Continuing Professional Development
The challenges facing the IT Profession - the employer perspective

September 2013
Executive Summary

"According to our survey, 59% of IT professionals said their organisations have no format or system for employees to record their continued personal development (CPD), or what they have is ineffective. If your company doesn’t offer an effective solution, or would like something to complement the current system, IT professionals can plan, record, report and reflect upon their CPD using our tool, the BCS Personal Development Plan. It’s free and quick to use."

The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) landscape has changed and continues to evolve. With this evolution, both employers and employees need to adapt to get the optimum benefits from their investment, and embrace an enlightened approach to CPD. This is not just a challenge to those in the IT industry, but to every workplace where IT plays a part.

Pressures of time, work and training budgets mean many IT professionals continue to struggle to plan and execute focused career development tasks. This presents a challenge for the profession, as short-term needs are driving a longer-term change in how individuals and employers approach personal development. Further, an IT workforce that does not keep up-to-date will lead to knowledge stagnation and a restriction on the ability to innovate and remain competitive; a situation that does not benefit the business or its employees.

This paper will discuss in detail the findings of the 2013 CPD Trends and Challenges survey, and set out the specific challenges being faced by IT Professionals (as perceived by their employers and line managers) in the planning and execution of their professional development objectives. We will also discuss how BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, believes these challenges can be mitigated or overcome, and how the CPD landscape looks in comparison to the findings of the 2012 CPD Trends and Challenges survey of employees.

Key findings:
- 46% of participants state primary CPD planning is the responsibility of the employee alone, rising to 59% in smaller organisations of 500 employees or fewer.
- 61% of those surveyed report there is less time in the working day for CPD activities than in previous years, with more than half working for organisations with no policy to set aside time for CPD in the working day.
- Two thirds state there is less funding for traditional CPD activities now than in previous years for their IT workforce.
- A third of respondents perceive their organisation does not support CPD.
- 78% of those surveyed believe their employees committed to less CPD than they would like, or none at all.
- 59% expressed their organisations have no format or system for employees to record their CPD, or what they have is ineffective.

The BCS response:
- IT professionals need to take the lead with their CPD planning, taking their needs and the strategic needs of their organisation into account.
• A broader view of what ‘counts’ as CPD is essential, focussed on outcomes, and including in-job tasks and the wealth of CPD resources that can be engaged at no cost and in time chunks that do not impact utilisation of staff
• Organisations that fail to recognise and encourage CPD risk falling behind the times and the competition. Where economic pressures reduce their ability to fully support CPD, there are measures the organisation can implement that are not debilitating to the business
• IT professionals can plan, record, report and reflect upon their CPD using the free tool from BCS, the BCS Personal Development Plan, if they do not have an effective solution to use from their employer, or where they wish to complement the facilities offered by their employer

The findings of the survey identify IT professionals need to employ the tools and guidance available to them to maximise their CPD opportunities and widen their understanding of what can constitute CPD activities, outside the limited range of traditionally recognised activities (including some that may currently be considered as business-as-usual tasks). Such tools enable them to identify their goals within their IT specialism (or with a view to transitioning to a new specialism), to record and manage their CPD, to engage with self-initiated CPD activities, and to embrace a reflective learning approach which recognises the benefits they gained and effectively put their new skills to use. All of these tools, resources and guidance are available from BCS within the CPD Portal at www.bcs.org/CPD.

David Evans, Membership Director at BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT commented: “If we think of professional development in terms of staying current, maintaining a competitive edge – increasing our effectiveness as professionals – then the importance to the individual and the organisation is clear. IT and digital are continuing to move at an incredible pace, and those that make use of the opportunity to transform organisations are finding that faster, better, cheaper, is attainable. How then do we support professionals in this? The first way is by showing them how to plan and conduct their development activities effectively – focussing on real outcomes not tick-boxes. The second way is through employers giving them the right balance of time and financial support. Clearly from this survey we have a lot of work to do.”
Introduction

BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, has a long history of driving professionalism within the IT industry through its chartered statuses, certifications, networking, specialist group activities and CPD initiatives. It has long recognised the importance of professional development, and BCS has reinvigorated its approach to CPD to make it more effective and more accessible for its members and the entire IT profession.

A survey conducted by BCS in August 2012 identified the perception of CPD within the IT profession and quantified the scale of key challenges that IT professionals face in maintaining their professional development in the current economic climate. This survey focused on the views of employees.

One year later, BCS conducted a follow-up survey to establish the perception of CPD and responsibilities amongst those who manage IT staff – with a view to identifying commonalities, on-going trends and any differences in opinion. The survey was comprised of 13 targeted questions (in addition to five profiling questions), drawing responses from 138 employers and managers of IT staff.

The survey was conducted by BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, between 16 May 2013 and Wednesday 17 August 2013. 138 employers of IT staff took part in the survey. Rounding has been used within the results of this survey.
Responsibility for CPD planning

The BCS survey in 2012 identified that 1 in 3 IT professionals felt their employer did not help them with their CPD planning.

To establish the perception of managers / employers, BCS asked respondents where their organisation considers the primary responsibility for CPD planning sits.

Responses indicated the primary responsibility for CPD planning sits either with the employee or is a joint responsibility with the employer.

If we focus on the United Kingdom respondents alone, there is no significant shift.

It is important that IT professionals take responsibility and control for planning their CPD and regularly review their goals and progress against those goals.

Both surveys show the onus is on employees for being wholly or partially self-sufficient in the planning of their CPD, so it is important that IT professionals make the most of the CPD planning and management facilities available to them, such as those found on the BCS CPD Portal and within the SFIplus IT skills, training and development framework.
Policy to set aside time for CPD activities

Traditionally some organisations have ring-fenced time for employees to concentrate on CPD activities. Keen to know if this is still the case, BCS asked if the participants organisation had a policy to set aside time for CPD activities.

Across all survey respondents, 52% state there is no policy within their organisation to set aside time for CPD activities.

Whilst some organisations have a policy to set aside time for CPD, the majority do not. Even within those organisations that do, BCS found 52% of those are reporting a drop in the amount of time available.

IT professionals should look to use whatever time they have in their working day as efficiently as possible, with an expectation that they may need to conduct some CPD outside of working hours.

There is also likely to be an opportunity for employees to revisit what can constitute CPD outside of the narrow field of traditional CPD activities – as they may be achieving more than they thought.
Time available during the working day for CPD activities

Having a policy to set aside time for CPD does not necessarily correlate to whether sufficient time is available within work time for CPD activities.

In the 2012 survey, BCS asked IT professionals if the time allowed for them to engage in CPD activities was less than in previous years. With 57% of over 700 respondents stating time pressure was a barrier to CPD for them, and almost 2 in 3 stating they had experienced a reduction in time available for CPD than in previous years, BCS wanted to know the perception of the employers and if this matched the experience of employees.

61% of respondents stated there is less time in the working day for employees to commit to CPD now than in previous years – comparable to that perceived by employees one year previously.

With continued pressures, the amount of time available for CPD activities continues to decrease

Where time for CPD within the working day has decreased in comparison to previous years, so has funding (the survey goes on to find) with 83% of those respondents also reporting a drop in funding for engaging in traditional CPD activities, such as training courses and attending seminars.
Across the profiles of respondents, there is a clear split between those organisations with up to 500 employees, and those with more than 500 employees.

Proportionately, smaller organisations place more emphasis on the individual to take primary responsibility for their CPD planning, with larger organisations favouring a shared approach.

Some respondents have commented that CPD is paid “lip service” but not followed up, and that within smaller organisations CPD is considered something for next year, whilst the organisation concentrates on staying in business and maximising staff utilisation.

Does this indicate that small firms do not make the link between CPD and productivity/effectiveness? Is there fear that if they invest in CPD then people will just leave?

Indications show that IT professionals may expect to conduct CPD within the working day, but that this time (and budget) is reducing. Employers and employees alike need to recognise the breadth of in-job learning and maximise returns on any learning outside the workplace.

Smaller organisations may not fully appreciate the link between CPD, productivity and effectiveness, so struggling to justify why CPD needs to be given attention when so many other business pressures are in play. Investing in CPD (and taking an active part in CPD planning) can increase productivity and enable smarter working, so de-prioritising it can be a false economy.

CPD is understood to be wholly or partly the primary responsibility of the IT professional, and generally the importance of CPD is recognised by employers. However, IT professionals may increasingly find they need to be both self-sufficient in identifying and executing their CPD, with an increasing need to perform some activities outside of the working day, if they wish to stay ahead of others and maximise their employability.

IT professionals must be self-sufficient to maximise their relevance and employability.
Impact of financial constraints on CPD execution

In the 2012 survey, BCS asked IT professionals if the finances available for their CPD activities were less than in previous years. With 3 in 5 of the over 700 respondents stating finances were a barrier to CPD, and 2 in 3 specifically stating a reduction in funding available for CPD activities than in previous years, BCS wanted to identify the perception of employers and if this mirrored the experience of employees.

68% of respondents stated there is less funding for traditional CPD activities (such as attending courses, networking events and similar activities) now than in previous years – comparable to that reported by employees one year earlier.

No size of organisation was immune from this, with 55% or more of representatives from all sizes of organisation expressing this.

During times of recession and financial uncertainty, it is understandable that funding for traditional CPD activities (many of which can require significant capital expenditure) may be capped or restricted.

However, revisiting a contemporary approach to CPD that is based on the successful outcomes of activities (such as “I learnt this and implemented what I learnt by…” rather than “I spent x hours attending a seminar on…”.) and looking at many other types of CPD, such as self-study, reading informative blogs and watching online educational content that can also bring valuable and free CPD benefit.

This approach needs to be embraced by both employers and IT professionals alike, to ensure effective CPD cadence and maximise CPD investment outcomes.
Recognition of CPD by employers

The 2012 survey of IT professionals revealed 91% of over 700 respondents recognise the importance of CPD to build their skills and grow their potential.

BCS were interested to understand if such a high opinion of CPD was held by employers, so asked if their organisation supports CPD and recognises the importance of CPD in building skills and growing potential.

Whilst 45% responded their employers support CPD and recognise the importance of CPD in building skills and growing potential, 35% responded their employer does not.

75% of the respondents who said their employer does not support CPD also reported that CPD planning was the primary responsibility of the employee and not shared between the employee and employer. Further, 94% of respondents from unsupportive employers also reported their employees did less CPD than they would like or none at all.

Most of the employers who do not support CPD place the responsibility for CPD planning solely with the employee.

To maintain sufficient levels of CPD, IT professionals need to take the lead.

There can be a variety of reasons for organisations not (or seemingly not) supporting CPD. Our survey indicates this perception could be linked to reductions in funding and time available for traditional CPD activities – activities that can be costly and take employees away from the office for periods of time, so reducing staff utilisation. Where such reductions are implemented, and no mitigation plan is put into action or communicated, a loss of interest from the employer can be presumed when it is not the intended perception.

The findings suggest that an actual or perceived lack of support or recognition of CPD by an employer can negatively impact the CPD undertaken by their IT employees, which will be harmful to both the employer and the employee.
How can a business thrive and move forward if the skills of its workforce are stagnant and becoming dated?

There are cost effective ways to enable employees to maintain CPD pace without impacting the business. This can include recognising stretch tasks as CPD activities, supporting mentoring and coaching, encouraging employees to engage with online educational content (such as watching online tutorials or thought-leader interviews, and listening to podcasts for their IT specialisms).

Comments submitted by respondents also highlight some concerning and potentially unfounded reasons for supressing CPD within their workforce.

This includes discouraging and blocking CPD, with the belief that if team members are trained they will leave the organisation.

Employers who fail to provide learning opportunities or who actively supress learning, will not prevent IT professionals from improving their skills and growing their potential, or from discovering the best way to progress their career within an organisation that invests in its workforce.

The Internet delivers a wealth of knowledge that is within easy reach of almost every IT employee; an unprecedented volume of resources that continue to grow at a significant pace. Podcasts, tutorials, eBooks and mentoring opportunities can boost the employability of IT professionals and help them maintain their level of professional development at little or no financial cost, and in time segments that are both convenient and manageable. BCS collates and curates content, such as over 20,000 hours of recorded material, an online library of IT related titles, 5,000 business related journals and magazines, and 4,00 titles within the Computer and Applied Science database

Professional networking opportunities can support employees to build their knowledge, and learn of new or different skills and best practice, opening doors to opportunities within their reach.

Encouraging CPD self-sufficiency within the IT workforce can raise professionalism; it can improve skill levels and efficiency, and aid staff retention, without being a drain on financial resources and damaging utilisation targets.

The days of CPD being just training courses at significant cost are a thing of the past. Restricting training for employees so they cannot gain knowledge and experience to progress their careers, can no longer be relied upon as a retention strategy – as employers who use these tactics will increasingly discover.
Perception of time committed to CPD

The BCS survey of IT professionals in 2012 revealed 62% of over 700 respondents commit to less CPD than they would like. BCS were interested to understand if this was also the perception of employers and managers, or if there was any difference in perception. They were asked, in their opinion, how much CPD their employees are currently able to commit to.

67% of respondents stated their employees committed to less CPD than they would like, with a further 11% stating they committed to no CPD at all.

With 11% of respondents in the 2012 survey also stating they were able to commit to none, the results from both surveys align in this respect. There was a 5% variance in the “less than they would like” response group.

91% of those who expressed “less than they would like” stated that CPD planning was wholly or jointly the responsibility of the employee. 37% of this group work within organisations that have a policy to set aside time for CPD, proving that such a policy alone does not necessarily enable good CPD practice. 75% reported less financial support for traditional CPD activities than in previous years; 72% reported a reduction in time in the working day. Both of these elements are potentially a significant reason why less CPD being committed than is desired.

Comments within the survey indicate that well motivated employees often manage their own CPD and choose to conduct it in their own time. There are also comments that suggest CPD needs to be seen as equal in importance to formal skills training and qualifications, and that the industry should be wary of a points-gathering mentality that fails to measure how what has been learnt has implemented; how the skills gained have been applied in the workplace.

There is a correlation between the amount of time committed to CPD by those the respondent manages, and the amount the organisation supports CPD and recognises the importance of CPD in building skills and growing potential. As the financial and time pressures often lead to less time being committed to CPD than is desired. However, there is a wealth of free CPD activities available on demand, enabling both financial and time barriers to be overcome.
support drops, so does the amount of CPD time the employees are able to (or is possibly willing to) commit. They also indicate the less time employees commit to CPD, the less their goals are likely to align to the needs of the individual or the strategic goals of the department or organisation – which benefits neither party. There is no single solution to this challenge. By taking an enlightened approach to CPD, employees can likely identify CPD activities they are doing, but do not currently consider to be of CPD worth. Being coached, working and mastering different technologies in their current role, stretch tasks and many elements of self-study are prime examples of potentially valid CPD that is being carried out on a regular basis, yet not being recognised as CPD by the individual. CPD is about building skills and expanding knowledge, with a reflective approach to measuring the benefit gained – “I learnt … and I used the new skills/knowledge to …”.

In terms of finding extra time for CPD activities, in today’s challenging business environment, with multiple time pressures and increased demands, IT professionals need to invest in the CPD activities that are likely to return the highest benefits.
Drivers for the Development Goals set for IT workers

Having a better understanding of the support for CPD amongst employers, BCS were keen to understand the key drivers to setting development goals for IT workers.

First, participants were asked if the development goals set for employees are aligned to the overall strategic goals of the department or organisation. Next they were asked if the development goals set for employees are tailored in order to maximise the growth potential of each individual.

61% of respondents stated development goals are set for their employees that align to the overall strategic goals of their department or the organisation.

This is a positive response, as the outputs from the activities engaged to reach these goals should be able to be employed – so benefiting both the business and the individual. When CPD is measured on successful outcomes, rather than simply collecting points or counting hours (regardless of benefit), it’s vital to not only learn but to apply what has been learnt effectively.

47% of respondents stated development goals set for their employees are tailored in order to maximise the growth potential of each individual.

Of the 61% who expressed development goals aligned to the department or organisation, 70% expressed they were also tailored to the needs of the employee.

Goals that align to both the organisation and to the individual are the ideal combination. Where they are only aligned to the individual or only aligned to the organisation, neither will gain maximum benefit and optimum potential.
Well planned and implemented CPD benefits both the employee and the employer.

Good CPD grows the knowledge and skills of the individual and enables them to grow their confidence too. Great CPD builds on this by allowing the individual to further shape and improve their work, implementing what they have learnt and benefitting the employer too – enabling them both to reach their goals and thrive.

However, 36% of the survey respondents stated the goals of employees are not tailored to maximise their growth potential and, of those, 45% stated the development goals were not aligned to the strategic goals of their department or organisation either.

Such goals do not benefit the employee or employer and the ability to change this could rest with the employee; the IT professional. 82% who expressed the goals were neither aligned to individual nor organisation needs, also state the primary responsibility for CPD rests with the employee. **SFIAplus** from BCS can help IT professionals to identify their current level within their specialism and establish what is expected of them to progress to the next level in their field, so clarifying what their key development goals should be. Setting and working towards those goals, considering how reaching such goals could also positively impact the employer, will benefit the individual and are also likely to benefit the employer too.
Do employers have effective formats or systems in place for recording CPD?

In April 2013 BCS launched its free-to-use, portable, cloud-based CPD planning and recording tool called the BCS Personal Development Plan (PDP). With over 1,000 users in its first weeks, and still growing, the PDP enables IT professionals to take their CPD records with them as they move from employer to employer (or between departments with their existing employer), without losing these valuable records. The PDP is designed to be personal to the user, rather than being a corporate tool, so BCS were keen to understand if employers of IT workers have formats or systems in place for recording CPD within the workplace, and if these were effective.

The participants were asked if their organisation prescribed a format or system for their employees to record their goals and activities.

![Diagram showing the distribution of responses to the question: 'Is there a prescribed recording format or system for employees to record their CPD goals and activities?']

Whilst 50% expressed they did have a system or format, 2% of respondents (who are managers of IT workers) were unsure if a system or format existed.

A quarter of the managers who expressed they had a solution, also expressed the solution they have was not effective.

In total, 59% of respondents either had no format or solution for recording CPD goals and activities, or they have a solution that is ineffective.
Across the profiles of respondents, there is a clear split between those organisations with up to 500 employees, and those with more than 500 employees. Proportionately, fewer smaller organisations have prescribed formats or systems than their larger counterparts. However, such employee count profiling does not reveal any significant differences in terms of reduced funding, reduced time available or recognition of the importance of CPD.

IT professionals, at any stage in their career, should make the most of the solutions available and, where systems do not deliver all that is needed, look to other solutions that may help complement them or mitigate them where they are lacking. Where such systems do not exist, IT professionals should look themselves for a solution that is designed for their needs.

The BCS Personal Development Plan is free for anyone in IT to use, is portable and designed to help any IT worker record their goals, record their activities, and suggests potential CPD activities for them to engage with.
CPD relevance in the recruitment process

A curriculum vitae (CV) or resume will often list work experience and list some traditional CPD, such as qualifications obtained, but may not give a fuller picture of the applicant’s commitment to their Continuing Professional Development and their other successes in their careers. To establish if recruiters ask for records of CPD and (if so) if they find this useful, BCS posed additional questions in their survey.

Participants were asked if, as part of the recruitment process, they specifically asked for a record of CPD in addition to qualifications and courses listed on CVs.

4% of respondents stated they always ask applicants for a record of CPD in addition to the qualifications and courses listed on CVs, as part of the recruitment process, with a total of 45% asking anywhere between rarely and always. However, 48% expressed they never ask for a record of CPD.
Respondents were asked whether they find it valuable to review the recent CPD goals and activities of applicants, as part of the recruitment process.

![Pie chart showing responses to the question: Reviewing the recent CPD goals and activities of applicants is valuable as part of the recruitment process.

- Yes, I do find this valuable: 25%
- I don't do this currently, but I would find it valuable to do so: 19%
- No: 5%
- Not applicable: 51%

Among those who never ask for a record of CPD, 69% indicated that they would find it valuable to review it, if it was available.

The survey found that 76% of respondents believed reviewing a record of an applicant’s CPD would be valuable, with 90% of those who request a record of CPD finding it valuable to do so.

From the perspective of an employer there is generally regarded to be a benefit in asking for an up-to-date CPD statement from applicants. It can show a commitment to their professionalism and demonstrate their own investment in keeping up-to-date.

Where employers do not ask for such details, outside of the basic information held within CVs, they should consider asking for it as it could be a valuable applicant differentiator.

Even where prospective employers do not ask for it, applicants should consider if they wish to take a report of their CPD with them to an interview, or submit it as part of the application process. It could help positively differentiate them from other applicants and give them an advantage. With this in mind, the BCS Personal Development Plan is designed to enable IT professionals to quickly generate a report of selected, relevant CPD records.

With 90% of those who ask for CPD records as part of the recruitment process finding it valuable to do so, and an appetite amongst many employers to do so, applicants should consider if submitting a record of recent CPD will give them a valuable advantage.
As part of the survey, participants were given the opportunity to provide free text feedback in regards to CPD. Their responses are represented in this word cloud:
Conclusion
The results of both the 2012 employees and 2013 employers survey largely complement each other.

They provide a clear message that IT professionals must take an active role in, and responsibility for, their own CPD planning. Ideally they should work with their line management to ensure their goals bring benefit to themselves and to the organisation, so that any investment needed on the part of the employer can be clearly justified. Further, where the goals align with the strategic aims of their department, any CPD activities engaged to reach those goals will bring skills and knowledge that can be put into practice quickly to reap the benefits. Well planned and implemented CPD benefits both the employee and the employer.

SFIA (Skills Framework for the Information Age) can help IT professionals in a wide range of disciplines to identify their career paths and, using Browse SFIAPlus (available to members of BCS) it is easy to identify goals for further self-advancement. A corporate view of SFIAPlus also offers managers and employers a tool to help identify potential goals and development activities for their employees and can add further value by providing management reports, such as gap analysis.

In terms of CPD activities, many IT professionals are continuing to come under time pressure that can restrict the amount of time seemingly available for CPD activities. However, taking an enlightened approach to CPD and revisiting the types of activity that can bring CPD worth, is likely to prove they are committing to more CPD than they originally perceived; changing the view there is less time in the working day to commit to CPD activities into an understanding that the scope of CPD activities that are being undertaken has changed to encompass in-job learning and other contemporary learning resources. Considering a mix of networking, self-study and in-job tasks alongside more traditional training courses and seminars can lead to a more balanced and practical approach. Depending on the development goal, the associated CPD activities that bring real benefit may not involve large amounts of time away from the normal working environment. Smaller bursts of high gain CPD activities may bring real and evidential benefit – so helping mitigate time commitment challenges. The BCS CPD Portal gives guidance on the types of activity that should be considered as CPD activities, resources and suggestions for CPD activities.

With 59% of respondents either having no CPD recording solution, or what they have is ineffective, IT professionals can benefit from utilising the free-to-use BCS Personal Development Plan. This allows employer independent planning and recording of CPD, with the ability to generate reports that 76% of respondents state they would value in a recruitment context. Outside of a recruitment context, these reports can also be used to help the IT professional manage CPD in their current roll, and it enables easy management of the reflective learning approach endorsed by BCS.

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