

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - HAVE YOU HAD YOURS TODAY?

From time to time it pays all of us to step back a little and take a look at what we are doing to further our skills so that they keep pace with developments in the field. Are we ensuring that we are not getting left behind and are best contributing to the business of our employers? This applies to everyone no matter which aspect of the profession you are involved in.

I recall clearly a story told to me by a friend who was responsible for the employment of staff within a public sector organisation. He was assessing redeployees that had been offered to him and came across one candidate that claimed 20 years experience within financial accounting, certainly qualifying him for an interview. Under closer examination it turned out that his skills extended no further than paying accounts! Indeed he did have 20 years experience but it was 20 x 1 year. His professional development had been seriously lacking, seeing him passed over for any career enhancing opportunities that may have otherwise become available to him.

The point being made here is that to a significant degree it is an individuals personal responsibility to ensure that he or she subscribes to the concept of "lifetime learning". It is not entirely an employer's responsibility to drive this process; a proactive approach is necessary for it to be successful. Certainly forward thinking employers do provide plenty of development opportunities for staff, but those of us that wait for these to be offered on a plate will be those that ultimately get left behind.

So what constitutes professional development? There are a number of good models that exist within a range of

professions. The CPA and Chartered Accountant schemes serve that profession well. The Institution of Engineers, Australia also has a good one that bears closer examination to give an idea of what any of us may do to keep ourselves current in an ever changing field. Their definition of continuing Professional Development (CPD) goes along the lines of:

Any activity that extends or updates your knowledge, skill or judgement and enables you to:

- Be more productive
- Understand and apply advances in technology
- Face changes in career direction
- Better serve the community

What constitutes CPD has been split broadly into five categories each with a time weighting factor that is used to multiply the actual number of hours undertaken. These categories are

Formal education and training

This comprises formal face to face, distance education, short courses and formal on-the job training. This category has a weighting factor of 2

Informal learning activities

Typical activities here include self-education by way of reading of journals and books or familiarisation with the operation of computer programs for example. The weighting factor for these types of activities is 0.5. Informal (i.e. self taught) on the job learning is also included here with a weighting factor of 1

Conferences and meetings

This is self-explanatory, the annual EPSM conference, SMBE seminar or our monthly technical meetings all qualify here with a weighting of 1

Presentations and papers

Effort put in towards preparation and presentation of technical material for courses, conferences and the like can be included with a weighting factor of 10. Special consideration is given to papers that are published in significant journals.

This is an overview summary of a fairly elaborate scheme but the end result is a total number of weighted hours that is representative of the amount and quality of professional development that you undertake. No definitive figures can necessarily be attached to this in terms of what is really adequate and what fails dismally but as an indication IEAust do specify a minimum for those members that wish to achieve and maintain chartered status within the Institution. The number prescribed under these circumstances is 150 weighted hours over any three-year period. Members that are part of this scheme are bound to keep records and are subject to periodic audit.

If for example during a busy week you read a couple of relevant articles in the "Journal of Clinical Engineering" over lunch for one hour, attended an SMBE meeting one evening that ran for 1.5 hours and prepared and presented a 1 hour talk on a relevant topic to your fellow workers your total weighted CPD for that week would be:

Informal learning - reading journals: 1 hour x 0.5
0.5
Conferences and meetings: 1.5 hours x 1
1.5
Presentations and papers: 1 hour x 10
10

Total weighted hours

12

Indeed a rewarding week, but not unusual for many of us I am sure!

So what is the take home message here? Professionals who are destined to succeed in their field of endeavor are those that seek out knowledge and are always learning. Try it for yourself, begin a record of the amount of professional development that you undertake according to the IEAust model and every now and then simply take a look at that record and have a think about whether you really believe that it is adequate in terms of quantity and content. Many of you may be surprised to learn that it adds up to somewhat more than you may have first envisaged. If it falls short then it may well be time to change thoughts into action.

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