

Professional Membership = Professional Development

Your guide to Continuous Professional Development

Foreword

The pace of change in the world of IT is accelerating - so much so, that there is danger of a major skills crisis arising in the U.K. It has been calculated that, if you do not spend a *minimum* of 5-10 days a year on technical and management "updating", then your skills and employability are likely to suffer. Employers are increasingly demanding evidence that such updating is regularly undertaken. Yet, for all too many hard-pressed IS professionals, this level of commitment to a traditionally structured training programme is next to impossible.

The trend towards responsibility for IS being transferred from IS professionals to "user managers" have also given rise to the need for skill development programmes that are accessible to those without formal IT qualifications.

As one of the leading providers of specialised IT education and training, and a longstanding champion of the concept of lifelong learning, IMIS's response to these seemingly disparate requirements has been to develop a programme of Continuous Professional Development that sets new standards in flexibility and user-friendliness.

Thus, the updating element of the IMIS CPD programme can include everything from conventional course attendance to distance learning, while the practical experience requirement can be fulfilled via both professional and voluntary activities - particularly valuable for those lacking employer support for their skills development programme. Users and other non-professionals can participate in the programme via affiliate membership of IMIS, with the option of transferring to professional membership at a later stage. And the employment of logbook tracking makes the whole process of progress monitoring and course validation both simple and straightforward.

After months of detailed research and development we have succeeded in producing a CPD programme that can really deliver the goods - and do so in a fashion that most closely mirrors both the needs of the profession and the way in which the majority of its members actually work.

Ian Rickwood
Chief Executive, IMIS

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Introduction to the Manual

Who is it for?

This Manual has been produced for all levels of membership of the Institute for the Management of Information Systems. It is as relevant to Affiliate Members as it is to the Professional Grade of Membership. Equally the Manual will be useful irrespective of your role or the aspect of the management of information systems function you carry out.

What is its aim?

- to provide a framework which facilitates Continuous Professional Development for all Institute Members;
- to provide a context for Continuous Professional Development in the Information Systems sector and in the wider scene of training priorities;
- to assist members in identifying their training and development needs to meet the challenges of transition to the Information Society;

How should it be used?

The Manual can be used in a variety of ways according to your needs. There are discrete sections providing stand-alone information on specific aspects of Continuous Professional Development, training and learning. Users are encouraged to dip into the sections as appropriate but it is suggested that Sections One and Two are used as the starting point to help you decide how you wish to use the Manual in meeting your own Continuous Professional Development needs.

Section Three concentrates on helping you identify how you learn most effectively - your preferred learning style(s). You can then maximise your learning potential through selecting learning methods, which most closely suit your learning style(s).

Section Four provides useful additional information, contacts and resources.

Section One

Introduction

Information Technology and the New Millennium

Much has been said and written about the issues surrounding the millennium, European Monetary Union and the need for new operating systems to cope with the number 2000 and a dual currency. Add to this pot-pourri the constant emergence of new technologies, new generations of products and services and the move to a totally networked, broadband and multi-media environment. The result? It depends on how you want to view it. Is it a view from the bottom of the mountain looking up to the peak or a view from the peak of one mountain across to the next with only the journey in-between as a challenge?

There are always inherent dangers and gulleys in change if it is not managed effectively. Equally there are always opportunities which change can uncover, can create, or which can be transformed from crisis to opportunity depending on one's view of the mountain.

The UK's Information Systems professionals and those who need information systems will need to determine their view of the mountain in order to tackle the challenges and the potential skills gaps which lie ahead.

Is there a Skills Crisis?

There are those that argue that the UK is about to enter an IS skills crisis in which the IS professional becomes a casualty of the transition to an Information Society and the IS employer faces a dearth of professionals with the necessary calibre of expertise. The reason for this potential calamity? Again it depends on how you view it. It is a relatively straightforward argument to claim it is the result of the erosion of trainee recruitment, the diminution of ongoing training, the lack of supplier training and the trend towards outsourcing. However, it could be argued that the IS world is better able and more experienced than any other sector in coping with and managing change, maximising the possibilities of technological discovery and in creating effective, competitive edge applications for each new technological discovery. So why is there a crisis now?

The purpose of this introduction is not to expound the possible reasons for the perceived or real impending crisis. It is, however, intended to set the context for this Manual. Whatever the reasons for the skills gap crisis, that there *are* concerns is what needs to be addressed by all Information Systems Professionals and the employers of MIS, if the sector is to survive. A more enlightened view of the mountain would be to claim that this concern could be used as a catalyst to shift attitudes toward training, skills maintenance and skills development.

There is nothing like discovering that one is in a swamp with the crocodiles loitering ominously close, to prompt action. May be that is where many believe themselves to be with the depth indicators being the only varying factor. A more lateral approach, such as draining the swamps, may be the way forward.

A Promising Future?

*Wise people learn when they can
Fools learn when they must. P. Honey*

There is another view. For those who can see it this way, there has never been a more promising time for those entering the industry, those already in the industry and wishing to build a career pathway or a career portfolio and those who worry that they are not going to be able to keep up with the new challenges as they move into the twilight of their careers. If there is a real or perceived skills shortage, the world could be your oyster. For those that wish to take responsibility for their own learning and development, for those that choose to identify their skills gaps and work towards closing those gaps, the future has to be bright. They can look forward to a future where their skills will be highly prized and sought after. These enlightened souls will be able to name their price and will have greatness thrust upon them. Surely this provides compelling reasons and incentive for doing something about it.

The Vehicle for Action

It is certainly the case that those that have the breadth of vision can see that taking charge of their own career development is the way forward for individual IS professionals. To stay ahead in this sector has always been the only path to survival. That much has not changed. Is it the will that has? If you are reading this, perhaps you are in shape, in spirit if not yet in action, to stay on the path and to pioneer new paths. Information Systems specialists have the opportunity to drive much of the UK's ability to become an international market force again. The transformation created by the IS revolution is the vehicle by which this can happen. Continuous Professional Development provides the vehicle for IS professionals to manage, implement and maximise the opportunities which the IS revolution affords.

There are many professional bodies, trades and trade associations which serve the IS industry; there now needs to be concerted action from all of them to drive the need for Continuous Professional Development and to provide a framework for their members in which this can take place. This Manual is an initiative by IMIS to support its members in the process of meeting the challenges of today and tomorrow. By its production, IMIS is also making a clear statement about the imperative for changing attitudes, a concentrated effort in training activity and the need for every member to take responsibility for their own skill and career development.

The skills crisis can be turned into a skills opportunity.

You can be part of that transformation by driving forward change and action.

Section Two

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for those Managing Information Systems

Lifetime Learning

Knowledge in the field of information technology has a particularly short lifespan. It is claimed that 20% of what we know becomes obsolete each year. It is also claimed that 60% of technology has yet to be invented. The implications of the statistics are fairly clear - without investment in training and development the logical outcome is that we would know next to nothing in less than ten years' time.

To be effective in any professional job it is essential to keep abreast of technical and business developments. We also need to continually develop our own performance and maintain or improve professional standards. If we do neither of these things we quickly cease to make an effective contribution. It is no longer possible to stay in one job or one area of expertise for the whole of one's career. Latest thinking suggests that people entering the job market today will have at least 14 jobs and five careers in their professional lifetime.

In order to meet these challenges, each individual will need to acquire new skills, cope with changes in working practices and operate in an environment where there is a continual need to be vigilant about the skills and competences required to be effective. Learning can no longer stop at the school or university gates - it now needs to be a lifelong process. Indeed lifelong learning is now a central theme of national education and training policy. It is only through a commitment to lifelong learning that as professionals we can measure our contribution to:

- evidencing our own career development;
- maintaining standards of professional excellence;
- ensuring the IS sector provides the skills and expertise industry requires of it to ensure leadership in the market place and competitive advantage.

It is not enough, however, to be committed just to the principles of ongoing professional development in the many forms it can take. To be effective for both employers and individuals, Continuous Professional Development must be an active process. It should be structured, organised and planned. It must be considered as a worthwhile and effective activity by all involved - the IS professional, the manager who has responsibilities for managing the IS function, the employer, the professional institution and the external consultant.

In this way Continuous Professional Development can become a natural adjunct to professional life with activities undertaken to develop skills and performance, complementing the learning through work experience. People, after all, are the ultimate sustainable resource. Maximise your potential as a resource and you will be maximising your potential in managing the resource, which Information Systems provide to industry and commerce.

What is CPD?

Many organisations and institutes have defined continuous Professional Development but the key-underpinning concept is the ongoing personal and professional development of technical skills, knowledge, attitudes and personal qualities. It is usually only the way in which CPD is carried out which varies, however there are key aspects and processes which need to be in place:

- planned and systematic training and development;
- continuous maintenance and improvement of knowledge and skills (technological, technical, commercial, managerial);
- development of personal qualities and attitudes which IS professionals need to bring to their job.

IMIS define Continuous Professional Development as:

"The development of the correct attitudes and the ongoing acquisition of the knowledge and skills required to meet and to take personal and commercial advantage of the challenges facing the MIS professional".

IMIS actively encourages CPD activities amongst its members and this Manual establishes the framework in which it can take place.

Membership of IMIS brings with it, the implicit understanding that members have assumed personal responsibility for the maintenance and enhancement of their levels of knowledge, skill and professional competence.

In turn IMIS sets out to provide ways in which to:

- promote the high professional standards of its members;
- enhance the perceived status of its members;
- gain recognition for its members.

The IMIS CPD Scheme is the vehicle by which these objectives can be realised.

CPD is a Partnership

Continuous Professional Development is most effective when it is regarded as a partnership between you as the IS professional, your employer and your Professional Institute. If all the partners are truly committed to the process of Continuous Professional Development, all will benefit.

It should be regarded as an obligatory not a compulsory activity. It should not be imposed on an individual, rather the individual should want to take part in CPD activities and processes and take responsibility for its implementation as a clearly defined and managed function in his/her everyday professional life.

What are the Benefits of CPD?

With the anticipated rate of change, innovation and invention in this sector, the most obvious benefits of undertaking CPD, are that it provides the opportunity to keep up to date. If employers, employees, suppliers or users fail to keep up to date, their competitive advantage quickly seeps away.

If you fail to keep up to date, you quickly reach your sell by date. This, in turn, limits your career progression, your earning power and your professional opportunities.

The benefits of CPD accrue to both the individual undertaking it and their employer. The benefits are greater when continuous learning is embedded in the company culture and the planned, coherent development of staff is on offer to all and indeed expected of all.

For the individual, the benefits of CPD are:

- competence maintained as technology advances;
- increased job performance and satisfaction;
- enhanced career opportunities;
- more earning power or at the very least job protection - the more up to date you are, the more flexible and multi skilled you are, the less likely you are to be the first out of the door when the chips are down;
- a planned approach to career development;
- a disciplined, focused approach to identifying your training and development needs;
- a self-disciplined approach to maintaining competence.

For the employer, the benefits of CPD are:

- more competent, flexible, up-to-date staff;
- increased competitiveness through ensuring that the technical competence of staff is current, of a high quality and relevant;
- improved business planning through ensuring an adequate supply of suitably qualified and competent technical and management staff;
- improve efficiency and effectiveness by optimising the contribution of staff to the achievement of the business objectives;
- an increased likelihood of retaining staff through demonstrating a commitment to their development and by providing opportunities for them to enhance their own performance and contribution;
- more informed recruitment decisions - the employer who is committed to CPD is likely to be more aware of the skill needs and gaps of the workforce and therefore clearer about the person and professional qualities being sought in recruitment;
- improved staff morale is likely to come from increased confidence and a sense of being valued

The IMIS Scheme

1 *The Objectives*

- (a) to promote the principles and practice of CPD to members and to their employers;
- (b) to provide advice and guidance to members in planning and identifying their career development needs;
- (d) to provide a credible mechanism by which members can record their CPD activities and thereby demonstrate their commitment to the profession and to their employers.

2 *Who Can Participate?*

The scheme will be open to all members who wish to participate. Student members are encouraged to regard CPD as a process they begin whilst studying and which will continue throughout their careers following the achievement of their first qualification.

3 *Code of Practice for Members*

To gain maximum benefit from Continuous Professional Development, it is recommended that individual members adopt the following Code of Practice:

- a) Prepare a CPD plan using Form CPD 5, found at the back of this manual, which includes the following:
 - the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes to be acquired or developed taking into account:
 - (i) the employer's business objectives;
 - (ii) career intentions, short and long term;
 - (iii) relevant personal interests;
 - the actions to be taken, with responsibilities and timescale, to meet the identified needs;
 - the plan should be developed, where possible, in conjunction with the employer;
 - the plan should be reviewed regularly (at least annually).
- b) Record all CPD activities and achievements so that progress towards implementing the plan, and maintaining professional competence can be demonstrated. The benefits should be evaluated.
- c) Provide to the Institute annually a completed record of CPD activities undertaken so that this may be formally recorded and credited. Use Form CPD 2.
- d) Support the CPD of other staff, and encourage the employer to support CPD as an integral part of professional life.

4 How Much CPD Should be Undertaken?

Some Institutes have adopted a rigid view of how much and what type of CPD activities they require of their members. IMIS wish to adopt a more flexible approach as it is the quality of the outcome of CPD, which it regards as being critical rather than the process and the amount of time allocated to it.

However, as a guide the Institute suggest members should undertake a minimum of 20 hours of CPD per annum either in formal study leading to an award or through other recognised CPD activities.

5 What Constitutes Recognised CPD?

IMIS recognises that CPD can take many forms and will consider accepting any of the following activities providing members can clearly state the learning outcome intended and record the extent to which this has been achieved through undertaking a specific CPD activity.

- attendance at training events (full-time, part-time, external, internal);
- distance and open learning programmes;
- structured programmes of learning leading to externally recognised qualifications (eg degrees, N/SVQs, diplomas, HNCs etc);
- structured reading/self study/ assignments;
- seminars/conferences/exhibitions;
- writing papers and articles for publication;
- professional institute meetings/activities;
- coaching/teaching/tutoring/mentoring others;
- making presentations, speaking at conferences and seminars;
- secondments/special projects;
- networking and sharing good practice with industry contacts;
- relevant voluntary or public office activities.

When selecting CPD activities to meet your identified training and development needs, it is important to not only consider your learning objective(s) but also how you learn best. This is covered in detail in a later section.

Previously IMIS allocated a point score to specific types of CPD activities. This route is no longer followed as it is recognised that the quality of learning is not directly attributable to the type of CPD activity. For example attendance at a conference may take up one working day, create a fairly major hole in the individual's training account for the year and achieve no more in learning gain, if incorrectly selected, than a focused one hour session with an individual's mentor, or line manager. Selection has to be based on a number of criteria of which the cost, the training need and the desired outcome are usually the three most important factors.

Similarly training providers would previously have needed to be IMIS approved in order for their courses to qualify as a recognised CPD activity. This route is no longer followed, however, you may wish to seek guidance on the relevance or appropriateness of courses through:

Institute of IT Training
Institute House
University of Warwick Science Park
Coventry
CV4 7EZ

Tel: 01203 418128
Fax: 01203 690164

In a later section you will find a list of training providers known to IMIS, which may be referred to once you have identified your training and development needs.

6 How do Members Join the IMIS CPD Scheme?

Members can join the scheme at any time by contacting:

The Secretariat
5 Kingfisher House
New Mill Road
Orpington
Kent BR5 3QG

Telephone Number: 0700 00 23456

Fax Number: 0700 00 23023

Email: central@imis.org.uk

Please quote your membership number and provide us with your completed registration form CPD 1.

Getting Started

In this Manual you will find all the CPD records and forms you will need to participate fully in the IMIS CPD Scheme. There are only two forms that you must complete to be part of the IMIS CPD Scheme. They are:

CPD 1 : Registration Form
CPD 2 : Annual Record of CPD Activities

The other forms have been devised as templates, which you can photocopy and use as they are. Alternatively, you may wish to amend them in some way to suit your particular needs. Providing you use the IMIS Scheme as a framework into which you structure your own CPD, you will find that pursuing CPD will become a natural adjunct of your professional life. It requires discipline and time but if you make it a regular part of your daily or weekly routine, you can adopt the CPD - habit without too much hassle. CPD at the end of the day should be to your advantage, it should be planned and it should be enjoyable. The forms, templates and ideas for using them are all designed to help you get started, keep you going and to reap the benefits for you, the users you serve and your employer. However, CPD is not about form-filling, it is about identifying your training and development needs and then adopting a planned and coherent route to meeting them. It is always more productive if this process can be undertaken with your line manager or if your organisation operates such a scheme, with a mentor.

Getting started with your CPD should therefore start not just with requesting your intention to get involved in the IMIS CPD Scheme, but when you identify your training and development needs and action plan how you intend to meet those needs.

Section Three

Your Learning Power

Lifetime Learning

*"To learn is to be:
it's a natural process"*

Alan Mumford, Specialist in Director and Management Development

Learning is a process, which many people believe only takes place at school, at work or in some other structured learning environment. In fact, it is often in unstructured environments that we acquire most of our knowledge, skills and attitudes. Learning is very rapid at the beginning of our lives, in fact we learn more in the first eight years of our lives than we do in all the remaining years and most of that learning is not a conscious or a deliberate activity. For example, the process of babies learning to walk, to talk, to feed is neither a conscious nor a deliberate activity. As children our learning is continuous, natural and closely related to practical experience - learning by doing.

Consciously or unconsciously we are forever learning new things and we will continue in this fashion as we go through life. It may be that we learn something as simple as boiling water scalds, or something much more complicated like learning how to use a new computer language.

Most people have a thirst for learning and acquiring new skills and knowledge. Lifelong learning is now recognised as an essential requirement of life today if, as individuals, we are to continue to be employable and if, as an industrial nation, we are to remain competitive in the international marketplace. It is for this reason that many institutes are now actively promoting the benefits of Continuous Professional Development to both employers and members. Regard lifelong learning as your route to sustained development and CPD as the means of achieving it.

Learning Effectively

As learning is an activity in which you invest much time, effort and resources, it makes sense to explore first the circumstances and situations in which you learn most effectively and productively. There are factors which may hinder the way you learn such as an inappropriate environment, bad experiences in the past, poor materials or poor presentations and the aspect we are focusing on here - inappropriate learning styles.

Your Learning Style

In the same way that we all have a preferred way of traveling, preferred style of cooking or music, we also have a preferred learning style or blend of styles which, when used, enables us to learn most effectively. A considerable amount of research has been done into how people learn and there are a number of publications and self-assessment questionnaires on the market, which you could use to help you identify your preferred learning styles(s).

Leading psychologist, Dr Peter Honey, and Alan Mumford, Specialist Management and Development, have conducted extensive research and written widely on the topic. In their book *Manual of Learning Styles*, they identify four categories of learning styles:

- activists
- theorists
- reflectors
- pragmatists

Spend a few moments reading through the following analysis of these four learning styles. Can you identify which is your preferred learning style?

An Analysis of the Honey & Mumford Learning Styles

Activist

Strengths

Flexible and open minded
Happy to have a go
Happy to be exposed to new situations
Optimistic about anything new and, therefore, unlikely to resist change

Activists involve themselves fully and without bias in new experiences. They enjoy the immediacy of the current experience and are happy to commit themselves 100% to the given situation. They learn by trial and error and self-discovery and tend to be very active people. They enjoy brainstorming to help them tackle problems and are forever looking to channel their energies into original exciting projects as they thrive on the challenge of new experiences. They are friendly outgoing people constantly involving themselves with others.

Weaknesses

Tendency to take the immediately obvious action without thinking
Often take unnecessary risks
Tendency to do too much themselves and hog the limelight
Rush into action without sufficient preparation
Get bored with implementation/consolidation

Activists learn best where:

- There are new experiences/problems/opportunities from which to learn
- They can engross themselves in short 'here and now' activities eg business games, competitive teamwork tasks, role-playing exercises
- There is excitement/drama/crisis and things chop and change with a range of diverse activities to tackle
- They have a lot of limelight/high visibility, eg chair meetings, lead discussions, give presentations
- They are allowed to generate ideas without constraints of policy or structure or feasibility
- They are thrown in at the deep end with a task they think is difficult, eg when set a challenge with inadequate resources and adverse conditions
- They are involved with other people, eg bouncing ideas off them, solving problems as part of a team

Activists learn least well where:

- Learning involves a passive role, eg listening to lectures, monologues, explanations of how things should be done, reading, watching
- They are not involved
- They are required to assimilate, analyse and interpret lots of 'messy' data
- They are required to engage in solitary work eg reading, writing, thinking
- They are asked to assess beforehand what they will learn and to appraise afterwards what they have learned
- They are offered statements they see as 'theoretical' eg explanations of cause or background
- They are asked to repeat essentially the same activity over and over again eg when practising
- They have precise instruction to follow with little room for flexibility
- They are asked to attend to detail, tie up loose ends

Reflectors

Strengths

Careful
Thorough and methodical
Thoughtful
Good at listening to others and assimilating information
Rarely jump to conclusions

Reflectors excel in viewing concrete situations from many perspectives. Using innovation and imagination they are ideas people. They like to collect data, both first hand and from others, and prefer to think about it from all angles and implications before making a move. They are thoughtful people who prefer to take a back seat in meetings and discussions. They enjoy observing other people in action. They tend to have a slightly distant, tolerant, unruffled air about them. When they act it is part of a wide picture which includes the past as well as the present and others' observations as well as their own.

Weaknesses

Tendency to hold back from direct participation
Slow to make up their minds and reach a decision
Tendency to be too cautious and not take enough risks
Not assertive - they are not particularly forthcoming and have no small talk

Reflectors learn best where:

- They are allowed or encouraged to watch/think/chew over activities
- They are able to stand back from events and listen/observe, eg observing a group at work, watching a film or video
- They are allowed to think before acting, to assimilate before commenting, eg a chance to read in advance a brief giving background data
- They can carry out painstaking research, eg investigate, assemble information, probe to get to the bottom of things
- They have the opportunity to review what they have learned
- They are asked to produce carefully considered analyses and reports
- They are helped to exchange views with other people without risk eg by prior agreement, within a structured learning experience
- They can reach a decision in their own time without pressure and tight deadlines

Reflectors learn least well where:

- They are forced into the limelight, eg to act as leader/chairman, to role play in front of onlookers
- They are involved in situations which require action without planning
- They are pitched into doing something without warning, eg to produce an instant reaction, to produce an off the top of the head idea
- They are given insufficient data on which to base a conclusion
- They are given cut and dried instructions of how things should be done
- They are worried by time pressures or rushed from one activity to another
- They have to make short cuts or do a superficial job

Theorists

Strengths

Logical vertical thinkers
Rational and objective
Good at asking probing questions
Disciplined approach

Weaknesses

Restricted in lateral thinking
Low tolerance for uncertainty, disorder and ambiguity
Intolerant of anything subjective or intuitive
Full of shoulds, oughts and musts

Theorists enjoy traditional classrooms and can adapt and integrate observations into complex but logically sound theories. They think problems through in a vertical step-by-step logical way. They tend to be perfectionists who won't rest easy until things are tidy and fit into a rational scheme. Theorists like to analyse and are keen on basic assumptions, principles, theories models and systems thinking. They tend to be detached and analytical.

Theorists learn best where:

- What is being offered is part of a system, model, concept, theory
- They have time to explore methodically the associations and inter-relationships between ideas, events and situations
- They have the chance to question and probe the basic methodology, assumptions or logic behind something, eg by taking part in a question and answer session, by checking a paper for inconsistencies
- They are intellectually stretched, when analysing a complex situation, eg being tested in a tutorial session
- They can listen to or read about ideas and concepts that emphasise logic
- They can analyse and then generalise the reasons for success or failure
- They are offered interesting ideas and concepts even though they are not immediately relevant
- They are required to understand and participate in complex situations

Theorists learn least well where:

- They are thrown into doing something without a context or apparent purpose
- They have to participate in situations emphasising emotions and feelings
- They are involved in unstructured activities where ambiguity and uncertainty are high, eg with open-ended problems
- They are faced with a number of alternative or contradictory techniques or methods without being able to explore them in depth
- They doubt that the subject matter is methodically sound eg where questionnaires have not been validated, where there are no statistics to support an argument
- They find the subject matter shallow or gimmicky
- They feel themselves out of tune with other participants, eg when with lots of activists or people who are less rigorous in analysing situations

Pragmatists

Strengths

Keen to test things out in practice
Practical, down to earth, realistic
Businesslike - get straight to the point
Technique orientated

Weaknesses

Tendency to reject anything without an obvious application
Not very interested in theory or basic principles
Tendency to seize on the first expedient solution to a problem
Impatient with wafflers
On balance, task orientated not people orientated

Pragmatists search out new ideas and take the first step to experiment with applications. They are the sorts of people who return from management courses brimming with new ideas that they want to try out in their own organisations to see if they work in the real world. They like making practical decisions and solving problems. They regard problems and opportunities as a challenge. Their philosophy is: 'There is always a better way to do things'.

Pragmatists learn best where:

- They can see an obvious link between the subject matter and a problem or opportunity they face
- They are shown techniques for doing things with obvious practical advantages, eg how to save time, energy
- They have the chance to try out and practise techniques with coaching/feedback from a credible expert
- They are exposed to a model they can emulate, eg a respected boss, a demonstration from an expert, lots of examples, anecdotes
- They are given immediate opportunities to implement what they have learned
- They can concentrate on practical tasks, eg drawing up action plans with an obvious end product, suggesting short cuts, giving tips

Pragmatists learn least well where:

- The learning is not related to an immediate need they recognise or they cannot see the practical benefits
- Organisers of the learning, or the event seem distant from reality eg all theory and general principles
- There is no practice or clear guidelines on how to do it
- They feel that people are going round in circles and not getting anywhere fast enough
- There are managerial or personal obstacles to implementation
- There is no apparent reward from the learning activity, eg increased energy savings, shorter meetings, higher bonus, promotion
- There are no experts or role models from whom they can receive feedback or practical advice
- They are surrounded by process orientated people

Maximising your learning power

Honey and Mumford do not suggest that everyone falls into one category to the exclusion of others but most people tend to have a preferred style, which dominates over the others. Try and select learning opportunities and methods, which more closely offer you your preferred learning mode(s). If you are a blend of styles, this indicates you can learn in a variety of situations and modes - a fortunate position to be in!

It is also important to note that no one learning style has any overwhelming advantage over any other. As you have seen, they each have their own strengths and weaknesses.

If you find you are often in situations, which call for you to employ a learning style, which you are less comfortable with, it is possible, through practise, to develop your learning skills using this style.

CPD Learning and Development Activities

The Building Blocks

This section, thus far, helps you to identify your preferred style(s) of learning so that you can be sure that wherever possible, you select training and development activities and opportunities which maximise the learning and development potential for you personally. The idea being that you make the most of your learning power.

The final building block in this progression is the addition of the wider dimension embraced by the phrase - Continuous Professional Development.

Taking a Wider View - Adopt a Holistic Approach to CPD

CPD is an on-going process in which you take responsibility and ownership to maintain and improve your professional competence. To be professionally competent you need not only professional skills and knowledge, you also need personal and life skills to execute your professional function. This is the wider dimension of CPD - a holistic approach to your development. For example, there is little value in being competent creating IS solutions if you do not have the personal skills to communicate your ideas to the Board or to those in the organisation who you need to persuade to adopt a new approach to Information Systems.

The ability to communicate, persuade and use your interpersonal skills are all examples of personal skills which need your focus and attention just as much as your professional and technical skills. These skills can also be developed; practised and acquired through CPD activities in just the same way as your technical skills can be enhanced or updated.

Work-based experiential learning is also an important aspect of CPD but is less easy to quantify or even recognise when it is happening.

Personal Development

Your personal development is important to your effectiveness and well being, both in the workplace and at home. It is now widely recognised that all work and no play does indeed make us very dull - a rounded, balanced and effective individual is one who has learned to balance the demands of a busy job against the pursuit of other interests, hobbies and leisure activities.

Some organisations actively encourage their staff to contribute to their local communities, offer their skills to voluntary groups and pursue courses of study for personal rather than professional or technical reasons (eg an Open University arts course).

It is, therefore, not surprising that relevant voluntary work, public appointments, informal learning and community projects are increasingly appearing on the lists of CPD activities produced by the various Institutes who encourage their members to undertake CPD.

Selecting CPD Activities

Selecting CPD activities to meet your training and development needs can be as simple or as complicated as you want to make it. If you have decided that you require formalised training and none of the other CPD activities will be appropriate, it is simply a matter of identifying a provider within your time, resources and travel constraints. If, however you have the option of selecting a variety of approaches, there are more factors to consider.

- What are your learning objectives?
- What form of learning will be cost-effective?
- What activities will most suit your learning style(s)?
- What training methods will be most appropriate for what you want to learn?
- What are your time constraints?

However, don't forget that the greatest opportunities for cost- effective learning are with you all the time - on-the-job. We tend not to recognise the learning and development we acquire as we face the challenges of the job because it doesn't take place in a traditional training context. Learning on-the-job should never be underestimated, rather it should be exploited and then consolidated through supplementary CPD activities.

Summarised on the following pages are some of the advantages and limitations of a variety of CPD activities, which will assist you in identifying the most appropriate activities to adopt in pursuing your own Continuous Professional Development. In making your selection you should also try and take your preferred learning style into consideration so that you make the most of your learning power.

Don't forget learning is only part of the picture; implementation - how you apply what you've learned - is a fundamental aspect of effective learning.

Learning Methods

On-the-job Training

This is also known as side-by-side training, coaching, one-to-one training, and supervised practice. If you find yourself showing a less experienced colleague the best way to perform a particular task, you are in fact offering one-to-one training. Alternatively you could be the recipient of this form of training.

This process requires individual instruction in which the trainer actively encourages the learner to acquire new skills and knowledge by practising them under the guidance of the experienced trainer.

Advantages

- This is a practical and realistic alternative to off-the-job training as all learning is done in the workplace
- Instruction by someone who knows the job from experience
- Skills taught are real and up-to-date
- Requires no special resources
- Training on-the-job can be taken for granted and not acknowledged as training as often no records are taken. As a result, it may not be given any recognition by the organisation, trainer or trainee.

Limitations

- Requires commitment from both parties
- Person responsible for training may not have the necessary knowledge or skills to train thus time and money may be wasted
- Person responsible for training may only know how he or she does the job, not how it should be done thus inappropriate working practices and values may be passed on - bad habits!
- Workplace may have a number of distractions which may not facilitate the learning process, for example, noise thus time and money may be wasted

Structured Training Courses

This refers to conventional learning such as that which happens in classrooms and colleges. Courses can be delivered in the form of lectures, seminars and tutorials and can be for the duration of a few hours a week up to a number of months or even years. Can be delivered on-site or by external providers.

Advantages

- Study time is scheduled and adhered to
- Access to resources such as well equipped libraries, workshops
- Trainers are at hand to provide information and advice, as well as support and guidance

Limitations

- Valuable time away from work
- May have pre-set entry requirements or conditions
- Regarded as a closed method of training, whereby the pace, topics, location and timing of the course is usually fixed by the trainer
- May not always deliver what is wanted - requires careful liaison and monitoring
- Training is only as up-to-date as the equipment and the trainer's expertise

Open Learning

'Open' means that there are no restrictions on how, when, where and what you learn - you are not confined to set times to attend structured learning programmes. 'Flexible' means that your learning can be accommodated around your other commitments using a variety of modes of delivery - text, cassette, video, telephone tutorials etc.

Advantages

- You can study at a time, place and pace that is suitable
- You can study what you need to know and skim areas you already know
- Activities, self-assessments let you know how they are progressing
- Regular summaries enable you to revise areas previously covered
- You have greater control of their learning
- Standardisation of training throughout an organisation, without the costs of face-to-face training off-the-job

Limitations

- You may feel isolated or lack discipline to take charge of your own learning process
- Sometimes trainers and managers assume that all other forms of training have suddenly become redundant and that open learning can be introduced as a replacement with little, if any, support
- Requires significant levels of trainer support to motivate, monitor and give feedback
- You cannot easily check out your understanding with peers or enjoy the dynamics of group learning

Technology-Based Training

High technology approaches to training are sophisticated forms of open learning. These include:

- Computer-based Training (CBT)
- Interactive Video (IV)
- Compact Disc - Read Only Memory (CD-ROM)
- Compact Disc Interactive (CD-I)

Be warned - just because you work with computers and technology does not necessarily mean using technology to learn will automatically be a preferred learning mode for you. If your learning style(s) leans heavily towards the theorist model, then computer-based learning may well suit you very well. If you have a pragmatist learning style, you will probably find this style of learning less rewarding.

Advantages

- The medium itself induces motivation
- Interactively means the training can closely match the needs of the learners
- The medium is relevant to a wide range of knowledge and skills
- Gives immediate and detailed feedback
- Cheap to maintain
- Performance of trainees can be measured simply

Limitations

- High initial costs (becomes more cost effective with large numbers, geographical spread, and regularity of use)
- Trainers role may be made redundant

Writing Papers and Articles for Publication

This CPD activity is probably quite familiar to you; the professional culture within which you work is more disposed towards writing papers and articles for publication (or presentation at conferences) than other sectors. Although it requires a certain discipline and application to make time to pursue this form of CPD, it can be very productive in terms of publicity. In academic circles it is often regarded as an essential aspect of career progression.

Advantages

- Promotes your breadth of knowledge and understanding
- Articles can be used in-house as possible learning/training resources
- Publicises your name and that of your organisation - good for the portfolio and CV!

Limitations

- Writing articles can be very time-consuming
- Requires a wealth of specialist knowledge and the confidence to write coherently and concisely
- Can require, access to a specialist library for further research

Exhibitions

Carefully selected, attending exhibitions can be a cost-effective way of seeing many new products and services under the same roof. Often you can test software or see demonstrations of applications, allowing you to do a first trawl of research. Exhibitions are an effective way of keeping up-to-date with the latest technology.

Advantages

- Access to the latest information, materials, products with experts on hand to answer queries
- One stop shop opportunity to compare and evaluate one product, method, materials against another
- Networking opportunities with like-minded colleagues

Limitations

- Valuable time away from work
- Large exhibitions can lead to an unstructured approach to seeking the information you require
- It takes skill and careful listening to unpack the value of a product from the 'sales pitch'

Secondments

Secondments can be offered internally or externally. Increasingly, management staff from large organisations are being seconded to community and voluntary projects as a part of their professional development. Your local Business in the Community office can provide help and advice to companies interested in integrating community secondments into their management development programme. Secondments need to last for at least a month to be effective.

Advantages

- Provides opportunities to apply skills and knowledge in a new environment and to consolidate learning
- A new environment can be a refreshing and stimulating opportunity
- New ideas learned on secondment can be applied in your own job
- An excellent way of testing a new job role as a potential career change

Limitations

- Secondments need to be structured and properly managed if they are to be beneficial and effective
- May require the secondee's post to be left for a few months or for other personnel to be available to cover

Special Projects

Projects are major pieces of work, usually requiring independent planning and/or research, which are completed over an extended period.

Assignments tend to be lesser tasks completed within shorter timescales. Projects and assignments can provide a fairly realistic simulation of the activity, which you would be expected to carry out at work.

Advantages

- Effective way of arousing interest
- Shows that a job or problem in real life demands a blending of several subjects and possibly the expertise of different members of a group
- Ideal way of allowing you to engage in independent study to show what you are capable of
- Provides opportunities for engaging in team development and for self-development

Limitations

- Requires high levels of commitment and involvement
- Where the project/assignment demands group work some members may be too confident and assertive and may take on for themselves the most interesting tasks and move ahead leaving the rest of the group behind
- The brief needs to be carefully designed in order to provide an effective learning experience with real-life applications

Seminars/Conference

There are several aspects to attending seminars and conferences and much will depend on your attitude and that of your Line Manager as to how you approach this form of CPD activity. Even if you are a keen attendee of seminars and conferences, you need to make careful decisions in selecting the most relevant and appropriate ones to attend. It is probably a good idea to ask your colleagues and Institute members which they consider are 'the best' seminars and conferences on the circuit and which organisers offer the most interesting and relevant events. The opportunity to meet and network with others in the same field is regarded by some as being just as important in terms of professional development as attending the formal sessions of the event.

Advantages

- Opportunity to network and exchange ideas
- Access to leading experts and specialists in your field
- A means of keeping at the leading edge of information, developments and research in your sphere

Limitations

- Requires time away from work
- Often an expensive way of keeping up-to-date
- Requires careful selection criteria to ensure the event will be useful and beneficial
- Knowledge gained may not be applicable to work situation

Making Presentations

As the person with Information Systems expertise, you will, at some stage in your career, need to make a presentation to put forward new and innovative ideas, or to defend a certain position that you feel you have to take.

Advantages

- You are there in person to defend/justify actions which may be queried as a result of you reporting back your findings
- You have the opportunity of addressing a number of people at the same time
- Face-to-face contact can be an effective and persuasive method of delivering information

Limitations

- Requires a skill and confidence (which may have to be learned)
- Preparing your presentation takes time and commitment

Professional Institute Meetings/Activities

Attendance at Institute meetings allows individuals to liaise with people who have a common interest in Information Technology issues. This is an ideal forum for networking with like-minded professionals, which actively facilitates the development of individuals, both on a personal level and in a professional capacity as well as providing an effective conduit for the dissemination of good practice.

Advantages

- Opportunity to network
- Open forum to discuss issues that may affect all individuals at some stage in their careers.
- Ideal way of keeping abreast of industry developments and technical advances
- Regional level meetings enable members to meet regularly and to share regional issues

Limitations

- May require time away from work
- Requires commitment as individuals will need to attend regularly to keep abreast of new issues/developments
- Regional events may not be as well resourced as those organised by central offices

Relevant Voluntary Work

Some organisations actively encourage their employees to become involved in voluntary work in the community in which the company operates. There are national schemes through which this type of involvement can be organised and your local Business in the Community office can provide your employer with details of these. Even when voluntary work is not organised through work, it can be a meaningful and rewarding way of enhancing your professional and personal development. It is certainly a constructive way of using your leisure time and providing a balance to your life.

Advantages

- Provides individuals with opportunities for further practical application of their knowledge and skills
- Widens work experience, knowledge and skills base
- Provides an opportunity to illustrate good company practice by returning skills to the local community

Limitations

- Must be carefully organised so as not to hinder the individual from performing his/her normal work duties
- Requires much commitment since there are no financial gains
- Skilled and effective people can be a threat to voluntary groups

Mentoring

Mentoring is a protected relationship by which one person facilitates another in their learning and skill development. The mentor is often a more senior person who has particular skills in supporting, guiding and advising. They usually also have experience and expertise in the job function of their mentee. There are various ways to set up a mentor scheme - one of the key aspects is whether the mentor is assigned to a mentee or whether the mentee can select their own based on the criteria of the scheme - ie, is the mentor someone who is there to motivate you, to provide technical advice, to be a sounding board, to be a confidant and counsellor, or to act as a tutor or coach to help you develop your skills - eg, in giving a presentation.

Advantages

- You have someone to turn to for advice, guidance and support
- You can share difficulties and problems in a safe and trusting environment
- A successful mentoring relationship can provide a good role model for the mentee often extending beyond the normal mentoring period
- Encourages taking responsibility for own learning and development
- Mentors also learn from the process of mentoring

Limitations

- In an assigned scheme, personalities may not gel
- Some mentors may be too inclined to solve the mentee's problems rather than facilitating the problem-solving process
- Not everyone makes a good mentor and it's important to provide training
- Can cause divided loyalties if the mentor is someone to whom the mentee has to report

Discovery Learning/Experiential Learning

All good teaching/training methods involve "learning by discovery"/"learning by experience" to some extent. Discovery learning describes a general approach to training in which the emphasis is on the learner discovering a learning point through experiencing and analysing a situation. It's perhaps easier to describe this form of learning as learning by living - experience of life is one of the greatest sources of learning if, and only if, we take time to reflect on what has been learnt.

Advantages

- What is learnt is retained in your mind, especially if the process is reflected upon and the learning consolidated by you
- Identify your own learning strategies and can apply them on future occasions
- Learning is effective
- Learning is immediate, done in context, so no transfer of skills is needed

Limitations

- It will usually take a long time to prepare. Also, it takes longer as a process than, for example, a straight lecture
- Some people will always **want** to be told how to do something rather than find out for themselves

Section Four

Training Providers

For assistance in identifying training providers to meet your training and development needs:

Institute of IT Training
Institute House
University of Warwick Science Park
Coventry
CV4 7EZ

Tel: 01203 418128

Fax: 01203 690164

Publications

The e-skills National Training Organisation (e-skills NTO) produce a range of guidance materials on career development and Continuous Professional Development. Contact e-skills NTO for current publications information.

Tel: 020 7 580 6677

Fax: 020 7 580 5577

Email: info@e-skillsnto.org.uk

Lifelong Learning by Norman Longworth and W Keith Davies. This book was selected for the European Year of Lifelong Learning Conference. Published by Kogan Page (1996)

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change by Stephen R Covey. Published by Simon & Schuster (1989)

Developing Learning Leaders: Creating a Learning Climate in your Organisation by Bob Garratt. Published by Director Books (1990 2nd edition).

Towards the Learning Company: Concepts and Practices by Mike Pedler et al. Published by Mc Graw-Hill (1994).

The Empty Raincoat: Making Sense of the Future by Charles Handy. Published by Arrow Books (1995).

For Life - A Vision for Learning in the 21st Century by Christopher Ball et al. A collection of writings from 25 authors embracing every aspect of learning. This book was produced to coincide with the launch of A Campaign for Life. Available from: RSA, 8 John Adam Street, London, WC2N 6EZ, Tel: 020 7930 5115.

Resources

The British Computer Society (BCS)

Further details of all BCS activities are available through the BCS web pages at: <http://www.bcs.org.uk> or by telephoning BCS customer services on 01793 417424. Information about forthcoming branch and specialist group events are also printed in Computer and Computer Weekly.

Employee Development Schemes

Initiated by the Department for Education and Employment to encourage employees to undertake learning activities on a voluntary basis. The objective of such schemes is to provide development opportunities to employees, which may or may not be related to workplace activities. Employee Development Schemes assist organisations to meet their strategic goals by developing a learning culture.

Further information and copies of case studies of companies who have implemented Employee Development Schemes are available from:

Individual Commitment Division
Department for Education and Employment
Moorfoot
Sheffield
S1 4PQ

Tax Relief

If you undertake company-funded work-related training your employer may be eligible for tax relief on the cost of the training. Employee Development Schemes are also categorised as exempt together with other activities intended to develop necessary skills eg leadership. It may be worth checking that your employer is aware of this incentive. For further information contact your local Training & Enterprise Council (TEC) or Local Enterprise Company (LEC) in Scotland.

Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs)

It is always worth contacting your local TEC (LEC in Scotland) to enquire how they can support training, lifetime learning and CPD initiatives. Support funding is sometimes available to employers.

TECs and LECs are listed in the telephone directory.

Libraries, Colleges of Further Education and Universities

These establishments can all help in a variety of ways. Some libraries have a computer database of local learning and training opportunities. Your local college of further education may also have a database on site and they will have staff whom are qualified to provide guidance and advice on selecting appropriate learning opportunities. They can work with individuals to ensure that courses are selected, which will meet their needs and, more importantly, can help the individual to determine the course appropriate to their ability.

Section Five

IMIS CPD Forms

Don't forget to photocopy the templates before using them, if you are going to need further copies.