

PHILIP SCHOFIELD explains how to plan for your 'portfolio career' with a personal development plan (PDP) that gives a clear summary of your personal learning needs and an action plan to meet them

# COPING WITH A CAREER CHANGE

A good employer in the past would plan your career and provide you with the necessary training and development. You would join as a trainee or go into a particular job, and in the following months and years would undertake a variety of job placements and training that led ever upwards until you reached what your employer decided was your full potential. At the start you might even be shown a succession chart that plotted your likely progress.

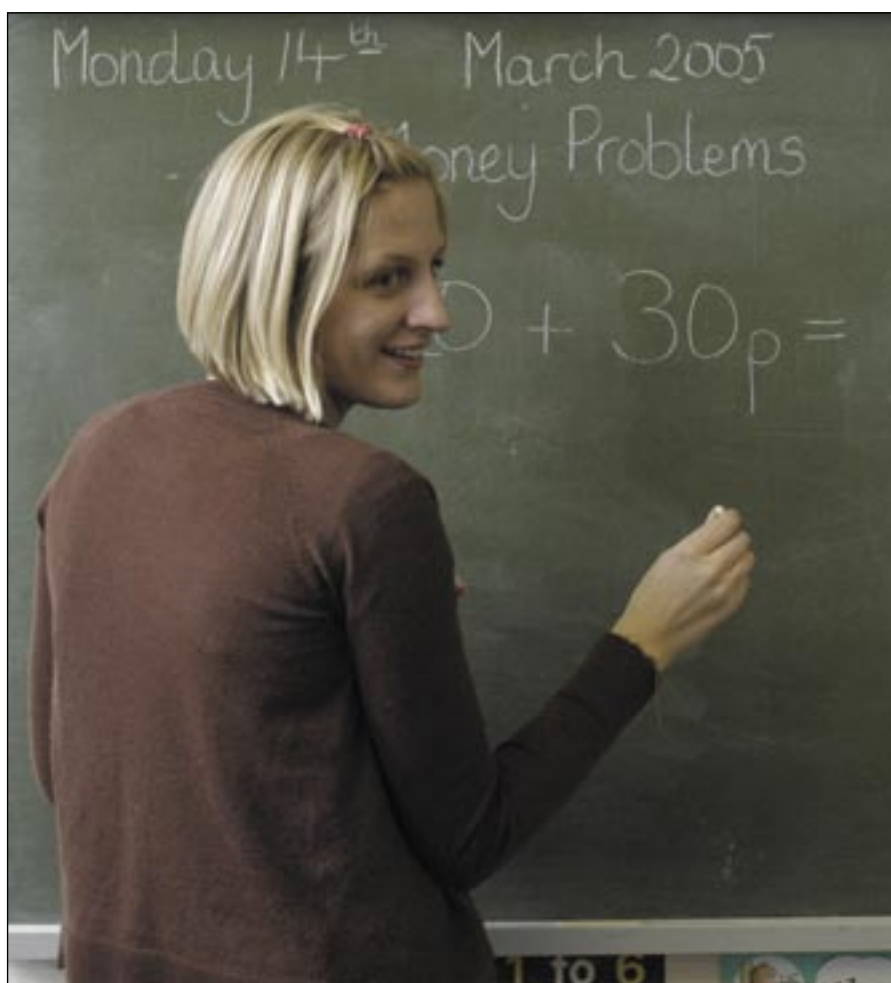
Such career planning was based on three assumptions: that you would probably stay with your employer until you retired; that the future was fairly predictable; and that your employer's structure and systems would change only slowly or not at all. In return for hard work and loyalty your employer provided lifelong job security and career development.

## An uncertain future

Today none of these assumptions remain true. To begin with only a tiny minority of people stay with one employer for the whole of their working life. On average one in four workers change job in any one year. And in some industries – such as the wholesale and retail trade, hotels, restaurants and leisure – more than half change jobs each year. Moreover, the future is now far from predictable. Ask your parents

**'Many careers will die out or change beyond recognition during your working life'**

or guardian about the unexpected changes that have affected them at work since starting their first job! Furthermore the pace of change is also



accelerating. So employers must constantly restructure to keep abreast of new technology, new systems, growing globalisation, the need to expand into new markets, and the need to cut costs. Various recent surveys show that more than a half of employers undergo some form of restructuring in any one year.

In this uncertain world many employers feel that they can no longer take responsibility for the long-term career development of their staff. And

because many of them have cut out layers of their management, they can offer far fewer opportunities for promotion. So their training and development initiatives tend to have only short-term aims.

On the other hand you have a lifetime of work ahead of you, and you need to plan and manage your own career as well as you can. One of the most useful ways you can do this is to create a Personal Development Plan (or PDP).

## Personal Development Plan

A PDP is a clear and succinct summary of your personal learning needs and an action plan to meet them. At its simplest it is used by working people to review the skills they need in their present job or sometimes for the next rung up the ladder.

Before you complete your education you might use one to set out your subject preferences for your exams. Then note the grades you need if you are to study a particular topic at university or enter a particular career, plan your revision schedule, and look at alternative options should your exam results be better or worse than you hoped. You might also plan any part-time work experience that will add to your skills and so help your

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employability. If you hope to take a year out, consider where you might go, how you will finance the trip and anticipate the sort of experiences that could impress an employer on your return.

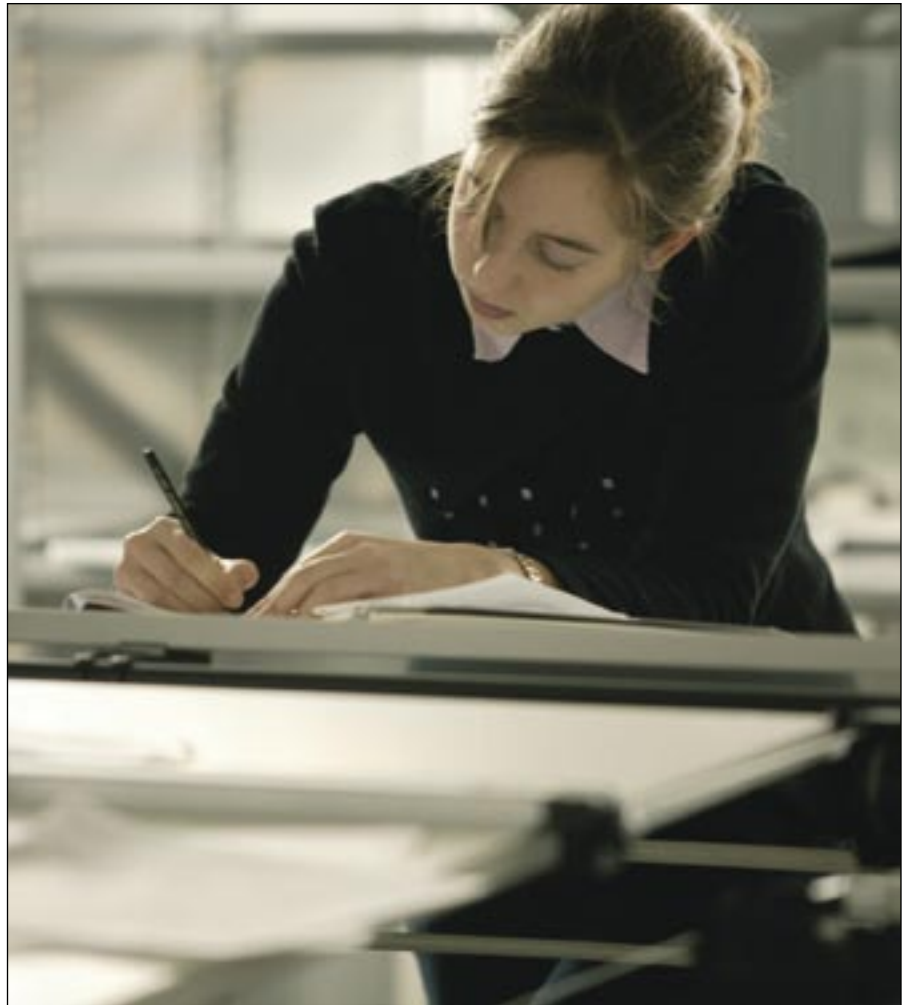
Once you start work your PDP might just look at the skills you need in your current job. However, it will be far more useful if it provides the basis for a wider plan. So it should also look at your medium to long-term objectives, consider alternative options, identify your learning needs, and set out a plan of self-development.

### Scope and content

Begin by listing those skills that will be useful in almost any career you choose to follow and which you think you need to improve. The Institute for Employment Studies looked at how PDPs were being used by employees in 14 organisations. In a report it said:

“Individuals should seek to enhance their employability through...the development of a range of transferable skills. These include computer literacy, interpersonal skills, communication techniques, languages, team working, negotiation, financial management and strategic analysis.”

Although you may not need the last two features until later in your career, do not overlook their value if you eventually want to become a manager or run your own business. Then plan how you will improve your skills. This plan could include activities such as part-time work in a team, buying and selling at car boot sales, helping in the family business, researching these topics



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on the internet, and reading relevant books and magazines.

Then look at any special ambitions that you have - things that you really want to do during your life - whether work related or not. If you want to do something enough you can overcome almost any obstacles. It is this desire that could help you to excel.

Do not plan just for a full-time career. Half the workforce are now 'flexible workers', so you could spend periods on fixed-term contracts, working as a self-employed freelance, a consultant, a temps or a part-time worker. You should be ready to move in and out of full-time jobs and various forms of flexible working. Plan for 'a portfolio career'.

To be realistic, a PDP needs to accommodate a number of alternative objectives and allow you to prepare for each on a contingency basis. It also needs to be regularly updated, so a loose leaf format is recommended.

### Who owns PDPs?

Some employers will encourage you to produce a Personal Development Plan and link it to your manager's appraisal of your strengths and weaknesses. This does help both of you to identify your short-

term training and development needs. But a PDP based only on your manager's assessment tends to take a narrow view based on your current job or the next step up the ladder. It will be most useful if it takes your personal aspirations into consideration and so forms the nucleus of a wider career plan. It can establish medium to long-term objectives, set out alternative strategies (looking at a number of "what if...?" scenarios), identify your learning needs, and set out a plan of self-development. In particular it can take into account the likelihood that your future may well lie outside your current employer.

Obviously telling your employer that you see your job as a stepping stone before moving on could damage your prospects. If you think your employer will insist on seeing your PDP, then you should prepare one section dealing with your current job and another private section dealing with your longer term plans.

As Karen Giles, a Policy Adviser at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, says: "If there is confidential information in a PDP, it is up to the individual to decide whether they want to share it with the employer."