



What is Continuous Professional Development (CPD)?

Mark Rendell, independent trainer and project manager, points out that life is CPD in action...

There's really no such thing as 'starting CPD'...

For me, CPD is just a fancy way to describe what we all do most of the time and in most settings: observe, practise, reflect and hone. This continuous cycle reflects our innate ability to learn and grow and to pack a whole range of skills and beliefs into our ever-expanding toolbag. We mostly do this subconsciously and from a very young age, as it's what helps us to remain safe, to articulate and communicate well, to achieve goals we set, to keep up with friends, siblings and peers, to 'belong'.

And secondly, it's far less complicated than its long title, 'Continuous Professional Development' suggests. Business is full of acronyms. Let's replace the words in this particular one to illustrate how important but how 'second nature' CPD is:

1. Career Pathway Dedication

Another way of looking at CPD is that it is the best means to allow you to create and follow the career pathway you choose for yourself. Good CPD will strengthen your confidence, will feel as though it comes from within (putting you in charge) and reinforces positive sentiments and beliefs you have about yourself and the direction you have chosen to follow. The last thing that good CPD wants to feel like is an externally imposed irritant meeting someone else's needs more than your own.

To build on the analogy I used in the introduction, good CPD will help you to tip up your toolbag to see what you've managed to put in it (over all these years), remind you of where your strengths are, and where there may be some gaps to fill, based on where you have decided you want to be. It'll also help you to identify how you learn best, so that it feels natural and that it flows. It doesn't mean that CPD will be 'easy' – we all know that dedication requires tremendous amounts of determination, effort and focus. But because you have set your goals, you remain in charge – that's very empowering.

2. Continuous Practice Delivers

Very few of us have completely natural talents that we can demonstrate from the word 'go'. That's why there is the word 'continuous' in the original acronym. As I mentioned, by our very presence here on planet Earth and the fact that we have reached this level of ability and achievement in our lives, we don't ever switch off the button that processes our experiences and observations and practice into learning and competence (in whatever we do). But one thing makes us better - great, even - at what we do: practice.

Practice is the means by which we really focus in on a new or complicated task (or a set of activities) so that we move from a conscious sense of awkwardness and painstaking attention, into an unconscious 'flow' – or grace - about what we do (some educators describe this state as 'conscious competence'). This process also reinforces our self esteem and confidence.

So, good CPD engenders a habit that encourages us to always seek to become better, more proficient, more competent and more aware of what we do and what we need to do.

3. Committed Performance Driven

There are many ways to harness your ambitions and desires towards a long term goal that benefits you and your organisation, not just in the classroom or the lecture theatre. Any interaction between you and a colleague, between you and a project or task, or an aim you have to achieve, is rich with the potential for learning and growing. And don't overlook the simplest or the most informal examples of learning-rich opportunities - good CPD is everywhere!

Here are a few examples that you may not have thought offered opportunities to help you improve your performance: the company suggestion box; the work experience person assigned to you for the week; the canteen health promotion stall; breaks at the seminar; the lunchtime gathering at the workshop; the evening classes; the online webinars; the case studies; the supervision session; the customer complaint/feedback. Do you see that I haven't even mentioned the 'traditional' places and methods that we talk about when we think about learning? Because good CPD occurs everywhere and continues throughout our lives.

So, don't think that CPD is yet another activity that you have to add to your already punishing workload. Good CPD in the workplace is already occurring and will be driven by you anyway, according to what you know you need to know and how you know you need to learn in order to reflect a mutually beneficial arrangement for you and your organisation.

It benefits you because good CPD will build on what you are already good at, will identify what's needed to help you become even more competent and proficient in your role and benefits the organisation because their investment in your growth and capacity will be reflected in increased performance because of a highly skilled, better equipped workforce and a happier and healthier workplace.

So don't worry about the complicated title.

Continuing Professional Development simply means *Competent People Deliver*.

For further information: www.markrendell.co.uk