



PRACTICAL GUIDE TO PLANNING & DEVELOPING YOUR CAREER

This guide aims to provide you with a range of material to help you with planning your career and making decisions.

You can read it from beginning to end or skip to the sections relevant to you.

Prospect has produced a range of podcasts that complement this guidance – easily accessible via the website at **www.prospect.org.uk/podcasts**

They will provide you with useful insights, hints and tips (see Appendix 1 for a full list).

Other career resources are available from the website that you can work through at a pace to suit your style of learning.

Visit **www.prospect.org.uk** and, under the ‘advice and services’ tab, browse ‘education, learning and skills’.

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1 Understanding yourself and your skills

Planning your career and making decisions can be challenging and raise all sorts of questions, such as:

- What type of job should I be applying for?
- What do I have to offer to potential employers?
- Can I move to a different industry or sector?
- What jobs or tasks would I enjoy?

Particularly after a period of unemployment it is tempting to leap at the first job opportunity, but it is worth spending time exploring your skills, strengths and career priorities.

Appraising what you are looking for will help guide you towards a more fulfilling job or career path. A clear understanding of your skills and strengths will help you to build your 'personal brand', enabling you to market yourself more effectively to potential employers both on paper – be that CVs, cover letters and/or application forms – and verbally, in interviews and/or at assessment centres.

So where to begin?

There are many aspects of yourself that you can explore and various ways of generating information about yourself.

To help you get started we will focus on three main areas:

- values and priorities
- skills and competencies
- strengths.

Values and priorities

How often do we find time to take a step back and reflect on the aspects of our work that we regard as worthwhile and important, ie what we value and our priorities?

Career values and priorities differ from person to person and may change over time. For example, regular working hours and work-life balance may not be a priority in the early stages of a career but may become important later, when a person has dependants and family commitments.

It can help not just to consider your current position but to think about the longer term: “What might my life look like in five or 10 years’ time?”

Factors you may want to consider include:

- learning potential
- opportunities for career progression
- opportunities for personal development
- working environment
- professional status
- the wider impact of your work (eg on society, the economy and/or individuals).

The ‘Values and priorities’ exercise in Appendix 2 is designed to help you think about what is important to you. While not exhaustive, it provides a starting point. You may want to add your own values to the list if they are not covered.

Skills and competencies

We turn now to the skills that you have developed through different experiences and activities you have been involved in to date. These could include:

- work experience (paid and voluntary)
- membership of societies/clubs
- serving on committees, governing bodies
- involvement in a professional body or professional groups
- training courses (eg management, leadership, team development)
- participating in/organising activities in the local community.

Think about some of the key responsibilities, activities and tasks that your roles have included and the skills needed to fulfil these successfully. A good example would be how you implemented a new system or procedure in an organisation or department. Relevant skills could include research, communication (written and verbal), project management, leadership, team-working and problem-solving.

Think about successes and achievements that you are proud of. What skills did you use to achieve them? Reflect on feedback you received from others (e.g. 360-degree feedback surveys, appraisals, coaching/mentoring sessions).

What are the personal attributes and skills that recur? Use the 'Understanding and evaluating skills' resource sheet in Appendix 3 to help you build a matrix of your skills.

Reflect on the skills that you have identified. Which do you particularly enjoy using and would want to continue using and developing in future roles? Which would you want to use less in the future? Bear in mind that it is possible to be skilled at things that we don't particularly enjoy doing.

See the Prospect podcast 'Selling your skills and strengths, part 1 of 3' for ways to think about the transferability of your skills – www.prospect.org.uk/podcasts

Strengths

Strengths tend to be a combination of knowledge and skills. Knowing your strengths can energise you and help you perform better. Finding a role that enables you to use and optimise your strengths is likely to enhance your job satisfaction, performance and wellbeing.

The 'Strengths' resource in Appendix 4 will help you identify your strengths and think about how you can use them in your current and future job roles.

The podcast, 'Selling your skills and strengths, part 2 of 3', helps build on this. Combine this with the 'List of key competencies activity' in Appendix 5 for a good start in defining what skills are important to you.

Taking stock

Review the exercises you have completed and the information you have gathered about yourself.

- Are there any themes or patterns emerging?
- What sort of roles or career areas would match your values, priorities, skills and strengths?
- What roles might you rule out based on your self-assessment?
- What are the transferable skills that you have to offer to employers?

2 Exploring your career options

Step 1 – Investigate your options

Having built a picture of what you want from your career and what you have to offer, you can now start to generate options. Research is an essential part of the career choice process.

The more you know about a particular option, the easier it is to evaluate its suitability, based on the information you have gathered about yourself and your requirements. Things to consider include:

- **The job** – What does it involve? What skills are required? What are the typical working hours? What are the opportunities for progression? What might be the challenges/difficulties? How will the role enable you to use and further develop the skills and strengths that you enjoy using? Think back to section one – how well does the role align with your career values and priorities?
- **The job market** – What are the current issues affecting your chosen industry? Who are the main players? How do these employers typically recruit? Are there regional variations in the job market? What are the trends in the sector? Which organisations are expanding? What might be the impact of the political agenda on the sector (threats and opportunities)?

Step 2 – Job-hunting

There are two approaches to job-hunting:

- the reactive approach – responding to advertised job vacancies
- the proactive approach – including general searches on online job sites, sending off your CV on spec, which some websites encourage people to do, and working with recruitment agencies.

Recruitment agencies

Many people believe that recruitment agencies are an easy option for job-hunting. They can be a useful additional method but to increase your chances of obtaining meaningful work, you will have to put in a lot of effort. You will need to:

- be specific about the type of work you are looking for and select agencies that deal with the relevant sectors
- ensure that your CV is targeted clearly at particular types of jobs to increase the likelihood of being selected by the agency
- contact the agency regularly to ensure that they keep you in mind for positions.
- The Recruitment and Employment Confederation – **www.rec.uk.com** – has an online directory of agencies.

Your own research

However, if you want to uncover the hidden job market you will need to be hands on. That means tracking down unadvertised vacancies or, perhaps, creating new opportunities for yourself.

It may involve carrying out research into the small and medium sized enterprises that operate in your field of interest, as these organisations are often less visible and may rely on word of mouth or proactive approaches to recruit.

Being proactive means building a network of contacts – both as a source of information about the field or organisation you are interested in and to get yourself known by people who may be able to help you.

First, try to identify people you already have some link with who may be useful, or could lead you to someone useful. Make a list of everyone you know: friends, family, colleagues, former employers, professional bodies.

Use social media sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook to let people know the type of work you are interested in and ask if they know anyone with knowledge of that area.

See ‘Hints and tips for using social media’, below.

Speculative applications

Having identified relevant employers, you could just send off your CV in the hope that they have a position available. Such speculative applications can result in success. To increase your chances, your applications should be well researched and targeted to that particular area.

Resist the temptation to send out identical CVs and covering letters in the hope that something will happen.

Information ‘interviewing’

A better approach may be to make an informal contact first, through ‘information interviewing.’

This is the process of arranging informal meetings to ask people about their jobs. In general, people respond positively to such requests, especially if you are only asking for information and advice and not a job (at this stage). Even if you are still unsure about the right job for you, information interviewing can help you decide if you really would enjoy this type of work.

One approach is to email a contact stating that you are interested in working in their field or their organisation and that you would like to get more information. Make it clear that you are not asking for a job, only 15 minutes of their time.

It is a good idea to mention where you obtained your contact’s name, especially if it is a mutual acquaintance. Suggest that you will contact them by phone in a few days to arrange an exact time for an appointment. The worst they can do is claim they do not have the time.

If you succeed in arranging a meeting, make the most of it by being clear about what information you would like to obtain. Do as much background reading and preparation as you can so that you do not waste your time or their time.

Questions for an ‘information interview’:

- What does the job involve in detail?
- What are the typical activities?

- What training and development is available?
- What are the reporting lines?

Questions you could ask about career progression:

- Are there any particular qualifications or types of work experience sought by that sector/organisation/department/role?
- Where are advertisements for this type of job placed?
- How did your contact get their job?
- How are candidates selected?

Always ask your contact if they can recommend more people who might be able to offer you further advice. This keeps your network expanding.

Finally, don't shy away from online networking. Social media has made networking more accessible and can be an important route to finding a job.

An estimated 30 per cent of jobs are filled through word of mouth via the 'hidden job market'. So speculative and proactive approaches are useful both to raise awareness of what's going on, and to find out about potential roles.

Hints and tips for using social media

- **Blog** – creating your own blog is a great way to showcase your written communication skills. You can start a blog using a site such as **WordPress.com**. You can also use blogs to gain current industry information.
- **Facebook** – some employers post careers information on Facebook. There are also sector-specific groups that you can access. Also, remember that if a recruiter searches for your name on Google, your Facebook profile may crop up. Go through your profile and check your privacy settings. Remove any photos or information that may damage your professional image.
- **LinkedIn** – is an excellent way to connect with potential employers. You can effectively post your CV online along with recommendations from previous employers. You can join relevant industry groups and directly message members.

Step 3 – Review your strategy

Job-hunting requires persistence and determination, but if you are not getting any results after a substantial period of time, you may want to review your strategy. This could mean:

- deciding that this career is not for you
- acquiring or developing skills by taking a course
- gaining experience by volunteering
- taking a less responsible job as a step to enhancing your chances of getting the job you want
- following up any contacts you may have
- changing your CV and covering letter to make it more effective (based on advice from your contacts).

Where to look for jobs

You can find vacancies in a number of places. The list below is not exhaustive and Prospect does not endorse any one organisation over another.

But using websites like these can give you a useful insight into understanding the current market:

- academia – **www.jobs.ac.uk**
- charity sector – **www.workingforacharity.com**
- environment – **www.earthworks-jobs.com**
- science – **www.naturejobs.com**
- local community – **www.gumtree.com**
- NHS – **www.jobs.nhs.uk**
- energy and science-based sectors – **www.cogent-careers.com**.

Don't forget to keep an eye out via traditional channels, such as national, regional and local newspapers; trade and professional journals; and dedicated titles like Jobs UK.

3 Marketing yourself effectively

Once you have investigated opportunities that seem to fit well with your skills, knowledge, strengths and experience you can start to prepare your application.

Step 1 – Research

The first step will be to contact the organisation to request further information about the role or career path. Organisations vary in the amount of information that they provide to prospective candidates, ranging from an extensive pack of information (including information on the organisation, a full job description and detailed person specification) to a short overview of the role with a brief description of the experience and personal attributes required.

Don't forget to look at the organisation's website.

Carefully read through any information you receive to identify the skills, competencies, knowledge and experience required for the role. Has the employer indicated which of these are essential (E) and which are desirable (D)?

You can then start to think about the evidence and examples you can provide to demonstrate that you are a good fit for the role. Break the skills down and think about how they would be applied in the context of the role. To help you, you can refer to the exercise in Appendix 3, 'Understanding and evaluating your skills'.

Application processes vary, with some organisations asking applicants to send a CV and cover letter and others requiring them to fill in an application form, sometimes online. Some employers may ask for a CV to be attached as well.

You should not simply focus on whether you have all the requirements – qualifications, experience or skills. Also consider how you can coherently and robustly demonstrate skills that can be transferable – or those you have the potential to obtain.

Step 2 – Preparing your CV

A CV is not a list of everything you have ever done; it is a marketing document and should help set the agenda for any interview. The information should be organised under clear headings, using a consistent format. Ideally your CV should not be more than two pages. A simple framework could include:

- name and personal details
- summary of key attributes and achievements
- career history (list in reverse chronological order)
- other experience (voluntary work, committee work etc)
- professional memberships etc
- education and training
- IT, other technical and language skills – state your level of competency
- interests.

Prospect's podcast, 'How to Write an Effective CV, part 1 of 3', will help you understand the structure and flow of a CV – visit www.prospect.org.uk/podcasts

Your aim is to make it as easy as possible for the reader to find evidence that you have the skills and experience they are looking for.

If you are at a stage in your career where you want to change your sector or discipline, the podcast, 'How to Write an Effective CV, part 2 of 3', will help you to focus on how to highlight your relevant skills and experiences.

The Open University resource site has a series of 'example CVs' that are worth looking at, including both chronological and skills-based CVs.

See: www.open.ac.uk/careers/improving-a-cv.php (Open University account required.)

Hints and tips for writing your CV

- Begin each bullet point or sentence with a single key word summing up the relevant skill.

- Give active examples to convey achievements and impact.
- Add quantifiables – eg numbers, timescales, outcomes – to make your examples more concrete.
- Include transferable skills and qualities developed outside work, for example, through involvement in voluntary activities, societies and sporting activities.

Look at your CV as if you were the recruiter. After a quick scan can you pick out clear evidence of each of the requirements outlined in the person specification?

- Do your key achievements stand out?
- Have you avoided large chunks of descriptive text?
- Have you used formatting tools (eg bold, italics, capitals and spacing) consistently?

Cover letter

Your cover letter is just as important as your CV and may be the first document the prospective employer looks at. It's another opportunity for you to convince the employer that you are a strong candidate and to showcase your skills, experience and achievements.

It is crucial to tailor each letter to each job and to convey your knowledge of the organisation as well as your understanding of the requirements of the role. Prospect's podcast, 'How to Write an Effective CV, part 3 of 3', explains how to write a cover letter – visit www.prospect.org.uk/podcasts

Structuring your cover letter:

Please state:

- who you are/why you are writing to them – your 'headlines'
- why you are interested in the role
- why you believe your knowledge, experience and skills make you a strong candidate. Provide context for the skills that you refer to – why are they relevant, what aspect(s) of the role would require these skills?

- why you want to work for the organisation. Examples include: projects/initiatives/research they are involved in; client base; opportunities to develop your skills and experience; opportunity to work in a sector that you have been involved in on a voluntary basis; the values/ethos of the organisation; and the expertise within the organisation.

Use positive language and, as with your CV, make sure that you provide clear evidence to underpin any skills and achievements that you refer to.

If you have recently been made redundant or are out of work you could turn this into a positive – use it as an opening to explain why you are applying to the sector or organisation.

For example you could say: “Having recently been made redundant from x, I am using this opportunity to change career direction in order to pursue ‘x’ or move into a role that will provide me with ‘y’.”

Identify the recipient and personalise the letter. If necessary, call the employer to find out who the letter should be addressed to.

Use formal language – eg surnames, yours sincerely/or yours faithfully (if you do not have the name of the recipient). Accuracy is vital – check spelling, punctuation and grammar and ask someone else to proof-read your letter.

Application forms

Many employers prefer people to complete an application form rather than send in a CV. This enables them to:

- deter unsuitable/unmotivated applicants
- create a focus on areas relevant to the job
- control information that applicants provide on areas relevant to the job
- compare potential applicants.

Some application forms ask for a personal statement. Employers often specify the type of information they expect to be covered in this section but where no direction is offered you need to provide:

- reasons for your interest in the role and organisation
- evidence that you have the skills, knowledge and experience required.

Hints and tips for completing application forms

- Read the form through carefully and note any instructions.
- Draft answers in a word processing document first; then transfer them to the application form. This will enable you to check for spelling and grammatical errors and do a word count.
- Tailor your answers to relate to the job description and person specification.
- Think about why the employer may be asking a particular question. What information do they really want? If the question is competency-based (ie asking for a particular example of when you did something) what skill is being assessed?
- Use different examples for different questions.
- Stick to word limits.
- Always keep a copy of the form so that you can revisit what you wrote if asked to attend an interview.

4 Interview preparation and selection methods

Employers use various methods to assess and select candidates, which vary from organisation to organisation.

Some employers may simply sift applications and then invite shortlisted candidates to attend one or two interviews. Others may require candidates to do tests and exercises as well as an interview.

Prospect's podcast, 'Preparation for Interview, part 1 of 5', concentrates on the initial preparation – visit: **www.prospect.org.uk/podcasts**

Interviews: first steps

Being invited for an interview means that your application has been well received and the employer is now considering hiring you. Converting this possibility into a reality requires careful and thorough preparation, which can be broken down into a number of steps.

Step 1 – Know yourself

Start by re-reading your application form or CV and your covering letter. Try to put yourself in the shoes of the interviewer.

- What are your strong points?
- Are there any gaps/weaknesses in your skills, knowledge or experience that you may be asked about?
- What areas might require clarification or explanation? Is there anything on the form that they might need to know?

Anything you put on your application form or in your CV may prompt an interview question so be ready to expand on any of the information you have given.

Step 2 – Know the job

Familiarise yourself with the job description, re-read the person specification and list the skills and qualities needed. This will help you to anticipate some of the questions you are likely to be asked. Think about which examples, from your own experiences, you could use to demonstrate your skills and qualities.

Step 3 – Know the organisation

Find out as much as you can about the employer. Visit the organisation's website, Facebook or LinkedIn page and request a copy of its annual report or find it on the website.

Organisations will often talk about their mission and vision (purpose) and their values and principles (culture and ethos). Be prepared to refer to these if asked what you know about the organisation or why you are attracted to it.

Find out what's going on in the sector – who are the main players/competitors? What challenges or threats is the industry or sector facing (eg changes in legislation and government policy)? What might be some of the opportunities (eg new markets or products)?

Step 4 – Know the details

Find out as much as you can about the format of the interview. Some organisations will tell you who will be on the interview panel and the type of questions you will be asked. If not, you might want to contact the organisation to request more detailed information.

Check the time and date of the interview, the location and the name/job title of the interviewer(s). Take with you the letter or email inviting you to interview. Have the phone number with you, in case anything goes wrong or you are delayed. Make sure you know how to get there and how long it will take – plan an alternative route in case of transport problems.

Interview questions

Employers may ask you a variety of questions but in essence they want to know three things:

- **ABILITY:** Can you do the job? Do you have the appropriate qualifications, knowledge, skills and/or experience?
- **MOTIVATION:** Will you do the job well? Do you have the right motivation, commitment and enthusiasm? Do you really understand what it involves?
- **FIT:** Will you fit in – with the team, the department, the organisation? Would people enjoy working with you? Equally important is whether you see yourself working in this environment and with this team?

Types of questions you may be asked:

Biographical

These are questions about your experience, qualifications and interests. Listen to the podcast, 'Preparing for Interview, part 2 of 5', which covers in depth how to tackle biographical questions – visit www.prospect.org.uk/podcasts

Technical

These are questions testing specific knowledge and abilities relevant to the role.

Competency

These questions seek examples of situations where you have demonstrated a particular skill, for example, your ability to work in a team or how you manage complex problems. Listen to the podcast, 'Preparing for Interview, part 3 of 5', for guidance on how to prepare for and approach competency-based interview questions.

Using the STAR technique, which is explained in the podcast, will help you to shape and structure your examples:

- **Situation** (10% of answer, set the context/background)

- **Task** (10% of answer, what you had to do)
- **Action** (70%, what you personally did, the actions you took, your behaviours)
- **Result** (10%, the outcome).

Scenario

These questions ask you what you would do in a hypothetical situation. Prospect's podcast, 'Preparing for Interview, part 4 of 5', provides a number of scenarios with examples of how you could respond to such questions – visit www.prospect.org.uk/podcasts

Motivation

These questions are asked to understand your commitment to the sector, organisation or the type of role or career path that you are interviewing for. Remember, the interviewers genuinely want you to do well, so keep this in mind throughout the interview process.

Your answers

With interview formats there are usually a mixture of structured, semi-structured or unstructured responses:

- **Structured** – all candidates are asked the same questions and their responses assessed against a set of indicators.
- **Semi-structured** – some questions vary from candidate to candidate and some questions are put to all candidates.
- **Unstructured** – all questions vary from candidate to candidate.

Pay careful attention to the interviewer and answer the question they ask, not the one you wish they had asked. Speak clearly and not too quickly and do ask for a moment if you need to think about your response.

Watch out for cues from the interviewer, as these can often tell you whether you need to expand on something or bring that answer to a close.

Use the STAR technique to help you to avoid going off at a tangent or becoming embroiled in details that are not adding anything significant to your answer. If at any time you need to ask for clarification, do so, as it will enable you to be sure that you understand how to frame your response.

Prospect's podcast, 'Preparing for Interview, part 5 of 5', is designed to help you think about responses to difficult interview questions – visit www.prospect.org.uk/podcasts

Psychometric testing

Some employers use psychometric tests as part of their selection processes. They may be used early in the process, with only candidates who achieve a certain score progressing to the next stage, for example participating in a day at an assessment centre. Psychometric tests are also used to promote and develop employees, as well as for career counselling and self-development purposes.

Psychometric tests can be clustered into two categories:

- ability or aptitude tests
- personality questionnaires.

Ability (aptitude) tests

These test a person's abilities in specific areas such as numeracy, verbal reasoning or critical thinking. They generally take the form of multiple-choice questions, which have right or wrong answers. Strict time limits are imposed, eg 30 questions in 30 minutes, and some tests are deliberately designed with more questions than can be completed in the time allowed.

Hints and tips for aptitude tests

- Use the practice question papers and make sure you understand the instructions.
- If you are taking the test at home, use a quiet room, where you won't be disturbed.

- Make sure that you have a clock or watch in front of you so that you can check the time. Some tests have a bar in the corner of the screen to show you how much time you have remaining.
- If you get stuck on a question, don't spend too long on it – move on to the next one.
- If you're not sure of an answer, put down your best guess but avoid wild guessing. You can usually eliminate one or two of the potential responses fairly quickly, as they are clearly incorrect eg too extreme or too low.
- Be aware that questions often become more challenging as the test proceeds.

Numerical tests

- If you have not studied maths for some time, it is a good idea to refresh your knowledge of how to do fundamental calculations such as ratios, percentages and fractions, and revisit your times tables.
- Check that you can do long multiplication.
- Practise interpreting data presented in graphs or tables. Have a look at the *Financial Times* or journals containing economic data and familiarise yourself with interpreting data.
- Do not worry about more advanced maths such as algebra or equations. These will not be tested unless the employer tells you explicitly that this is the case.

Verbal reasoning tests

- Try extracting the main points from passages of information and summarising their meaning.
- Practise reading complicated or unfamiliar texts about subjects that you do not understand.

Personality questionnaires

Personality questionnaires are used to gather information about a person's typical behaviour and reactions in different situations.

For example, they can indicate how you might relate to other people, your work style or your ability to deal with your own and others' emotions.

Unlike ability tests, there are no right or wrong answers and selectors use personality information to identify traits or characteristics that have been identified as contributing to success in a given role.

It's important to stress that personality questionnaires assess preferences and not abilities. Selectors would typically use the information generated from your responses as part of the interview.

For example, if you have reported yourself as being someone who prefers to work independently, the selectors may want to explore how you would deal with project work that requires collaboration with others.

Hints and tips for personality tests

- Be honest and be yourself. You will not know exactly what personal qualities or traits the selectors are seeking and strength of preference being sought. You may also come unstuck at interview if selectors probe your responses in more depth and ask for examples of how you have responded in certain situations. The questionnaires usually contain checks that highlight inconsistencies in your approach.
- The questionnaires are usually untimed, but it is recommended that you put down your first reaction to the questions rather than spending time pondering their meaning or agonising over your response.

Situational judgement tests

Situational judgement tests are multiple-choice tests that consist of short descriptions of job-related situations.

For each situation, several actions are listed that could be taken in response to it.

Respondents are required to make judgements about the effectiveness of the actions provided. SJTs have become increasingly popular for recruitment as they can assess skills not picked up on through other measures, ranging from problem-solving and decision-making to interpersonal skills.

The response mechanism can vary. For example, you may have to rate a set of courses of action, choose the most and least preferred action or allocate ratings between different options.

Hints and tips for completing situational judgement tests

- Think back to similar situations or scenarios that you have observed through your own working life. What courses of action succeeded and which didn't?
- Put yourself into the scenario. How would you prefer to be dealt with in the situation being described?

Written exercises

Written exercises can be used to assess a number of different skills and can take different forms. These exercises can test your ability to:

- process large amounts of information quickly and decide what is most important
- analyse problems and come up with conclusions or recommendations based on your analysis.

Throughout the written exercise you will need to express yourself clearly and succinctly. Ignore irrelevant information, spot inconsistencies and demonstrate good attention to detail.

Written exercises can also test specific skills, depending on the position that you are applying for. For example, if you are applying for a copywriting and editing position, you may be asked to proof-read a piece of text.

If you are applying for a customer service role, you may be asked to draft a response to a letter of complaint.

If you are applying for a consultancy or management role you may be presented with a case study to analyse. This usually involves providing you with a range of information about an issue, such as reports, financial data, newspaper cuttings, emails, letters etc. You will then be given a task to complete based on your analysis of the information eg write a report, a press release, or identify the main issues and put forward your recommendations to address them.

In-tray or E-tray exercises

These exercises aim to simulate the types of dilemmas and decisions that may arise in a typical day's work for that organisation and are used to assess how you might cope in different situations.

They are often used to assess skills such as decision-making, analysis and problem-solving and task prioritisation.

You would be presented with a range of information designed to simulate an in-tray/in-box, such as requests requiring you to take action (eg seek further information, delegate the task etc) and/or make a decision.

You may even need to perform the task (eg writing an email). You will be expected to prioritise all the tasks, indicating the most important and/or urgent as well as what kind of action is required. A time limit is usually set to complete the activities.

Hints and tips for in-tray or e-tray exercises

- Identify which request you should deal with first, which to postpone and which to delegate and to whom.
- Identify which tasks, if any, are urgent. What action will you take to deal with them?
- How will you eventually tackle the task(s) that you decided to postpone?
- Skim-read all the tasks to gain an overview of what you have to do within the time available and indicate the reasons for the decisions that you make.

Group exercises

Many employers use group exercises, where several candidates are given a joint task, to assess your capability to work effectively in a group or as part of a team.

Group exercises vary, but one of the most common types is the discussion group, where a group of candidates are given one or more topics on current affairs or issues relevant to the organisation.

The group is given a set amount of time for discussion and may be asked to reach a unanimous decision. The main objective is to observe how you relate to others in the group, not what decision the group reaches.

Good team-working is not about always getting your ideas taken on board, but about listening to and co-operating with the rest of the team and using others' ideas to reach a goal. Assessors also look for candidates who demonstrate good analytical and logical reasoning skills. Try to show this by:

- communicating clarity of thought and expression
- showing you can understand and absorb information easily
- thinking through the issues in a logical way
- showing you can identify key points and reach a conclusion
- contributing new ideas to take the discussion forward.

Some organisations may ask a group to analyse a case study. The group will be required to study the evidence and come up with solutions to the problem within a set timescale. As with group discussions, the assessors will be more interested in the behaviour within the group than the precise solution to the case problem.

Hints and tips for group discussions

- Make regular contributions without appearing competitive or riding roughshod over others.
- When putting forward an idea, provide the rationale behind it.
- Be supportive towards others and encourage contributions from quieter people.

- Show that you are engaged with the topic by listening attentively – make eye contact with the speaker and use non-verbal cues such as nodding.
- Build on the points made by others, summarising and moving the discussion forward.

Resources – selection methods

Here are some links to psychometric tests and recruitment exercises:

- Assessment day – numerical, verbal and inductive reasoning questions with answers explained: **www.assessmentday.co.uk**
- Kogan Page – verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning tests with a personalised feedback report: **http://bit.ly/kogan_profile**
- Kenexa practice tests including numerical, verbal, logical: **http://bit.ly/kenexa_assess**
- SHL Verbal, numerical and diagrammatic reasoning tests. Timed practice and feedback given: **http://bit.ly/SHL_tests**
- E-Tray Exercise, Civil Service Fast Stream – **http://bit.ly/civil_etray**

5 Developing your career in the workplace

There are a number of ways to build and shape your career development while you are in your current workplace.

360-degree appraisal

360-degree appraisal is a personal development review system that gathers feedback from several sources.

These may include colleagues and customers, as well as anyone who reports to a person. Supporters of the process claim that it provides better information about a person's performance than a traditional appraisal based on their manager's assessment.

Up to 10 people may be asked to complete a questionnaire about you as part of the process. The person being appraised may also need to complete a form for themselves.

Often those providing feedback are asked to read a series of statements and score them against a scale. This feedback should always be anonymous. The questions may relate to behavioural competency requirements, as well as other aspects of your role.

A 360-degree appraisal gives a person the opportunity to identify strengths that they might not be aware of and to think about how they might address any development needs. Anyone receiving such feedback needs to:

- be brave and try not to focus entirely on negative feedback
- listen to or read what is said carefully and with an open mind, and reflect on the feedback.

Advantages of 360-degree appraisal

- The people giving feedback are often more informed about aspects of a person's performance than their manager.
- Questions can be tailored to be relevant to the person's role.
- Respondents can give tailored feedback with examples.
- Individuals can get feedback on their performance from a wide range of sources.
- Feedback is sometimes about aspects of a person's performance that they are not aware of – good and not so good. It helps people to understand how others perceive them.

Disadvantages of 360-degree appraisal

- There may be lack of clarity about what is required and how it will be used.
- Feedback may be ambiguous or not specific enough.
- The reviewing manager may lack the necessary skills. Ideally a skilled coach should deliver feedback.
- Poorly designed questionnaires result in irrelevant or ambiguous feedback.
- Reviewers may lack time to complete the review properly.

Information on 360-degree feedback is included in ACAS's guidance, 'How to Manage Performance', at http://bit.ly/acas_perf

Hints and tips for 360-degree appraisal interviews

- Make sure you have plenty of notice of any performance interview.
- Find out in advance where and when it will be held and what will be discussed.
- Read all documentation in advance, and prepare any questions or comments you wish to make.

Personal development review

A personal development review may also be called a performance review, performance management, or performance appraisal. For the employer the purpose is to assess a person's performance and to reinforce its connection to the aims and objectives of the organisation.

For the person the benefit is the opportunity it gives you to understand and demonstrate your worth to the organisation, and to discuss your objectives and development over the next review period.

A 360-degree assessment sometimes forms part of an appraisal process.

If there is a serious issue with a person's performance they should already be aware of it before the appraisal interview – it should not be the first time this is raised.

The review process should be both backward and forward looking and should be developmental rather than focusing on a direct link between the person's pay or bonus. A good PDR process does not include disciplinary procedures.

Top tips for an effective personal development session

Before the interview:

- Check the frequency of the meetings and who is responsible for booking them.
- If someone else has booked the meeting, ensure you have plenty of notice, and know where and when it will be held and what will be discussed.
- Dig out all relevant documents such as the job description, your last appraisal documentation, details of any objectives set, and copies of any competency or other framework. Prospect has a members' guide to competencies and how to prepare for them – <http://library.prospect.org.uk/id/2004/00005>
- Be prepared to discuss your performance in detail, especially against any specific objectives, with examples of work you have done and extra responsibilities you have taken on. It helps to have some facts and figures to support you.

- If you have had issues to overcome, be prepared to discuss these honestly, and stress the actions taken to overcome them. Again, it helps to have facts and figures.
- Be prepared to talk about any training you have undertaken in the period, and how you have used this – or plan to – in the workplace.
- Think about the next review period. Is there any training or other development you would like to take advantage of? Explain what you want, why, and how you and the organisation will benefit.

At the review:

- Be confident and assertive. This is not a time for modesty. Make sure that you have raised all the points you wanted to make in support of your performance in the review period.
- Listen carefully with an open mind. Seek clarification and ask for more examples if necessary.
- Take notes to help you reflect later.
- Ensure that any goals or objectives are realistic and fair. Agree with your manager a way of reopening the discussion if circumstances change in the review period.

The SMART model

You can use the SMART model to set goals and see if objectives are reasonable.

The SMART acronym stands for: **Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Timed.**

- **Specific:** objectives should define what needs to be done and what is deliverable.
- **Measurable:** how much, how many, and how you will know when it is achieved.
- **Agreed** (achievable is sometimes used): both parties should be in agreement.
- **Realistic** (or relevant): objectives should be meaningful and appropriate to the level of experience and skill.

- **Timed** (or time-bound): objectives need defined timescales and to be achieved by a given date.

If things don't go to plan, refer to Prospect's members' guide to appealing against performance appraisal: <http://library.prospect.org.uk/id/2004/00004>

The ACAS conciliation service also offers general guidance on performance reviews: http://bit.ly/acas_perf

Investors in People

Investors in People was introduced into the UK in 1991.

It is a business improvement tool designed to enhance people within the organisation.

liP has three principles – Plan, Do, Review – and ten indicators. In 2009 the liP standard was reviewed to enable organisations to concentrate on high-priority indicators and work to improve these areas first. See more at www.investorsinpeople.co.uk



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Some evidence suggests that organisations benefit from adopting liP. Reports and surveys cite improved efficiencies within companies and increased employee engagement and performance.

A recent study from the Institute for Employment Studies states: “Organisations that choose to enter the liP process generate higher gross profit per employee than would a randomly selected organisation.”

But how can it help with your career planning and development?

The framework and principle behind it is that the success of the organisation you work for depends on the input of its people.

Engaging in the process will not only help you to understand more about the direction of the organisation, but to be directly involved in your own development and help to influence change. According to liP, the process “provides (employees) proven performance improvement and makes the most of the skills and talents of everyone within an organisation”.

Being involved in a process that gives you the opportunity to improve your workplace and develop your skillset can only benefit your long-term career planning.

Quality management systems

Your organisation may be working towards a quality assurance and management system – a commitment that its products or services meet key quality standards. This is achieved by understanding the meaning of quality in the context of the organisation and identifying approaches to measure and evaluate its effectiveness. Two underlying principles are normally included:

- **Fit for purpose** – the product or service should do exactly what the organisation states that it will do.
- **Right first time** – the product or service should have all errors eliminated and maintain the level of quality throughout. Quality is determined by users, clients or customers and is not related to the price of a product or service.

The British Standards Institute – www.bsigroup.co.uk – provides an insight into quality standards, which may vary, depending on your sector or industry.

By understanding how quality is managed within your organisation you can see at first hand the consistency of the standards that are produced and how that feeds into the overall level of performance.

Examples of quality standards include:

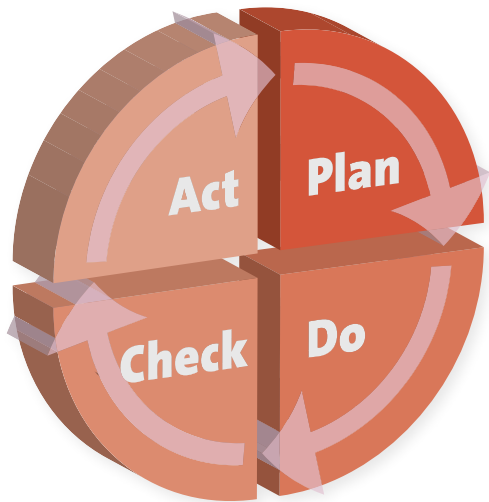
- ISO 9001 – visit www.qmsuk.com
- the standards issued by the Quality Assurance Agency within higher education – visit www.qaa.ac.uk
- the standards issued by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence within health and social care – visit http://bit.ly/nice_quality

You can help develop the process and shape best practice by getting involved.

All quality management systems have clear objectives. These cover:

- identifying the outcomes for the system

- planning and documenting an appropriate process for delivering these objectives
- implementing how the system will be monitored
- reviewing the outcomes against the original objectives (see diagram).



Plan Identify the problem and establish objectives

Do Implement the plan

Check Measure the effectiveness of the plan against the objectives

Act Correct and improve the plan, continually monitoring it against the objectives of the QMS.

thereliabilityroadmap.com

How can quality improvement systems help your career development?

There are three key ways that you can improve your career potential through involvement with quality improvement systems:

- You will become part of a team working to improve standards, procedures and services, possibly working with people you don't normally work with and thus enhancing your professional business network of contacts.
- You will have a chance to make an impact for change within your workplace and work with senior managers to implement new processes. They will see you working in a different environment and positively contributing to change.
- You will learn new procedures and techniques that you can redeploy in other organisations and industry sectors if you decide to move on now or later.

The International Organisation of Standards is a network of national standards bodies – visit www.iso.org

Mentoring and coaching

Mentoring and coaching happen in a variety of ways in many organisations, including workplaces and, increasingly, community organisations. Sometimes the process is upfront and formal. At other times it can be ad-hoc and informal and not even recognised as mentoring or coaching by anyone involved. There are many shades of provision in between.

There are subtle differences between mentoring and coaching, even though the personal skills required to fulfil both roles are similar.

Personal skills required

Skills needed for mentoring and coaching include: listening; communication; problem-solving; team-working; planning and organising; analytical skills; ability to empathise; being able to set and review targets to maximise performance; and technical and specialist knowledge (coach).

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MENTORING AND COACHING	
Mentoring	Coaching
Individual often chooses mentor	Individual does not choose coach
Mentor is not necessarily a subject expert	Coach is often a subject expert
The mentor's main role is to provide personal support during learning	A coach's main role is to help the individual gain new skills or increase performance
The mentor gives feedback only when asked	The coach gives regular feedback when not asked
The mentor controls less and only gives advice when asked	The coach exercises control over the process
The mentor questions, challenges and provides options, rather than teaching or providing answers	The coach provides specific direction or instruction (teaches)
Mentoring is normally long term and can benefit both parties	Coaching is normally short term
Mentors maintain confidentiality	Coaches share performance information with others

Top tips for coaching and mentoring

- Establish clear roles, responsibilities and learning objectives.
- Agree working practices, communication methods and frequency. Review these regularly and adjust accordingly.

- Try to keep to scheduled meetings.
- Reflect on the relationship, processes and framework.
- Acknowledge progress, success and where more development is still required.
- Reflect on what worked well/what could have been done better – use this to help shape future coaching and mentoring relationships.
- Consider a person's preferred learning style – for more information visit **www.peterhoney.com**

If you would like to consider the role of workplace coach or mentor further, you can complete an online resource developed by the Open University and Foundation Degree Forward, 'Supporting Workplace Study'.

Visit the TUC unionlearn website for more details – **www.higherlearningatwork.org** (click on the 'workplace support' icon and scroll down to the link). A direct link to the course is at: **http://bit.ly/ou_workplace**

For more information on mentoring, visit **www.mentorset.org.uk**

The GROW model

The GROW model is a technique often used in coaching and mentoring. The following table explains what it is and how you can use it for your career development.

Adults learn best when they decide what and how they want to learn, and this fits in with their own personal goals.

Sometimes establishing your own goals is not straightforward. You may have been in a particular role for a long time, lack confidence in your ability, or a particular possibility may not have occurred to you. The GROW model aims to clarify what a person wants to achieve and how they want to do it – see table.

QUESTIONS MAY INCLUDE

GOAL

- What do you want to achieve?
- How do you know that the goal is worth achieving?
- How will you know when you have achieved it?
- What will achieving the goal do for you or give you?
- How much personal control do you now have over your goal?

REALITY

- When do you want to achieve it by?
- How will you measure it?
- What is happening at the moment?
- How do you know this is accurate/true?
- Who is involved?
- What have you done so far?
- What effect did this have?
- What is holding you back?
- What have you learned from this situation that could be useful?

OPTIONS

- What would you do differently if you could start again?
- Who might be able to help?
- What if you had more... time, money, and a magic wand?
- What would a wise old friend suggest to you?
- Which options interest you?
- Which option would you like to act on?
- What are the benefits and pitfalls of this?

WHAT NEXT

- What are the next steps?
- Will this address your goal?
- When will you take these steps?
- What will you gain/lose from doing this?
- What might get in the way?
- Who needs to know?
- How committed are you to this (on a scale of 1 to 10)?
- What stops you being a 10?
- What do you need to get to a commitment of 10?

Working through a range of questions in the four GROW areas enables you to clarify and agree goals and start to identify a range of actions you might take towards achieving them.

Conclusion

Throughout this guide the aim has been to provide you with insight, help and advice on cultivating and sustaining your career.

Prospect is here to help and support you through all stages of your career and this guide is one of many resources designed to help with your career planning. Others can be found on the website: **www.prospect.org.uk**

Appendix 1: Careers podcasts – www.prospect.org.uk/podcasts

Access an individual podcast by visiting <http://library.prospect.org.uk/id/> followed by the podcast number in the left-hand column below (for example, <http://library.prospect.org.uk/id/2012/01480>)

PODCAST NUMBER	PODCAST NAME
2012/01480	LOOKING AFTER YOUR OWN WORK STRESS How to identify your stressors – Section 1, Part 1
2012/01572	Resilience – Section 2, Part 1
2012/01573	Time management – Section 2, Part 2
2012/01574	Saying ‘No’ – Section 2, Part 3
2012/01575	Work/life balance – Section 2, Part 4
2012/01577	Techniques to help you relax – Section 2, Part 5
2012/01482	Signposting to resources – Section 3, Part 1
2011/04103	BODY MAPPING – Part 1
2011/04104	Body Mapping, Part 2
2011/04105	Body Mapping, Part 3
2013/00108	PERSONAL TRANSITION CHANGE AND YOU Anticipating change – Part 1
2013/00113	Navigating change – Part 2
2013/00118	Learning from change – Part 3
2013/01083	TRANSITIONS IN ACTION Life transitions and career planning – Part 1
2013/01084	The career management cycle – Part 2
2013/01082	Imposter phenomena and career transition – Part 3
2013/00831	THINKING ABOUT SELF EMPLOYMENT? Self reflection – Part 1
2013/00833	Practicalities and risks – Part 2
2011/00861	PREPARING FOR INTERVIEW Initial preparation – Part 1
2011/00862	Biographical questions – Part 2
2011/00863	Competency questions – Part 3
2011/00864	Scenario questions – Part 4
2011/00865	Tricky questions – Part 5
2011/00858	SELLING YOUR SKILLS AND STRENGTHS Transferable skills – Part 1
2011/00859	Job descriptions, analysing the skills required – Part 2
2011/00860	Identifying strengths – Part 3
2013/01228	RETIREMENT AND LOOKING FORWARD The transition from work to retirement
2013/01226	KEEPING IN TOUCH ONLINE

Appendix 2: Career values

On the following pages are some of the common factors that people find are important to them when asked why they do their job. (There are spaces at the bottom to add anything not listed.)

- For the first column, 'Free choice', tick all the values that are important to you or desirable.
- For the next column, 'Half', cut the number of values you have chosen by half discarding those of lesser importance.
- For the final column choose only your top three essential values.

		FREE CHOICE	HALF	TOP THREE
Using your abilities	Not feeling like you could do the job with one hand tied behind your back. Stretching yourself. Using your skills.			
Accomplishment	Feeling that you achieve something. You have clear goals. You can see a result for your efforts.			
Being busy	Not having stretches of time when you have nothing to do. You have a buzz of activity.			
Being responsible	Taking charge of your own work and the work of others. Being accountable.			
Variety of task	Every day is not the same because you do different things.			
Variety of environment	Every day is not the same because you are in different places.			
Variety of contact	Every day is not the same because you are interacting with different people.			
Adventure	You regularly take risks and have feelings of exhilaration or danger.			
Fun	You are able to be light-hearted. You don't have to be serious all the time.			
Prestige environment	The place where you work is held in high regard as a major player in the field.			
Advancement	There are opportunities to be promoted to higher positions.			
Money	You earn or have the potential to earn a larger than average salary. You have perks, such as a company car, etc.			
Development	There are opportunities to enhance, expand or develop your role and learn new things.			
Recognition	When you perform well, your efforts are acknowledged or rewarded by praise, promotion or money.			
Authority	You get to tell people what to do. You give direction to others.			
Social status	You feel proud when you tell people what you do for a living. People think your job is interesting or glamorous.			
Colleagues	The people you work with are easy to get on with or interesting. There are opportunities for socialising with colleagues.			
Helping individuals	You are involved in providing aid and assistance to people directly.			
Helping society	You are doing something which contributes beneficially to society.			
Caring	You are involved in showing support, empathy and love to others.			
Nurturing	You are involved in helping other people to develop.			
Justifiable	What you are doing fits in with your moral value system.			
Fairness	You and other workers are treated fairly by your employer. You have good conditions of employment.			
Spirituality	Your work allows you to express or explore your faith.			
Management	You have a good working relationship with your boss. Your manager's way of working fits in well with your own.			

		FREE CHOICE	HALF	TOP THREE
Training	Structured opportunities for learning are provided and supported.			
Creativity	You get to generate new ideas or solutions to problems. You get to innovate and be original.			
Decision-making	You get to make some of the choices that affect your work.			
Autonomy	You have some freedom to do things when you want and how you want.			
Being expert	You have the opportunity to gain and use an in-depth knowledge of a subject. You are sought for advice in this area.			
Competition	You get the opportunity to test your abilities against others.			
Subject	Your work is enjoyable because you have a strong interest in the subject matter you are dealing with.			
Aesthetics	You deal with ideas or things that are beautiful and require appreciation.			
Quality	You work in situations in which precision and attention to detail are important, or where there is little room for error.			
Security	You have security of employment. It is not likely that you will lose your job or have to find another job regularly.			
Stress-free	You do not have to work under high levels of stress. The pressure of work is not too high and there is little conflict.			
Health	Your work positively contributes to your physical and psychological wellbeing.			
Stability	Work routines and duties are largely predictable and not likely to be subject to sudden or unforeseen changes.			
Hours	You do not work more than average or irregular hours. Your job does not impinge on your family or social life. The patterns of work suit your lifestyle.			
Resources	You have the materials, equipment and money you need to do the job. You are not expected to produce great results without the right tools.			
Workspace	The place where you work is comfortable and suited to your working style and personal preferences.			
Supportive	The organisation you work for is open and tolerant. Your views are sought and respected during decision-making.			
Cooperation	Your work requires operating as part of a team and interacting with others to achieve a goal.			

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Appendix 3: Understanding and evaluating skills

Step 1 – Unpacking the skill buzz words

‘Team-working’, ‘Problem-solving’, ‘Organisation’, ‘Leadership’, ‘Initiative’, ‘Attention to detail’ – there are so many buzz words and phrases out there, but what do they really mean?

In order to demonstrate that you have a particular skill, you first need to understand what it means and that involves knowing what sort of behaviours and actions are components of that skill.

For example, you will recognise somebody as a good communicator if they:

- have identified clearly why they are communicating and what they want to achieve rather than hoping that the other people get the point
- have researched and understand the target audience – their needs, background knowledge, level of understanding, preferred communication methods, personality, etc, rather than making too many assumptions or using stereotypes; have gained a thorough understanding of the topic so that they speak with authority, rather than going on about something they know little about
- have prioritised and selected what to include and what to leave out, rather than giving too much or too little information; have adapted their materials and methods of communication for the particular topic and audience, rather than relying on the same old techniques for the sake of convenience
- have anticipated potential misunderstandings or likely areas of confusion and checked that the right message has been communicated, rather than assuming everyone will approach things from the same perspective
- have chosen an appropriate level of language to use, rather than hiding behind complex jargon or being patronising; have actively listened to and responded to the views of others, rather than forcing their views them

- have spent time reviewing, correcting, amending and refining their words, rather than just dashing something off without thinking
- have engaged with people through appropriate eye contact and body language, rather than just focusing on the information; have reviewed the results of previous communication and sought feedback in order to improve in the future, rather than assuming everything is as good as it can be

To see how good someone's communication skills are, consider how many things from the list above they regularly engage in and how effectively they do them. A bad communicator will do hardly any of those things; a moderately good communicator will do some of them; a great communicator will probably do all of them (and more).

Do the same for any skill buzz word by considering what a person really good at that skill would do or what someone really bad at it would do.

Step 2 – Putting the skills in context

Even though many jobs ask for very similar sets of skills, the nature of the role and the working environment mean that they are used in different ways. Each responsibility will require a combination of different skills to be completed successfully.

Let's look at one of the duties from a job description for an administrative role:

“Organise meetings, conferences or events; this includes sourcing venues, liaising with speakers and exhibitors, etc. Oversee the smooth and efficient running of the department's events from initial idea to event review.”

This task looks as if it mainly concerns organisational skills, but it requires many other skills, too. Just focusing on communication skills, you may have to:

- clarify exactly what the event is intended to achieve, so that the stakeholders are completely satisfied
- obtain information from venues about their capacity, availability and facilities, so that you can communicate this as needed
- explain exactly what you want from any suppliers or speakers, so that they don't do the wrong thing

- negotiate terms and conditions for venue and equipment hire, so that you get the best deals
- draft publicity materials targeted at an appropriate audience, so that you get all the right people coming
- write clear joining instructions for delegates and exhibitors, so that you minimise the number of questions they ask
- respond promptly to enquiries with accuracy, patience and tact, so that nobody experiences delays or confusion
- provide regular reports and updates on the event's progress, so that stakeholders are fully informed and have no need to worry.

You can do the same exercise for other skills – for example, how might this task require problem-solving or initiative?

In summary:

- We have looked at how to unpack a skill buzz word to see what it is made up of.
- We have examined how a particular skill helps you to fulfil a specific job responsibility. This is important because it is much easier to remember performing a particular action or behaving in a certain way than to dredge up abstract examples to demonstrate a buzz word.

Step 3 – Look for evidence of skills in your activities

There are different ways of doing this:

Look for specific behaviours

If you are seeking evidence of a specific skill, just pick one of the behaviours associated with that skill.

For example, if you are trying to find examples of your communication skills, try to remember times when you anticipated potential misunderstandings or likely areas of confusion and checked that the right message had been communicated.

Do the same thing with other behaviours.

List and analyse

Start off by making some lists:

- List your achievements – things you are proud of. They could be from your work or non-work activities.
- What have you done well? When were you uncertain that you could manage something, but you pulled it off? When did you face a challenge? When did you surprise yourself? When did you get some praise or good feedback for something you did?
- List your daily activities. What do you do regularly? What behaviours are part of your day-to-day routine? What things do you do without really thinking about them?

Now, go through each item on your list and try to explore how you used various skills within that activity, just as in Step 2 we looked for elements of communication skills in the job responsibility. How did you use communication skills? How did you use problem-solving? etc.

One way to think of this is to imagine that you have to recruit your replacement for that particular activity. If someone else was going to do it as well as you, what skills and qualities would they have to demonstrate?

Ask for feedback

Approach people you trust, who have seen you in action, and ask them: “What would you say I am good at?”

When they come up with something, such as “You are really good at sorting out problems,” ask them if they can think of any examples that convinced them of this.

You will start to get an idea of which of your strengths have an impact on others and that will enable you to collect examples.

When asking people, give them advance notice so they can think about it. You should also be prepared to return the favour for them.

Step 4 – Identify your gaps

Do the opposite of some of the things in Step 3:

- See if there are behaviours you don't regularly engage in.
- See if there are skills that you don't use within your listed activities.
- Ask for feedback on your weaknesses.

Another approach is to have a list of common skills. Taking each in turn, see how many examples you can come up with that demonstrate this skill. You need to work on the areas where you find it hardest to think of examples.

Step 5 – Plan to fill the gaps

Think about what you could do to gain experience of using the skills you lack evidence for.

This might involve getting some training, but it may be more useful to think of things you can get involved in where those skills are used.

The easiest way to build skills is to volunteer to take on extra responsibilities either in work or outside work. You could ask other people for examples of how they have used and developed the skills you are targeting.

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Appendix 4: Identifying your strengths

Strength: a natural capacity for behaving, thinking or feeling in a way that allows optimal functioning in the pursuit of valued outcomes.

Flow: a state of existence you reach at times when you are totally absorbed in an enjoyable and fulfilling activity.

Working in pairs, choose an example of a situation or task when you were ‘in the flow’ This could be when:

- You lost track of time.
- You were totally immersed in the task or situation.
- You felt energised both during and after the event.

Put yourself back in the situation and talk your partner through your example so that it comes alive.

- What was the situation/task/event?
- What were you doing?
- Who was there, what was the place like?
- What were you feeling?
- If your partner was a fly on the wall, what would they have seen you doing?
When was the moment you were ‘in the flow’?

When you sense that your partner is genuinely ‘in the flow’ ask them to write down the key conditions for them to thrive (down one column of the paper).

Now ask your partner what skills and strengths they were using and write these down in the other column. Add any others you notice.

Ask your partner to indicate which of the conditions are generally true, ie not just applicable to this example.

Example: Providing individual career guidance

CONDITIONS/KEY FACTORS FOR ME TO THRIVE	SKILLS/STRENGTHS USED
Working one to one	Building rapport and trust
Using professional knowledge and expertise	Listening, questioning, eliciting and analysing information, making links, spotting themes/patterns and underlying issues
Making a difference	Offering a new perspective, enhancing self-understanding
Moving someone forward	Helping to decide on next steps, ways forward

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Appendix 5: List of key competencies

BUSINESS AWARENESS – Knows what we do and how we do it. Is aware of competitors. Up-to-date with general business news. Aware of developments in the sector. Thinks about implications. Has worked in a commercial setting. Understands the importance of customer satisfaction and shareholder value.

CUSTOMER ORIENTATION – Identifies and prioritises customer needs and recognises constraints. Seeks to find out more about customers and provide a better service. Adopts professional approach to customers. Is reliable and delivers on promises.

ANALYSIS/PROBLEM-SOLVING – Able to identify and separate out the key components of problems and situations. Able to manipulate and interpret information from a range of sources, to spot patterns and trends in information and to deduce cause and effect from this. Can generate a range of creative solutions, evaluate them and choose the most appropriate option.

QUICK THINKING/LEARNING – Able to pick up and assimilate relevant information quickly and easily. Learns new tasks rapidly. Responds swiftly and appropriately. Can think on their feet in rapidly changing environments.

TEAM WORK – Actively participates in team. Encourages co-operation. Aware of the needs of others and responds flexibly. Shares information and supports other team members. Can get things done through others and set realistic objectives. Seeks opportunities to develop others. Prioritises team goals over individual goals.

COMMUNICATION – Able to communicate information and ideas clearly and articulately both in oral and written form. Uses appropriate language, style and methods, depending on audience and the purpose of communication. Able to convey complex information clearly. Anticipates the information that others will need.

SELF CONFIDENCE/RESILIENCE – Measured confidence to take on demanding work or put forward views when they may be challenged. Stays calm in a crisis. Handles competing demands. Overcomes setbacks. Welcomes and learns from criticism.

JUDGEMENT/DECISION-MAKING – Takes balanced view of situations incorporating different perspectives. Seeks alternative viewpoints. Recognises priorities, weighs up different options and evaluates risks. Reaches logical conclusions and decides on appropriate plan of action. Evaluates previous judgements in order to improve.

RESEARCHING AND INVESTIGATING – Has the ability to recognise information needs and identify and utilise appropriate information sources. Persists in seeking information and adopts a variety of strategies. Questions, checks and evaluates information and sources. Pays attention to details.

PLANNING AND ORGANISING – Able to achieve results in a quality, timely, and cost-effective way. Sees priorities, plans the efficient use of resources, and monitors progress against objectives. Anticipates crucial stages in projects. Formulates alternative means of achieving objectives. Responds effectively to unforeseen events.

RESULTS/QUALITY ORIENTATION – Sets high but achievable standards for self and others. Seeks opportunities to improve process and outcomes. Constantly reviews performance to identify areas to develop.

INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS – Able to influence the views and behaviour of others through persuasion and encouragement. Manages conflict or other sensitive issues tactfully and effectively. Able to adapt behaviour to a wide range of people.

PERSONAL MOTIVATION – Sets personal goals which are challenging but achievable. Pursues these with energy, persistence and determination. Enthusiastic and committed to improving personal performance levels.

FLEXIBILITY/ADAPTABILITY – Has actively sought to learn new things on own initiative. Has responded positively to change and adapted to new situations quickly. Able to take on a diverse range of tasks equally effectively.

INITIATIVE/INDEPENDENCE – Able to work things out without having to be shown too often. Takes responsibility for own time and effectiveness. Alert to opportunities to contribute appropriately without being told. Able to spot and implement opportunities for improving situations.

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