



The CPD Certification Service

The Coach House, Ealing Green, London, W5 5ER  
Tel: (020) 8840 4383 Fax: (020) 8579 3991 E-mail: info@cpduk.co.uk  
www.cpduk.co.uk

## WHAT IS CPD?

### THE BACKGROUND TO CPD

Global competition is a factor in the lives of an increasing number of professionals. Clients are ever more aware of their rights and the levels of quality that they demand are continuously rising. New technology offers many new methods of working. Against this background has developed a commitment to new methods of learning and, in particular, to Continuing Professional/Personal Development.

Professionals are increasingly recognising the benefits of adopting a planned and structured approach to the maintenance and upgrading of their skills. Not only do they need to keep up to date but they also need the ability to acquire new knowledge in response to the challenge of new business requirements. It is this ability to gain new knowledge which is being seen by professionals as the best possible means of gaining a competitive advantage over their peers.

### CPD DESCRIBED

There are, naturally enough, many definitions of CPD. The basic concept that they all seek to describe, however, is an educational system which seeks to:

- operate throughout the working life of a professional
- mirror the requirements imposed upon professionals by their professional organisations and, equally importantly, by their clients
- operate in a systematic and structured manner
- cover the full range of knowledge and skills, personal, technical and commercial, required by a professional in his or her working life

### THE PROVISION OF CPD

CPD comes in many guises. It is not just limited to off site courses or seminars. There are many types of learning now recognised as being relevant to the acquisition of knowledge. These include:

- distance and open learning, including computer-based systems
- structured reading, including data sheets and periodical articles
- writing technical papers
- membership of relevant professional committees
- part time teaching
- skills developed as part of normal in-house activities

"In-house" CPD can take the form of specific training or, just as important, the gaining of new skills and experiences though the transfer to new roles and responsibilities within the organisation.

Each of these can be considered as items which have a discrete timescale and which have a start and a finish. It is important, however, that they all take place within a structure and that they are recognised as being a part of a continuous and on-going process.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CPD

CPD is not a new idea. In varying ways it is merely the encapsulation of what has always been considered to be good professional practice. The change is in its perceived importance in the current business environment. This has been brought about by factors such as:

**Quality assurance.** This normally requires that adequately trained staff perform all significant roles within an organisation and that the training is kept up to date on a regular basis.

**Change.** The lessons learned at university or college have a decreasing lifespan. In the more hi-tech industries, this can now be reduced to months rather than years. It is also unusual for anyone, particularly a professional, to keep the same role for more than a limited period. New skills have to be acquired in order to allow for personal career development.

**Customers.** They are increasingly demanding and much better informed about their rights than at any time in the past. The concept of the "duty of care" is recognised as a prime responsibility for all professionals, and having an adequate and suitably maintained skill base is a part of this duty.

**The law.** Just as the customers are requiring a high level of performance from the professionals, so is the law. Ignorance is no defence and, in some areas, can be seen as an offence in its own right. As the cost of indemnity policies becomes an important feature of many balance sheets, so any method of reducing their cost is desirable. Some insurance companies are now recognising the existence of a structured CPD scheme within an organisation as a factor to be considered when calculating the premium for professional indemnity insurance.

**Professional standards.** The professional institutions have the role of maintaining the standards of competence within their membership. These standards can be communicated efficiently to the membership through the use of CPD.

**Competition.** The requirements of modern business mean that professionals have to be as just proficient in the skills of customer care and communication as they do in their traditional, professional, ones. These skills must be developed and then maintained through the CPD process.

## EFFECTIVE CPD

If it is to be effective, it is important that CPD should be seen as an integral part of the life of an organisation. In too many instances, it is seen as a cost which has to be paid for an activity which can be stopped or started at the whim of the organisation. If it is to achieve the desired effect, CPD must be:

- an integral part of the organisation's strategy
- considered an investment in the total skill base of the workforce
- intended to increase learning, not just to offer training in specific skills
- assessed and evaluated in order to measure its effectiveness
- applicable to different staff members and flexible enough to reflect their requirements
- the catalyst for change the workplace

It is also important that the "achievement" of CPD should not be seen in terms of the acquisition of points or "flying hours" but in improved performance of the staff and an increase in the success of the business as a whole. Only if this "holistic" approach is adopted will CPD offer the maximum possible level of benefit to the organisation.

## **CPD AND INDIVIDUAL NEEDS**

CPD must improve the level of competence of the individual staff members. That, after all, is its main aim. This means that emphasis must be placed upon measuring individual levels of competence, both before and after CPD activities, rather than just measuring the number of hours spent on CPD. It is vital that the type of CPD required is accurately identified and that the acquired skills are then put into practice. This is best achieved by the use of a structured review process, in which individual staff are appraised on a regular basis.

This will seek to establish

- gaps in the current levels of professional competence
- opportunities for career development and additional skills required
- aims and objectives of the CPD process as applied to the individual
- evaluation of CPD activities to date

Individuals must be encouraged to plan their own CPD programmes so that they can quantify

- the level of competence in a skill base prior to the CPD
- the level of competence required in order to make a significant enhancement to career progression
- the most suitable type of CPD (courses, structured reading, etc)
- the best method of assessing the level of achievement at any stage in the process.

Individuals can use this to produce evidence of what they require and then to quantify the advances that they have made as a result of the CPD process.

## **CPD AND THE BUSINESS**

CPD must form an integral part of business strategy if it is to be a success. This means:

- establishing the mechanisms for individual review procedures
- planning a company wide CPD programme, including the required evaluation processes
- organising all internal training and development so that it can be included in the CPD programme
- making the enhancement of managerial skills and the possibilities for their application an integral part of the business strategy

## **CONCLUSIONS**

All professionals are having to adapt to a rapidly changing work environment. Certainty of employment can no longer be taken for granted and changing levels and types of professional skills are an essential for a successful career. A commitment to CPD throughout a working life is essential in this context and this should encourage all professionals to:

- produce their own CPD plans to indicate their own personal and professional goals
- view CPD as a continuous process which will form a constant part of their working lives
- ensure that CPD is concentrated upon enhancing their performance.

CPD is of increasing importance to all professionals. It concentrates upon reviewing and developing individual professional skills and abilities and is an efficient method of improving their competitive potential in the modern marketplace.