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Assign tasks to a development plan

Once you have recognised and established the key areas you wish to develop over the next one, three and five years, you can start to assign these tasks using a development plan template. Think beyond the next 12 months. Treat the plan like a contract with yourself, to ensure you comply with the goals and objectives you lay down. There are many example templates available online to download or use as a reference.

Example: personal development plan

Here is an example of a personal development plan.

Personal development plan			
Name: Jeffrey Tranh		Date: 20 December 2015	
Objectives	**Criteria**	**Actions**	**Implementation strategy**
What do I want to achieve? I want to achieve a qualification to recognise my current work and improve my areas of weakness: time management and stress management.	*How will I recognise success? How will I review and measure my improvement?* Complete a Diploma of Business. Review after completion of the first half of the course. Efficiency at work improves. Stress at work decreases.	*How will I achieve my learning objectives?* Enrol by January 2016 to complete by December 2017. Ensure time management and stress management units are completed early in the course.	*How will I practise and apply what I learn?* Use techniques I learn from the course in my daily work
I agree to fulfil these objectives by the given times. Signed:			

Implement and use a management system

Using a management system can assist senior managers in ensuring compliance with organisational standards and objectives, but implementing management systems can be difficult. Resistance to change is often encountered and careful management of that process is recommended.

Once a management system has been implemented, organisational culture generally changes; however, the cultural change may need to occur before effective implementation can be achieved. This is the dilemma faced by senior and line managers. Simply having a management system does not ensure compliance with work plans and organisational objectives; but it does provide a solid framework in which you can create collaborative plans and benchmark performance.

Plan, monitor and control performance

A management system does not have to be complicated. In its basic form, it encapsulates several functions of the business such as finance, procurement, sales, distribution and warehousing into a central format (usually digital) for the purposes of planning, monitoring and control by senior managers. Line managers usually monitor their particular functional outputs to ensure compliance with organisational objectives.

Performance plans are specific to organisations and roles. For a PDF of a sample performance plan, visit the United States Agriculture Department's website at: www.dm.usda.gov/employ/employeerelations/docs/Guide-ExPerfPlans.pdf.

Create a performance plan

To create an effective system that ensures your PDP aligns with organisational objectives, you and your supervisor can create a performance plan. A performance plan is the document developed at the beginning of the appraisal period during a performance and development dialogue (PDD). The PDD is a formal meeting with your supervisor that defines the critical elements and performance standards against which your performance (or that of your staff) is appraised. It is one of the main instruments to identify development needs and to secure the enhancement of professional skills among managers.

Here are the steps to creating a performance plan.

Creating a performance plan

1 **Review goals**

Review organisational goals to associate preferred results in terms of units of performance such as quantity, quality, cost or timeliness.

2 **Specify outcomes**

Specify desired results for the particular functional group (your area of management).

Measure the effects on work performance

Work performance can be measured against existing quantitative organisational measures such as output units, output dollars, input dollars, inventory levels, staff turnover, share price, market value, brand value and so on.

Care must be taken to select the best measurement in order to avoid subjectivity and to ensure all measures of quantitative work performance are weighed in line with organisational priorities.

A sales manager might choose sales figures as the most important metric (measurement of performance), but there are many ways of measuring sales: percentage achieved against budget, total sales in dollars, total sales in units, percentage of returns, return on capital or market share.

Make sure the measures used to judge performance are useful and practical.

Example: use useful measures

Terry runs a small business and uses basic performance indicators such as sales, profit margin and inventory to judge his own performance. He also applies this method to his sales staff and inventory officer and it seems to work well enough. When Terry employs an accounts clerk, he transposes the organisation's KPIs onto her work performance.

After three months, Terry tells the clerk that she is underperforming. However, the organisation's KPIs are neither useful nor practical to assess the clerk's performance. The clerk says it is unreasonable to expect her to influence the sales figures, for instance.

Terry consults a small-business advisor, who recommends creating job descriptions for each role in the organisation indicating specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely goals for each position.

The staff are happy with this change, as they now have clear measures for their job performance that relate to the firm's overall goals. Terry is able to assess their performance and give them useful feedback.

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Types of performance measures

Performance measures can be classified as quantitative or qualitative.

A quantitative measure looks at 'how much'; it is expressed in numbers or dollars. For example, a company's quarterly sales figures could be used as one measure of the performance of the sales manager. This measure would take the form of a dollar figure. The data could be analysed in the context of past sales figures, staffing levels, market conditions or advertising expenditure.

A qualitative measure looks at 'how well'; it cannot be expressed in numbers. For example, feedback from team members on the support they received during a major software upgrade could be used as one measure of the performance of the team leader. This measure could take the form of comments collected in a team debriefing. The data could be analysed to identify patterns in the comments, and find suggestions to improve the process next time round.

Your personality traits

The 'big five' personality traits is a theory that is used to describe five broad dimensions of personality. It is also sometimes known as the five-factor model (FFM). The five factors are openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism.

In its modern form, this theory has been around since the 1960s, although there have been some refinements. The FFM is supported by many scientific studies. It gives consistent results, which are not affected by changeable factors such as mood or setting. It is widely applicable, is supported by a large body of evidence, and has consensus support from psychology researchers.

The theory rates personality traits on a spectrum. For example, on the trait of 'openness', people can be rated from closed minded at one end to open to new experiences.

Openness to experience

- Inventive/curious vs consistent/cautious

Conscientiousness

- Efficient/organised vs easy-going/careless

Extraversion:

- Outgoing/energetic vs solitary/reserved

Agreeableness

- Friendly/compassionate vs analytical/detached

Neuroticism:

- Sensitive/nervous vs secure/confident

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External events	In the face of significant external events such as environmental changes, market changes, supply changes or client requests, prioritisation can still be based on existing organisational objectives – unless those objectives are also affected. In that case, senior management must be notified as decisions will need to be made about the organisation's priorities as a whole. Action taken to address an event will be queried by stakeholders (including supervisory managers) if it does not align with organisational objectives. Unless the event is an emergency, then following the steps above will remove you from significant liability and ensure company objectives remain a priority.
Interruptions	Events that cause a delay in your work progress are referred to as interruptions. As a manager, you will be interrupted many times a day by staff issues, phone calls, emails, unscheduled meetings and so on. Research by Professor Gloria Mark, University of California has found that it takes around 25 minutes to return to your original task after an interruption. Prioritising these interruptions is often difficult for new managers or those unused to such circumstances. The reason is that these interruptions often occur because of a priority set by the person interrupting you.

What is your priority?

Much of the literature on work prioritisation centres on making a list and allocating numbers or letters to signify the order in which you will deal with them. We have discussed the importance of this in the day-to-day context of work, but in the event of interruptions, what methods can you apply to ensure you make the right choice?

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Consider what your priority would be in each of these two examples.

Considering clients	Prioritising demands
A person comes into your workspace and demands your time to talk about a salesperson who has mismanaged a sales process. This incident is of the highest priority to that person. You are sitting with an important client finalising a large sale contract. What is your priority?	You are in the middle of a forecasting meeting with a group of suppliers when you get an email from the company secretary asking for an immediate response to attend a function organised for next week. He has given this request his highest priority because the schedule he is working to requires a reply within 20 minutes. What is your priority?

Three simple ways to say no

One method for ensuring your priorities are met is to simply say no to competing tasks and commitments. Here are three ways to say no to someone.

Be brief but firm

'I'm sorry. I can't do this right now.' Be sympathetic, but firm. If pushed to give a reason, tell them it doesn't fit your schedule and change the subject. Most reasonable people will accept this. If not, calmly repeat your response, excuse yourself and walk away.

Delay response

If you are not a confident person, or you're dealing with pushy people, you may choose to say, 'Let me think about it and get back to you.' This will give you a chance to prioritise their request properly. Importantly, this approach helps you avoid letting yourself be pressured into over-scheduling your work and increasing your stress levels.

Partial involvement

In the event that you do want to help but simply don't have the time, try, 'I can't do this, but I can...' and outline a lesser commitment you can make. This way you'll still be partially involved, but on your own terms.

Get organised

In his bestselling book *Work smarter not harder* (1995), Jack Collis states that personal organisation is contextual. That is, it depends on your work context. Collis points to four factors to keep in mind, but cautions that it is wise to know how and when to back off a task. The four factors to keep in mind are shown here.

Location	**Space**
Location – is it conducive to performing your task?	Space – do you have enough space to do your work efficiently?
Easy access to tools	**Comfort**
Easy access to tools – list, select and arrange only those tools you need to get your work done. Remove non-essential items.	Comfort – ensure your workspace is comfortable. There is a view that a bit of discomfort will 'keep you on your toes'. But research has found that an uncomfortable workspace reduces productivity.

Effective use of technology

Personal computers (in an organisational context) are the interface allowing input and retrieval of information from a business management system. You will need to consider work health and safety, privacy and security issues. For technical issues, liaise with your IT officer or manager to get help for you or your team with the system or hardware.

Effective use of technology
A standardised operating environment (SOE), which is the platform applications and programs available for users on the business network
A common operating system (unless multiple systems are required for business purposes)
Usage policies covering internet and email, ergonomic requirements and other work health and safety issues
Information used and shared responsibly and stored securely to protect people's privacy
Explicit policies about personal use of technology and equipment
Systems designed to prevent data fraud or theft and deal with other security matters

Software

The software used forms the framework of the management system. You need to be familiar with the policies on software use, such as those relating to privacy, licensing, piracy and data theft. Leaders are generally expected to model a firm grasp of the operation and use of the software systems in the business.

Effectiveness comes with familiarity. Gain an understanding of each program's shortcuts (most software uses shortcut keyboard strokes to minimise time wasted clicking around the screen) and specialised uses. Be prepared to undergo formal training, if required.

Seek expert advice from:

- developers (if the software is industry-specific)
- experienced users
- manuals and help functions
- internet forums and help sites.

Effective communication

Effective communication in business can be the difference between success and failure. It's important to use the right means and message for each situation. For example, it would be unprofessional for a salesperson to send a text message to a client saying 'CU in 5, Barry'. However, it would be very useful for a plant manager to text 50 workers saying 'Emergency shut-down due to flooding. Evening shift cancelled.'

A simple communication process involves a message travelling through stages, although barriers can be encountered at each stage:

Efficient use of scheduling technology

Effective use of technology is only half the picture. Work prioritisation is also about the efficient use of your time. It is essential you use technology to improve your efficiency, rather than letting it distract you from your priorities.

Computerised system efficiencies
Basic efficiencies that can be obtained through the use of computer systems include: • centralised scheduling of tasks such as project management charts, call centre scheduling (funnelling of incoming and outgoing calls) and staff timetables • global access to information such as research data, product performance data and manufacturing data • complex calculations such as computer modelling, computer aided design (CAD), financial calculations and data analysis and presentation.

Software efficiencies
Valuable time can be wasted using software in the wrong way. To make the most of the software you use, you must ensure: • you are trained in or are familiar with the common functions of the software • you have one point of contact for issues relating to the software (this may be a department, not necessarily one person) • you avoid wasting time creating your own work-around solutions to software bugs or problems (unless this is your role) • you use the software as directed by organisational policy and procedures.

2C Maintain work–life balance, manage stress and attend to health

The term 'work–life balance' originated in the 1970s to describe the balance between a person's work and personal life. With busy work schedules, personal commitments and family life, achieving this balance is crucial. The availability and suitability of flexible work options is dependent upon the type of work you do, the needs of the work unit and your particular circumstances.

Managers and supervisors may seek advice in this area from human resource specialists who are trained in applying policies and guidelines for an appropriate balance.

What is an appropriate balance?

Research suggests Australia tops the list of the hardest-working nations in the world. Specifically, Australian professionals are working approximately 48 hours per week; 70 per cent are contributing unpaid overtime after work hours; and they spend approximately six hours per week doing that unpaid work.

According to research company IBIS World, there is likely to be a significant trend towards more part-time employment by 2020 as Australian workplaces see the benefits of allowing a more balanced work–life allocation.

Types of flexible work arrangements

There are many options available for establishing flexible work arrangements.

Flexible work arrangements include:

- job-sharing
- flexible working hours
- part-time work
- deferred salary
- telecommuting (working from home)
- breastfeeding breaks and facilities
- purchased leave (also known as 48/52)
- phased retirement
- work-based childcare.

Balance work and life effectively

The balance for each person is different, but research indicates that the key determinant of an effective work–life balance is not the employer's policy in this area but the approach of the line managers. About 40 per cent are supportive of balanced initiatives, 40 per cent are undecided, and the remaining 20 per cent are not supportive.

Being a supportive manager means that you:

- understand the benefits of work–life balance for employees and the organisation
- commit to finding alternative arrangements if needed
- show empathy towards those who are in need.

Role overload

Time at work plus travel plus child care can combine to become unbearable to the person. Job satisfaction, health and family life can be negatively affected.

Work

Work interferes with family: the knock-on effects of stress or low morale in the workplace are felt in the family home.

Family

Family interferes with work: the demands of caring for their family affect the person's mental state and increase the likelihood of absenteeism.

Caregiver strain

The person feels the physical, emotional and financial strain of caring for a family member, such as a sick spouse or an elderly parent.

Deal with stress and other health issues

Role overload and other imbalances in your work life can have a seriously detrimental effect on your health – mental, emotional and physical. Excessive stress can lead to alcohol abuse and anxiety or even depression. Alcohol use may be a direct or indirect response to physical and psycho-social qualities of the work environment.

So how can you deal with stress and the associated health issues caused by problematic work conditions?

Prioritise wellbeing to increase job satisfaction

Put your health – physical and mental – above your work priorities. This could mean scheduling a walk to a local park, or exercising before the start of your working day. It's commonly believed that at least 30 minutes of exercise each day benefits your health and overall wellbeing.

An article on the eHow Sports and Fitness website tells you how to fit exercise into your busy schedule and how to devise a workout plan you'll stick to. To read this article, visit: www.ehow.com/how_4743_fit-exercise-busy.html.

Here are four suggestions that can help you to deal with the demands of your personal and work life.

Example: the WA Health Flexible Working Arrangements Policy

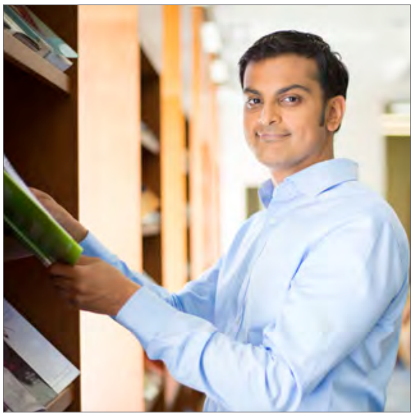
The WA Health Flexible Working Arrangements Policy was developed in consultation with key stakeholders in the health system in Western Australia. WA Health promotes flexible and responsive work practices that enable staff to balance their work and life responsibilities. The implementation of work-life balance goals and strategies contributes to the wellbeing of employees and the organisation. A collaborative and cooperative approach between managers and employees is essential to enable the benefits of work-life balance working options to be maximised by employees and the organisation. It is a system-wide policy adopted by WA Health in 2015 and offers many benefits across the Department of Health, metropolitan health services, and WA country health services.

Practice task 6

Create a full, week-long schedule for the upcoming working week (Monday to Friday, or whichever days you work in a week). You can do this on your electronic schedule (such as MS Outlook) or complete this table. Use suggestions in this section to ensure that your schedule reflects an appropriate work–life balance and the priorities you place on your work and personal activities.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
7 am							
8 am							
9 am							
10 am							
11 am							
12 pm							
1 pm							
2 pm							
3 pm							
4 pm							
5 pm							
6 pm							
7pm							

3A Assess personal knowledge and skills against competency standards



Businesses change, and with that change, so do the roles in the organisation; some subtly, some dramatically. The reason for ongoing professional development is to ensure you have the skills and knowledge that allow you to adapt to any change and remain a positive contributor to the organisation and to your personal and professional growth.

In order to improve your knowledge and skills, you will need to first assess your current abilities.

Stay current

The concept of 'staying current' pervades the education, legal and health sectors and is increasingly used in the finance, building and real-estate sectors. It simply refers to an ongoing requirement to maintain up-to-date skills and knowledge in your given field.

Staying current is a compliance or regulatory issue in some industries, but it should be considered an essential requirement for all workers.

Staying current promotes:

- safety
- productivity
- compliance
- job satisfaction.

Is currency a legal requirement?

To find out whether currency is a legal requirement for your industry, you need to locate your industry governing body, presiding government department, HR department or union representative for more details.

A quick search of the relevant website/s or a phone call to the information line can establish what regulations guide your industry with regard to currency. It is essential you are aware of your requirements, so take the time to understand how and what you need to do to stay current.

You might need to update a qualification, take a refresher course or resit a test. Costs may be covered by your employer or claimable as a deduction on your tax return, so make sure you keep receipts for fees paid along with your documentation.

Of course, staying current makes sense in terms of employability and performance, so always strive to stay in touch with developments in your field through industry governing bodies, government departments and union representatives.

Continuous improvement

Many organisations have a policy in place to drive continuous improvement. Training opportunities – whether voluntary, suggested or obligatory – are provided to ensure workforce competency in areas of concern. This may affect your personal work priorities and professional development, if only in the short term.

Areas of concern or potential are identified through a five-stage process, as shown here. These stages can be followed when you are examining your own work practices.

Stages of a continuous improvement process
1. Define
2. Measure
3. Analyse
4. Improve
5. Control

Nationally endorsed competency standards

Nationally endorsed competency standards define the skills and knowledge to operate effectively and show how they should be applied to perform effectively in a workplace context. Study the competency standard documents, which give details of performance criteria, essential skills and knowledge you need in order to reach the required standard. In determining whether or not you achieve this standard, you must deconstruct these details to ensure that you understand what skills and knowledge underpin them and can be demonstrated in the workplace.

Here is an example of the performance criteria that are included in the element 'Serve as a role model in the workplace through personal work planning'.

Performance criteria for a service element could include:

- communication skills
- organisational skills
- time management
- goal setting
- personal awareness.

Other standards

You need to be aware of other standards when evaluating your professional development needs and reflecting on how up to date you are with each. Some of these standards are shown here.

1. Prioritise the competencies	2. Weight the results
Group the competencies according to their importance. For example, if you are measuring yourself against 20 competencies, five might be day-to-day requirements of the role and important to organisational goals. These may be categorised as the highest priority. Another five are weekly requirements, but only one is an organisational requirement and so a high priority; the others are categorised below the highest level, and so on.	Give a weighting to each criterion. If you've established five levels of priority, then your weighting can start at five for the most important and go down to one for the least important. Go through and assess each skill and multiply your result (where expert = 1, not capable = 5) by the weighting factor. You will end up with the highest values assigned to those areas of weakness that have the highest priority.

Self-evaluation

The benefits of self-evaluation can be augmented by the involvement of another person. Talking to your supervisor or trainer in an excellent way to get help with your professional development planning; this is discussed in the next section.

Transfer your findings to your development plan in order of priority. It is prudent to list your most urgent needs first, as those who may need to approve funding or leave shouldn't have to search for your highest priority.

Example: self-evaluation of skills

Brian has served in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) for six years as a communications and electronics technician (CETECH). At the completion of his service, Brian applies for a role with a local communications provider. At this stage, Brian's qualifications are not nationally recognised so the employer asks Brian to provide evidence that he can meet the new job requirements and the guidelines of the industry.

Brian prepares an evaluation of his skills against the position description given to him by the employer and recognises that he is unaware of the legal compliances (in this case a telecommunications cabling licence). Although Brian is unsuccessful in this application, his knowledge of civilian industry requirements improves. He completes a licensing course and is able to gain employment in the telecommunications industry.

Compare information from various sources

Identify differences in ratings from the various sources. If gaps are noticed, ask yourself if you behave differently when you're with a particular group.

Take a step back

Consider how you tend to rate yourself. Do you tend to be self-deprecating or generous? Imagine the feedback is about a colleague to help gain some perspective.

Identify key points

Identify the key points and their related actions.

Identify development opportunities

Devise appropriate development opportunities or make a commitment to researching them. A brainstorming activity can be useful.

Consider previous feedback

Consider whether you have had similar feedback before in your career, and, if so, ask yourself why.

Apply feedback to improve competence

Once the opportunities for development have been identified, what options do you have to improve in those areas? There are many approaches to improving competence, some of which are presented here.

On-the-job training (OJT) occurs when experts in the field identified for development assist in your training at work.

Success is reliant on the training skills of the expert and your willingness and aptitude to learn.

On-the-job training could form part of a qualification (such as an apprenticeship) or it could allow you to be promoted within the organisation.

Formal training or study ranges from short courses (typically one to five days in length), to nationally recognised qualifications, to research programs, which could take years.

Success is reliant on assessments such as practical tests, written exams and essays and research projects.

You will receive a qualification such as a certificate, diploma or degree.

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Source of energy	**Extroversion 'E' or Introversion 'I'** E = Extroversion: • Gains energy from the external world and people • Acts first and thinks later • Enjoys a wide variety and change in personal relationships • Feels deprived when excluded from interaction with outside world. I = Introversion: • Gains energy from their inner world • Motivated by inner thoughts • Prefers one-to-one relationships • Requires 'private or alone time' to recharge their energy
Receive information	**Intuition 'N' or Sensing 'S'** N = Intuition: • Looks for overall patterns from information and relationships • Speculates on possibilities and forecasting the future • Comfortable with using 'fuzzy data' to guess meaning and outcomes • Imaginative and conceptual S = Sensing: • Focused on sensory details of the present such as sights, sounds, smells. • Analyses and stores the specific details of here and now • Use common sense to create practical solution • Reality-based dealing with detailed facts and memory of past experience
Making decisions	**Feeling 'F' or Thinking 'T'** F = Feeling: • Analyses information based on subjective thinking, personal feelings and impact on people • Naturally sensitive to people's needs and reactions • Decisions made based on human and aesthetic values • Unsettled by conflict and disharmony T = Thinking: • Analyses information in detached, objective manner • Used factual principles and logic to form conclusions systematically • Task-oriented and able to provide objective and critical analysis • Accepts conflict as normal part of relationships

Action learning
The action learning method is about solving real-world problems. This style of learning is ideal if you enjoy working in groups and have the ability to interact with others comfortably. It is conducted in small groups (six to seven people) known as action learning sets. Group members are usually drawn from different areas of the organisation. The method involves sharing a work-related problem and, through the use of each group member's experiences, learning how best to deal with the issue. Groups often require one member to act as the facilitator. Facilitation skills are specialised and should be developed prior to using this method. If you have developmental needs that are specific to work issues (for example, needing to reduce staff turnover), then action learning can be a powerful tool.

Coaching
In an academic sense, coaching refers to a one-on-one style of training. Coaching falls under the heading of on-the-job training, but can also be formalised through the use of traineeships with external training contractors. If you prefer close assistance to develop your skills or knowledge, coaching is a good option. This might be in cases where technical skills are lacking in areas such as work methods or using the available technology at work.

Exchange/rotation
Exchange and rotation programs give you exposure to different elements of the organisation or, in some cases, partnering organisations. This method of education can be useful for managers who identify that their skills are too narrow, or that they do not have a clear 'big picture' of the organisation's workings. Exchange involves swapping your position with another person of a similar ranking. To be an effective learning tool, the job you move into should be substantially different from your own and present new challenges to you. Additionally, senior managers must provide an extensive support system covering work-function training, inductions, introductions to the new team and constant feedback. Exchanges typically last 12 months. Rotation, while very similar, usually involves a shorter time frame. This method takes the form of a coordinated, scheduled rotation from one position to another through several functional units in the business in order to gain a better overall picture of operations. Rotation is often done in preparation for advancement into general management roles and is therefore popular in succession planning.

3E Identify and develop skills to achieve and maintain a competitive edge

You have been given tools and techniques for evaluating and improving your professional competencies in line with organisational benchmarks, such as your position description and organisational policies and procedures. There can be benefits to you and your organisation if you also aim to identify and develop new skills to achieve a competitive edge.

What is a competitive edge?

In business, a competitive edge refers to an organisation's ability to maintain an advantage over its market competitors. In the field of personal development, that scope is reduced to an individual level. Visualise yourself as the organisation, and those who would compete with you as your market competitors. Ensuring you maintain your competitive edge can deliver two main benefits: professional sustainability or growth and organisational sustainability or growth.

Your competitors could include:

- colleagues and peers
- supervisors and managers
- other organisations within the industry scope
- other organisations within your scope of expertise.

Competition within organisations

Competing with others in your organisation should not be approached in a way that has a detrimental effect on the firm. Well-managed competition in the workplace involves setting key objectives for staff (including managers) whereby the competition is internalised by the individual; that means they are striving to achieve something for their own reasons and not in an antisocial and destructive manner. Competition is therefore based on the individual's desire to achieve their own goals, and not on beating a co-worker.

Typical results from an overly competitive or poorly managed competitive workplace include:

- increase in stress and anxiety
- conflict between competing colleagues
- conflict with management
- large and undesirable fluctuations in mood and morale in the work group.

Identify new skills

When identifying and developing your new skills, you may like to consider the following information.

Apply knowledge

Applying knowledge at regularly-spaced intervals ensures that at least the key concepts are maintained in your memory. Skills (the physical manifestations of your knowledge) should also be practised regularly. A good example of this concept is the Senior First Aid certificate. The skills obtained during the course might never be used in a real-life situation, so in order to stay competent first aiders must attend a refresher course every three years. The true professional and personal value of training opportunities is only discovered when you apply your new-found knowledge.

Example: develop new skills to achieve a competitive edge

Training and development consultant, Dr Daniel Hill, is often engaged by corporations to design internal training programs for use by mid-level and senior managers. Dr Hill advises his clients that they should look to add skills and knowledge outside of work that can enhance personal career opportunities, yet still demonstrate added value to their organisations. The theory behind such a recommendation, Dr Hill says, is that managers gain big-picture skills that positively affect their ability to make decisions.

During the running of his internal training programs, Dr Hill ensures that participants engage in feedback sessions, self-reflection, and creative thinking exercises in order to:

- identify areas of improvement
- evaluate and determine the value of the various opportunities they each recognise
- discuss options with peers and managers
- come up with a list of alternatives for further consideration.

Courses such as this are run regularly in large organisations that are committed to staff development.

In organisations that don't offer such opportunities, staff may need to be proactive and seek professional feedback from colleagues, initiate big picture discussions or learn independently using online professional forums.

Summary

1. Competency standards, such as position descriptions and nationally endorsed industry competencies, can be used to assess your skills and knowledge and determine future development needs, priorities and plans.
2. Seeking feedback is necessary in order to identify development opportunities.
3. Feedback is most effective when it is received from multiple sources such as colleagues, supervisors, clients and stakeholders.
4. Networking can be used to improve your professional skills and knowledge, and create new relationships to benefit you and your organisation.
5. Industry associations, government agencies and lobby groups are a valuable source of knowledge for professional development.
6. Identifying and developing new skills outside your regular organisational requirements can enhance your decision-making skills, professional acumen and promotion prospects.