

CPDs: What is it and how can you maximise your learning experience?

Many industry and academic professionals reach a stage in their careers when Continuous Professional Development (CPD) becomes an important element in their progression. This might be encouraged by employers or even be a mandatory requirement as part of a registration with a professional body. I will focus this article with examples from my background in the geological and mining industry, although similar aspects apply elsewhere.

What is CPD?

CPD is a way for professionals to maintain and develop the standards of technical and professional competence required for their work. As well as broadening your knowledge, CPD gives assurance to your employers, and to society in general, that you are professionally competent. (Geological Society of London)

So, how can you maximise your learning experience for your CPD?

Formal Learning (tested/ untested)

Sitting in classrooms and attending formal training is probably the most common way of learning or refreshing your knowledge about a topic. The aims and objectives of your training are usually established and by the end of the training you either take an exam or just get a certificate for participation.

Examples are attending short courses through an internal or external supplier. Distance-study is another part of assessed learning. For example, I am currently contributing to a distance study programme for mining professionals at the Camborne School of Mines. Students from many different backgrounds are participating in part-time study of the mining chain and finish either with a PgCert or a MSc in areas like Mining Engineering, Exploration Geology or Mineral Processing. By the end of such a programme, you will have a far better understanding of a certain subject.

Informal Learning

This passive CPD activity usually does not have aims and objectives established and is not necessarily specific to your job or training requirements. However, it will provide you with a breadth of knowledge relevant to your job. Attending conferences, for instance, is one way of learning about your subject in general and meeting subject matter experts.

However, CPD is not just about attending courses and conferences, which lie sometimes heavy on your budget.

Self-directed study

Another learning activity that will give you an increased understanding of a subject, is studying a subject relevant to your employment by reading and keeping up-to-date with information. This can include papers, journals and other written or online material, such as webinars.

Professional Practice

In simple terms, development through professional practice includes learning that you acquire through working. This aims to improve your technical, management and business skills. Examples can be the improvement of technical knowledge and skills, interpersonal development (communication skills) and business development skills.

Usually, this should go beyond your usual duties and can often be debatable. For example, last year I logged the full geo(technical) suite of 2000m of diamond core during an exploration project in Zambia (normal duties). Whilst for this project this was probably enough, I encouraged a group of my co-workers to inspect the core once again and compare the geology to other parts of the country/ region. Eventually, this increased our knowledge of the area and we started to interpret the geology from a different angle.

Contributing to Knowledge

If you are involved in academia or have a generous employer that encourages you to publish articles or make presentations at conferences, then this activity will classify as contributing to knowledge. Another example of this CPD category is to run seminars and actively participate in knowledge dissemination to the wider public.

Non-work activities

Mentoring younger colleagues or contributing to professional organisations falls under the CPD category of non-work activities. For example, acting as a representative for a society's student chapter will both allow you to develop mentoring abilities as well as engage in a society or professional body.

Important in my opinion is always to have a good mix of CPD activities. Particularly in the current economic climate it is often rather difficult to find financial sponsorship for training. Therefore, having a mix of formal training and other professional activities will help you maximise your learning experience.

As usual, I will be looking forward to hear your comments and experiences about this topic.

Best wishes
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