Building and Retaining Membership in a Digital Learning Professional Association

Leadership and Learning in Organizations

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Area of Inquiry

Partner Organization

The Northeast Digital Learning Association (NEDLA) has existed since 2007 (formerly known as PADLA) and is the regional chapter (Northeast & Mid-Atlantic US from Maine to Virginia) of an established national organization, the USDLA. NEDLA serves digital learning professionals in all fields, aiming to create community, share digital best practices, and freely exchange ideas and information between industries. The board is made up primarily of volunteers from various fields focused on digital learning. Although they have a long history as "PADLA" (Pennsylvania Digital Learning Association), the previous leadership's last change before leaving was to rebrand as NEDLA, in the hopes of expanding the organization's reach beyond the area of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. However, the previous leadership stepped down shortly after making that change. Since NEDLA has a new leadership team and a weakened membership due to the pandemic, NEDLA is now taking the time to consider possible futures and ways to build the organization back up. In some ways, it is the beginning of a new organization. Ultimately, the new leadership is looking to increase their membership and retention, build infrastructure within the organization, and improve outcomes for the members they serve. Since NEDLA is undergoing a lot of change, it is seeking a new direction and aiming to build infrastructure. My area of inquiry and focus will be around building digital/online communities through membership engagement.

Historically, the organization as PADLA was run by a single person and very much functioned because of that one person's effort. While that effort was helpful in keeping the community together and many members still think of NEDLA/PADLA by

that original leader's name, there was very little infrastructure created or member tracking done. Because of this, when the original leader retired and new leadership entered, there was very little information to work from. It is as if they're building many of their processes from the ground up. This is the problem, both in terms of trying to make transformational change and in remaining relevant, there is no information or process to build from.

The new leadership team has already started by revamping the mission, vision, and values. Their next goal is to start generating programming. In prior research, I was able to help them by doing interviews and getting to know their membership better through a situative lens. Their hope is that by partnering with me, they can continue that work and more to help bring their members to the forefront and build infrastructure around maintaining member information. Their goal is to have a stronger process and infrastructure in place that will help them work with members going forward and allow for better continuity of service, even during leadership changes.

This problem is important since there are many members who relied on this community for sharing best practices and finding people and resources to help them in their roles. Further, the opportunity to share across industries is often rare and this provides a local, relevant place for professionals to do that. This issue likely stems from a lack of infrastructure in the past and the leadership style of previous leaders, but there may be other contributing factors I'm not aware of. Perhaps members preferred a less rigid structure to associate with each other.

In terms of evidence, there is an absence of evidence entirely, which is partly the problem. The organization has no systems in place for gathering feedback or data to

analyze membership or needs. The only way we know this problem exists is because NEDLA knows there is a lack of infrastructure and member's observe activity has declined.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders include three main categories, though there are perhaps countless indirect stakeholders beyond this. First, the board of NEDLA, who has asked me to help them work through these challenges. Their oversight, work, and expectations are the most direct feedback and engagement I'll receive. Their work to bring NEDLA forward will be key in achieving my capstone goals. The board consists of a variety of professionals from different industries but with a shared background of digital learning. In this way, they are representative of the members they seek to serve.

Second, the members of NEDLA, who will be receiving programming and resources through the organization. Ultimately, this work is to serve them (and indirectly their stakeholders as well). Improvements to infrastructure, including member feedback, program evaluation, and building digital community will directly impact the members of the organization and potentially attract new members as well. As has been shown in my initial study, the members themselves are looking for a community of practitioners to learn and bounce ideas off of. Offering even this one single service is of great interest to the members I interviewed, many feel somewhat on their own and are looking to learn from others in their field.

Finally, we can also say NEDLA serves the people who receive digital learning/education/training from the members of their organization. Ultimately, by sharing ideas and creating a community of best practices, those the digital learning
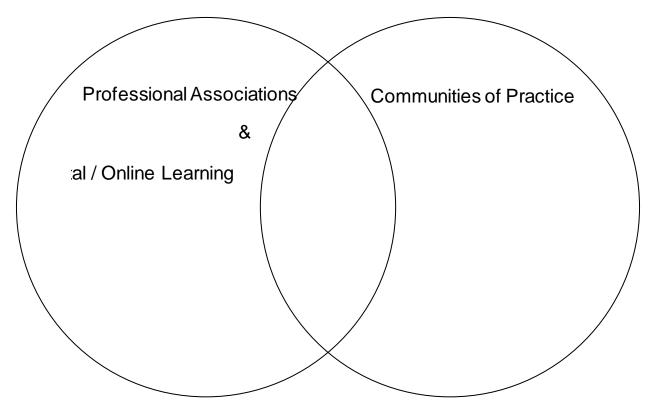
community serves are benefited by better education, training, or learning in their respective areas. Further, there may be deeper cross-industry connections that get made from this initial connection that strengthen the work of organizations. While some of these things may take time, it does suggest that indirect stakeholders would be anyone in the organization of a member of NEDLA, both as receivers of digital learning or members of organizations that become connected.

Literature Review

Approach

This study will seek to understand what drives members to participate and learn in the professional membership organization, NEDLA, which aims to be a community of practice, with a focus on digital and online learning. Since NEDLA is an organization focused on learning and interested in understanding participation and motivation of its members, a situated perspective on learning, motivation, and participation is not only extremely relevant but also likely to be an extremely productive approach. Further, understanding members and potential members' situated experiences both within and outside NEDLA will inform their participation within NEDLA. Ahead, this section will lay out a theoretical approach to understanding NEDLA and their membership via a situated lens using the foundational literature of situated identity and motivation related to learning within communities of practice. Then, the following section will examine professional organizations and how they align to communities of practice (and where they may deviate, as not all professional associations are communities of practice). And finally, because NEDLA is a part of the US Digital Learning Association (USDLA) and their work takes place primarily online, the second section will also connect digital and

online learning at the individual level with activities and engagement in communities of practice and professional associations. These two sections will lay the groundwork for understanding NEDLA's membership and their memberships participation, making recommendations toward growing the membership base, and rebuilding its infrastructure around key organizational practices.

Professional Associations
&
al / Online Learning

Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice (CoPs)

When considering communities of practice, this study will focus on two important concepts based on the research below. First, individuals join or remain in communities of practice to explore or participate in contexts that allow them to try new identities, continue in identities that are important to them, or connect with others who share the same identity. Second, communities of practice require a strong backbone of knowledge building behaviors based on peer interaction that allows for individuals to reframe their thinking and create community understanding.

First, here is one definition of communities of practice which this study will be using: "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger-Trayner, 2020, What are communities of practice?, para. 1). Going further, from a situated perspective, learning occurs using environmental resources including other members, artifacts, tools, etc., which means learning occurs always in relation to the environment (Hand & Gresalfi, 2015). The difference between learning and identity relates to what resources people draw on, informational or interpersonal, where interpersonal resources allow for learners to position themselves among others and to make sense of themselves in a context (Hand & Gresalfi, 2015). Put another way, identity is how people come to understand themselves as they learn and in relation to others in a community during their learning (Nolen et al., 2015). Nolen et al. go on to say that learning involves engaging with a particular context, engaging with the tools, practices and possible identities offered by the community to participate and, in relation to that space, construct identities and positioning themselves against others in the community, with a desire to take on that identity (Nolen et al., 2015). These concepts are foundational to situative motivation and identity but also suggest that understanding the contexts in which someone participates is a clear avenue for understanding their motivation. As described above, if an individual wants to be identified as a member of a group, or participate in a group in a certain way, there must be a context that allows them to do so. Motivation changes with context (Turner & Patrick, 2008). Therefore, members may join groups to seek out contexts that allow them to participate in identities they want for themselves and in relation to others. Further, the ability to participate in a

particular identity (or context or with a particular tool) may indicate why a member might engage with organizations in certain ways.

In 2001, when the concept of communities of practice was still emerging, research on communities of practice had not yet covered virtual communities (Johnson, 2001). However, recently there have been many studies in a variety of contexts on the idea of virtual or online communities of practice. In 2019, Gasson and Waters conducted a study on situated professional knowledge in a 10-week graduate course. Although the study was done on a course and not an association/organization like NEDLA, this course still mimics elements of NEDLA because it is a group of professionals coming together online to learn. Using data from online discussion boards in the course, Gasson and Waters were able to see how interactions online allowed participants to co-construct situated knowledge that simulated experiential learning (Gasson & Waters, 2019). This paper is important for two reasons: First, it offers a model for knowledge building behaviors that can be used to examine other online communities, such as NEDLA, and helps to explain how community knowledge building and peer learning occur. In this framework, individuals go through 4 levels, contextualization, reflections, problematization, and objectification.

Contextualization	Exploration of relevant structures of meaning via story, analogy, or reference
Reflection	Debate fit of salient frame with individuals' local reality (experienced context of application)
Problematization	Exposure of assumptional framework mismatch, individual breakdown, reframing
Objectification	Objectification of consensus frame to

	provide generic reality.

(Gasson & Waters, 2019)

These levels will be used as a framework for building and interpreting observation protocols. Second, it demonstrates that those behaviors were highly dependent on peer influencers to validate their own frames and to explore other's sense-making of the problem or situation (Gasson & Waters, 2019) In other words, individuals do not simply engage with a group as a distinct individual, they engage with peers, explore other member's understandings, and weave community/peer understanding into their individual sense-making (and sometimes vice versa). This is why peers and peer learning are so important, because they offer new ways of thinking for individuals to work from within the community, without which, individual understanding would not be able to integrate new thinking.

While the previous framework will be leveraged for observation and interviews, since it focuses on the process of reframing ideas via interaction with peers, it does not focus as heavily on the resources and tools that are involved. Gunawardena et al focused on online communities of practice through social networking tools as an opportunity for metacognition (Gunawardena et al., 2009). This is an important distinction because in this study, while the process shares many similar traits to the above framework in terms of how people reframe their understanding, this study focuses on how those reframed understandings become expressed via a wiki (a resource that all participants could edit and contribute to) and other tools and resources. This is important because in a digital space, it is not just interaction through the moment where reframing occurs. The process of exploring new frames of understanding through

engagement and weaving a community understanding can happen not just in conversation but embedded in the artifacts the community creates.

In 2018, Sentence and Humphreys also recently examined a grass-roots community of professional practice that supports both academia and industry called Computing At School (CAS) in the context of situated learning theory (Sentance & Humphreys, 2018). CAS is a particularly useful comparison to NEDLA because in 2014, a large curriculum change left many teachers in need of professional resources and support to either learn the new (coming from the old curriculum) or to enter the space entirely. NEDLA supports both programming and resources on digital learning and technology, a field which is in constant change and similar to CAS's situation. One key point is that the organization is teacher owned and teacher driven. While NEDLA is not truly a grassroots organization, this does represent a goal for NEDLA, specifically the goal of creating an environment with the free exchange of ideas and service to members. The paper also concludes that providing "professional learning that is delivered, formulaic, and didactic will not help teachers and learners … as much as an understanding of the ways in which teachers support and learn from each other" (Sentance & Humphreys, 2018, p.19), suggesting again that peer-to-peer, situated shared or co-constructed knowledge is more important than the type of programming or resources provided.

Professional Associations & Digital/Online Learning

First, professional associations enjoy a variety of definitions depending on what aspects of the association are under consideration by the study going on. For the purposes of this study, "professional associations are identification and organizing

bodies for fields of professional practice" and often come with private benefits or public benefits for members (Hager, 2014, p.40S). Further, "professional associations provide opportunities to engage within and across sectors, industries, and professions because they often form around shared personal or professional interests" (Young & Berlan, 2021, p.2). This is particularly relevant because NEDLA also aspires to bring a variety of sectors together around digital learning. In the US these are often 501(c)(3) organizations under the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) code and therefore gain funding primarily through dues, donations, grants, endowments, and service sales (Ki & Cho, 2019), in NEDLA's case, dues. Professional associations can be varied in focus and membership depending on the sector they participate in, which may affect how they participate. For example, members of non-profit and government sectors are more likely to incur the cost of membership than for-profit (Young & Berlan, 2021). Further, non-profit and government sectors view benefits of a professional association through a lens that prioritizes public benefits, cultivating their field, and want to be connected to something larger than themselves (Young & Berlan, 2021). Finally, Wenger (2011) observed professional associations as a practical application of communities of practice themselves, thus the connection in this study.

Professional associations perform a variety of functions, including but not limited to creating meaning, promoting learning, and acting as stewards of their professions. Haynes and Samuel (2006) describe many emerging trends at the time, which are still relevant and seen now in many professional associations today. Some of those activities include creating meaning, building a learning culture, and recognizing themselves as living systems that need to be able to adapt to change (Haynes &

Samuel, 2006). This reflects what a community of practice does as well. Also, because members of professional associations are not always steadfast in their commitment to their professional association, many associations have begun incorporating peer-to-peer learning activities as an alternative to traditional offerings to build more value for members (Wenger, 2011). Learning also occurs through facilitating mentoring and represents another function of professional associations, which can be formal or informal, where typically formal structures are indicative of longer lasting mentoring programs (Zabel, 2009). Interestingly, younger members and newcomers were less interested in tangible benefits (unlike older more established members), which may be understood as younger professionals looking to affirm their identity (Zabel, 2009). This also connects back to the literature on communities of practice where participation and identity are one and the same. And finally, Weller also describes how professional associations can act as communities of practice, stating ultimately, associations serve an important role in negotiating societal and organizational norms as well as the boundaries of communities and the evolution of those communities' practices. (Weller, 2017).

One of the earlier studies done in 2003 on online communities of practice (OCoPs) focused on faculty communities of practice and while it primarily discussed the transition from Faculty Learning Communities to Communities of Practice, it also describes how to shift from physical to online modalities at the time (Sherer et al., 2003). Further, this article describes the importance both of connecting the community to resources outside itself (in this case, outside the institution) and the importance of supporting technology that supports the community (Sherer et al., 2003). This is

relevant both because of NEDLA's history as a primarily in-person community and because NEDLA is trying to transition to a more online approach to participation.

Communities are constant interaction, peer to peer, group to individual, and even group to group. When considering learning, several frames must be taken into account at once in order to make sense of what is happening in a community, in an individual, and the interaction between the two. For example, knowledgeable instructors and peers create learning societies, work side-by-side, and co-construct knowledge together (AlFuqaha, 2013). Beekeepers and maple syrup producers in Maine also sought out peer-to-peer and expert-to-peer learning, but also perceived benefits from fostering community and friendships as well (Velardi et al., 2021). Here again we see the value of community-based approaches and this stresses once again the interaction of peers and suggests that for the community to work, knowledgeable instructors and learners must be peers to build the community and co-construct together. However, self-directed learning (SDL) explains an individual's motivation for joining a group. In SDL, learners define and achieve their own learning goals, making learning intensely purposeful, self-motivating, and growth-oriented (Morris, 2019). By participating in multiple CoPs, a learner creates personal learning networks, which also suggests learning is informal, situated, and built around common practices (Wang, 2011). Although it is often important to focus on the learner taking on meaning-making, it is not in a social or contextual vacuum and requires the individual to balance their own goals with societal needs (Morris, 2019). This is how the individual connects with communities, to take on new identities, common practices, and resources, as a part of their own learning and to bring their learning journey into a new space. Ideally, a place where they can be a part

of something larger and where that larger entity can help define societal needs and contextualize problems for the individual.

There are, however, several limits and problems with digital learning itself and the research that has been done on online communities and learning until now. These problems are included in this study to help describe the context of the field and provide markers on the limitations of acting and doing research in digital learning spaces. For example, sampling problems, where the most visible participants are the most focused on as well as focusing on low-level but easy-to-collect metrics, which may provide data but limits the creation of a substantive definition on what participation really means (Malinen, 2015). Further, most research does not account for opportunity differences among adult learners. For example, access to technology for African-American adult learners may limit how learners can bring learning experiences to their current day-to-day lives (Bullock 2019). Digital equality plays a major role in understanding online communities and that for those on the margins of access, traditional strategies may be less effective (Smythe and Breshears, 2017). In some cases, direct instruction was required to bypass key struggles in achieving certain tasks and suggests that high stakes activities for participating in society should be the basis for digital literacy (Smythe and Breshears, 2017). Lastly, digital access and internet access are not static concepts, an individual's access may change over time or the technology itself may change and require additional learning to become proficient again (Smythe and Breshears, 2017). While this last study is less likely to be an issue in an online digital learning field, it is important to keep in mind the boundaries of the field itself and that those boundaries may especially affect newcomers in unexpected ways.

Research Questions

1. *What do digital learning professionals perceive as valuable about professional associations?*

This question explores what digital learning professionals find valuable in professional associations. Primarily through interviews and observation, there will either be confirmation or an interesting tension between what digital learning professionals say they find valuable and how they actually participate in their associations. As the literature has shown, there are a variety of reasons why digital learning professionals might belong to or participate in professional associations and exploring what they find valuable will be important in understanding why they join or participate.

2. *What role does identity and motivation play in creating positive experiences for digital learning professionals?*

This question is supported by the idea that, according to the literature, participation and behavior are linked to identity and motivation very closely. By observing digital learning experiences and by interviewing on those experiences, it is possible to learn how digital learning professionals participate in their professional associations and then understand how that connects to motivation and participation. In some cases, once again, there may be a tension between how the digital learning professional participates versus how they see themselves or their motivation.

3. *How do professional associations support the learning of digital learning professionals?*

This is a continuation of the second question but shifts the focus to the professional associations. Since the literature describes professional associations as a

medium which plays an important role in how norms, practices, and communities develop, it is important to explore how professional associations actually do that in tangible ways, for example, creating opportunities for socializing and networking, how they structure events, and what other resources they offer.

Data Collection

Three types of data were collected (survey, interviews, and observation) between November 2022 and January 2023. The primary group targeted for the study were current, existing members of NEDLA. Surveys were sent three times from November to January. The survey included an invitation for participants to be interviewed for the study one-on-one over Zoom. Through the survey, I hoped to gain an understanding of what members are feeling broadly as well as identify some basic demographic information and interest in participating further. Since participants were digital learning professionals, internet access is likely available and, as busy professionals, the flexibility of an online format likely elicited a stronger participation rate. However, due to NEDLA's lack of data about how many members are participating actively (there is no current list), it was difficult to determine if it was a representative amount of respondents. Most communication for the organization goes out through 3 primary avenues: NEDLA leadership's linkedin, NEDLA's group page and social media (which has 38 members) and an email list of around 1,000 members (maintained by NEDLA, but not all are active running memberships at this point). These methods were how the survey was sent out for NEDLA members.

Since NEDLA is struggling to get participation and membership, a secondary group was surveyed at the same time using the same survey. Digital learning

professionals in high traffic Linkedin groups focused on digital learning, instructional design, and educational technology were focused on as well, as they are all potential members of NEDLA and represent people NEDLA would like to involve as members. Linkedin groups included are as follows:

- Instructional Design Central (IDC) - Approximately 30,000 members

  https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2672881/

- Freelance in Instructional Design and E-Learning Industry - Approximately 28,000 members https://www.linkedin.com/groups/3638251/

- The Instructional Design Forum - Approximately 18,000 members

  https://www.linkedin.com/groups/1988597/

- eLearning Industry - Approximately 135,000 members

  https://www.linkedin.com/groups/110953/

- Instructional Designers - Approximately 33,000 members

  https://www.linkedin.com/groups/58371/

- The Learning Guild Community - Approximately 67,000 members

  https://www.linkedin.com/groups/102144/

These groups were largely selected based on relevance and convenience but represent participants who are building their own personal learning networks and seeking out communities to share and learn from. Further, several of the groups are gated only to learning professionals and admittance is only gained after a review. The review process is not the same for each and not obvious in every group, so there may be some unknown bias in the sample. While this does affect the sampling for the study, it also means anyone in these groups were admitted by an active community of digital

learning professionals. So the sample will represent what online digital learning communities consider to be digital learning professionals at this moment.

Survey

The survey invitation and link were also posted on NEDLA's social media (Facebook and Linkedin) and via their email list of members by their leadership. The survey invitation and link was also posted on the Linkedin group pages listed above directly by me with an introductory message explaining the survey and its purpose, as well as the incentive offered for taking the survey. The survey invitation was posted 3 times in each group, once in December 2022 and twice in January 2023.

Survey data was collected through an online tool called Airtable (https://www.Airtable.com), which can automatically take forms filled out by participants and create spreadsheets. The survey questions can be found in the Recruitment Materials section below.

This survey will aim for quality of responses, variety of participants based on location, role, and industry, and cross examination with other forms of data. Since NEDLA's membership and participation are minimal (as well as the goal of this study to improve them and the table above demonstrates this problem) and the social media platforms the survey were posted on are saturated with content already, response rate will not be a good indicator for validity. Instead, an even mix of participants based on location, role, and industry will help the survey to be relevant and truly represent the digital learning professional's experiences. Further, the combination of surveys, interviews, and observations will help to verify the results of any one type of data.

Interview

Interviews provided rich, context-laden information to help craft participants' stories as well as understand the future needs of NEDLA members going forward. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, a common web conferencing platform to ensure ease of access and offer the option of recording. Interviews averaged between half an hour to forty-five minutes all were recorded after receiving the participants consent. Due to concerns about Covid-19 and the nature of NEDLA as a primarily online, digital learning association, using an online platform was effective from both a health and safety standpoint as well as ease of use. Zoom allows participants to sign in from anywhere with little to zero travel time, minimizing the interruption in their schedule. While it does rely on internet and computer access, participating in NEDLA presupposes this access already, as it is unlikely members of a digital learning community do not have access to a computer and internet.

Zoom's ability to record also offered the chance to more accurately gather data and code it based on specific parameters. With a recording, captioning, transcripts, and coding based on time-stamp were available. This allowed for a closer analysis of the video when required, including facial expressions, background, and body language after the interview was complete. The interview questions themselves are included in the Recruitment Materials section.

Observation

Observations were performed on one live NEDLA event and 1 recorded NEDLA event. The live event occurred on 11/29/2022. 1 recorded event was also observed after it occurred. According to NEDLA these were considered typical events and representative of the majority of their sessions. The format was primarily a webinar-style

presentation by an expert or person of interest. Both events took place on Zoom and were recorded. During the live event, I attended with my camera off and took notes throughout the duration of the event. The observation tool to be used is included in the Recruitment Materials section.

NEDLA's events were public and open to all who attended. As an online medium, it was clear that I was present and observing the session. NEDLA has approved my presence in these sessions but does not want my presence to affect how participation occurs during their sessions. For these reasons, and based on the requirements of a quality improvement project, I did not announce my presence or purpose to the other attendees.

Validity

First, by gathering responses on surveys, interactions in interviews, and observations, it was possible to deepen the stories that are told through triangulation and examine affirmations and tensions across the data. This approach helps to solidify and demonstrate the stories that are being shared in interviews or offer an alternative perspective from which to compare the shared stories in interviews through surveys and observation. Each type of data brings different richness to the story, surveys allow for members to reflect on their own, interviews provide an interaction in the moment, and observation represents something occurring in real time, day-to-day life. These multiple approaches help to validate what was collected while bringing the stories that are told to life. Second, by drawing on recent studies of situated learning in similar contexts, the study will help to confirm or complicate the findings of those recent studies. Although qualitative research and situated learning are highly contextual, these studies provide

guidance to ensure the data gathered and conclusions made are congruent with current thinking. Finally, by using a consistent script and survey approach, each participant received a similar experience, ensuring that variation within the data came from lived experience and individual sense making and not from variation in the data collection method.

Analysis

Response and Participate Rate

Table 1 describes the response rates on surveys and interviews. The majority of responses came from Non-NEDLA participants and approximately 20% of survey responses were interviewed for either group.
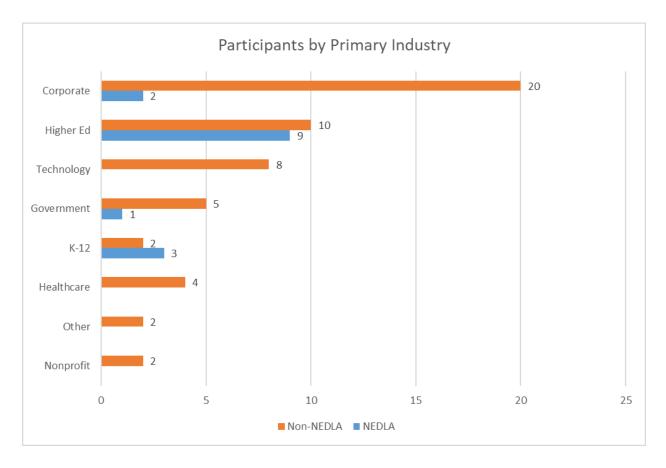
Table 1: Survey and Interview Participation Rate

	NEDLA Participants	Non-NEDLA Participants	Total
Surveys	15	53	68
Interviews	4	15	19

Demographics

The surveys included demographic questions, Likert scale questions, and open-ended response questions. Participants were asked to disclose the industry they participate in. Figure 1 represents participants by Primary Industry, meaning the first industry they selected in the list. Figure 2 includes additional industries the participant may have selected in addition to their first selection.

Figure 1: Participants by Primary Industry

Participants by Primary Industry

Industry	Non-NEDLA	NEDLA
Corporate	20	2
Higher Ed	10	9
Technology	8	
Government	5	1
K-12	2	3
Healthcare	4	
Other	2	
Nonprofit	2	

Participants primarily identified themselves as coming from corporate, higher education, and technology industries. However, participants were also able to identify additional industries they participate in, because digital learning professionals often cross industry boundaries or participate in multiple industries at once. For example, an instructional designer might work at a university but also does contract work with the government or a corporate organization on the side. Since digital learning professionals tend to participate in many different areas, it was important to include additional industries as options. When included, the graph of industries, while still heavily represented by higher education and corporate, became more rounded. Finally, 28 survey participants (41%) identified themselves as participating in multiple industries

while 40 survey participants (59%) identified themselves as participating in only one industry.
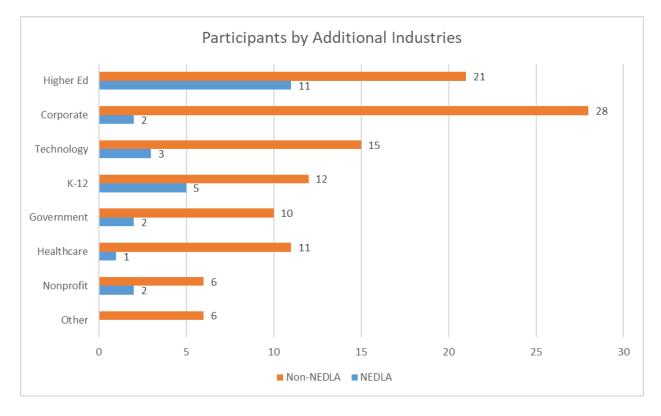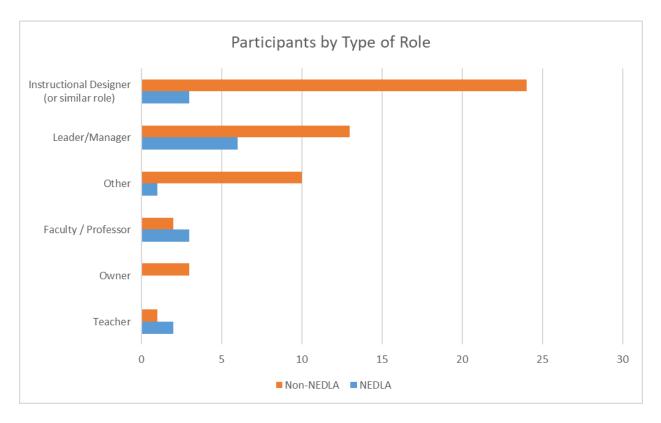
Figure 2: Participant by Additional Industries

Participants were also asked to share their title or role. Those titles were grouped into a set of categories based on the titles submitted. Participants primarily identified themselves as instructional designers (or similar role) and leaders or managers. Instructional designers roles included roles such as instructional designer, learning specialist, learning experience designer, and elearning designer. Leader/Manager roles included roles with the word manager, VP, CEO, or lead in the title. The following graph shows the breakdown of those categories for participants.

Figure 3: Participants by Type of Role

Participants were also polled as to whether they were a member of any digital learning professional organizations. 68% of non-NEDLA survey participants responded that they were a part of a digital learning professional organization and, interestingly, 73% of NEDLA survey participants responded they were a part of a digital learning professional organization, despite NEDLA indicating they were all members.

Figure 4: Are you a member of any digital learning professional organizations?

Thematic Analysis

After the interviews were completed, interview transcripts were generated automatically by Zoom's recording and transcription service. An inductive thematic analysis was employed to review interview data following the model of Braun & Clarke (2006). First, the transcriptions were downloaded and reviewed for comprehension as well as cleaned up for errors and readability using DeDoose. Second, the interviews were coded inductively, highlighting key phrases and concepts within each interview as they appeared and initial codes were generated from the interviewer's language directly. Then, those codes were combined into categories where similarities were observed. Finally, these categories were reviewed for potential themes and themes were developed. Each theme is defined separately for each group. Two similar themes

emerged for both groups, while the non-NEDLA participant group had an additional theme as well. Themes and categories are written below.

NEDLA

- Expanding Capabilities
    - Broaden Scope/Reach
    - Diverse Perspectives
    - Keep up with Field
    - Tools/Technology
    - Diverse Perspectives
    - Learning Approach
- Connection
    - Networking
    - Giving Back
    - Peer-to-Peer Interaction
    - Relationship

Non-NEDLA

- Expanding Capabilities
    - Broaden Scope/Reach
    - Diverse Perspectives
    - Keep up with Field
    - Tools/Technology
    - Diverse Perspectives

- ○ Learning Approach

- ○ Personal/Professional Development

- ○ Play

- ● Connection

  - ○ Networking

  - ○ Peer-to-Expert Interaction

  - ○ Peer-to-Peer Interaction

  - ○ Relationship

  - ○ Community of Practice

- ● Involvement in the Field

  - ○ Community of Practice

  - ○ Contributing to the Field

  - ○ Giving Back

  - ○ Creating/Changing Standards

  - ○ Part of Something Larger

  - ○ Recognition

Findings

NEDLA versus Non-NEDLA Responses

Since NEDLA participation was low and additional responses were gathered
from non-NEDLA members, two-sample t-tests assuming unequal variances were
performed on each factor for each Likert question under the assumption that these two
groups were the same. Table 2 describes the means for each group as well as the p
value and significance (indicated by an asterisk), for each factor of each question.

Table 2: Likert Question Factors - Two-sample t-tests assuming unequal variances

Please rate each of the following based on how important it is for your decision to be part of a professional organization.			

	Mean		
	NEDLA	Non-NEDLA	P(T<=t) two-tail
Access to Resources and Technology	**4.5333**	**3.8679**	**0.0135** *
Interacting with Peers	3.9333	4.1321	0.5222
Interacting with Experts	4.3333	4.3019	0.8934
Creating Common Practices	**4.0000**	**3.3774**	**0.0302** *
Being Recognized as a Member of the Community	2.7333	3.0377	0.3446
Promoting and Supporting Community Values	3.7333	3.3774	0.2709
Working and Solving Shared Problems	4.3333	3.8868	0.0926

How likely are you to engage in each of the following methods of interacting with a professional organization?			

	Mean		
	NEDLA	Non-NEDLA	P(T<=t) two-tail
Webinars	**4.5333**	**4.0189**	**0.0417** *
Social Media	2.7333	3.5472	0.0589
Email	**4.1333**	**2.9434**	**0.0006** ***
In-Person	3.3333	3.2075	0.7703
Online Forums	4.0000	3.6415	0.2533

Video Calls	3.8667	3.4151	0.2645

How likely are you to learn from the following activities?

	Mean		
	NEDLA	**Non-NEDLA**	**P(T<=t) two-tail**
Attending webinars and other events	**4.6667**	**4.2075**	**0.0310** *
Conversations with experts	4.4667	4.1698	0.1903
Conversations with peers	4.4000	4.2453	0.5411
Working with peers on a shared problem	4.2667	4.1698	0.7609
Trying new resources or tools	4.3333	4.3774	0.8801

Overall, t-tests revealed 5 out of 18 factors across 3 questions where the difference in means was unlikely to be due to chance variation alone, assuming both groups are the same. Therefore, it is likely these groups are similar across the majority of these factors, however, the small sample size of NEDLA members does limit this analysis.

Throughout the findings ahead, there are three charts that show data from both NEDLA and Non-NEDLA members for three different Likert survey questions. Responses were gathered on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with written value to each score shown at the bottom. The average of each category appears to the left of the stacked bar, with percentages of each response included within each band of color.

NEDLA Themes

Theme 1: Continual Growth

NEDLA Participants described the need for continual growth in terms of keeping up with their field, relevant technology and common best practices. Often this desire for continual growth came alongside a practical need or an acknowledgement of the ever-shifting landscape of their field, but also just as often a genuine passion for their field. Participants often described learning about technology via webinars, articles, or perhaps gaining access to play with a particular tool. However, growth related to the exchange of ideas frequently coincided with descriptions of a passionate community debating issues and problems while maintaining mutual respect.

Theme 2: Authentic Connection

NEDLA Participants frequently described a desire for authentic connection in the form of expanding their network, building relationships, and helping each other. The initial purpose of meeting and networking was often described based on finding someone with a certain expertise or getting support on a specific problem. However, long-term relationships, building a reliable supportive network, and having a forum to discuss relevant issues were often described by more established members in more established communities. Further, the desire for authentic connection was often described alongside workplace challenges, including limited staff, limited funding, or a lack of interest in the needs of digital learning by the organization.

Non-NEDLA Themes

Theme 1: Continual Growth

Non-NEDLA participants often demonstrated a strong focus on the latest innovations and future possibilities when discussing continual growth. Participants also described diversity as an important part of their communities but described it in terms of sharing ideas and approaches, rather than debating them. Finally, participants frequently referred to professional development and building professional skills as an important part of what they get out of professional associations.

Theme 2: Authentic Connection

Non-NEDLA participants described networking in terms of building relationships and finding a community where they belong. Belonging often was described as having a shared language, knowledge base, or understanding and often came with some form of mutual recognition. Mentoring was also described alongside building deeper relationships. For more established participants, mentoring meant offering to share their experience or expertise with newcomers, while newcomers, inversely, join these communities and networking to seek out experience and expertise in their field. Finally, especially among more established professionals, authentic connection is described in terms of small groups of close-knit relationships that come together organically and share knowledge and expertise; often without specific agenda, membership costs, or the goal of profit.

Theme 3: Contributing to the Field

Non-NEDLA participants frequently described seeking out and enjoying platforms to present their work (and see others presentations as well). Further, participants described joining communities in the context of having an impact on their industry's

standards or transforming their industry's knowledge and best practices. These contributions often came with recognition and prestige, which was welcome, but secondary to the core concept of having their voice heard and being able to influence the field.

Finding 1: One of the primary reasons digital learning professionals join associations is to make authentic personal connections grounded in learning.

Many participants described the desire and need for connection and lasting relationships within their industry. Participants often described aversion toward sponsored events, traditional forms of networking, and shallow engagement. Further, the two highest means related to why digital learning professionals join professional associations were "interacting with peers" and "interacting with experts." One participant described it this way:

"Other people join professional associations for business opportunities and those types of things. That's not where I live at. I don't have anything to sell, you know, other than time. And for me it is more about the personal connections than trying to grow a business, or, you know, an avenue or find someone that could help me out financially in a different scenario, or, you know, hire someone so I can work on a bigger project. I respect people who do, because it's a great place to meet people when you want to do that. That's not why I join them."

These meaningful connections were often described directly alongside participation and learning. To participate authentically in the group means to be engaged and learning side-by-side with others. Although fourth on the list, "Working and Solving Shared Problems" still featured a high mean as a factor for deciding to join
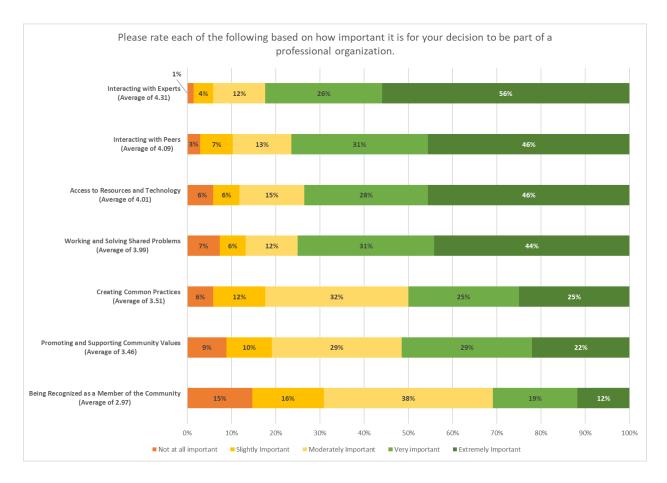
professional associations. All this suggests that traditional forms of networking and sponsored approaches are often acknowledged as positive by-products but rarely as the primary goal.

"If I'm going to join an association, I want to be with people who really want to learn, the way that I want to learn, and are interested in things I'm interested in but not just there because they want to make more money or they're looking for a new job. That's a benefit of associations and it's definitely a good part. But I just want to be clear that's not my goal in any of those, because I really want authentic learning, authentic connections. An authentic networking."

Another participant described making a goal in advance to learn something through another person directly and planned to network specifically toward that learning goal. While a very goal-oriented approach, it is still networking based on working on a problem and recognizing another person's expertise.

"I consider myself a lifelong learner, but when I go to an association, I come with the intention of learning something. Sometimes I have a list of what I need to know. So I'm trying to, you know, network with those people, right? But I have a rule that I need to walk away with one nugget and I really I hone in on that."

Figure 5: Importance of Various Factors on Decision to be a Part of a Professional Association

Please rate each of the following based on how important it is for your decision to be part of a professional organization.
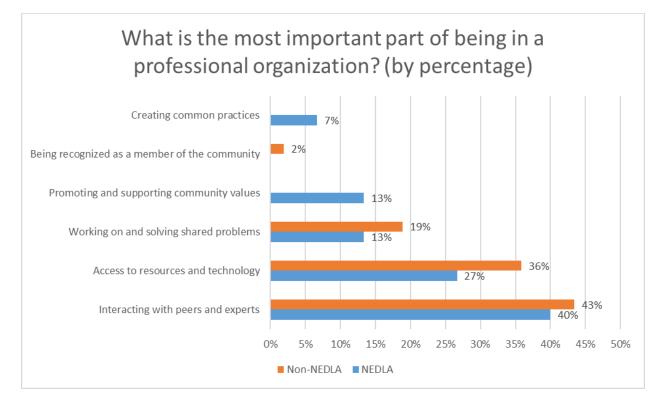
The above graph of survey responses further indicates a preference for interaction and working together. Three of the top four responses involved connecting or working with another person. Further, the top four response have much higher means, particularly the factor interacting with experts.

T-tests on this data revealed that the difference between means for NEDLA and non-NEDLA members for the factors of "Access to Resources and Technology" and "Creating Common Practices" were statistically significant (P=0.01 and P=0.03 respectively). In both cases, NEDLA members tended to rate these factors higher than non-NEDLA members.

The figure below shows what participants felt was the most important part of being in a professional association. NEDLA participants are in blue and non-NEDLA

participants are in orange. The factors that are most important to both groups are "interacting with peers and experts," "access to resources and technology," and "working on and solving shared problems." This further supports the idea that digital learning professionals are looking to build connections in their associations.

Figure 6: What is the most important part of being in a professional organization? (select one)

What is the most important part of being in a professional organization? (by percentage)

Finding 2: Identity within the digital learning field is complex, fluid, and frequently changing, but despite that, belonging and mutual recognition are essential to a positive experience with a professional association.

As a new-comer, the following participant described their realization that they had actually been in the field of digital learning for a long time, unofficially. Further, while traditional degrees and coursework are often tied to identity as a digital learning

professional, they are not entirely necessary to participating and creating an identity in the field.

"I haven't been in this space for a long time, as far as instructional design, instructional learning. Officially, now that I've gotten into it, what I realized is I've been in it for a long time. It was just a matter of me acknowledging that. Hey, you're in this space. So I think now that I've acknowledged it, and you know, been surrounded by it on a daily basis, I'm starting to see it more, even just in, you know, current events and things like that. So, it's been nice. I actually started an instructional design program and didn't complete it. Nonetheless. I'm here, and I'm working in it"

A common experience once in the field is that titles frequently change and role expectations may change as well. Many participants had gone through career changes or personal shifts in understanding around who they were in the field. Through that experience, identity and motivation at their core are based around experience design and learning. The many varied titles and roles express the great variety of approaches participants could take to put that identity on.

"The titles have just changed. I was a senior instructional designer. Now I am a learning… experience… learning experience… Oh my God! What am I?"

The following participant describes going into a new field and realizing that they were actually something else. Many participants expressed similar evolutions and realizations, discovering new words to describe themselves in a field that is frequently changing and its roles are frequently reimagined. Further, finding the right title or the right way of describing oneself is crucial for participants to fully embrace, participate, and pursue their work.

"When I transitioned into instructional design and curriculum design, I didn't really fit into the mold of the people that I was working with, and what I've discovered over the last 3 years is that I'm not a curriculum designer. I'm actually a learning experience designer, and I didn't actually understand that term. I didn't even know it existed. And I've been doing it for 15 years. So kind of finding that was huge for me, and you know it's just words. It really doesn't matter, but at the same time, it kind of defines what I've been doing, and who I am, and so being able to discover that was huge, and that's been a while back."

This participant describes that shift very personally as a way of expressing themself. They also discuss removing the clutter, which again demonstrates a type of evolution, growth, and narrowing of focus that seems to lead to a clarify for who they are.
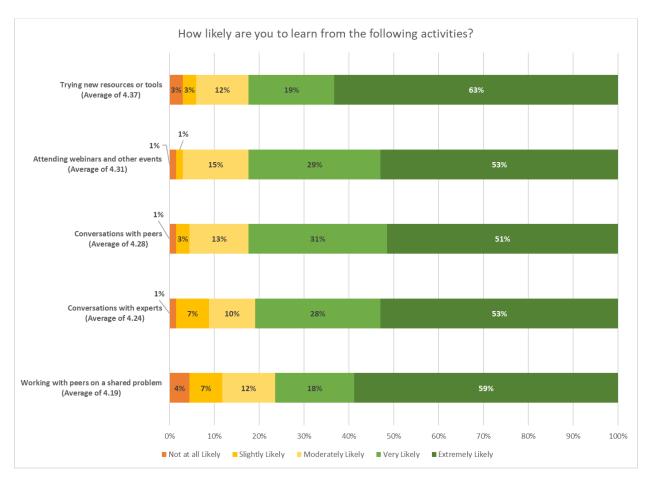
"My biggest challenge, I think, is where I fit into these and gaining my voice in them. I guess in that I have shifted a bit in my career, in the last few years. And so that's where even right now, like I've been going to bed excited because I am. I have shifted myself in a way. Now that I'm starting to feel comfortable and starting to see myself again. The way I want to see myself, and so I guess the biggest challenge for me right now is just getting rid of the clutter and figuring out how to express me."

Due to the variety of approaches and identities within the field, a positive experience must create a sense of belonging within a diverse group. The participant below describes returning to professional associations after pivoting to a different but related field and what that means to them.

"After that first conference, it kind of felt like I found my tribe again. These are my people, and I don't know if that will make sense when I say that. But it's like there's a lot of commonality, and there's a lot of interest in the same vein, and there's a lot of desire to just kind of improve where we're at instead of holding the status quo."

"You know, if you're just talking to someone in general, my own mother, she still probably doesn't know what I do. She says 'she just does training for adult learners.' I tell people I'm an instructional designer, and they're like, 'what is that?' but I think it's really a rewarding feeling when you can meet someone and you can really chat it up about what you do, the tools you're using, the type of training you're developing."

Finding 3: Professional Associations support digital learning professionals most effectively by creating an accessible space to participate that brings people, ideas, technology, and other needs together in an authentic way, regardless of the format of interaction.

Figure 7 shows how digital learning professionals prefer to learn and shows that whether it's email, webinar, workshops, etc., the format of interaction and learning does not make a huge impact. However, it should be noted that in open responses and interviews, a minor preference toward webinars, peer interaction, and social media (specifically Linkedin), emerged. Based on the previous findings above, it's possible that these platforms feature more prominently because making connections is a core part of their function. Figure 7 also showed a strong preference for peer and expert interaction and access to resources and technology over most other categories. All this suggests that how the learning is delivered is not the most important part of a professional association's offerings.

Figure 7: Likelihood to Learn from Various Activities

How likely are you to learn from the following activities?

Activity	Not at all Likely	Slightly Likely	Moderately Likely	Very Likely	Extremely Likely
Trying new resources or tools (Average of 4.37)	3%	3%	12%	19%	63%
Attending webinars and other events (Average of 4.31)	1%	1%	15%	29%	53%
Conversations with peers (Average of 4.28)	1%	3%	13%	31%	51%
Conversations with experts (Average of 4.24)	1%	7%	10%	28%	53%
Working with peers on a shared problem (Average of 4.19)	4%	7%	12%	18%	59%

T-tests on this data revealed that the difference between means for NEDLA and non-NEDLA members for the factor of "Attending webinars and other events" was statistically significant (P=0.03). Again, in this case NEDLA members rated this category higher than Non-NEDLA members.

Figure 8: Likelihood of Engagement from Various Methods of Interaction

How likely are you to engage in each of the following methods of interacting with a professional organization?

Method	Not at all Likely	Slightly Likely	Moderately Likely	Very Likely	Extremely Likely
Webinars (Average of 4.13)	1%	7%	16%	26%	49%
Online Forums (Average of 3.72)	4%	10%	28%	24%	34%
Video Calls (Average of 3.51)	12%	10%	22%	26%	29%
Social Media (Average of 3.37)	9%	18%	28%	19%	26%
In-Person (Average of 3.24)	16%	19%	19%	16%	29%
Email (Average of 3.21)	12%	18%	29%	21%	21%

The chart above shows that webinars seem to be a preferred form of interaction, especially for NEDLA members. Although on the surface this may seem unaligned with other data, it is likely that webinars are the right balance for digital learning professionals between investing their time and quality of interaction. Many of these professionals indicated having enough time is a major organizational challenge. Webinars are easy to pop in or pop out, record, etc. Thus making them a very accessible option for busy professionals.

T-tests on this data revealed that the difference between means for NEDLA and non-NEDLA members for the factors of "Webinars" and "Email" were statistically

significant (P=0.04 and P=0.0006 respectively). Again, in both cases NEDLA members rated these categories higher than Non-NEDLA members.

The participants below describe common experiences for many, which comes in active learning. This may take the form of workshops, online or in-person, serving and participating on committees, teams, and boards, or engaging in discussion with other members. In these roles, participants might serve as expert panelists, judges for certain rewards, or reviewing proposals. Despite the fact that lack of time was a common challenge among many participants, many wanted participation to be meaningful and hands-on where possible. Even webinars, which may appear on the surface less active, often become more hands-on as participants reach out to the speaker or do research around the topic area before or after the event. Below are two examples of two different types of participation from two different participants.

"I am a part of the proposal review for their conferences and that I find very interesting. It helps me grow. And I was surprised to know that I was pretty able. I started it 2 or 3 years ago. I didn't think I could review, but I was happy to know that I could really talk more about the gaps and stuff in those proposals and I didn't do badly in reviewing them. So I do those and that really helped me learn and grow about different topics and how to deal with them."

"Generally, when I'm focused on those groups I'm focused on an event that's coming up, most likely. And when I'm looking at the events, I'm looking at speakers that maybe are either in an area that I want to grow in or in an area that I'm currently working in. And so then I may go out and seek information from their site. Their places, and I, you know, may reach out to them individually, and start a conversation with them."

Finally, although event observation was limited to the observation of two NEDLA sessions, there was limited participation during both webinar style events. Both were primarily presentations and did not generate or create many opportunities for engagement for peer-to-peer or peer-to-expert interaction. Cameras were frequently off during both, the chat was mostly quiet, presenters used most of the time. One attendee claimed that a response spurred a bunch of ideas and questions and that she'll follow up after the event, which is consistent with the second interview response above.

Finding 4: Professional associations can sometimes create barriers to participation, engagement, and diversity within their association, which limits both membership and the quality of their offerings.

Professional associations can remove barriers to entry into their communities in several ways that help make the space more accessible to all. Particularly, a lack of funding was a common organizational and personal challenge for many participants both simply to join, as described below.

"I am kept out of professional organizations often by the high cost of joining or membership etc. Many professional organizations don't consider that people other than 'students' may be financially strapped."

Cost also came into play regarding the content and resources the professional association puts on and also who they spotlight within their association. The participant below describes trying to participate and share what they were doing and the resistance they met when trying to do so.

"I have noticed in these associations that every time I have submitted something thinking I have been innovative, given that I am one and given that we have not paid for

resources, I have done a very good job at my center. And every time I wanted to showcase that, they say back, 'we are sorry,' you know. So, that made me realize that they do not make a space. They make a space for the best of the best but they may not make space for the minimal people who have minimal resources, but they make best of the least right, and I pride myself that we are able to, with minimal resources, produce a lot, and they do not showcase that."

Below, a participant describes how sponsor-driven events feel to them, which do not seem to focus on learning or connection. Sponsor-driven events are further called into question since one of the primary organizational challenges of participants was a lack of funding.

"I don't participate in some of the online workshops that are happening, and this, I admit, is a bit of a cynical point of view. A lot of them are sponsor-driven, so it's a thinly disguised sales pitch and also there's very little in terms of activity for me to get involved in. So the value of those types of things tends to be minimal in comparison to something that's a little more active where you might be trying to approach a problem in a workshop, you know? Whether it's digital, whether it's face to face. But you're trying to get some ideas. You're trying to work some things through. That's where associations will definitely help me."

Finally, larger professional associations seem to be more focused on western-centric approaches and better funded approaches, as the participant below shares in two separate instances.

"I think my association is doing a great job but I do feel that it does not have a diversity of countries like us in their portfolio. I think all organizations have not started

addressing that, because, you see, when they start showcasing or they take interviews,

it's always about people who are doing very well and they're in the West with the

resources they have. We always go for free resources. So, the people whose resources

are better. They tend to be reflected more."

"Our context is different. Our culture is different. So the nuances of

communication are different. So I think that hasn't been taken much into the view in

these materials."

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: NEDLA can grow by investing in and aligning to more diverse perspectives that are typically passed over by larger associations.

In larger associations, well-funded and US-centric perspectives are elevated and focused on while people with different contexts and less funding have more trouble participating and getting recognized. This presents several opportunities for NEDLA as a professional association.

First, continuing to offer low membership fees and free access to certain resources will provide a necessary service to less funded people and organizations who would like to be a part of an association but cannot afford the larger associations. By connecting people to others with similar funding/cost requirements, there will be opportunity to discuss needs, share ideas, and work on those ideas for mutual benefit. Sessions based on solving a problem or working with certain technology on a budget would attract people and invite participation and ideas targeted toward a group that actually needs them. Letting those people show off and demonstrate what they have been able to do for free or with limited resources will give previously excluded people a spotlight to stand in. Further, it may yet attract people with a budget, as they can learn to do something they already do for less and save their organization money.

Second, inviting and offering more international perspectives, NEDLA can create a diverse membership that digital learning professionals are seeking. Similar to the barrier of cost, the barrier of US-centric mindsets may exclude some groups that desire a chance to share their successes or learn from others in similar situations. NEDLA stands for Northeast Digital Learning Association and is part of USDLA, but that does

not mean it cannot include international perspectives. Findings show an interest in many kinds of diversity and a niche where international perspectives may be missing from the activities of larger professional associations. New ways of thinking and fresh ideas from other cultures and contexts would be welcomed by members and offer many new groups of potential members as well.

Recommendation 2: Events and other resources, offerings, and experiences at NEDLA should be designed to create more peer-to-peer and peer-to-expert interaction.

While there was only a limited number of events to observe, it is likely that building in more peer-to-peer and peer-to-expert interaction is possible and attractive to potential members. It will also help to build engagement and retain current members as well. Findings show that members, even in presentation-based approaches, will seek out presenters and experts or other peers after the presentation to learn and gain insights into their own situation. This could be designed into the format of events themselves and NEDLA could build resources on their website for members who join to help them access each other more easily. NEDLA would aim to be a hub with a primary goal of connecting people, resources, and expertise together to help professionals who need it while also bolstering connections between members.

According to the findings, there was a consistent desire for belonging and connection among digital learning professionals. This feeling of belonging and connection is key to attracting and retaining members. In-person social events, sharing within the group, and working on problems collaboratively all offer opportunities for members to be a part of the group and feel that sense of belonging. Online events

should focus on discussion, breakout sessions, allowing time for experts to interact, and leaving time to give people a chance to swap information after the event is over.

Asynchronous connection, using social media, especially LinkedIn and Twitter, offer places to build conversation and let people connect more organically. By investing in building NEDLA's presence on these platforms, people will be able to respond and converse directly on their own rather than waiting for the next event. This is especially important as NEDLA's events can sometimes have wide gaps between one event and another.

Focusing on demonstrations is another powerful way to bring people together on something that may be immediately applicable. Demonstrations of technology, by members not sponsors, gives the presenter a chance to stand in the spotlight and the attendees a chance to see real solutions by their peers that may be applicable to their own situation. Further, avoiding sponsored events, unless they truly offer a tangible benefit or value to attendees, will ensure NEDLA does not turn off attendees to a sales style or approach.

Recommendation 3: NEDLA may attract more digital learning professionals by using its resources and platform to amplify the voices of digital learning professionals within its association and help them contribute to the field.

One key difference between NEDLA and non-NEDLA participants was an interest in impacting the field of digital learning. Although the sample size for NEDLA members was small, it is still likely that they would be interested in this type of support too. Since non-NEDLA members are interested in contributing to the field and

amplifying their own voice, this is something NEDLA could aim to offer more of to attract more digital learning professionals.

There are many ways this could be achieved. This could include offering opportunities for members to present and share their expertise within the group, as stated before. Creating panels or presentations based on someone's expertise, a unique solution to a problem, or discussing challenges in a specific context would give participants a chance to feel heard and valued while contributing to professionals in their field. Bringing multiple experts together on a topic can build mutual recognition between experts who then experience a sense of belonging and a stronger panel with greater influence and prestige for participants.

In addition to synchronous experiences, NEDLA may be able to raise the voices of others via their website, newsletters, and other postings. Through a newsletter, blog, or website, NEDLA can focus on synthesizing information as a resource for members but also highlight members who are doing something extraordinary but perhaps cannot present or attend live sessions. This would be especially useful alongside international members, who may be far outside the typical timezone.

Contributing to the field could come in a variety of different forms, including mentoring, presenting, volunteer opportunities, board or panelist opportunities, and reviewing proposals. Mentoring, in particular, offers the chance for individuals to build close, long-term relationships through the professional association and as NEDLA rebuilds its membership, offering a mentoring program for people who are newer to the field may be very effective. Newer members may not have as much funding as more established members and if NEDLA continues to offer lower costs to members, this

would be an easy way for newcomers to get what they need. Participants frequently

discussed how important giving back was to them in all these different approaches and

creating avenues to do that will deepen their experience within the association.

Appendix A - Recruitment and Data Collection Materials

Survey Welcome Message (Linkedin)

Hi everyone!

I'm currently in the Ed.D program at Vanderbilt, Peabody College. My research capstone focuses on digital learning professionals and what motivates them to join online communities. I would love to hear from you and learn about your experiences! I would so appreciate it if you could fill out this 5-minute survey and help me research this topic! There is also a small incentive for 5 randomly selected participants who complete the survey.

Here is the link to my survey! https://airtable.com/shrtzrhEfUS1EiRlf

I hope you all have a great end to your year and happy start to your next year!

-Travis

Survey Welcome Message (NEDLA)

NEDLA has been working with Travis Meister for his doctoral research through Vanderbilt University. He is researching how digital learning professionals engage with professional associations and learn together. Here is the link to his survey: https://airtable.com/shrKwos0yfOA0K7SE. We would love to hear from you to learn more about how we can support you in the future and support Travis in his research.

Digital Learning Professional Survey

Thank you for participating in the study!

The goal of this survey is to better understand digital learning professionals, their needs, and what motivates participation and learning in online learning communities of practice.

1. Full Name

2. Industry (select all that apply)

   ○ K-12

   ○ Higher Ed

   ○ Corporate

   ○ Healthcare

   ○ Technology

   ○ Nonprofit

   ○ Government

   ○ Other

3. What is your role in your organization?

4. How long have you been in your current role? (years)

5. Where are you located? (Ex: Philadelphia, PA)

6. Are you a member of any digital learning professional organizations?

7. What is the most important part of being in a professional organization? (select one)

   ○ Access to resources and technology

   ○ Interacting with peers and experts

   ○ Creating common practices

   ○ Being recognized as a member of the community

   ○ Promoting and supporting community values

○ Working on and solving shared problems

8. How important are each of the following for your decision to be part of a professional organization? (1=Not at all important, 2=Slightly important; 3=Moderately important; 4=Very important; 5=Extremely important.)

○ Access to resources and technology

○ Interacting with peers

○ Interacting with experts

○ Creating common practices

○ Being recognized as a member of the community

○ Promoting and supporting community values

○ Working on and solving shared problems

○ Are there other _____

9. Describe a time recently when you had a positive experience through your professional association.

10. What do you see as your professional organization's role in your field?

11. How likely are you to engage in each of the following methods of interacting with a professional organization? (1 = Not at all likely; 2 = Slightly likely; 3 = Moderately likely; 4 = Very likely; 5 = Extremely likely)

○ Webinars

○ Social Media

○ Email

○ In-Person

○ Online Forums

- ○ Video Calls

12. How likely are you to learn from the following activities? (1 being least preferred and 5 being most preferred)

- ○ Attending webinars and other events
- ○ Conversation with experts
- ○ Conversation with peers
- ○ Working with peers on a shared problem
- ○ Trying new resources or tools

13. Would you like to share any additional thoughts?

14. Are you willing to be interviewed for approximately 30 minutes online via Zoom to share more about your experiences with professional associations?

- ○ If yes, please provide your email

Interview Invitation

Subject: Professional Association Research Survey - Interview

Hi [Name]

You responded "yes" to being open to an interview regarding professional associations and online learning to my post on linkedin. I'd like to find a time to set up the interview. When are you available?

-Travis

Interview Questions

Tell me about your role	Opening
What does it mean to you to be a digital learning professional?	Grand tour
Why do you belong to a professional association?	Mini grand tour
How would you describe the community of your professional association?	Mini grand tour
What challenges do you (or your organization) face when it comes to digital learning and how does that connect to your professional association?	Example
In what ways do you learn from the professional association?	Example
Leave time for clarifying or expanding on any survey responses.	

Observation Tool

# of people…

attending at start of webinar/event:	with cameras on at start of event:
attending at end of webinar/event:	with cameras on at end of event:

Short description of event and its goal/purpose:

Comments in the chat:

Questions for expert/panelist/presenter	
Application of Concept in Personal Context	
Peer-to-Peer Discussion	
Technology Issue	
Total Comments	

Describe any stand-out interactions between presenter and attendees:

Describe any stand-out interactions between attendees and other attendees:

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