

Implementation of the CPD Framework case study

<i>Name of Institution:</i>	Oxford Brookes University
<i>Title of Project:</i>	Career and Personal Development Website
<i>Level:</i>	Open access for all staff
<i>Date of Project:</i>	October 2010 – August 2011

1. The Project Brief

Oxford Brookes University is committed to supporting all staff in managing their own career development. This is clearly articulated in the institution's HR strategy which includes a commitment to the development of a culture that emphasises the continuous development of each individual through coaching and mentoring approaches. This includes an increased focus on maximising the potential of individuals and this project aims to support the workforce to develop tools, techniques and experiences to manage their own personal and career development process. Practical help to do this and mechanisms to enable individuals to respond to this institutional vision, has been developed in this project in the form of a Career and Personal Development website. The website provides an internet based tool to assist staff in making life and career decisions and plans, and draws together in one place a variety of existing and new support mechanisms.

2. Project Context

Oxford Brookes University focuses on providing an excellent student experience through a flexible modular programme. There are consistently high levels of student satisfaction.

This is a result of considerable investment and change in the institution. There has been significant institutional change regarding the structure of the organisation and the physical environment in order to develop a responsive learning environment. In the last three years the institution has experienced unprecedented levels of change to achieve this and further change is planned over next few years. Development is integral to this change and brings to the forefront a commitment to the well being of staff and a focus on professional roles. The University dispels the idea that progression and development are linear and promotes the idea that career pathways have changed from the classic and well-defined routes of the past. It aims to promote self development by enabling all people to achieve their potential (students and staff) through providing a wide range of development opportunities that are not directly connected to going "up" classic ladders but which nevertheless constitute "gains" developmentally. This institutional philosophy underpins the project and has provided it with its key principles and focus.

The project aims to establish a central point for diverse information about career development along with a range of development tools and opportunities for staff. At the moment this is being achieved within existing resources; further development will be considered in a later phase. An important aspect has been to challenge the varied definitions

and conceptions of what Continuing Professional Development actually means and to identify and embed an institution wide definition relevant to the University in its current form.

The first phase of the project establishes a set of definitions and principles to help reset the culture around career development, and then a variety of structured web based tools and resources. The intention is that the tools will link into other activities, the key one being PDR. Training around use of the website will be incorporated into PDR training in the future so that managers can use it as a resource when doing objective setting with their team members.

3. Project Participants

The project has a senior champion, Head of Human Resources in the University. The Development Group comprises staff development consultants from across a range of development contexts and specialist areas, and is supported by a website designer and web editor. This group has done the work of moving the project forward and developing the model. The pilot site has been tested by users from Administrators Forum (AdFor,) some Brookes-based AUA members and other groups of staff as awareness widens.

4. Outline of approach taken

The need had been identified within the University for a clear set of definitions of career development in order to inform further work in this area and to provide a context for career development and management across the institution. A preliminary paper outlining this as part of a wider skills development strategy had been presented to HR Directorate. The paper identified a possible process to achieve this including a need to talk to people about the role of HR, the nature of career development and what the dept (OCSLD, where the project is based) is able to support.

Evidence of the need to reframe ideas about career development and improve and enhance the perception about what could be done to support the personal and professional aspirations of colleagues was gathered. It was felt important to widen/redefine ideas about career development away from wholesale acquisition of new posts, and formal qualifications, to include smaller, gentler, more paced interventions that accrue to larger steps over time.

It was also felt to be important for people to understand that not all careers follow career paths and that it might be constructive to identify areas of personal development in advance of going for bigger or wider career goals, and that career development skills, like any skill, can be learned and, with practice, flexed and become useful tools and attributes in themselves.

The project outline was supported by the administrators and the AUA group. And they also provided early support for the definitions, the proposed use of a self coaching model, ideas about content and ways to open up the dialogue. They also provided indications of who to approach initially with this alternative model of career development. This turned into the development of a formal project plan proposing a linkage with the AUA to consider the value of integrating the AUA professional framework. It became increasingly clear that the AUA professional behaviours could be an important contribution to the project. The initial project plan was revised to clearly include and integrate the AUA Professional behaviours CPD framework.

The initial stages of the plan were concentrated on designing a working model that could bring all the ideas and aspirations of the project together, and that would attract people to use it. This had to be accompanied by a statement of values and principles that would set the tone for the site, define its boundaries and align to institutional principles. It was felt to be particularly important to try to communicate these initial principles head-on, to address the preconceptions staff had about career development

There were a number of early issues and concerns about finding the balance between the HR management focus and HR training and development. Achieving an agreed understanding and commitment to the principles and purpose of the project, as well as the outcomes, was an important early success factor. For example, an early key issue to be overcome was detaching the concept of 'development' from that of 'performance management', pay and ideas of hard progression. This was at the heart of what the career development website was to do – to disengage development from hard progression, and move responsibility for development from being that of the institution to being that of each individual.

Another difficult part of establishing the model was to identify how the skills elements of the model should relate to the professional behaviours. This took some time and forced the team to consider relationships not only between the skills and behaviours but the added complexity of levels.

The site was shaped by three models that come together in an attempt to offer a "holistic" experience in relation to the user. The overarching model is an adaptation of the GROW model (Whitmore) in coaching – the team call the adaptation **i-GROW**. i-GROW leads into/fronTS two other models; the AUA behaviours (represented by colour coded circles) and a Role Related skills model (represented by a honeycomb of colour-coded hexagons). This visualises the occupational strands or themes or skills clusters that make up the Brookes skills landscape. There have been some blanks left to acknowledge new themes and strands that HEIs may need to include and employ in response to a changing context. This model requires that roles are seen to compose some or many of these individual strands rather than to belong or "fit" to only one of them, rather like elements in chemistry compositions.

The main relationship between the three models is that i-GROW, or doing the self-questioning process that i-GROW promotes, is like a lens on the individual. Through one end, exploration focuses on behaviours, through the other, on tangible, competences and "hard activities" or skills.

In addition to the three models, there are two other sections which provide important perspectives of career development; role-holder interviews and the job library.

Alongside and following the work on developing the model there were a number of different strands of activity including:

- Developing ideas and concepts into web based appropriate tools which were fit for purpose.
- Identifying exciting activities and resources relevant to the model and deciding where they should be positioned in the model framework
- Developing the web space and locating it within the University website

The project plan included a number of milestones relating to developing the model around a 'coaching' approach, piloting and gathering feedback. Once the website had been structured and contained the basic self assessment tools along with some of the materials a pilot was held to gather feedback. Revisions on the basis of the feedback were made and continuing work completed in order for the website to go live for general use across the institution in Autumn 2011. It is envisaged that there will be continuing development after that date in order to incorporate further materials and resources and refine the experience of using the website.

The presentation of a poster about the project at the AUA conference 2011 was useful in providing an opportunity to gather evaluation data on progress and to use feedback from the pilot group of users. It also provided the opportunity to share findings and progress with other project teams and interested parties.

The AUA consultancy support was used throughout the project but was most valuable in the early stages when the team was considering how to incorporate the AUA model of professional behaviours and how to articulate their relationship to skills elements that did not fit under the umbrella of professional behaviours. This was complex and time-consuming, resulting in a number of iterations before arriving at an acceptable working model.

Progress of the project was reported to senior managers in Human Resources and through a series of project updating meetings. Throughout the process the team received positive support from managers within the institution. Due to the discussions at the earliest stages with senior managers they were able to see the benefits of the project and gave the development team their full support whilst promoting the project where possible.

5. Materials used

A number of AUA materials were used or adapted. These included:

- Adaptation of the coaching wheel which is integrated as self assessment tool
- The behaviours framework used to identify which of the internal training courses related to the professional behaviours
- The behaviours framework was adopted as the basis for the visuals used on the web

The GROW model for coaching model (J Whitmore) was adapted and added to emphasise the element of 'self' in a new model called 'iGrow' – this helped to make it absolutely clear that career exploration starts with the self, and that self-awareness is the start-point and foundation stone for future movement and development. The model also incorporated goal setting and objective setting tools, SMART objectives, Hugg pyramid models, and approaches from Andy Cope's work (Being Brilliant), AUA coaching wheel and tracking documents, as well as linkages to development tools used by staff development consultants across the university, professional and skills sector bodies, our careers centre resources and to key university policies of use in a career development context.

6. Observations and learning points

- a. Managing to come to an agreed understanding and commitment to the principles and purpose of the project, as well as the outcomes, was an important early success factor. A key issue to be overcome was detaching the concept of 'development' from that of 'performance management', and realigning responsibilities from the institution to individuals
- b. The AUA professional behaviours did not immediately align to the original intentions of the project. The Professional Behaviours helped broaden, yet clarify, thinking behind what was to be achieved by the project and provided a valuable early forum for discussion.
- c. The Ideas arising/identified from the experiences of the project team needed to be supported with actual real evidence if they were to provide a convincing case for senior managers to support the project. This was an important early task of the project team and included finding out whether others have the same ideas about what is useful and the real, against perceived, staff needs.
- d. An initial intention of the project was to incorporate 'levels' but this became overly complex to do and it was therefore decided to identify and incorporate 'behaviours' that are explicit in specific grades rather than levels. This issue took a long time to resolve as it was complex and very difficult to present in a simple and logical way. It is acknowledged that it is a difficult thing for individuals to rate for themselves so by excluding this from the model it does mean that individuals will probably need to seek

expert guidance when get to aspects of levels of development within skills and behaviours.

- e. It was challenging to identify how the model of the AUA Professional Behaviours and the University Skills Matrix should be represented for maximum usability on the web. It took a lot of planning to decide the best approach to getting complex ideas across and in hindsight it would have been valuable to have used a web design specialist early in the project to steer this area.
- f. Identifying the Principles (which were fundamentally about the culture of the organisation and the complex nature of change) took some time and the creation of a number of iterations. Importance of clear and appropriate language for the user, the need to allow time for an iterative process to work and the importance of dialogue with colleagues at a grass roots level were key learning points in this process. In attempting to change what is fundamentally a conceptual framework and develop people's understanding of that via the web proved to be very challenging. The process would have been assisted by involving a web designer earlier in the process. This would have helped with identifying the web presentation, communication and interaction in building their understanding.
- g. It became clear at the first meeting of the full team with the AUA consultant that the initial project proposal was too ambitious. There was a lack of clarity in the outcomes and huge amount of development to do in a limited time, there were no designated staff to work on the project. The project needed clarity and simplification which was achieved through a redefining of the outcomes in the revised project plan. It was also clear that the original perceptions of the scope of the project were not held by all stakeholders to mean the same thing.
- h. There were a number of risks involved with the project that had to be addressed. These included:
 - a. Risks about staff moving out of the project and taking their expertise with them
 - b. Getting an appropriate and acceptable message across the institution about careers being an individual thing – this could be perceived as reframing of the psychological contract and fall-out can take the form of a lowering of morale
 - c. How to enable people to make the best use of the project.

7. Evaluation

Evaluation of the pilot was by an online survey of all members of the pilot group (20). The feedback was that colleagues were largely enthusiastic; they felt it was useful and they would use it in the future, they were keen to give ideas about development.

Positive aspects of the feedback made reference to the simplicity of the model, the positive approach of looking at strengths as well as where there is a need to develop, enabling people to look at their career in terms of life as a whole. In general it made people feel positive about career options.

Feedback specifically about the AUA Professional Behaviours highlighted that they were easy to find but were initially rather wordy (on AUA website), but that information on AUA website helped them to use the action plan and to think about roles.

Feedback and evaluation indicates that the project outcomes have been met but recognises that there is still work in progress. Longer term plans will include continuing evaluation on the availability and use of the web site for all users.

An unexpected outcome that has been identified is that colleagues have been keen to express the potential for further developments, taking the original aims of the project further than originally identified. It is too early to tell if these will materialise.

8. Conclusion

The project team has been pleased with what it has achieved in this project and in particular the contribution of the AUA Professional Behaviours has played a contributing part in the development of tools and in providing useful link to another source of professional development expertise/resources and to other valued authorities on professional behaviours.

The project has raised awareness of the AUA within the institution through the direct links to the website and the use of resources with the AUA logo. It is considered to be a positive and useful source of development which is now opened up to all colleagues. The project team feels as though it has built a firmer bridge between OBU and AUA and has opened this up to all groups of staff and not just managers. It is hoped that involvement of individuals should increase as a result of the project.

The career development model is to become integrated to PDR and managers coaching training plans for further use. It potentially gives another dimension to what OCSLD can offer within the institution, extending the focus away from solely courses and development days.

There is increasing interest across the institution about career development as the project has clearly put it on the map. The project has adopted and reinforced the University statement about endorsing CD and acknowledging nature of CD. Evaluations and feedback show that it has gone some way in impacting on these efforts to change the cultural conception of what development is – approaching development in terms of personal strengths and a holistic view of the individual. This is clearly one stage in an ongoing process and the further development of the project will sit alongside other areas of work in the university to support the ongoing development of staff.