

## **ABSTRACT**

The study explores how organisations can contribute to the personal and professional development of their staff. It is borne out of the author's interest in understanding the relationship between personal and professional development, and the role organisations can play in contributing to both.

The researcher believes that the two forms of development are commonly confused. Employees are often asked to write 'personal development plans' when the corporate objective is to identify and address shortfalls in business or task-related knowledge and skills, enabling them to perform their jobs more effectively. Skills-based training courses are presented as 'personal development opportunities' and facilitative events seeking to 'develop the whole person' are often not properly understood or integrated by individuals in their work context.

In this study, data was collected from nine research participants, who are, or were, either involved in personal or professional development of themselves or staff who reported to them. In-depth interviews were conducted in the context of a phenomenological inquiry framework. A phenomenological approach was also used to describe and analyse the data gathered from the interviews.

The analysis revealed three major categories which hold sub categories within them. They are:

### **Definitions and associations**

The findings in this study show that the nine participants definition of personal and professional development were often confused and used interchangeably.

They believed personal development to be a positive element to include in one's life and work and were motivated to personally develop to change themselves or their situations for the better.

Many benefits are perceived as available to both organisation and individual. However, there are also significant disadvantages and pitfalls to be aware of for those seeking its benefits.

Their feelings about personal development ranged considerably. Fear, grief and loss were experienced at the start of a development process which changed over time to positive descriptions such as strength, peace, love, hunger and drive to achieve.

### **Development and training**

When given an opportunity to reflect on past experiences all participants could recall instances of developing that had not been part of an intentional change process. Current management of the personal development process was divided between those who experienced themselves as pursuing a path and those who felt unable to do so. Demands or constraints from the participants' current employers were the most common reasons given for inability to plan and progress personal development.

Training was often regarded as providing skills and a 'first step' for participants in the development process. Development was described as a broad process that was ongoing and likely to take place, whether or not training was an element of it. Opposing views were held about the role of the trainer. Transference of learning from the training room to the workplace was viewed as important, and the need for a supportive workplace recognised. However, a significant theme was the lack time organisations gave for reflection on learning.

### **Organisations**

Organisations were experienced as being able to play an important role in an individual's personal and professional development, although this did not always occur.

There was some recognition of the individual's responsibility for their own development, however, organisations were mainly perceived as having a responsibility for developing their staff. Many ways were cited as possible for organisations to help the individual, particularly in providing resources and facilities. However, there was significant evidence of organisations falling short of the aims and standards they espoused for development. Management style was significant to how well organisational aims were implemented.

Statements are made about the experience of this inquiry upon the personal development of the researcher.

The researcher provides his rationale for adopting the qualitative phenomenological approach. Limitations of the study and how it might be developed further are also outlined.

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