

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Ruth McGuire provides tips on how to plan and review personal development needs

As its name suggests personal development planning is “personal” to the user and its aim is to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities of participants. It has also been described as a “form of loyalty to one’s own skills and potential”. Although some development will happen as a natural consequence of work, without planning it tends to be reactive and passive rather than proactive. However, a systematic approach to development can be achieved through personal development planning (PDP), which can be self-initiated or directed by managers through appraisal sessions.

PDP is not an end itself; it is a cyclical process. This means that you can start your development at any point in the cycle.

PDP can be based on issues that arise from appraisal sessions with a manager, suggestions arising from mentoring or coaching sessions, your own ideas or problems that you have encountered in your work which suggest development in a particular area is needed. PDP may also be prompted by internal or external changes. For example pharmacists working as part of a large organisation such as a hospital or within a supermarket may experience change when restructuring occurs. On a smaller scale, community pharmacies may go through change as a result of new regulations, systems and procedures or changes in staff.

PDP also allows you to evaluate your performance, to identify training or development needs, and to think about future plans. In essence, PDP is about lifelong or continuous learning in the workplace. It can also be used to highlight future goals for development. For example, one of your goals could be to improve your communication skills or customer service skills. A useful starting point for PDP is your job description. This should identify the skills that are required to perform your job competently. These skills should be prioritised. It might also be helpful to categorise the types of skills needed to perform a job competently. For example, physical skills involve practical, hands-on work, behavioural skills involve interpersonal, management or leadership skills and knowledge-based skills involve the processing, analysis and application of information.

Key benefits of PDP include the following:

- 1 It identifies routes for personal progression
- 1 It revitalises technical skills
- 1 It identifies existing skills that need updating or new skills that need to be acquired
- 1 It builds on and reinforces transferable skills
- 1 It promotes continuous learning
- 1 It helps you to reflect on achievements which leads to a sense of achievement and growth in confidence
- 1 It helps you to make the most of opportunities at work
- 1 It increases levels of motivation and job satisfaction
- 1 It provides individuals with mechanism for reflecting and monitoring own performance

IMPLEMENTATION OF PDP

PDP should be realistic and based on what is achievable. The SMART technique, which is used by many managers, could be applied to create a personal development plan. This means that objectives for development have to be met and have to be:

- Specific** Be specific about exactly what you want to develop. For example “skills” is too vague a term, be more specific, eg, communication or presentation skills.
- Measurable** Define criteria that can be used to measure whether or not your objectives have been achieved.
- Attainable** Do not be too ambitious. Set objectives that you know are attainable.
- Realistic** Be realistic about what you want to develop.
- Timely** Think of a realistic time frame within which you plan to achieve your objectives.

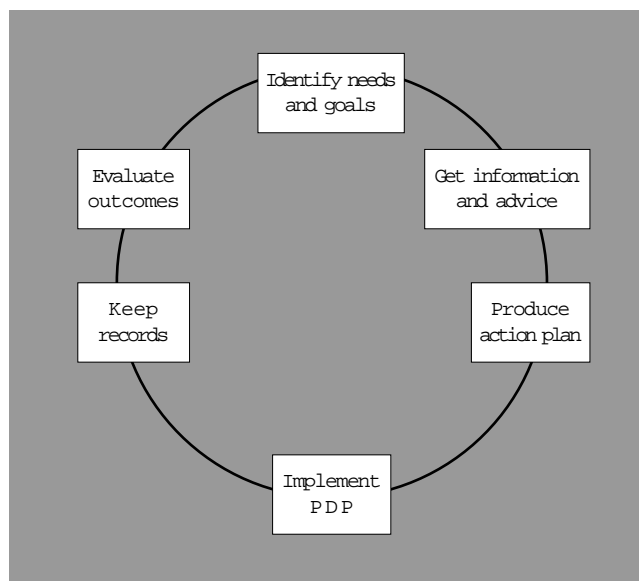


Figure 1: The cyclical nature of personal development planning

However PDP is done, the outcome should be that you:

- 1 Become or are made aware of your potential
- 1 Reflect on strengths and interests
- 1 Take account of organisational realities and link personal plans to organisational needs
- 1 Think about own values
- 1 Match own values to characteristics of work
- 1 Are aware of changes which impact on work

NEEDS ANALYSIS

Development is an inevitable consequence of change. The swift pace and availability of information and communications technology has meant that most workers have had to learn new skills and adapt to a changing working environment. For some staff, development is necessary for their career advancement, for others it is required for remotivating or for adapting to both the “content and process” of change. In looking at development needs, it is useful to break down the role and responsibilities of job roles into categories so that key areas for development are not overlooked. For example the role of the “pharmacist” could be broken down into areas such as subject knowledge, time and resource management, people management, training of pharmacy and other staff, team working skills, customer service skills and communication skills.

ACTION PLAN FOR DEVELOPMENT

Objective setting involves clarity about what has to be done in order for an outcome to be achieved. If the objective is clear then the final outcome can be measured against the initial objective. Indicators of success will help make the objectives measurable.

Records should always be kept to log the development undertaken and to track progress. A PDP record also serves as a reminder of achievement and can form part of the evidence for a CPD portfolio. It should contain the date, any development need identified, chosen method of development, date(s) that development was undertaken, outcomes and further action.

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A SIMPLE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE

Find a relevant course on communication skills to attend. Identify three clear learning objectives from the outset.

RATIONALE

I am undertaking the development so that I can be a better manager and manage my team more effectively.

DEVELOPMENT METHOD

Training? I'll check whether any relevant organisations offer a course that is relevant.

In addition I'll ask colleagues whether they've been on any good communication courses.

I'll check the course description carefully for relevance before booking myself on the course. I will set myself three objec-

tives that I want to achieve from the course.

TIME SCALE

I shall find a suitable course within the next four weeks and attend it within the next two months.

REVIEW TIMESCALE

I will review the results within three months of completing the course.

CRITERIA FOR MEASURING SUCCESS

I will measure my success by checking that my three learning objectives have been achieved.

I will draw up a list of at least six lessons learnt with ideas on how they can be implemented at work.

OUTCOME/CONCLUSIONS OF DEVELOPMENT

The course was useful and it has helped me to be more reflective about how I communicate with staff and customers and to learn to listen more effectively and 'read' body language and other signals when speaking to people.

FURTHER ACTION/DEVELOPMENT

I need to keep working on my communication skills and improve my written communication skills and find a relevant training course or mentor.

DATE OF DEVELOPMENT

REVIEW DATE

SIGNATURE

DEVELOPMENT METHODS

Development methods vary and their use will often depend on resources, timescale and individual learning styles of participants. Some of the most popular development methods are:

Audio tapes/CDs/videos Audio tapes, etc, are portable, inexpensive and could be useful if information needs to be quickly absorbed. Tapes are quite often used on foreign language training programmes.

Case studies Case studies are sometimes used on training programmes or in isolation on individualised training programmes. The "scenario" approach can help to reinforce learning, especially if case studies from within the workplace are used. They can be obtained fairly easily and as a development method it is inexpensive.

Coaching The coaching method of development is growing in popularity and has been imported from the United States. Key features of coaching are that it is objective, short-term, time limited, goal specific, action and performance orientated, personally tailored, and involves feedback. Coaching could be organised as an internal development method or external coaching can be arranged.

Computer-based training Many companies offer interactive training which is delivered via a computer. This kind of training tends to be highly specific and ensures that participants receive consistent input. With many packages users progress at their own pace and can "backtrack" to correct or check their understanding. Standards vary across computer-based training packages and careful selection is required. In terms of resources, a computer with up-to-date hardware and software is needed.

Quality circles This kind of development requires good organisation if it is to be successful. Quality circles are made up of individuals with common interests in, for example, solving a particular problem. Individuals take responsibility for certain tasks and report back at regular intervals. Quality circles have been found to be highly motivational for staff and helps them develop key skills such as problem solving, communication, and information gathering.

Mentoring A mentor could be someone from within an organisation who offers support and guidance to another person. They are more experienced than the trainee and meet regularly to offer help. The success of the process often depends on the relationship trust and respect that develops between the mentor and the trainee. The mentor effectively acts as a role model.

"Sitting by Nellie" Sitting by Nellie is a simple method of development which involves literally sitting alongside someone more experienced or watching them perform a task. It is useful if the development does not require too much learning or intellectual "engagement" with a task.

Training courses Training courses vary in quality and careful selection is needed to make them effective. For example, questions need to be asked at the outset about content, aims and objectives and experience of the trainers.

Training can be external or in-house if a specially tailored programme is required or if several participants need the same type of training. Some organisation will often arrange courses for their members which are specifically tailored to their needs. It might be useful to build up a file of expert speakers who could be called on to deliver training.

EVALUATION

Once a development activity has been completed, it should be evaluated. You could do this yourself or it could be carried out in conjunction with peers and managers. Whenever you carry out PDP it is important to evaluate and review your outcomes so that you can assess whether the development activity was successful and to measure the impact it has had on your work.

At the end of the development activity, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 What can I do better as a result of the development?
- 1 Have additional development needs been identified?
- 1 How effective was the development method?
- 1 Could I have gained more from the activity?
- 1 Did the development meet my needs and achieve the objectives I set?
- 1 How will I make use of the development?
- 1 What next?

FURTHER READING

1. Adler H. The ultimate how to book — strategies for personal development. Hampshire: Gower; 1999.
2. Sangster C. Planning and organising personal and professional development. Hampshire: Gower; 2000.
3. Siddons S. Developing your people — pain free solutions for busy managers. London: CIPD; 2001.