A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
ROADMAP
TO SUCCESS
PLANNING YOUR LEARNING JOURNEY

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Having a solid, actionable plan for your **professional development** is the best way to ensure you achieve your career goals.

Planning out an in-depth and genuine understanding of your abilities, shortcomings, time, energy, and ambitions can seem daunting, but if done properly, can become a **roadmap to success...**

In this guide, we cover the key elements of building a roadmap to success, including identifying your current skill gaps, setting career goals, building sustainable learning habits while balancing work and development, and tracking and showcasing your progress throughout your learning journey.

Identifying Skill Gaps

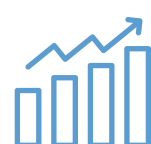What they are, why they matter, and how to use them

Setting Career Goals

The best ways to set manageable and achievable goals

Balancing Work and Learning

Incorporating sustainable learning habits into your day

Showcasing Progress

Why tracking & showcasing your progress is important

IDENTIFYING SKILLS GAPS

A **skill gap** is best understood as the difference between an individual's current skill level and the level they need to reach.

While it might seem that skill gaps are problems, they should be embraced as a natural part of career growth. They are opportunities to learn and develop, not obstacles to ignore or avoid.

Keeping skill gaps in mind allows us to use them as a tool for development. By understanding the skills we have and those we need, we can focus our learning more effectively, maximise our growth, and increase our adaptability.

Ultimately, skill gaps allow us to identify our weak points in the **short term,** while building to success in the **long term**.

This becomes particularly relevant when discussing career progress. It's only natural to come up against skill barriers and the need for additional education or qualifications as you **climb the career ladder.**

It's important to note that skill gaps aren't always the result of something someone hasn't learned yet. Social, technological, and industry changes often create skill gaps, especially in fast-evolving fields like Artificial Intelligence.

There are several categories of skill gaps to consider, from knowledge and practical abilities to more specialised skills. Being aware of as many as possible ensures a well-rounded approach to growth and success.

HARD SKILLS VS. SOFT SKILLS

A great place to start when assessing your skills is figuring out how to categorise them.

Hard Skills

Hard skills are generally tangible, measurable, and teachable, and they tend to be role or industry-related. Skill gaps occur with hard skills when knowledge of a process or workflow is missing, when an individual is unable to complete tasks without assistance, or performance doesn't meet the required standards of efficiency or quality.

Soft Skills

Soft skills are the interpersonal, cognitive, and behavioural abilities that aren't specific to any one role or industry. Examples include communication, leadership, time management, and problem-solving. Gaps in soft skills often surface when teamwork or collaboration is challenging, communication breaks down, or stress and burnout take their toll.
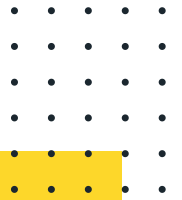
The distinction between hard skills and soft skills often comes down to the difference between **objective** and **subjective**.

Hard skills can be measured objectively, like the speed or accuracy of completing a task. Soft skills are more subjective, such as how well someone works in a team.

When it comes to skill gaps, it's important to be aware of the areas you may need to develop. **Successful career progression** requires a mix of both soft and hard skills, and knowing where you need to improve makes it easier to build a solid roadmap to success.

EXPECTATIONS VS. GOALS

A slightly different way to look at skills and the gaps they create is to consider the difference between **technical** and **transferable** skills.
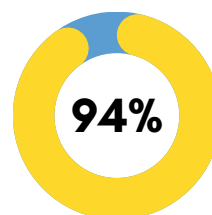
Technical skills are specific to a role or function and include abilities such as regulatory knowledge or programming. Transferable skills are broader and include strengths like critical thinking, project management, and adaptability.

A great starting point for assessing your skills is to check the industry standards and expectations, whether in your current role or in the field you want to move into.
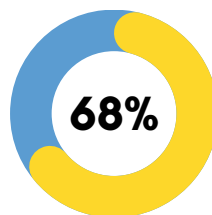
If there are clear knowledge gaps or professional qualifications you need to obtain to progress, then that's where you should start.

Another way to look at it is through your personal goals and achievements. Is there something you've always wanted to do, even if it doesn't directly affect your career?
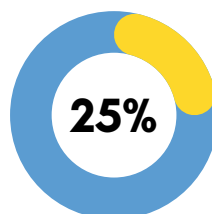
As with most things, the best option is perhaps somewhere in the middle. Consider what qualifications or skills you need to acquire, and of those, which interests you most as a starting point?
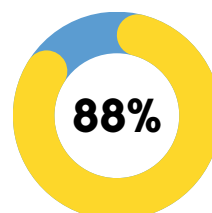
94%

A massive **94%** of employees believe they would stay longer at a job, if it invested in their development.

68%

68% of people believe that learning helps them adapt in the workplace.

25%

It's estimated that effective development can boost performance by up to **25%.**

88%

88% of companies that prioritise employee retention use development as a key retention strategy.

SETTING CAREER GOALS

Assessing and analysing our skills and the resultant skill gaps only gets us so far. We now need to turn them into **actionable plans**, strategies, and goals.

When shifting focus from what skills you need to how you'll develop them, a useful starting point is considering your short-term and long-term goals.

Short-term goals drive quick wins, helping you build skills and confidence. Long-term goals focus on bigger-picture career progression, such as stepping into leadership roles or becoming an industry expert.

A key grasp of both, and how they work together, is essential for setting and achieving your goals. Understanding how the short-term goals can act as stepping stones towards your long-term aims helps build a solid **roadmap for success.**
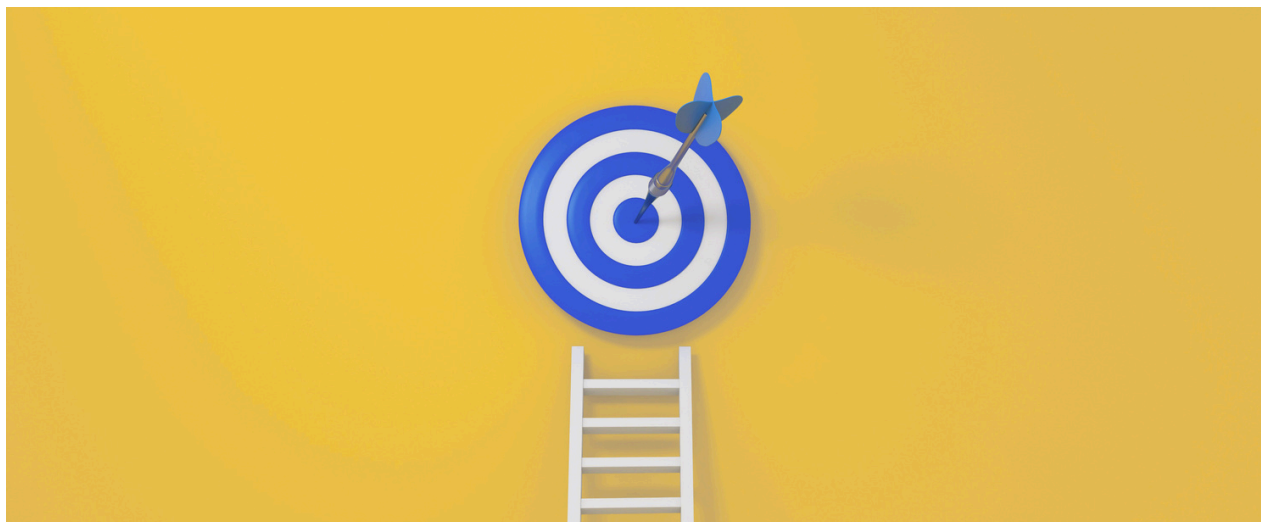
This brings us to the idea of aligning your goals with your overall career vision.

Although it's good to pursue **knowledge, qualifications, and skills** that interest you, if there's little to no chance they can help your career goals in the long run, it might not be the right decision to focus on them.

Keeping the bigger picture in mind when setting goals helps avoid wasted effort and keeps you motivated along the way.

One of the best ways to keep your goals on track and ensure your short- and long-term goals align with your overall aims is to use a **structured framework** for setting them.

GOAL SETTING FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks such as **SMART** help keep goals on track.

By setting goals that are **Specific**, **Measurable**, **Achievable**, **Relevant**, and **Time-bound**, you create structure and accountability.

When applied to professional development, **SMART** goals help turn broad ambitions into clear, measurable, and actionable steps.

There are, of course, alternatives to SMART goals, such as **PACT** (**P**urposeful, **A**ctionable, **C**ontinuous, and **T**rackable), which puts more of an emphasis on how you achieve your goals rather than the result.

But ultimately, all that matters is finding a way to quantify, measure, and build towards your goals, close your skill gaps, and achieve your overall aims.

A common mistake to watch out for is focusing solely on the outcome and not considering the journey that leads there – both matter. Another pitfall is setting too many goals at once, especially when trying to grow your knowledge base. To avoid this, make sure your goals are **realistic and achievable.**

Time (and energy) constraints are perhaps the biggest issue when it comes to closing skill gaps, particularly if it's in addition to a full-time job.

Setting unrealistic timelines can derail even the best goals. A balanced approach ensures your plans fit your lifestyle and schedule, setting you up for success.

BALANCING WORK AND LEARNING

It's clear that taking a balanced approach to assessing your skills and setting goals is key to **understanding** and **achieving** them. One of the biggest challenges in continuous professional development, however, is finding the right balance between **work** and **learning**.

We all have limited time and energy, so fitting learning into a busy work schedule can be challenging. But **effective learning** isn't just about time – it's also about when and how you learn.

There are a variety of **high** and **low-focus** tasks that can help build toward your overall goals. Matching your learning to your current energy levels is essential for progress consistency. Podcasts are a great low-focus way to learn, whereas dedicated reading and note-taking require more energy and focus.

In that sense, much like exercise or dieting, **consistency** is more important than **intensity**. One really intense workout a month isn't as beneficial as shorter, lighter workouts throughout the week, and the same applies to learning. The smaller, more regular steps **combine** and **compound** over time.

Inconsistent and intense bursts of effort or progress can also lead to burnout. Instead, try to keep regular and manageable check-ins that ensure you are able to balance your work schedule with **professional development.**

Instead of asking "*how much can I fit in this week?*", consider *"how much can I sustain every week?"*

CREATING SUSTAINABLE LEARNING HABITS

A realistic learning schedule should be specific and well-planned, yet flexible. One of the most effective ways to balance work with professional development is to block out small, regular time slots for **learning new skills.**

Incorporating microlearning into your schedule will help you to make **consistent progress** in small, manageable steps.

Along with fitting consistent learning into your schedule, recognising the development opportunities within your **existing work** is a key way to build new skills and capabilities.

Taking advantage of **work-place education schemes**, **work-funded courses**, **training platforms**, and **mentorship programs** are some of the more obvious ways to learn at (or with) work, and can all be a key part of building a genuine roadmap to success.

Don't forget that **learning opportunities** are all around you at work. From meetings and projects to everyday problem-solving, each experience can help you develop skills, grow professionally, and move toward success.

Development plans work best when built into your day. Take time to explore **new tools or concepts**, apply fresh ideas at work, and reflect on learning opportunities as they come - both on and off the job.

Learning and education don't have to be completely separate from your day-to-day job; you're developing a career and should incorporate what you learn as quickly and efficiently as possible. Putting **new ideas and concepts** into practice only helps you grow, learn, and succeed.
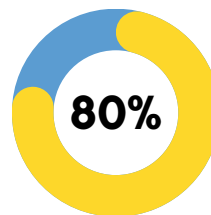
MAKING AND TRACKING PROGRESS

In order to understand whether we are making meaningful progress and actually learning rather than just working through activities, it is essential to track our progress.

Professional development is continuous, which is why it helps to think in terms of learning metrics vs. completion metrics.
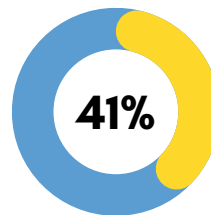
Like the distinctions between hard and soft skills or technical and transferable skills, **learning versus completion** boils down to subjective versus objective perspectives.

On one hand, we have **completion** metrics, which involve tracking what we are **finishing**. This includes completed courses, how many hours we've done, and other more tangible elements like certifications or qualifications earned. The advantage of focusing on this as a metric for progress is that there is a provided structure and real external evidence of your work.

Alternatively, learning metrics are more subjective and instead focus on what has changed, more specifically, what you, as an individual, feel has changed. This includes how you feel about your knowledge, your confidence, efficiency, and impact, and how they are evolving throughout your development.

80%

A huge **80%** of professional learners agree that learning helps add purpose to their role.

41%

Nearly half of current workers bridged their skill gaps with training.

*If we consider professional development as a **continuous improvement cycle**, then we understand that true progress is measured by growth and completion. Reflection and understanding of where we started, where we are now, and where we are headed are all essential to staying on track and actually achieving our goals.*

SHOWCASING YOUR PROGRESS

Although going out of your way to showcase progress may feel a little self congratulatory – it is, in fact, an important part of your development and **essential to success**.

Learning and effort alone don't guarantee **recognition** or **opportunities**.

Think of showcasing your growth not as self-promotion, but professional communication, more specifically, communication of your current abilities and future goals.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Planning and working through a professional development roadmap isn't the easiest of tasks. It starts with an in-depth self-assessment and analysis, requires you to address your shortcomings, work on them, and then showcase everything you've learned, all while balancing work and learning.

Ultimately, it takes **dedication** and **balance** to achieve your professional development goals. But a solid plan, understanding your limitations, where you can (and can't) learn, all help create opportunity, and visibly build your credibility.

No matter your career, pursuing professional development can support you in advancing your salary potential, developing your skills, and improving your opportunities for promotion and career progression.

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