



Learning Journal





What is a Learning Journal?

A Learning Journal is an informal tool to help you to take note of any learning that you experience - for example, during a work project/activity or following a training event. This is known as reflective practice.

It is worth noting the learning outcomes from your development activities and using this information for future planning and development. You may find that the project worked well in one particular area and it could be useful in future professional activities/projects and, or you could inform others about your achievement. Likewise you may have realised during the project that you need to develop your skills/knowledge in a particular area.

Whatever the outcome it is useful to jot down this information in note form - for private reference, while it is still fresh in your head.



Why Keep a Learning Journal?

There are several reasons why it is useful to keep a Learning Journal:

- it can help in your preparation for Performance Review discussions
- it is a record of past and future training needs and can help you identify priorities for action
- it could form an annual record of your Continuing Professional Development (this is a requirement in some occupations)
- it can help you tailor your CV and letters of application for a specific post or career move.

It is also good training practice to maintain a Learning Journal. An essential part of learning can only happen when you apply in practice the knowledge you have acquired, or when you reflect on something that has happened to link it to knowledge you already have from previous experiences. There is strong evidence to show that the more ways we link new learning into what we already know, the easier it is to remember and apply the new learning.

These days, most people are very busy - we rarely make the time to stop and think about things, even less often do we reflect on what we have learned from a situation and how we can bring about further changes in our behaviour based on our learning. We need to integrate these processes into our normal daily routine so that we get real benefits from experience.

The learning journal is a tool to help you make this happen.

How We Learn From Experience

Learning from experience is a process and, like all processes, it is possible to break it down into the constituent parts. Imagine a circle with four steps or stages at the four points of a compass.



Stage 1: Have an Experience

There are two different ways of having an experience. One is to let the experience come to you (reactive) and the other is to seek it out deliberately (proactive). The opportunities to learn from experience are greatly increased if the normal everyday things which happen to you are supplemented by extra experiences we create. Suppose, for example, you attend a weekly management meeting which tends to be very dull. You could decide to view it as a learning opportunity and start to experiment with different ways of running the meeting.



Stage 2: Review the Experience

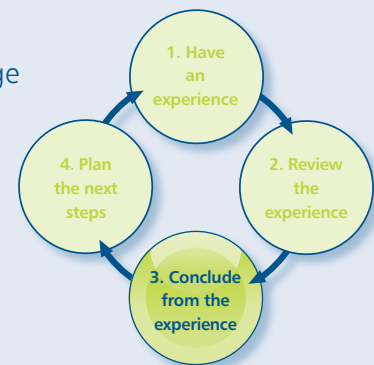
If you are to learn from an experience it is vital to review what happened during it. In the dull management meeting, you might experiment by having a different person take the chair for different agenda items, for example. Your review might focus on the differences you observed between the way the best and the worst chairperson undertook the task.



Stage 3: Conclude from the Experience

Concluding involves thinking about your findings from the “Review” stage and looking for conclusions, ‘answers’ or lessons learned. It helps if the conclusions are specific rather than global. After the management meeting, you might conclude that the best chairperson:

- clarified the objective of whatever was to be discussed
- actively sought people’s ideas
- summarised at frequent intervals.



Stage 4: Plan the Next Steps

Planning involves translating some of the conclusions into a form where they can be actioned. An example might be to spend ten minutes at the start of the next meeting discussing your conclusions about the best chairperson and working out how to help those who had most difficulty in this role.



Learning is a continuous process - the four stages in the process of learning from experience are mutually dependent on one another. No stage makes sense, or is particularly useful, in isolation from the others.

Ways of Distorting the Learning Cycle

The four stages - experience, review, conclude and plan - are mutually supportive. None is fully effective as a learning procedure on its own. Each stage plays an equally important part in the total process (though the time spent on each may vary considerably).

Most people, however, develop preferences which give them a liking for certain stages over others. The preferences lead to a distortion of the learning process so that greater emphasis is placed on some stages to the detriment of others. Here are some typical examples of what can happen if people get stuck in one of the four stages:

1. Experience - some people cannot sit still and have to be rushing around, constantly on the go. This results in plenty of experiences and they assume that having experiences is the same as learning from them.

2. Review - some people can shy away from first-hand experiences and postpone reaching conclusions for as long as possible whilst they collect more information about the experience. This results in an ‘analysis to paralysis’ tendency with plenty of pondering but little action.

3. Conclude - some people have a compulsion to reach an answer quickly. This results in a tendency to jump to conclusions by circumventing the review stage. They find that conclusions, even if they are the wrong ones, are comforting things to have.

4. Plan - some people are too keen to start planning what to do next, but without doing the analysis beforehand. This results in a tendency to go for 'quick fixes' by over-emphasising the planning and experiencing stages to the detriment of reviewing and concluding.



The Advantages of Being a Conscious Learner from Experience

Doing anything consciously and deliberately clearly takes more effort than doing something unconsciously or intuitively. But the extra effort secures many advantages. If you are a conscious learner from experience you:

- are clear about what you have learned
- can communicate your learning to other people
- know how you learn and can therefore improve the way you do it
- have a recipe for continuous improvement and for helping others to improve
- keep ahead of and 'comfortable' with change
- learn from successes not just from your mistakes
- are better able to transfer learning from one specific situation to a broader range of other situations
- are more purposeful - determined to extract learning even from unremarkable routine experiences.

So the good thing about being a conscious learner is that you do not just become a better learner but your performance is improved.



Support from Your Manager

In addition to creating your personal Learning Journal it is important to review learning with your line manager. After each learning module discuss with your manager:

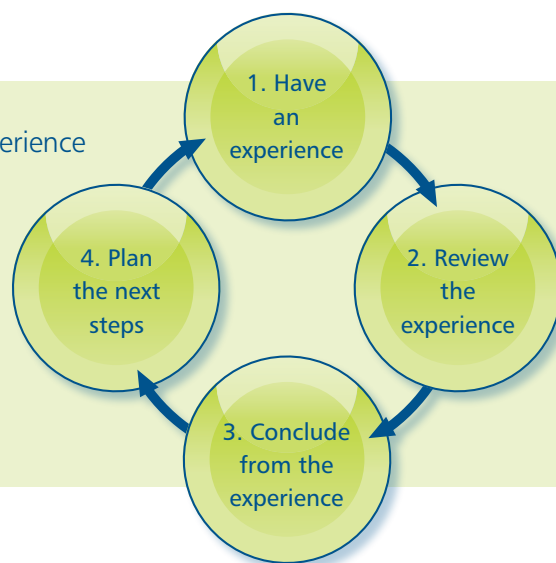
- your learning
- any project work involved
- the projected outcomes of any action that you plan to take as a result of the learning
- any support needs
- any difficulties that you can anticipate
- your Personal Development Plan.

For example, after attending a workshop on Time Management, you might feed back to your manager that you find it difficult to work on reports because of the high level of day-to-day interruptions in your job. You might suggest that you want to book a meeting room occasionally so that you can work undisturbed on these tasks - the outcome will be that you complete the reports more quickly and on time. There is a potential problem if you are not available to answer queries or make decisions while you are working in private, but you could agree to delegate this responsibility to a team member during these periods.

How to Keep a Learning Journal

The Learning Journal can be used to help you to:

- consider what you want to achieve from a learning experience (stages 4 and 1 of the learning cycle)
- review the experience (stage 2)
- reach conclusions (stage 3)
- plan what to do better/differently (stage 4)



Keeping a journal also helps to 'force' you (if that is what it takes) to search out learning opportunities since the discipline of making journal entries puts a certain amount of pressure on you to have something to enter!

There are 3 forms for you to complete in the Learning Journal:

- Before Learning form



- Personal Action Plan



- After Learning form.



This pack includes completed examples of each of these forms.

You can copy these forms if you would like to keep a hard copy version of your journal. If you are using an electronic journal, create a file for each separate learning event so that you can easily access your information.

Follow the steps below to complete your Learning Journal:

1. Think about a forthcoming learning event (it could be a workshop or seminar, or a meeting, etc.) and complete the Before Learning form to identify your objectives.



2. When you take part in the learning event, keep a record of your action points - use the Personal Action Plan form during the event.



3. Reflect on your learning immediately after the event, and use the After Learning form to record your thoughts and findings.



4. Finally, implement your Personal Action Plan and revisit the After Learning form to record the impact of your actions three months after the learning event.





Before Learning (to be completed before the learning event)

Learning Event: Presentation Skills Course Date: 28th February

Questions/Activities	Comments
1. Review the results of any assessment activities (e.g. a performance review; self-assessment profiles; etc.) From this, identify your learning objectives for this learning event (i.e. what specifically do you want to know, or be able to do after the training?).	<i>Identified the need to develop Presentation Skills at my last Performance Review.</i> <i>Need to develop better structures and use visual aids more effectively.</i>
2. Discuss your learning objectives with your manager, before you attend the training. What does your manager want you to achieve as a result of this learning?	<i>Prepare presentations that have a clear purpose and are delivered confidently.</i>
3. What barriers might prevent you from getting the most from the learning (e.g. lack of time, resources, access to expert help)?	<i>Lack of opportunity to make presentations after attending the workshop.</i>
4. What action is required to remove (or limit) these barriers?	<i>Manager to identify opportunities to support her in the preparation and delivery of departmental presentations.</i>
5. How and when will you provide feedback to your manager after the learning event?	<i>By email on return to work.</i>
6. Your manager's comments:	<i>The emphasis should be on developing presentations that have a clear purpose, are relevant to the audience and are delivered with impact.</i>

Personal Action Plan (to be completed during or immediately after the learning event)



Name: L. McHugh Learning Event: Presentation Skills Date: 28th February

Action Points	Responsibility	Target Date	Outcome/Impact	Completed
<i>Speak to manager about opportunities to contribute to presentations.</i>	<i>L McH</i>	<i>8th March</i>	<i>Opportunities identified</i>	<i>12th March</i>
<i>Watch other people presenting at work and make notes about what they say and do that seems to work</i>	<i>L McH</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>Generate a list of good practice at work</i>	
<i>Review xyz website for more hints and tips on presentation skills.</i>	<i>L McH</i>	<i>31st March</i>	<i>More info on good practice</i>	
<i>Get some coaching in using PowerPoint – speak to manager</i>	<i>Manager?</i>	<i>8th March</i>	<i>Confident operation of PowerPoint</i>	<i>31st May</i>



After Learning (to be completed after the learning event)

Learning Event: *Presentation Skills*

Date: *28th February*

Immediately After Learning	
Questions/Activities	Comments
1. Comment on the effectiveness of the learning event (were your objectives achieved, for example?).	<i>Gained useful input on structuring a presentation, but course didn't cover the practical use of PowerPoint.</i>
2. What conclusions have you reached (or what were the lessons learned)?	<i>I can now identify the presentation objectives and consider the audience's needs. Also learned some useful tips on managing presentation nerves.</i>
3. What will you now do better or differently?	<i>I'll routinely develop a presentation objective and check this with whoever has asked for the presentation to make sure that I've got the right angle on the topic. I'll practise doing presentations.</i>
4. What specific action are you going to take as a result of this learning? Discuss with your line manager.	<i>Prepare and co-deliver a presentation with line manager, and identify ongoing opportunities for me to deliver presentations.</i>
3 Months after Learning	
5. After you have implemented your action plan, identify what has been the impact of your actions.	<i>Developing more confidence in presenting. I gained Dept Heads' approval for a new system that I'm not sure I could have achieved before.</i>
6. What problems have you encountered in implementing your action plan and how did you overcome these?	<i>Difficulty in getting coaching session in using PowerPoint. 3 sessions have been planned but all have been cancelled due to other priorities. Still not able to use PowerPoint. Need to make a firm commitment to follow this through.</i>
7. What will you do differently when you next participate in a learning event?	<i>Maybe ask the tutor for specific info on things like PowerPoint that may not be part of the advertised course content.</i>



Before Learning (to be completed before the learning event)

Learning Event: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Activities	Comments
1. Review the results of any assessment activities (e.g. a performance review; self-assessment profiles; etc.) From this, identify your learning objectives for this learning event (i.e. what specifically do you want to know, or be able to do after the training?).	
2. Discuss your learning objectives with your manager, before you attend the training. What does your manager want you to achieve as a result of this learning?	
3. What barriers might prevent you from getting the most from the learning (e.g. lack of time, resources, access to expert help)?	
4. What action is required to remove (or limit) these barriers?	
5. How and when will you provide feedback to your manager after the learning event?	
6. Your manager's comments:	

Personal Action Plan (to be completed during or immediately after the learning event)



Name: _____ Learning Event: _____ Date: _____

Action Points	Responsibility	Target Date	Outcome/Impact	Completed



After Learning (to be completed after the learning event)

Learning Event: _____ Date: _____

Immediately After Learning	
Questions/Activities	Comments
1. Comment on the effectiveness of the learning event (were your objectives achieved, for example?).	
2. What conclusions have you reached (or what were the lessons learned)?	
3. What will you now do better or differently?	
4. What specific action are you going to take as a result of this learning? Discuss with your line manager.	

3 Months after Learning	
5. After you have implemented your action plan, identify what has been the impact of your actions.	
6. What problems have you encountered in implementing your action plan and how did you overcome these?	
7. What will you do differently when you next participate in a learning event?	



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