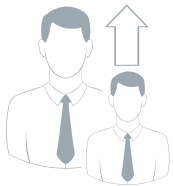# How to Build a Professional Development Plan

What is a Professional Development Plan and Why Do I Need One?

A Professional Development Plan (PDP), also known as an Employee Development Plan or an Individual Development Plan, is used to document career goals and set out a strategy on how to meet them.

Every information professional – in fact, every professional – needs a professional development plan. You have to stay current in order to remain relevant. And relevance is relative: there's a difference between staying where you are (treading water) and setting out to get a better position, more pay, or increased responsibilities. You're the only one who knows what road you're on– meaning you have to take responsibility for your own professional development plan.

Because everyone's professional journey is different, we can't tell you precisely what should go into your plan. However, we've put together a framework that is comprehensive, yet flexible, to allow you to develop a plan that makes sense for you and your professional goals.

Where Do I Begin?

First, assess where you are now with your career and what your future goals are. Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten? Is there a specific certification or training you need to get you to this goal? Gather the required information so you can clearly define the pathway to your career objectives. Always make sure that your goals are SMART:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**imely

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Choose How You Will Accomplish Your Goals
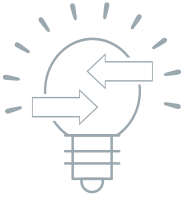
There are plenty of different learning mechanisms, such as conferences, webinars, and training. These are more formal options insofar as they are scheduled, cost money, etc., but this is only one approach. Many professionals have found success through less formal and more experiential sorts of methods, such as on-the-job training, mentoring, and coaching. Professionals should always cultivate and maintain an understanding of the foundational works within a discipline– industry standards, best practices, books that capture fundamental practices and processes, etc.

Develop a Timeline With Specific Targets and Goals
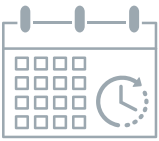
We believe that professional development should be broad and comprehensive and that a well-rounded professional will work to improve in three areas: domain competencies, information management competencies, and professional or soft skills competencies.

Domain competencies are specific to a particular sector, industry, or horizontal work process. For example, an individual who works as an HR manager in the oil & gas sector could work to improve domain skills in employee onboarding or compensation, or an understanding of the exploration & development process.

Information management competencies For an information management professional, this will be an expertise deep-dive in the day-to-day requirements of their roles. For the aforementioned HR manager, it might be a more fundamental understanding of the importance of information management to effective onboarding.

Professional or soft skills competencies focus on those skills that make for a more effective employee, no matter the role. These include but are not limited to project management, change management, communication, and budgeting.

Our framework recommends that individual professionals look to this as a matrix. Determine what skills to work on in each of these three areas, and then select learning mechanisms based on availability, timing, budgets, etc. This might be reviewed by the individual's manager, particularly where approval (for travel, a training course or conference, etc.) is required.

Here's a template for what this might look like:

Knowledge Area	Formal Education	Informal / Self-Directed Education	Coaching & Mentoring	On-the-Job Training
	■ Degree programs ■ Training programs ■ Certifications	■ Books ■ Standards ■ Social Media ■ MOOCs	■ Formal or Informal ■ More effective with more structure ■ Lunch & learns	As directed, in addition to or instead of coaching or mentoring
Sector / Industry Competencies				
IM Competencies				
Professional / Soft Skills Competencies				

There are other ways to do this, and even within this framework, you'll need to determine the appropriate domain, IM, and professional competencies that apply. But this type of plan can readily be incorporated into annual reviews and helps to ensure that your professional development plan aligns to your personal and organizational goals.

Evaluate Your Plan and Measure Your Progress

Ultimately, it's the responsibility of the individual to determine their appropriate learning paths and outcomes. Be sure to review your Professional Development Plan before committing to it and check back in regularly to make sure you are on track achieving your goals. Remember- change is normal, and as you progress in your career, sometimes it will be necessary to update your goals to align with your direction. By committing to your professional development in this manner, you can expect career success.

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