

Why is continuing professional development key for success

Professional development helps employees continue to not only be competent in their profession, but also excel in it. Actively pursuing professional development ensures that knowledge and skills stay relevant and up to date. It also allows employees to be more aware of changing trends and directions in an industry. It ensures you continue to be competent in your profession. It is an ongoing process and continues throughout a professional's career.



How do you ensure continuing professional development?

There are several ways in which you can identify development needs.

- Identifying Your Needs.
- Planning and Carrying Out Development Activities.
- Reflecting on Your Learning.
- Applying Your Learning.
- Sharing Your Learning with Others.

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1. Identifying Your Needs

There are several ways in which you can identify development needs. For example, you can carry out a skills audit. You may receive feedback from colleagues or your line manager about an area in which you are

weaker. Alternatively, you may have an interest in a particular area and want to develop your knowledge. Once you have identified your key areas for development, you then need to plan your activities.

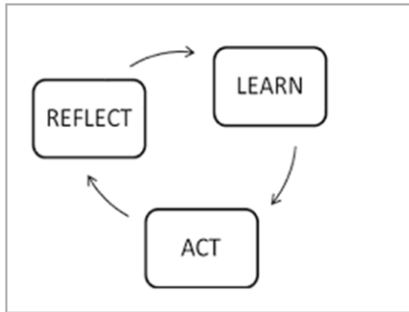
2. Planning and Carrying Out Development Activities

Your employer may have a limit on what they are prepared to pay, so you may need to consider self-funding or alternatives such as online resources that are cheaper or even free. Informal learning, including side-by-side learning, video training, mentoring, coaching or reading on the subject. There is a growing recognition that continuing professional development is both essential and potentially expensive.



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3. Reflecting on Your Learning

Reflecting on what you have learned is a vital part of continuing professional development. Learning does not emerge only from activities that you designated as ‘development’, and you may find that you are learning at least as much from your day-to-day activities. For any

formal or informal but development activity, you should record the activity, what you found useful or not useful about it, and what you have learned.

4. Applying Your Learning

Going on training courses or watching videos is only the start. You then must apply what you have learned to your own job. This can be quite a clumsy process, especially at first. The competence theory of learning sets out that we move through four stages when we learn:



- Unconscious incompetence – not knowing what we don’t know.
- Conscious incompetence – knowing where we need to develop and watching other people do it, but still unable to do it ourselves with any skill.
- Conscious competence – being able to do something reasonably well, provided we concentrate; and
- Unconscious competence – being able to do something almost instinctively, without needing to focus on it.

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When you have done some training or other development activity, you will probably be somewhere between conscious incompetence and conscious competence, depending on how much you have been able to practice. You therefore need to spend time applying your learning and practicing moving to a stage of unconscious competence.

5. Sharing Your Learning with Others

Some of them add a fifth stage to the competence cycle – being able to teach others. It is certainly true that being able to articulate and share your learning is an important part of making sure that you have fully understood it.



Conclusion

Continuing professional development is an ongoing process, as well as a cycle. You are likely to continue to learn throughout your professional life. It is therefore a good idea to develop a process for it that works for you at an early stage of your career.

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