

SFIA

AT THE HEART OF BUSINESS CHANGE

IBM Certified Consulting Learning Specialist Paul Jagger FBCS explains how SFIA version 5 repositions learning and development (L&D) at the heart of business change.

In December 2011 the SFIA Foundation launched version 5 of the Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA) at the BCS Offices in Covent Garden, London. I attended the launch event as a representative of the BCS Learning & Development Specialist Group (L&D SG). What follows is my perspective on some very important changes to SFIA that impact the learning and development (L&D) professional working in IT and the computing science/IT teacher working in secondary, higher or further education.

So what has changed?

The biggest change announced in SFIA version 5 is that of L&D moving in to the category of Business Change and the creation of a new sub-category entitled 'skills management'. This places workplace L&D at the heart of business change

– recognising that learning is the people side of successful change.

The new skills management category identifies seven skills (see box). Several of these skills have been renamed and their descriptions updated

from SFIA version 4, while others are entirely new, including 'Teaching and Subject Formation', a skill specifically intended to recognise the specific IT/computing science expertise that qualified teachers and higher education tutors and lecturers bring to the IT profession. Other skills are also relevant to the education sector, including Learning Design and Development, Learning Delivery and Learning Assessment.

An important point to note is that all these skills have representation at SFIA level 5 (or higher), which is the entry point for Chartered IT Professional (CITP). Furthermore, CITP has a specialism entitled 'learning and development' ensuring that Chartered status is open to all L&D practitioners in business and teachers, tutors and lecturers in compulsory and higher education.

Why were the changes needed?

L&D was very poorly represented in SFIA and the role of educators in schools and academia was simply not recognised. Considering that many IT enabled business change projects fail to deliver because they do not pay sufficient attention to winning hearts and minds, or preparing people to work in new ways or with new

systems, processes and technologies – it is vital that L&D takes its place at the heart of IT enabled business change.

What was the situation with L&D in earlier versions of SFIA?

In previous versions of SFIA, the learning and professional development related skills were, dare I say it, hidden away under the category 'Procurement and Management Support', clearly this is a category with little, if any, relevance to workplace L&D. Furthermore, there was no representation of teacher, tutors and researchers working in computing science and information technology teaching – this despite recognition among professional bodies, government and industry of the need to align compulsory and higher education in IT with the needs of employers. The dire state of IT teaching in UK schools has thankfully been recognised by government and Michael Gove has announced some bold plans to return computing science to the National Curriculum.

Why was learning and development so poorly represented?

I believe this situation arose because nobody stood up for L&D in the past, so our skills were relegated to the odds and ends bin of SFIA – and many L&D skills were simply omitted.

Moreover, many of the skills defined for L&D professionals were still described as either education and training or IT training related – belying a long outmoded view of L&D as primarily concerned with delivering formal classroom training courses, this despite the fact that recent research suggests that only 10 per cent of work based learning happens in a formal context.

In the past when I challenged the positioning of L&D in SFIA, the response I (and others) received was 'they are only categories, it doesn't really matter', to which my response was to invite the SFIA Foundation to move Project Management under Procurement and see how well that would be received by the project management community.

Why is this so important for business?

The UK economy in general and the IT industry in particular is suffering as a result of the devaluation of IT/computing science in the classroom. Business cannot afford to extend that devaluation in to the workplace – continuous learning is all we have to sustain competitive advantage in the information society.

How did the BCS L&D Specialist Group contribute to the changes?

The BCS L&D SG made a very significant contribution to the latest version of SFIA both prior to and during the public consultation on SFIA version 5, with many members weighing in on the debate about the future positioning of workplace L&D within SFIA. Several fellow BCS L&D SG committee members made personal representation to the SFIA board and secured the backing of industry and academia for some long overdue and much needed changes to the SFIA skills for L&D practitioners in IT. Furthermore, the SFIA version 5 project board included representatives from QA the UK's leading commercial IT training provider and the Open University – one of the first universities to fully align its undergraduate computing/IT curriculum with SFIA.

How do these changes fit in with the wider context of L&D in IT?

In the December issue of *ITNOW* the Chair of the BCS L&D SG committee member, Jooli Atkins, set out her views on the shift in emphasis from 'IT training' to 'learning and development' that has been reflected across the profession, firstly with the renaming of the BCS IT Training SG to the L&D SG in November 2010 and more recently with the rebranding of the Institute of IT Training as the Learning and Performance Institute in September 2011. The latest changes to SFIA continue this shift in emphasis and go further by positioning learning and development as a function of the SFIA category 'business change' – a symbolic change perhaps, but one that reflects the reality of modern workplace learning and development practice where learning and development

is an enabler of change.

I believe that in the knowledge economy, the importance of our ability to learn and then successfully apply knowledge and skills are the only truly sustainable competitive advantages. Those of us working in the IT profession are the engine of the knowledge economy and we know only too well how important it is for us to continuously learn (and unlearn) in order to remain competitive on both a personal and organisational level.

For too long the importance of L&D has not been recognised by business leaders, which perhaps explains why L&D is often relegated to a side-show of HR, itself very much a side-show in many businesses. The changes in SFIA version 5 will not fix that situation overnight, but they are a significant step in the right direction in the IT profession.

The next step must be for workplace L&D to evolve into the champion of business change – and take its rightful seat at the top table of business as evidenced by the trend in major US corporations to appoint chief learning officers.

I look forward to the day when learning in the classroom and the boardroom are equally valued and seen as the route to future professional success.

REFERENCES

www.bcs.org/sfiaplus and/or www.sfia.org.uk

BCS Learning & Development Specialist Group: www.bcs.org/category/9399

Chartered IT Professional registration: www.bcs.org/category/10972

Eric Schmit's critique of UK education system: <http://bit.ly/qFleag>

SFIA v. 5 launch event videos and presentations: www.sfia.org.uk/cgi-bin/wms.pl/2788



SFIA Skills

Learning & Development Management
Learning & Development Assessment
Learning Design & Development
Learning Delivery
Teaching & Subject Formation
Resourcing
Professional Development

SFIA Levels

3-7
3-6
4,5
3-5
5,6
5,6
4-6