

60 Ways to learn and develop

As you and your manager develop your Personal Development Plan, you will need to consider which activities suit your needs and which help you to deliver the business needs of your service. Try to think of meeting learning and development needs in different ways - not only in formal off-the-job courses and workshops - there can be more effective ways to learn new skills and knowledge.

On-the-job Learning

Often, the most effective learning takes place at your place of work.

- 1. Sit-by-Pat** – the most traditional way to learn a new skill or task is to sit with a person who currently does that, and learn through doing it. Keep a log of what you learn to appreciate just how valuable this method of learning is.
- 2. Delegation** – an individual undertakes a task that their manager would normally undertake e.g. attending a meeting, taking the minutes perhaps, and reporting back..
- 3. Mentoring** – either be a mentor to someone else or find yourself a mentor. A mentor provides a source of feedback and general guidance to another member of staff, acting as a trusted adviser.
- 4. Job enlargement** – undertaking an extra activity in addition to current duties. The additional activity generally involves a higher level of responsibility.
- 5. Reality training** – this is an appropriate form of training for members of staff who generally work away from the front line. Usually involves working in the front line e.g. with service users.
- 6. Trial and error and re-trial** – an effective way to learn is by being given the chance to try a new skill or activity in a controlled situation, learning from any mistakes.
- 7. Appraisals** – the appraisal discussion can itself be a source of learning, besides providing the opportunity to formulate a Personal Development Plan, linked to achievements expected at work.
- 8. Reviewing your successes** – helpful in analysing and planning for future success. This can be undertaken individually or, ideally, with another person.
- 9. Coaching** – another member of staff acts as “coach” encouraging the development of new skills or knowledge and providing constructive feedback.
- 10. Shadowing** – attachment to another member of staff or team for a set period of time in order to learn from them.
- 11. Observation**–learning from watching others in action.

Work Experience

12. Secondment – taking on a particular task or a different job for a period of time, usually in a different department, unit or organisation.

13. Job rotation – this can be a formal or informal arrangement where two or more individuals rotate jobs for a set period of time. Within teams it can be useful to enhance versatility.

14. Assistant to – an individual is seconded to work for a senior manager for a set period of time.

15. Job share – where the duties of one post are shared between two or more individuals.

16. A temporary job move – to cover for absence for example, provides opportunities to develop new skills and acquire knowledge in a different area.

17. Temporary promotion – “acting up” or deputising for a set period of time.

18. Work experience in another organisation – either through job swap or secondment.

19. Job transfer – a permanent move into a vacant position at the same level provides further opportunities for broadening skills and knowledge.

Group/Team Activities

We gain an enormous amount of knowledge and skills from other people. Group activities are the core components of many training courses-although learning from others can take a variety of different forms.

20. Task forces – groups of people, often from different departments, brought together on a full or part time basis for a fixed period of time to carry out a defined project.

21. Working groups – groups of people brought together to explore and resolve work-related issues.

22. Quality Circle – a multi-level group of volunteers who meet to discuss how to improve the quality of services and/or products.

23. Team building exercises – exercises are used to develop the team as a whole. Often a person from outside the department is used as a facilitator.

24. Problem solving groups – a number of people drawn together with the purpose of providing a solution to a specific problem.

25. Brainstorming – an exercise to stimulate ideas. Members of the team propose ideas that are not evaluated or judged by others in the group, but simply collected and recorded.

26. Action learning sets – groups of 5 or 6 people work to a group contract for personal and group development. Many certificate-based courses provide the opportunity to form such groups.

27. Workshops – where groups of people explore issues together, often drawing on real life experiences.

28. Discussion groups – used as a focus for sharing information.

29. User groups – generally composed of people with similar jobs, or using similar software applications, who meet from time to time to share information and experiences.

30. Social clubs – people who join such clubs will develop useful contacts, often in departments other than their own, to learn about what's going on in other parts of an organisation.

31. Simulation exercises – there are now a variety of simulation exercises from which much can be learned about 'real life' situations.

32. Management games – these can be externally run or can be a specific team exercise concerned with management issues.

Self-Development Activities

It is not only the manager's responsibility to provide learning and development for individuals. Self-development activities can improve job satisfaction and long-term career prospects.

33. Adult education classes – there is always a large choice of classes available. Local libraries usually have information of courses in their areas.

34. Co-coaching – agreeing to meet regularly with another person to help each other learn from work-related activities, problems and issues.

35. Buddy systems – formal or informal systems where colleagues support each other in work and career-related matters.

36. Time out – approved Leave (without pay) may be given to undertake self-development activities e.g. attend Territorial Army activities

37. Study leave – approved leave (with or without pay) to undertake an approved course of learning e.g. attend University Summer School

38. Special projects – taking on direct responsibility for an assignment to help develop an individual's skills or knowledge.

39. Research – undertaking research into a topic of interest which may or may not be specifically related to the person's job.

40. Podcasts and other audio recordings – these are often used for personal development e.g. mindfulness.

41. Technology enhanced learning – these are packages which help develop an individual's skills and knowledge. They allow learning to take place at the learner's pace and a location that suits.

42. Skills packages – usually a collection of materials to aid individual learning e.g. books, CD-Roms, audio recordings etc.

43. Personal testing programmes – these are self-analysis tools often found in management textbooks and on computer-based programmes.

44. Distance learning packages – These usually relate to specific skills. Most nationally known colleges now produce such packages.

45. Open learning (OL) – available from the Open University and a variety of other forums, OL is similar to Distance Learning, but each student usually has a personal tutor. OL is usually undertaken in an individual's own time.

46. Reading – This can include journal articles, White Papers etc. as well as books.

Courses

While there are many other Learning and Development opportunities, face-to-face course-based training is likely to remain popular and is indeed a very effective method of learning, providing there is a clear link between what's learned off the job and how it is to be applied to real life. The following is a sample of what's available.

47. Short courses – one to two days, usually covering specific topics.

48. Modular courses – these usually take place on several occasions, over time, so that learning can be put into action in the workplace and then reviewed.

49. Refresher courses – Reminders or updates on specific topics.

50. Professional skills training – a planned programme usually run by colleges e.g. Prince 2.

51. Formal training programme – planned programme for apprentices, management trainees etc.

52. Part-time courses – day/evening courses which usually lead to a qualification.

53. Taster or awareness courses – provide an overview of a topic which may be studied in detail later.

54. Residential courses – delegates work and live with a group away from the workplace for a number of days. Usually, work takes place in the evenings also, so learning takes place in the shortest time possible.

55. Study courses – e.g. Open University courses which do not necessarily lead to formal qualifications. They can be group or individual learning based.

56. Visiting – other departments and/or different sites/ organisations and feeding back.

57. Networking – is a way by which people have opportunity to meet together informally as a means of enhancing learning.

58. Seminars – are held on a particular topic and provide opportunities for delegates to hear experts speak and be involved in discussions.

59. Conferences – many professional bodies and organisations hold these as an annual event e.g. CILIP.

60. Visual resources – for example, TED talks, DVDs etc. which can be used as an aid to either team or individual development. They can be particularly effective if followed by discussion of the issues raised.