The IoIC Continuous Professional Development Programme

A Guide to Creating your Personal Development Plan and Writing your Reflective Statement

What is a Personal Development Plan?

A personal development plan (PDP) is a tool which allows you to document an open and honest consideration of your current knowledge, skills, strengths and weaknesses and enables you to think about the areas in which you need to develop via training, independent research, mentoring or a number of other means. Creating your PDP gives you an opportunity to reflect upon your current performance, achievements and learning as well as plan for the future to ensure your ongoing development.

There are many benefits to creating and owning your PDP. Below are just a few of them:

An increase to your level of self-awareness

In an age where we are constantly reachable by phone, email or social media, the ability to take some time out to think about what we really want out of life and our career is increasingly becoming more difficult. But the importance of doing so is by no means decreasing. By taking the time to think about where you are at this point in your career and where you want to be; what you truly value and the areas you want to pursue; and what action you are willing to take to achieve your goals, your levels of self-awareness will increase and you will find that the process of writing your PDPs will become easier.

Increased motivation

Research has shown us that setting goals or objectives which are specific; challenging yet attainable; timed; and used to evaluate performance significantly increases motivation. Knowing that you are working towards an overarching aspiration by reaching smaller objectives motivates you to keep going, keep working and keep developing. But it's not just about performance – the same piece of research also found that a learning goal, rather than a work related goal, actually leads to increased levels of performance in the bid to reach said goal. An individual whose PDP includes a learning goal wants to develop competence by mastering a challenging situation, whereas those which contain only performance related objectives might only be seeking 'favourable judgement'. In the internal comms profession, learning about new ways to creatively solve problems and being open to new and innovative ideas is key.

Building resilience

When things go wrong, it's easy to lose motivation. Having your PDP on hand to remind you of exactly what it is you're working towards and what you need to do to get there will allow you to look past the negatives and refocus, helping you to build the resilience needed to get back up again after you've been knocked down. Higher levels of resilience can help not only with work related tasks but also our physical and mental health – it allows us to transform challenges into opportunities and continually learn from situations which we might initially have perceived to be setbacks.

How to create your PDP

It's important to remember when first approaching your PDP that this process is all about you. The clue is in the name – it's a *personal* exploration of where you are now, where you want to be and what you need to do to get there. And of course, your ability and potential to develop is not restricted to your work; as we've already seen, increases to performance are driven more by a learning objective than a work one. Similarly, choosing to focus on your time management skills so you're able to spend more quality time with your family is more likely to motivate you than striving to make more sales during a certain period.

The personal aspect of creating your PDP also means that the onus is all on you. You don't need permission or approval from a line manager to start the process and you are not required to share your plan with anyone (although, as we'll discuss later, you might find that it can be very useful to do so).

With all of this in mind, we have created what we hope will be a helpful guide to writing your PDP. This is by no means a prescriptive model. It's important to find what works for you when thinking about your personal development and the ways in which you will most benefit from this process.

SWOT

You might like to start the process of creating your PDP by first writing an analysis of your current **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats (SWOT). There are various ways to go about this, some people might create a grid and others might design a mind map. However you decide to SWOT up, the following questions might help you to get started:

- What do you do well?
- What tools and resources do you have available to you?
- What have you achieved in the last year or so that you are most proud of?

- What could you improve?
- Which areas do feel least confident in?
- Where are your resources lacking?

- What opportunities are already open to you?
- Where can you create new opportunities?
- Are there current trends that you're able to take advantage of?

- Is there anything that might get in the way of you achieving your objectives?
- Are there limitations to your development in terms of budget/scope/time?
- Is there anything in your life that is about to drastically change?

Depending on how you decide to go about analysing where you currently are, you might end up with something like this:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Strong knowledge of the organisation Multiple relationships across departments Passion for my role Stand out copy-editing and proofreading skills Professional qualification in internal comms Supportive line manager Membership of professional body	Lack of confidence Small training budget Relationships with senior leaders Time management Work/life balance Creativity
Opportunities	**Threats**
Networking events Mentor Furthering my education	Cuts to IC budget Busy home life Limited knowledge of comms channels Competition from colleagues

Now that you've conducted your self-analysis and determined the areas which you believe to be your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, you might like to share your thoughts with a trusted colleague or friend to gain a different perspective. This person could be your line manager or someone else who is invested in your professional development, or a family member who knows you personally and is able to provide some feedback on your attitude and behaviours. Part of becoming more self-aware is finding out how we are viewed by others – you might find that, by asking your line manager to review your SWOT analysis, they encourage you to add your ability to speak up in meetings to your strengths or that your friend or family member lets you know that you might want to work on your listening skills.

Competency Framework

The IoIC Competency Framework has been written as a reference tool which IC professionals can use to establish what is expected of a practitioner at various levels – from entry roles to senior leadership – and where they currently sit within the professional landscape.

Having written your SWOT analysis and received feedback from colleagues or those within your personal network, you should now be thinking about your objectives. You might find that the IoIC Competency Framework is a good guide as you map out where you want to be within the next 12 months and the knowledge and skills that will be required of you in order to get to that level.

Your objectives are the things that you need to complete or achieve in order to reach your overarching PDP. A PDP can encapsulate as many objectives as necessary. Your objectives can be short, medium or long term and should be reviewed on a regular basis in order to remain fluid and relevant to your development. To turn your objectives into more specific actions, think about making them SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed). For example, rather than:

Increase knowledge of communication channels

Your objectives should read more like the following:

To be able to put forward a convincing case for implementing Workplace by Facebook by increasing my knowledge of social media channels, particularly Workplace, by the end of April 2017. To include data on the measurable impact Workplace has on levels of staff engagement.

An objective like the one above might fit into a number of overarching PDPs, such as 'Increasing my influencing skills with key stakeholders' or 'Gaining confidence when writing and delivering proposals'.

Now that you've decided on your objectives, think about the actions that you need to take in order to achieve these. Again, it might be that there are a multitude of actions that you need to complete for one single objective. There might, for example, be a specific training course which will really help you to achieve your desired outcome and you might find that you need to complete some reading either post or prior to the course.

By the end of the process, you should have something that looks like this:

PDP title	Increasing my influencing skills
PDP description	In order to reach the next stage of my career and enter a managerial role, I feel it's important that I gain the confidence, knowledge and ability to speak up and represent internal communications in order to influence leadership and encourage them to see the value of internal comms
Date range	01/03/2017 – 29/09/2017

Objective title	A case for a new collaborative platform
Objective description	To be able to put forward a convincing case for implementing Workplace by increasing my knowledge of social media channels, particularly Workplace, by the end of April 2017. To include data on the measurable impact Workplace has on levels of staff engagement
Action required	In order to achieve my objective, I will need to investigate Workplace and the ROI it has already offered to other organisations which have implemented it.

	I will also need to read available materials which will help me to present the data on the ROI in a coherent and comprehensive manner. Furthermore, I will attend a course on Social Collaboration in order to fully understand the most effective way to present a case for investing in a new social platform
Resources required	Relevant literature on Workplace plus measurement and insight Social Collaboration training course
Target review date	07/04/2017
Target completion date	28/04/2017

Your PDP is a working document and should change over time as you learn and develop. It's important to keep your PDP up to date in order to ensure that you are getting as much value as possible from the process and your CPD remains relevant.
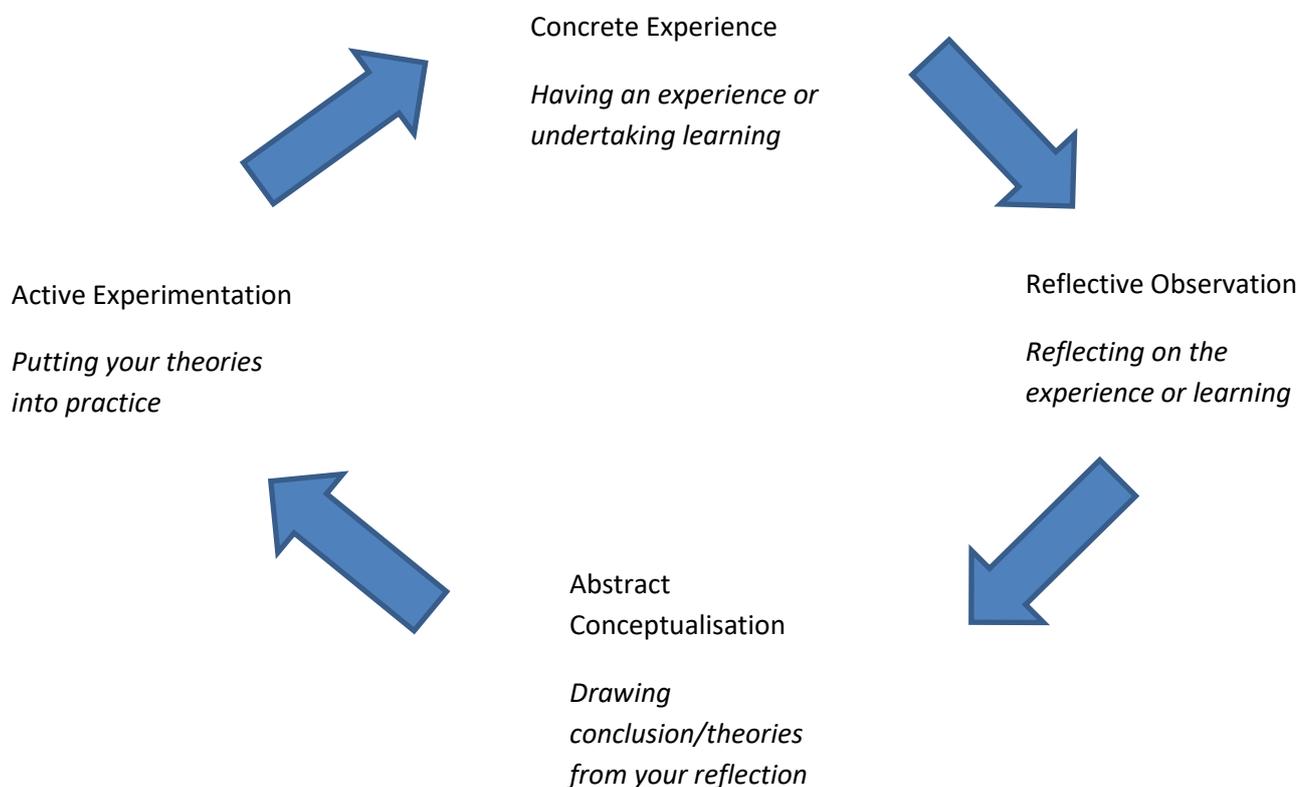
Reflection

What is Reflection?

If you've read the accompanying guide to using the online CPD system, you'll probably have noticed that reflection is a concept that comes up a lot. In order to claim for CPD hours, users are required to reflect on all learning undertaken and write a short reflective statement outlining exactly what they have learnt. But what exactly does reflection entail and why do we ask you to do it?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines reflection as, 'Serious thought or consideration'. It is a mass noun – something which can't be counted – an abstract idea that you cannot see or touch. So in layman's terms, reflection is just thinking really, really hard about something.

Reflection is, and should be, a huge part of professional development. Evidence suggests that any reflective practice improves the way that we perform in our jobs - it helps us to embed our learning and enables us to put it into practice when we find ourselves in situations which require a new behaviour. Without reflecting on the learning you have just completed, it's easy to simply move on to the next task and miss out on the opportunity to actively think about how you're going to use your new skill or knowledge and the ways in which you can develop it even further.

It takes time and practice for reflection to become a natural process but, as with most things, the more you do it, the better you'll become and the more you'll benefit from the learning that you complete. There are a number of theories which attempt to define this process, the most common being Kolb's Learning Cycle, demonstrated below:

Concrete Experience

Having an experience or undertaking learning

Active Experimentation

Putting your theories into practice

Reflective Observation

Reflecting on the experience or learning

Abstract Conceptualisation

Drawing conclusion/theories from your reflection

Writing your reflective statement

Every time you add an activity to your PDP in order to build up the 32 hours required to complete a CPD cycle, whether it's attending a training course or reading a journal article, you'll need to write a brief reflective statement outlining what you have learnt from the experience and how you might apply your learning to your role or future development.

Writing your reflective statement doesn't have to be an arduous task. It is an opportunity for you to spend some time thinking about what you have learnt and how you plan to use your new knowledge, culminating in a portfolio of all the learning that you have completed over 12 months and the ways in which you have applied it to your work and life.

Your reflective statement will vary from activity to activity and the level of detail you include will depend on the type of learning you have completed. If, for example, you have just completed a large project which took a great deal of time and required you to step out of your usual comfort zone, your reflective statement might be a lengthy one with reference to what you learnt about yourself as a person and the ways in which you like to work. It might also contain a sentence that starts *'If I were to do this project again, I would…'*

On the other hand, if you've read an article on employee engagement or attended a training course on social media, your learning is likely to have been very targeted and specific and your reflective statement can therefore simply be one or two sentences about the new skill or piece of knowledge that you have acquired and how you will implement it back at work.

Whatever you're reflecting on, it's important to remember the two key elements of reflective writing:

1. The first person – this is all about you, so make sure you're writing in the first person (*I, me, my, mine*) and that you're considering **your** feelings, thoughts, values, actions and practice.

2. Looking back – you will only be required to reflect on learning that has already taken place and how it might change your thoughts and approach to future situations. What happened **then** and what are your thoughts **now**.

The ability to reflect effectively is a useful skill both in our professional and personal lives. Rather than a one-off task which needs to be completed as part of a checklist activity, try to see reflection as a transformative habit of mind which will help you to learn, develop and grow.