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Employability: Making the Most of Your Career Development

Workplace Learning and Development

Contributors: **By:** John Neugebauer & Jane Evans-Brain

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Workplace Learning and Development

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In this chapter we consider the main tools for your personal learning and longer-term development. There are three key reasons for the emphasis on workplace learning:

- First, and most obviously, to align your values with those of your work organisation and to enable you to perform effectively in that first role.
- Second, to enable you to develop professionally, inside or outside the organisation, in the short to medium term.
- Third, for your longer-term career development and your employability – maximising your longer-term potential to align with your dreams and ambitions.

The first of these reasons is the most obvious to manage, and is most likely to be supported by your work organisation. In contrast, the third is the most nebulous – not least because it is very possible that you are preparing yourself for a longer-term role which may not even exist yet. All three need careful attention. The difference between these aims and your earlier learning is that, this time, you have the personal responsibility for what you do.

Exhibit 5.1

Learning and Long-term Employability

For longer-term employability I look for how well people express their ideas and thinking: to see how far they have an appetite for further knowledge – a hunger, and a reason, for further growth; and to understand their future career dreams. Some of this can be judged from what candidates have done earlier in their education, such as travel, Duke of Edinburgh scheme, societies and positions of responsibility. They show how someone is keen to develop.

Allie Whelan, Director, LeapUK

Understanding How We Learn

Before we look at the resources available to help us learn, it is worthwhile to review how we learn – and think about our personal learning styles.

Most commonly used is Honey and Mumford's (1986) learning styles approach. They suggested that we learn in four ways:

- Activists: who learn by having an active involvement in concrete tasks and relatively short-term tasks.
- Reflectors: who review and reflect, stand back, listen, and think. Reflectors need to take care not to be seen as 'quiet' or day-dreaming.
- Theorists: who learn by taking on new situations, but need to relate these to theory. Reflectors need to be aware that absorbing new ideas might distance them from day-to-day situations.
- Pragmatists: who learn by linking between new information and real-life problems. Pragmatists like techniques which can be applied immediately.

Individuals can evaluate their current learning styles by undertaking one of the many Honey and Mumford learning styles inventories, which are widely available. Whilst there is no 'right' or 'wrong' learning style mix, it is better to have a good balance of each style. For example, if your learning style is mainly reflector, you may achieve deep insight into what is happening around you, but you may be seen in the workplace as not living in the here and now. In contrast, activists, who certainly do live in the here and now, may find that in

their desire to get things done they fail to notice things and repeat previous mistakes.

Practical Application

This short review of learning styles reminds us that to be fully effective learners we need a range of styles. In this way we are more likely to take full opportunity of learning and development from our work environments.

Furthermore, it is worthwhile to bear in mind that our preferred styles may also reflect on how we come across in the workplace. In this way, learning styles are not only important for understanding how we develop, but they also give good clues to how we may be perceived in the workplace. For example, reflectors may feel uncomfortable speaking up in team meetings or in giving presentations. It is therefore worthwhile to consider your learning styles: if you have areas of weakness, look for opportunities in the workplace to find new balance with these. [Table 5.1](#) gives some practical ideas on how you could manage this.

Training, Learning and Development

You may hear the terms 'training', 'learning' and 'development' being used interchangeably. In fact they have different points of emphasis, and it is important to recognise those differences:

- Training is the process to enhance work performance and improve current or special personal knowledge, skills and attitudes so that a job is performed accurately, effectively and ensures continuing improvement of work quality (Romanowska, 1993). On the other hand, Bramley (2003: 4) defines training as the process 'which is planned to facilitate learning so that people can become more effective in carrying out aspects of their work.'
- Learning aims to deliver qualitative and relatively permanent change in how an individual sees, experiences or understands something in the real world (Marton and Ramsden, 1988).
- Development is a more wide-ranging, longer-term concept. Nadler and Wiggs (1986) see development as preparation of employees for an uncertain future. It may include linking the organisation's strategy and retention strategy for employees, and linking career with learning plans. In terms of employability, development may also include learning and experience outside the immediate organisational boundaries.

Table 5.1 Balancing learning styles

TABLE 5.1 Balancing learning styles

Learning style	Strengths	Possible weakness: why this matters	Practical steps to address
Activist	Seen as getting on with it. Less likely to be resistant to change	The work usually gets done, but at what cost? May do too much yourself (or try to give that impression). May take risks in determination to deliver	You get the work done, but how effective are you? Balance your style with stepping back and thinking about things – use a learning journal or read a few articles or books – lift your head above the parapet!
Theorist	Understands the wider, deeper issues. May be leading edge as new ideas are explored	Too interested in theory and not living in the real world. May be seen as indecisive, or slow to complete work	Look at activist and pragmatist styles. How, particularly, can you make decisions or explain actions in more practical terms?
Reflector	Thoughtful and careful. Sees the deeper meaning. Good at problem solving. Good at data review and listening	Too much a day-dreamer, questions the 'what, why and how' without getting on with work. May be seen as indecisive or slow to complete work	How comfortable are you in group situations? Make and take opportunities to speak up in team meetings or give presentations. If it helps, get a colleague to give feedback in how you did. Build your confidence
Pragmatist	Down to earth, and happy to put new ideas into practice	A focus on technique and practical application may mean that people or policy may be overlooked	Spend more time listening to others, especially on implementation practicalities. Be careful of those shortcuts: they could yet get you into serious trouble

As you look at your learning plan, remember that you will have each of these elements, and access a range of different facilities to develop your learning.

Reflective and Action Learning

Action learning (and its closely linked concept of reflective learning) is an approach to practical learning originally developed by Professor Reg Revans. Revans believed that real learning only took place when it was supported by real-world experiences – not in formal courses and lecture theatres. Despite being a business school professor himself, Revans was damning of the position of those business school professors who had little or no experience of the real world – so much so that, in the end, he resigned from his position at Manchester Business School.

Although recognising that the detail of action learning may vary, Marquardt and Banks (2010) note that the underlying common principles of the approach are:

- Real work experience: learning is acquired in the midst of action and dedicated to the task at hand.
- Based on actual organisational experience and personal development: participants work on problems aimed at organisational as well as personal development and the intersection between them.
- Peer learning: learners work in peer learning teams to support and challenge each other.
- Learning to learn: users demonstrate learning-to-learn aptitude entailing a search for fresh questions over expert knowledge (based Marquardt and Banks, on 2010: 159–160).

There is limited empirical evidence as to why action learning should be as successful but it is claimed that action learning repays the cost of the learning by five to twenty-five times. Even so, as a form of learning, its practicality and closer link with real-life workplace issues means that it remains a popular and widely used concept.

Practical Application

Reflective and action learning need your personal investment in time and thinking about workplace successes and failures. In Appendix E we show a model action learning log.

Best Value Learning and Development?

Despite the investments made in designing and delivering learning and development solutions, it does not follow that those which are the most expensive (e.g. attendance on an external course or conference) are the most effective.

CIPD surveys consistently suggest that learning closest to the workplace is the most effective. In-house development programmes (52 per cent), coaching by line managers (46 per cent), on-the-job training (29 per cent), job rotation, job shadowing and secondments (23 per cent) are consistently rated as the most effective (CIPD, 2012). Other forms of training, such as audio and video tapes (2 per cent), e-learning (11 per cent), external conferences and workshops (14 per cent), and formal education and courses (12 per cent) are rated amongst the least effective. Learning methods such as non-managerial coaching, mentoring, action learning sets and internal knowledge-sharing events fall within the mid-range of perceived effectiveness (CIPD, 2012).

Practical Application

For long-term employability, including development within your role, developing your workplace learning is important throughout your career. Therefore whether you are in an organisation that organises training for you or in one where little attention is given to your learning, you need to keep an up-to-date learning plan covering what you need to do in the next 12–18 months.

Your learning comes from a number of sources:

- Ensuring that you have the ability to deliver all elements of your role description and performance

objectives.

- If, as we recommend, you keep a reflective learning log (see Appendix E for an example), look at gap areas in your performance and work out how to close them.
- Keep examples of your competences up to date (see [Table 3.2](#)). Look at areas of competence strength – how can you develop these for the future? Look at areas of weakness in your competences – how will you cover these?
- Express your learning plan in SMART terms (Specific, Measurable [what success looks like], Achievable, Realistic and Timed).
- Look at your longer-term objectives and what you need to develop to be credible in those areas.
- Check your plans with your line manager.
- Discuss your plans with your mentor.

Some organisations (including an aerospace company we spoke to) in the UK use a 70:20:10 ratio to guide a balance of learning, with 70 per cent related to the job and role, 20 per cent from social learning such as mentoring and networking, and 10 per cent related to course attendance. Other organisations, such as the RHP Group, have a nominal monetary budget to support individual learning, which is used in addition to direct work-related training. Mentoring and how professional bodies require undertaking continuing professional development with your professional bodies are also important in developing your learning, and we discuss these now.

Mentoring

We share seeing the understanding of the role of mentor, as defined on the Alta Mentoring Scheme:

A mentor has relevant knowledge and experience, and works on a short or long term basis with a mentee to give advice, guidance and support to assist the mentee's career, learning and development.¹

Mentoring offers the following benefits:

- A separate, objective sounding board.
- A source of experienced advice and guidance on a range of work-related issues.
- An adult-to-adult relationship, which may include constructive criticism.
- An independent role model.
- Someone you can turn to when you feel 'stuck'.

Despite the advantages of having a mentor, they are not a panacea. In particular, they will not tell you what to do (you will need to sort that out yourself), neither will they substitute for the role of the line manager. Mentoring can be used in conjunction with other types of learning, including coaching.

Exhibit 5.2

The Value of Mentors – Employers' Views

Mentors can be hugely valuable in a number of ways: giving feedback and advice, expanding your network and acting as a sponsor for you at a more senior level. The right mentor pairing is important in order that you have effective communication between you and a high level of trust and respect. When you are starting out in your career the best approach is to take all the help you are offered and use these relationships to further your network and enhance your experience. Sarah Harper, Goldman Sachs

Graduate 'work readiness' and employability is now very much improved. Even so, we use coaches and mentors during their early development. Jane Hadfield, Head of Learning & Development, Human Resource & Development Directorate, North Bristol NHS Trust

So what are the benefits of having a mentor? They may be summarised as:

- time for personal learning/reflection
- broader organisation awareness
- broader network via the mentor
- builds competence and confidence
- helps to deal with difficult circumstances
- learns from the experiences of others
- maintains a focus on both current work issues and longer-term career progression and personal development
- gaining independent, third-party advice.

We also know that there are benefits for being a mentor as well. Even if you are an undergraduate, or a recent graduate progressing through professional training, you may have a lot to offer people a few years behind you:

- time for personal learning/reflection (as mentors support the development of others, many report that they develop a different perspective of the organisation, or that it helps them to stay in touch with issues outside their immediate organisational levels)
- leadership: sets an example that can be 'passed down the line'
- learning from the perspective of others
- passing on knowledge and experience
- helping others to 'grow'
- contributes to organisational performance
- gives something back
- supports organisational learning.

Mentoring others is usually enjoyable, and demonstrates to potential employers that you have transferable skills.

Although mentoring benefits are usually expressed as being for the mentees, organisations benefit as well. They offer improved access to, and retention of, scarce talent and present new opportunities for employees. It is a cost-effective way to develop people and, pursued appropriately, should lead to an increase in employee loyalty and commitment. The direct benefits of a good mentoring relationship as you develop your employability portfolio are that it will give you:

- honest, candid, and objective feedback
- support and a different perspective.

Once you are in employment your manager may, at times, also give you advice as a mentor. But it is best for you to find a mentor outside your usual line. Your employing organisation may have a formal mentoring scheme. Alternatively, look to see if your professional body has a mentoring scheme, or ask your HR department for recommendations. If you are not employed, look for a mentor, who may be a family member or friend. There are professional-specific mentoring schemes and, increasingly, special schemes for women (see details at the end of this chapter).

Women specialist mentoring schemes recognise the particular needs of women, especially for those who are working in male-dominated organisations where female role models and confidantes may be harder to find and women colleagues form only a low proportion of the overall workforce. Examples include:

- The Mentoring Foundation, www.mentoringfoundation.co.uk/, a UK scheme to help more women reach the very top of large organisations.
- Alta, <http://alta-mentoring.com/>, for women in aviation and aerospace.
- Women in Film and Television UK, www.wftv.org.uk/mentoring-scheme, for those with at least 5 years' experience.

Women-only schemes are designed to supplement male/female mentoring; mentoring does, of course, remain open and valuable for men as well. Women-only schemes are usually structured and formalised. The

schemes are lawful in the UK as part of 'positive action' or 'positive support' diversity programmes. The value of the schemes can be judged by some of the comments that mentees have given on the value of their schemes. For example:

'The mentoring scheme fosters an incredibly supportive and safe environment to openly identify obstacles (both professional and personal), push boundaries, learn new skills, ask questions and take risks.' Fleur Jago, Producer (Mentee 2014) WFTV Mentoring Scheme, used with permission

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Whether CPD is a voluntary or mandatory part of your professional development, it should keep you up to date with the technical aspects of your work and help you to ensure that your personal skills remain appropriate and relevant. Friedman (2012) surveyed 102 professional bodies and found that 55 had their own definitions of CPD. Our own definition of CPD is:

A methodical approach to maintain and improve professional and personal skills, to enable personal work effectiveness throughout an individual's career.

Looking at the overall effectiveness of CPD, Friedman (2012) found that use of CPD was widespread (indeed, Gold and Smith, 2010, estimated that about 20 per cent of UK employees had their own CPD plans). However, there were some concerns about the use of CPD. For example, some regulatory bodies may see CPD as a form of public protection; however, it may equally be thought of as weak unless it is underpinned by legislation. On the other hand, where organisations wish to reinforce their own distinctive brand or culture, they may prefer to reinforce their own learning styles rather than rely on generic CPD approaches from national professional bodies.

Practical Application

We see CPD as an essential part of employability, though we recognise that employers may or may not see it as important in your development. If you are in an organisation which encourages your learning, CPD provides an invaluable framework for your development. If you are in an organisation which pays little attention to your development, your CPD programme will help you to maintain the skills that will enhance your employability where you are, and support you if you leave that employer.

Many professional bodies have their own CPD frameworks. As an example, abstracts from the CPD framework for dentistry are shown in [Exhibit 5.3](#). Review your CPD twice a year and make sure that it is realistic and continues to develop your skills and competences.

Your CPD may include an action plan for:

- Your developing competences – how you work with others, not just your technical skills ([Table 3.2](#)).
- Developing technical knowledge and skills.
- Coaching and mentoring (see [Table 5.2](#) at the end of the chapter).
- Ensuring that you use all types of learning styles in your development (see [Table 5.1](#)).
- Reflective practice and action learning (see [Table 5.1](#) and the example in Appendix E).
- Conventional learning through formal courses.
- General reading and activities which are 'outside the box' and enable you to take a broader perspective.

Exhibit 5.3

CPD and Professionalism – an Example for Dental Professionals

Some professional bodies have strict CPD requirements, which may also be established in law. In the

example below we have shown an abstract from the General Dental Council's (GDC) requirements for CPD. Dental professionals are advised to refer to the original source for the full requirements.

Notice the breadth of CPD examples which are given, as well as the importance attached to formal recording of CPD activities and minimum time commitments. Notice also that CPD is a legal requirement.

Keeping skills and knowledge up to date throughout your career is at the heart of what it means to be a dental professional.

We require you to do CPD because the GDC's purpose is to protect patients and the public. CPD helps to maintain public confidence in the dental register by showing that dental professionals are staying up to date. This is so you can give your patients the best possible treatment and make an effective contribution to dentistry in the UK.

The CPD scheme

CPD makes an important contribution to patient safety and is a requirement for continued registration with the GDC.

The GDC's current requirements have been in place since 2008 and they are set out in law. These can be found at the GDC's website at www.gdc-uk.org/governancemanual. You must meet our requirements to maintain your registration or restore to the register. Our requirements are based on a minimum number of hours of CPD that you must do during the five-year CPD cycle that applies to you. We will require you to tell us about all the CPD you have done at the end of your five-year CPD cycle. We will also invite you to provide us with certain information each year about the CPD you have done during your CPD cycle.

Definition of CPD

CPD for dental professionals is defined in law as lectures, seminars, courses, individual study and other activities that can be included in your CPD record if it can be reasonably expected to advance your professional development as a dentist or dental care professional and is relevant to your practice or intended practice.

Examples of types of CPD may include:

- courses and lectures
- training days
- peer review
- clinical audit
- reading journals
- attending conferences
- e-learning activity.

Visit www.gdc-uk.org for some suggestions on how to carry out your CPD.

Source: Abstract taken from 'Continuing Professional Development for Dental Professionals', General Dental Council (2013) and used with permission

Performance Reviews

Assessment doesn't stop at university, and most employers adopt some form of employee performance review (also known as 'performance appraisals'). The aims of the performance review process are objectives, feedback and evaluation (Storey and Sisson, 1993). In turn, this typically involves:

- linking your work objectives to those of the team and the organisation
- monitoring progress against SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed) work objectives
- looking at your current and future learning and development needs
- understanding how the work environment may have helped, or obstructed, your performance
- updating your SMART work objectives for the coming review period
- accepting the results of 360-degree feedback (in some organisations) (see following section)
- understanding whether there is any additional support you may need to do your job effectively
- giving feedback to your manager.

In some organisations, especially in the commercial sector, performance reviews are often linked to pay or bonus reviews; a minimum threshold of good performance will be required for you to receive a pay review. Some performance review schemes may end with an 'overall rating' – that you were 'good', 'very good', 'not good enough' and so on. Furthermore, and especially during graduate development periods, your performance reviews and an updated assessment of your competences (see [Chapter 3](#)) will often be used as part of your development assessment, and possibly of your standing on talent management programmes (see 'Talent Programmes' below). Where there are internal job selection processes, they may be used as part as selection assessment. In those occasions where organisations either restructure or need to implement redundancy programmes, performance reviews may also be used as an important de-selection criterion, so it is important to get them as right as possible.

So what might go wrong with performance reviews? Important as they are, performance reviews can go wrong. Poor reviews may be:

- infrequent (e.g. only annually)
- a monologue from the manager
- a review only of failures and omissions (or an excessively glossy review which fails to look at setbacks)
- based on impressions, not measurement of work against objectives
- a disagreement between the employee and the manager
- that both parties are left feeling disgruntled and the employee demotivated.

Qualitative performance objectives may be difficult to assess objectively, whereas quantitative goals (budget management, hitting date objectives, sales, project time lines etc.) concentrate too much on the numbers and not enough about the circumstances (good or bad) in which you worked.

The research on performance management systems underlines many of the problems associated with this technique of management. For example, it is not always easy for managers to make objective distinctions in performance (Heneman, 1992; Wiese and Buckley, 1998). In turn, this makes overall ratings more difficult to get right. Managers themselves may feel ill prepared or insufficiently trained to undertake appraisals. Crush (2013) noted that appraisals can go wrong when neither party comes away from the review meeting 'any the wiser', an excessive focus on what needs to be done rather than how it is done, a failure to have clear work objectives, a tendency for employees to feel disengaged and a failure to give praise. Overall, it is little wonder that so much has been expected of performance review as a process, and yet that potential has not yet been fully delivered.

Against the difficulties associated with performance reviews, organisations are often looking both to improve appraiser training and develop clear policy. One area of emerging interest is 'abolishing' the formal annual performance appraisal. In its place, organisations such as Accenture (management consultants), Microsoft, Gap, and Expedia are said to be introducing more frequent, less formalised schemes (Kirton, 2015:10). For many, this would in any case reflect the type of good practice which could already be integrated into current schemes. It will be interesting to see how these schemes develop, and whether they genuinely achieve the aims of a good review suggested by Stone and Heen (2014): appreciation, evaluation, coaching.

360-Degree Feedback

As part of your performance reviews (sometimes used for graduate development, though typically used from junior management roles and above), you may take part in 360-degree feedback.

This feedback on your work performance should remain relevant to the role, but benefit from a broad range of stakeholders. You will be invited to gather feedback from a range of contributors (subordinates, peers, managers and customers) (Chen and Naquin, 2006).

As to how effective and useful 360-degree feedback is, CIPD (2012) found that 22 per cent of organisations rated 360-degree feedback as effective for talent management (against only 3 per cent for assessment centres).

But 360-degree feedback also has its critics. These include lack of clarity on purpose, use only to deal with under-performers (in some cases), potential breach of confidentiality, lack of measurement effectiveness, treating it as an end in itself, not part of a wider process, and poor communication with those involved (Wimer and Nowack, 1998). At a more practical (and potentially cynical) level, the value of the feedback may also depend on who chooses the 360 responders, and whether the review is for genuine, confidential development or is constructed as part of a flattering performance review.

Practical Application

Some colleagues may be relaxed at the prospect of their reviews, whilst others may be cynical, tense or non-committed. This is a pity. Well executed, performance reviews are a very important part of working life and can give you realistic and supportive feedback on how you are doing. You must prepare for a performance review and not leave it to your manager to give a monologue report on your process. Indeed, a well-trained manager should let you do most of the talking during the review. You can prepare by:

- keeping your performance review papers safely (though increasingly, reviews are kept online)
- checking your performance against your SMART objectives under regular review – certainly not leaving it until the next review before you look at them again
- knowing how well (not so well) you have done since the last review meeting (give actual data and examples)
- not assuming that, just because performance reviews have not been mentioned, they will not happen (some line managers still find formal performance reviews a chore and do not prepare adequately for them; make sure that you are prepared and have considered your learning needs as part of that review)
- keeping notes on what has gone well and not so well, and why (give actual data and examples)
- thinking about your own learning and development needs (remember, you should have your own learning plan)
- agreeing to new objectives for the coming review period without underestimating the potential for other factors to interfere with your ability to deliver – this is not a mandate for playing games in performance reviews, however, a good adage is to be cautious in promising what you think you can do and then seek to exceed expectations in quality and timing of delivery
- arranging your review date with your manager in good time – don't let your manager, or yourself, be rushed into getting results together at short notice.

In conclusion, the performance review is a widely used system, in all sectors and globally. Despite this, it can still be seen as a complication, even a barrier, to what should be constructive and valuable feedback between the employee and the manager. We have included a candid review here so that you may have an objective perspective of the process. It is important for you to have an informed and 'can do' attitude towards your own review, and use this section to minimise some of the pitfalls in the system.

If your organisation has a talent management programme, your potential participation in the programme will be based on how you perform in your role and how your future potential is judged. We will now look at talent

programmes in more detail.

Talent Programmes

Organisations use talent development programmes to develop key employees for future managerial or specialist roles. Graduates may initially be put on talent programmes to focus learning and development investment in what is often an expensive resource to recruit, and one which organisations hope will provide at least some of their longer-term specialist and managerial resources. Other organisational talent programmes may be focused on specialist functions, graduates or to develop more senior – and the most senior – executives of the organisation.

CIPD (2015a) found that about 60 per cent of commercial organisations and 40 per cent of public sector organisations used talent development programmes. Of these, 54 per cent include all staff in their talent development programmes, whilst about 35 per cent focus on higher potential employees only; about 17 per cent of graduates were allocated to some form of talent development programme (CIPD 2015a).

Talent management programmes should link organisation strategy with employee performance and potential in order to provide the organisation with its longer-term functional and management needs. This does not happen as frequently or as systematically as you might expect. Charan noted the paradox that organisations focused time and resources to managing finances, but commented on a 'scant approach' (2010: 2) to identifying and developing their leaders.

Blass (2007) emphasised the interdependencies between talent management and performance management and also noted that performance management (linked with a systematic review of future potential) should be a good basis for talent management systems. For Charan et al. (2011) talent can be identified by ranking current performance and future potential; individuals with high performance and high potential will be ready for early promotion, following a path of development aimed at developing self and progressively leading larger teams and groups within the organisation. Those with lesser talent potential may make slower progress, and not to such senior levels, whilst those with low performance and low potential would come under further review, either for development or for leaving the organisation.

Given the profile and money spent on them, do talent programmes work? At the individual level, Blass (2007) found that only 31 per cent of managers had any real confidence that their organisation could identify high-potential talent. At organisational level, Guttridge et al. (2006) found strategic failures to link talent management and business strategies. Blass noted that although the necessary alignment with business strategy was considered critical, 'in practice they are too often developed in isolation' (2007: 3). Research by CIPD (2012) found that only 6 per cent of organisations regarded their talent management activities as 'very effective', 50 per cent 'fairly effective', but 15 per cent as 'fairly ineffective or very ineffective'. As a result, they observed a slight fall in organisations using these programmes: to 54 per cent in 2012 from 61 per cent the previous year. By 2015, the organisation behaviour specialist Adrian Furnham expressed the view that 'telling someone they are talented is disastrous' (2015: 44): in part, this reflects the difficulty in identifying 'talent' in the first place, but also recognises the raised expectations (which may not be achieved) of those identified as talent.

Practical Application

If you find yourself in a talent programme, what can you expect from it? We don't want the experience to be 'disastrous', but for you to make the most of the opportunity without losing your head and sense of proportion. Typically, this may include work rotation, promotions, project work, management training schemes, qualifications, mentoring, secondments, transfers and job shadowing (Blass, 2007). Throughout this time you can expect that your performance will be monitored through regular performance management reviews and future potential assessed through competence assessment. The talent pool is usually kept under regular review, with new opportunities for newly identified talent and dropping for those who are not making the required level of progress. Talent development programmes are not a panacea for long-term tenure in an organisation. Indeed some organisations (including accounting and financial services) will terminate

employment of graduates who fail to make the required standards during or on completion of the talent programme.

And what should you do if you find that your organisation does not have a talent development programme? Or that it does, and that you are not part of it? Of course, this does not mean that your development is of no value to the organisation (in reality, whilst talent programmes help to focus development spend on those who are most likely to benefit from it, they are also regarded as potentially elitist). Instead, you should develop your own talent programme. This is not as difficult as it may seem, though it will mean that you need to invest time to do so – indeed, it is central to the purpose of this book on employability. Use the chapters in this book to develop your personalised talent development programme. Once you have done this, use it as the basis for working with your mentor (see ‘Mentoring’ in this chapter) on your personal development.

In conclusion, talent programmes are still widely used, and graduates may often find themselves on an organisation-based programme. Despite the hype which surrounds them, they have weaknesses in design and implementation. Even so, they are an important opportunity to take and make the most use of – so much so that if you are not on one, we do suggest that you prepare your own programme (see [Table 5.2](#) for an example).

Conclusion

Effective learning and development – throughout your career – is key to long-term employability.

The techniques for learning at work may still include development of theoretical knowledge through reading and professional studies, but will now rely more on learning from your work performance, including reflective learning.

Mentoring and CPD have important roles in your continued learning and development, so do get organised to make the most of these resources.

Table 5.2 Sample individual learning plan

TABLE 5.2 Sample individual learning plan

	What	By when	Support needed
My personal goals	Achieve 'chartered' status in professional exams	3 years from now:	Can my employer provide financial or time resources to support?
	Enhance all work-related competences in preparation for career advancement		
	Gain further experience in [subject] to prepare for new job applications	Review competence examples every 3–4 months. Look out for new roles from 12 month's time	Line manager
	Keep a broad view of wider developments in my area of work through reading and external conference attendance	Next 18 months: Request short-term attachment to [name of] department Read professional journal. Attend 3 professional body events each year. See if local university has relevant public seminars	
Learning to achieve this	Complete professional exams, review chartered criteria	Ensure I complete at least three exam modules each year	Use competences examples to see what gaps I need to close
	List out my competences examples (Table 3.2), and review strengths and areas of development	Every 3–4 months By year end	Discuss with line manager; keep an eye open for secondments
	Get better at [competency] and discuss with line manager how I can improve in this/these areas	In next 18 months	
	Gain experience outside current role with a secondment/ placement	Within 2 months	
	Find a mentor and discuss development plans with mentor. See mentor every 6 weeks	Ask [trusted colleague] to give me feedback on team effectiveness over next month	Check if mentoring scheme available, or via my professional body
	Is there 360-degree feedback available as part of organisation learning schemes? If not, do I have a trusted colleague who could give me feedback on how I come across, especially in team meetings and presentations	See HR information for possible 360-degree feedback	

Performance reviews are also an integral part of your learning and tracking the impacts of your development. It is very important that you prepare yourself thoroughly for your performance reviews – don't simply leave it to your manager.

Some organisations will still give good support for your learning, others less so. You may also find yourself part of an organisation talent programme, or find yourself excluded from it. Whichever of these apply, remember that managing your learning is in the end your own responsibility. Do take time to manage it effectively.

Action

Having read this chapter, we suggest that you think about the following action points:

- Commit yourself to your long-term personal development with a personal learning plan.
- As you start work it is worthwhile keeping a journal, especially in the first year. This will help you to move up the learning curve more quickly. Keep notes on what you did, things you achieved, problems you encountered. Topics to include are:
 - who does what
 - your first impressions (and see how they develop over time)
 - a sketch map of who works where (useful as you get bombarded with new names)
 - learning plans which you need to achieve
 - things going well (how will you replicate this in other areas of work?)
 - things going not so well (and how you will fix these).
- Set aside regular time for that personal development.
- Find a mentor – or two.

- If you are on a professional development track, look at professional qualifications and requirements for CPD.
- Think about how you could develop your mentoring skills.
- Take the opportunity to look outside the box for learning opportunities, for example: mix your learning styles; visit a library and browse through the books; think about how the full range of arts, science, technology, social changes and culture could impact your work; go to a talk which does not seem relevant to your field – what can you learn from it?
- Read your professional journals; think about writing an article.

Further Reading

Find a copy of Honey and Mumford's learning style questionnaire (Honey, 1986); look at your learning styles and think about what you can do to make fullest use of each of the four learning styles.

1 See <http://alta-mentoring.com/> – used with permission.

- workplace learning
- performance reviews
- talent management
- mentoring
- talent
- employability
- talent development

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