

Empowering employee growth: Developing effective individual development plans

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An individual development plan (IDP) can be a powerful tool to drive employee growth, engagement and satisfaction, while simultaneously contributing to the achievement of organisational goals.



“ But IDPs are often developed and reviewed during performance appraisals, which dilutes their effectiveness. ”

Follow these five tips to make sure that IDPs take pride of place in your organisation and deliver maximum benefits to employees and the business.

1. Separate IDPs from performance appraisals

To save time, HR departments and managers often combine the IDP and performance appraisal processes. What this means in practice is that the employee and manager will have one meeting (or two separate meetings in close succession) to discuss the employee's performance and IDP.

While this might seem effective, this approach may lead to some significant challenges. Consider the table below, which outlines the key differences between performance appraisals and IDPs.

Performance appraisal	Individual development plan
Focuses on the employee's performance	Focuses on the employee's development and growth
Led by the manager	Led by the employee, with input from the manager
Evaluates the employee's job performance, skills, and capabilities	Identifies an employee's strengths and areas for improvement

If the performance appraisal and IDP are not treated as separate activities, there is a risk that:

- The IDP will become a plan to address performance gaps rather than a plan for future development and growth. The IDP then loses its power as a tool for employee engagement and instead becomes a performance remediation tool.
- The employee's role in the IDP will decrease as the manager now uses the opportunity to discuss performance gaps

and shortcomings, rather than employee strengths and development opportunities.

- The IDP is reduced to a list of training interventions aimed at addressing performance or skills gaps, rather than a holistic plan for long-term employee growth.

The results of the performance appraisal **must** feed into the IDP (see step 2 below), and it is possible to successfully combine the appraisal and IDP processes. However, this requires both managers and employees to clearly understand the differences between the two processes, and to respect these differences during their discussions.

“ If your team isn’t quite there yet, it might be a good idea to schedule IDP discussions a few weeks after the performance appraisals – just to give everyone a chance to clear their minds. ”

2. Let the employee lead.

An IDP primarily reflects the employee’s ambitions, not those of the manager or organisation. So, it follows that the employee should lead the process of developing their IDP, with very specific input from the manager.

Employees are responsible for:

- Developing and monitoring their IDP.
- Identifying their strengths and areas for improvement.
- Setting specific goals and a related action plan.

Managers, on the other hand, are responsible for:

- Supporting the employee in developing and monitoring their IDP.
- Developing a better understanding of the employee’s professional goals, strengths, and development needs.
- Helping the employee to identify areas for improvement, set goals and develop an action plan. Employee goals should be **informed by** the performance appraisal, but **not limited to** the performance appraisal.
- Identifying ways to align the employee’s goals with business goals, to ensure that they are working towards objectives that are beneficial to both the employee and the organisation.
- Advising on available growth and development opportunities, such as training, mentoring and job shadowing.

3. Identify strengths and development opportunities.

Yale University in America has developed a simple [self-assessment worksheet](#) for employees to explore their strengths and development opportunities. The worksheet contains four parts and includes key questions the employee should consider and then discuss with the manager:

1. Professional goals and aspirations

- What gives me the greatest sense of satisfaction and reward?
- What do I want to do that I am not currently doing?
- What do I care about most in my work and life?
- Do I see myself changing roles? If so, when, and what does that next role look like?
- How might my role change in the future? What competencies will I need to be ready?
- What work experiences do I need to develop professionally and remain engaged?

2. Strengths and development opportunities: What are my current strengths in the following areas, and where could I further develop?

- Technical knowledge or expert skills

- Personal skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Management and leadership skills

3. Passions: What do I simply love doing? Do I have a passion for...

- Contributing my expertise and delivering results?
- Supporting others?
- Designing and assisting with how work gets done?
- Developing the future vision, culture, and architecture of the organisation?

4. Alignment: Now that I have a clearer sense of what I have to offer professionally, and what I would like to offer in the future...

- Where do my professional goals and aspirations overlap and align most with the needs of the organisation?
- How will my personal goals and motives help me deliver results in the organisation?
- What will be important for me to perform at the maximum level in my current job?
- Where is my department going, and what do I need to grow with it?
- What future roles or positions are exciting to me?
- What skills and capabilities will be important to prepare for future roles?

4. Develop a concrete action plan.

The ultimate purpose of the IDP is to develop a concrete action plan that the employee can follow to grow and develop both as an individual and within the organisation.

“ The manager’s role in this step is crucial, since the employee is likely to need support and guidance to develop the plan and identify suitable opportunities for growth that are offered by the organisation. ”

To develop a strong action plan, the employee (with assistance from the manager) should:

- Start by identifying **long-term goals** based on the strengths and development opportunities identified by the employee.
- Break long-term goals into **short-term goals** that are easier to define, monitor and measure.
- Identify the **small and achievable tasks** that need to be completed to achieve the short-term goals.
- **Prioritise** these tasks based on their relevance, importance, and urgency.
- Define how you will **measure** whether or not the task has been successfully executed.
- Identify the **resources** the employee will need to successfully execute each task, such as time, access to tools or equipment, support (such as coaching or mentoring), training in specific skills or competencies, etc.
- Set a realistic **timeline** for the completion of each task.

5. Monitor, evaluate and adjust.

Responsibility for implementing and monitoring the IDP action plan falls on the employee, although the manager must provide support – especially in terms of negotiating the required resources.

The employee and manager should schedule regular check-in meetings – such as once a month or once a quarter. During these meetings, the employee reports back on progress (as per the measurements specified in the action plan) and discusses any challenges and achievements. This will help identify areas that require more focus or support.

“ The action plan and IDP are living documents and should therefore be regularly updated to reflect progress and possible changes in the employee’s goals. ”

The HR Department should also evaluate the organisation’s IDP process to determine whether employees are achieving their career goals, and whether the process is contributing to the organisation’s success. This can be done by:

- Tracking a sample of the tasks and/or goals in employee IDPs to determine whether they are achieved successfully and within the specified timeline.
- Assessing employee and manager satisfaction with the process through surveys or other feedback mechanisms.
- Assessing the impact of IDPs on overall business outcomes such as employee engagement, retention, and performance. This can be done through, for example, employee engagement surveys, data on talent retention and career progression, and data on key performance metrics that link to the organisation’s overall goals.

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