re-organises what learners say about themselves into a profile on the seven dimensions.

This means that the data produced by the tool, whether for an individual or an organisation, is contextual: its outcomes will be affected by the learner's perception of herself at a point in time, in relation to the learning context (or contexts) in mind at that time. This allows the tool to be repeated to reflect and report on changes in a learner's self-perception and/or changes in the learning context. In organisational settings this is of particular value as it means the 'learning providers' are in a position to intervene in ways that are very likely to affect learning power.

Other important aspects of the instrument are that it:

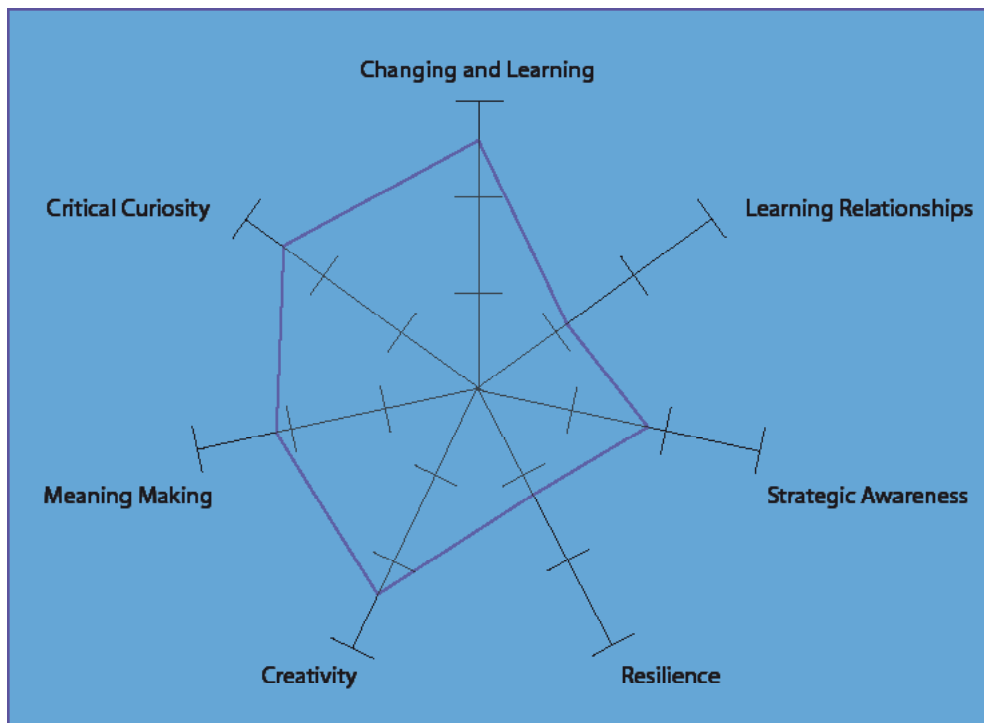
- appears to have high 'face-validity'
- creates numerical 'raw scores', stored in a database that makes the aggregated data available for interrogation and analysis
- can therefore contribute usefully to institutional self-evaluation

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Example ELLI Profile



Organisational Value

What advantages can ELLI offer to my organisation?

Within organisations, structured use of the ELLI methodology offers the chance to:

- Improve the quality of learning design and delivery, so that it appeals to the widest range of learners possible and delivers a better return on investment
- Improve the ability of managers, coaches and mentors to work effectively with individuals by increasing awareness of learning strengths and development areas
- Improve the 'take-up' of non-compulsory training, and the retention of all training, by offering more personalised 'routes' to the achievement of agreed learning outcomes
- Contribute to a culture in which learning, and the management of learning, are seen as integral to organisational performance and more highly valued across the whole organisation
- Optimise 'informal learning' by demonstrating its value in support of, or in place of, formal learning and training programmes

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Applications

ELLI and Individual Coaching

ELLI methodology offers the opportunity to develop high quality coaching relationships between individual employees and coaches or mentors. If both parties have an understanding of the employee's learning profile this can provide the basis for focused coaching conversations, especially those geared towards critical path analysis, goal-setting, performance review, career development, succession planning and talent management. Specific examples include:

- As an integral part of an induction process: identifying the new employees' attitudes and approaches to learning and using these to plan personalised 'induction learning packages'
- As a means of handing responsibility for personal learning and development to motivated and capable employees eg. graduate recruits, 'fast-track' or 'high potential' young managers, so that they are better equipped to take advantage of appropriate learning opportunities
- As a way of supporting experienced employees who need to accelerate their learning as job roles, responsibilities and technology changes require them to adopt new skills and behaviours
- As a means of ensuring that personal action and development plans will be genuinely personal, kept alive and actually implemented, following PDP conversations, training or development interventions

ELLI and Performance Management

ELLI methodology may support operational and line managers in their responsibility for developing and monitoring the performance of their staff. Many managers find it difficult to maintain a 'developmental' relationship with employees as a normal part of their daily work - often limiting their performance management activity to required (and much dreaded!) 'appraisal' interviews. Used within an established and trusted relationship, ELLI offers managers a model for working with their staff to:

1. Identify trusted learning methods/approaches and match these to opportunities for workplace development (eg. a staff member with highly developed 'critical curiosity' may be motivated by the opportunity to work on a project that requires a lot of investigative and research skills, whilst a highly creative learner may enjoy being involved in new product or process innovation).
2. Identify less well-developed skills and understand if there are contextual factors preventing these dispositions being developed (eg. a learner with room to improve her strategic awareness, or her critical curiosity, might have been in an environment where other people did all the planning and finding out and she followed. Once these factors are identified, management practices can change and opportunities for learning development identified.)
3. Build learning development objectives into long-term professional development plans. This ensures that employees are challenged to develop long-term 'learning to learn' skills, in addition to the job-related competences that may be specific to a particular professional role.

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Applications

ELLI and Learning Design

ELLI offers knowledge and tools that are crucial to anyone involved in the design and delivery of training and learning courses, programmes and events or in the creation of 'learning environments'. ELLI offers an immediately accessible 'checklist' to support good learning design and ensure that the learning made available in organisations is structured in ways that are learner-centred. It raises awareness of the need to build learning power by developing competence in a variety of learning skills and also to recognise that while those skills are being developed, some leaders may need additional support, flexibility and choice in how they work. ELLI helps learning and development professionals to:

- Ensure that learning design actively uses and develops all 7 dimensions of learning
- Offer the same learning material through different media/activities to help to develop 'rounded' learning
- Create a better understanding of how to design different 'gateways' to access the same learning content and achieve the same learning outcomes whilst supporting different learning strategies
- Create materials/supporting resources that will add value to primary learning designs eg. additional exercises and techniques for maximising and reinforcing available learning

If the ELLI profile is completed by a group (eg. a working team or an action learning set) it can also produce 'group profiles', charts that give insights into the strengths and needs of a particular learning group. This can be of significant value to a learning designer, trainer or facilitator in preparing appropriate programmes for them.

For example, knowing that a group in general scores high on 'critical curiosity' may enable them to work successfully with a lot of independent, problem-based, investigative learning methods. A group with a less well developed ability in this area, presented with a requirement for this type of research, might become easily frustrated unless developing this has been accepted as a part of their learning purpose and might, in any case, need a much higher level of 'instructor support' with it.

If a learning facilitator is aware that s/he is working with a group with low self-reports in the area of 'meaning making', there might be a greater need to help the group make connections between the 'simulated experience' on a training programme and the 'concrete experience' of the workplace. There might also be a greater need to explain how individual choices and decisions impact on wider organisational issues.

ELLI and Self-Managed Learning

ELLI helps those responsible for managing their own learning to understand more about their own strengths in order to maximise learning opportunities and learn efficiently. This includes establishing how to 'navigate' learning opportunities, practise learning methods, and choose from a wide variety of challenges and learning strategies, in order to develop a more rounded learning power profile.

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Learning Dimensions

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|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Changing and Learning | Being like..... 'The Explorer' Changing and Learning versus being stuck and static | Seeing learning as a positive experience. Seeking out new learning opportunities. Accepting responsibility for learning and having belief in personal capacity to learn/change. |
| Critical Curiosity | Being like..... 'The Investigator' Critical Curiosity versus passivity | Enjoying a challenge and confronting perplexity. Learning by working things out, problem-solving, seeking out information and better understanding. Enjoying questioning, finding out, self-directed research; refusing to accept things at face value. |
| Meaning Making | Being like..... 'The Integrator' Meaning Making versus data accumulation | Seeking to make connections, integrate ideas, make a 'whole' from separate parts. Relating new learning to relevant past and current personal experience. Pulling learning from different sources. |
| Creativity | Being like..... 'The Inventor' Creativity versus being rule-bound | Exploring possibilities, enjoying novelty and uncertainty. Using creative imagination; 'playing' with ideas and concepts. Willing to let go of control and take risks, seeing mistakes as opportunities for learning. |
| Resilience | Being like..... 'The Builder' Resilience versus fragility and dependence | Enjoying problem-based learning. Being willing to 'wrestle' with difficult concepts and persistent in achieving personal goals. Good at accepting and managing negative emotions, fears and frustrations related to learning. |
| Strategic Awareness | Being like..... 'The Navigator' Strategic Awareness versus being robotic | Being thoughtful about intentions and making conscious choices about how to learn. Planning and applying effective learning strategies; reflecting upon personal learning experiences and taking responsibility for own learning development. |
| Learning Relationships | Being like..... 'The Networker' Positive Learning Relationships versus isolation or dependence | Having good social resources to learn through; knowing how to work with others. Benefits from pooled learning and shared expertise, enjoying collaboration but confident and capable when required to work alone. |

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ELLI in Action

Individual Learner Profiles

The ELLI 'project leader' or learning designer can work with individual profiles and then extend to group profiles.

Learning Group Profiles

Learning Design Applying 7 dimensions

Development of 'learning intervention' to meet specific learning objectives and outcomes. Does the learning methodology allow for application of each of the 7 dimensions of learning?

If there is a clear set of learning strengths and weaknesses shown by the learning group profile, is this being taken into account in the learning design? Are there opportunities to include activities that will strengthen less well developed dimensions?

Can you develop 'extension activities', related to the 7 dimensions, to provide additional 'learning to learn' skills whilst working on key subject-matter content?

Is there an opportunity for individual and group learning review and evaluation as part of the learning process?

Are the approaches that are being taken to internal learning and development consistent with what ELLI tells us about Learning Power? Are we designing and delivering learning initiatives that will build organisational learning power and support a sustainable learning environment?

Individual Learning Profiles, supported by mentoring conversations, leading to greater self-awareness about personal learning power.

Recommended 'extension modules' to introduce tools and techniques for developing individual dimensions of learning power: practising and rehearsing less well developed learning skills.

Learning and Changing Module

Critical Curiosity Module

Meaning Making Module

Creativity Module

Resilience Module

Strategic Awareness Module

Learning Relationships Module

Creation of individual 'Learning Power Development Plans' as part of Professional Development Planning. How can I work on the achievement of performance goals whilst at the same time developing my personal learning power?

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Applying ELLI in your Organisation: An example model

