

Personal Development Plans/Individual Learning Plans

What should be in the PDP?

There are many formats that can be used for PDP's. Organisations often develop standardised in-house forms, or adopt ready-made forms. In some workplaces, departments or individual managers devise their own paperwork to use with their teams, and sometimes individuals are left to produce their own. As a general guide, it is useful to incorporate the following features in a PDP:

i) Identified training and development needs (What?)

The PDP should be used to record all training and development needs identified through training needs analysis. Additional training needs often arise after PDPs have been completed, but organisations will have different views and policies on whether additional needs should be accommodated or not. The most important thing to remember is that work-based training and development plans should be agreed by the individual and their manager. Getting agreement might involve compromise, negotiation, or even enforcement (especially if there are legal implications).

ii) Training objectives (Why?)

It is extremely difficult to identify suitable training solutions without clearly defined training objectives. We need to be specific about what we expect to gain from training and development activities - what are the expected outcomes, what are the expected benefits to the individual and to the company? Expected outcomes should be noted on the PDP in precise terms - vague expressions like "improved efficiency" and "better job performance" should be avoided. Training objectives should be SMART, i.e., Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Time-bound. If we are clear about what we want to achieve, it is easier to plan how to achieve it, and it is certainly easier to evaluate.

iii) Development methods (How?)

This is about how training and development needs are to be addressed. What methods are available and which are the most appropriate? There is a wide range of learning methods available and selecting the right ones depend on a number of organisational and personal factors. (See handouts "A range of training and development methods" notes below on organisational and personal factors)

iv) People (Who?)

It's important to note who is going to be involved in training interventions. Obviously the learner themselves will be involved, but there may be other people internally such as line managers or mentors or in-house trainers. Noting who is to be involved will act as an aide memoire for organising development activities

v) Time scales (When?)

The PDP should indicate the time-scale within which training is to be completed. Urgent training needs should be prioritised in date order.

vi) Review (So what?)

Often left out of PDP's, it is nonetheless important to include methods and dates of review. This helps to keep people on track and increases the likelihood of objectives being met.

Organisational factors to be considered in preparing a PDP

These include:

Organisation training policy – what's allowable?

Budgets – what's affordable?

Corporate priorities – what's most important?

Releasability – can you be spared?

Timing – is the timing right?

Location – where will it happen?

Equality of opportunity

Training Policy

The parameters within which training activities are organised in an organisation should be defined by a Training Policy. The Policy sets out the company stance on training activity, roles, responsibilities, processes and resources.

Budgetary constraints

The level of investment in training varies from organisation to organisation, and learners need to be aware that budget holders may not be able or willing to provide funding to meet individual training needs.

Sometimes the preferred training method may not be financially viable - training costs vary considerably between providers, and some training needs may be met more economically through in-house training rather than via external courses.

Corporate training priorities

The Company business plan or Corporate training plan (if there is one) sets out the company's training priorities for the coming year, and usually covers issues such as leadership, culture, management practices & style, business structure & processes, IT systems, teamworking. Some individual needs may be addressed at the corporate level, and some development activities may be mandatory.

Releasability

Line managers have to take into consideration the needs of their section/department when planning training and development activities. Releasability becomes an issue when people have heavy workloads or commitments; when more than one team member requests day release to pursue a course, or when several people have identical needs. Line managers have to determine where the priorities lie and release staff accordingly.

Requests for study leave should be considered in accordance with guidelines laid down in the training policy or staff handbook.

Location

There may be issues around location of training related to travel costs and time, which may rule out certain development options. There may also be policies related to using local providers or restricting travel.

Equality of opportunity

All training interventions supported by the organisation must comply with equality legislation, and this must be reflected in personal development plans. For instance, the organisation must not favour one group over another in its provision of development opportunities.

Personal factors to be considered in preparing a PDP

Personal circumstances

It's important for learners to consider their wider circumstances so that they can take a realistic approach to learning. People may have all sorts of things going on in their lives such as caring for dependents, long-term illnesses, involvement in social and leisure activities, moving house, a new job, various work commitments etc. There are times when people simply do not have enough time or reserves to take on substantial learning.

Time commitment

Linked to the above, it is important that people appreciate how much time they will have to commit to learning. How much, if any, time will they be given by their employer? How much of their own free time will they have to use? Their learning plan may be over-ambitious in terms of the time they have available.

Individual learning style

The success of a training or a development programme is largely dependent upon whether it is compatible with the learning style of the individual concerned. Most people have a preferred learning style, and whilst they might occasionally adapt, as a rule they find it difficult to learn using methods contrary to their preferred style.

Some people recognise their own learning style and choose training activities which reflect it, others do not. Problems arise when people undertake learning activities which are not suited to their learning style eg. open learning when they prefer taught lessons. (See material on learning styles on moodle)

Study Skills

Some people may have undertaken learning recently or on an on-going basis and have well-developed study skills. Others will be returning to learning after a long absence. The learning experience is likely to be more successful if people learn how to learn.