Introduction

This book is a practical text which promotes the concept of 'People Experience' – PX – as an alternative to traditional 'Human Resources'. It explores the strategic contribution of the function and explores how HR can support overall business goals whilst still maintaining a focus on developing and engaging individual employees through deployment of a PX model.

The book is split into four sections and promotes learning and discovery through the key components of knowing yourself, knowing your business, knowing your industry and knowing your profession.

Knowing yourself. We start with a focus on knowing yourself and position this as the foundation which will enable you to operate at a strategic level within the HR profession. It can be a valuable exercise to conduct a deep dive into our own soft skills and the factors which can impact on our performance. We pay particular attention to the concept of self-care and the unique challenges a career in HR can place on this.

Knowing your business. Here we move on to look at the importance of really getting to know the details of how the business you work in operates. We look at how you can then move on to leverage this knowledge to enhance your profile within your business and the results you can achieve in your role.

Knowing your industry. In this section we broaden our focus to encompass the industry you operate in and consider what influence this has on both the performance of your organization and your own career development. We consider how you can stretch your impact beyond the remit of your current organization and make lasting change at industry level.

Knowing your profession. Finally we promote the importance of fully understanding your profession and professional responsibilities in addition to looking at factors shaping the profession for the future. We consider how you can make an impact within your profession

and also encourage you to consider how you can play an active role in shaping the profession for the future.

So why a toolkit? Let's look at the definition as a starting point.

Toolkit

1 A set of tools designed to be used together or for a particular purpose.

2 Software designed to perform a specific function, esp. to solve a problem.

(Collinsdictionary.com, 2018)

Therefore, it is my hope that through reading this book you'll find ways to add to your own toolkit, ditch the tools that aren't working for you any more and find some new ones to help enhance the work you do going forward.

Activity 1: Knowledge and impact

Before we get started I want you to take a moment to consider the four-box grid below. The headings are fairly self-explanatory; however, for clarity consider them as follows.

Yourself. In this section, think about all of the elements that enable you to operate as the best version of yourself: your motivations, ambitions, goals, your mental and physical wellbeing. Also think about any stress points, areas for development and emotional triggers.

Your business. In this section, think about the business you currently work for, or the one you aspire to work for if you're looking to secure employment there sometime soon.

Your industry. Here we're talking about the industry in which your current or desired business operates, eg retail, leisure, oil and gas.

Your profession. Your chosen occupation, and I'm going to take a guess that if you're reading this book there's a good chance it's Human Resources, although as you will establish as we progress through this book I'm encouraging you to think more along the lines of 'People Experience' or 'PX' as a description for the work we do. Equally, this

model and text applies if your profession could also be defined as 'General Management' or business leadership, as you will also discover that my vision for PX and the future of our profession promotes a broadened accountability that should be shared across a leadership team for maximum benefit, as opposed to sitting with one function.

What I'd like you to do is to draw out the basic four boxes for yourself and as you will see I have added the title 'Knowledge' to this first table. I'd like you to shade out an additional square within the box as an indicator of your current knowledge level in this area. For example, if you feel that at the present time your current knowledge of your profession is greater than your knowledge of the business you work in, the square you have shaded in the 'Profession' box should be larger than the square you have shaded in the 'Business' box.

There's going to be all kinds of reasons for how you size your boxes at the present time so make a note of any that come up as you complete the exercise and also date the sheet you do this on too as it's going to be a useful marker for your progress and to determine where and how to focus your time and energy.

Figure 0.1 Knowledge map
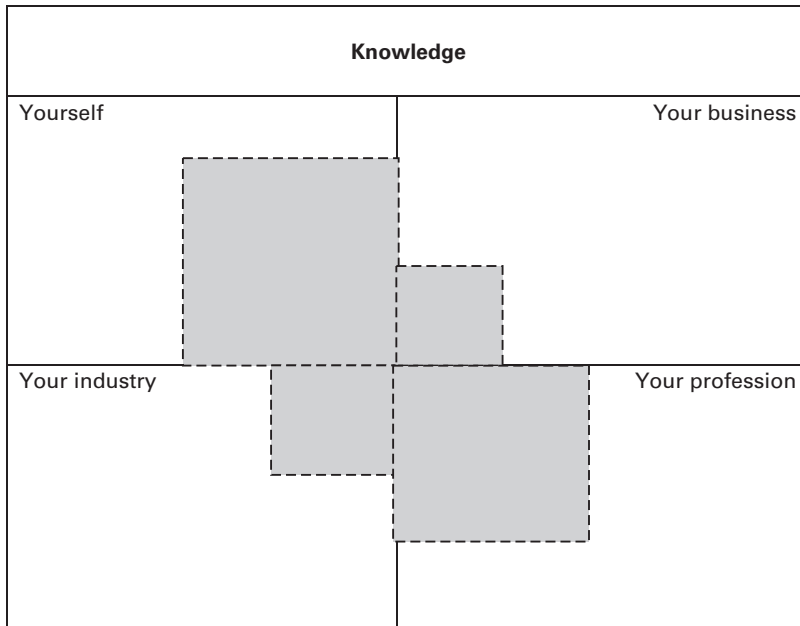
Next, we're going to repeat the activity but this time I want you to consider your current 'Impact' in each of the sections. For example, how visible are you and how valuable is the impact you make in each area? You need to be really honest with yourself here, especially when it comes to thinking about the impact you have within your business. Think in commercial terms: what have you delivered or enabled someone else to deliver that has really made a difference?

In terms of 'yourself', when you think about impact, think about self-care. What impact are your current life and career choices having on your ability to show up, deliver great work and be an all-round awesome human? The higher the level of self-care, the bigger the box!

Again, make some notes about the reasons for your sizing of the squares and ensure you date the document so you have a measure you can refer back to.

When you've completed the activity I want you to be brave and get a second opinion. Find someone whose opinion you trust and ask them to complete the same activity based on how they perceive your knowledge and impact. Give them the form template and ask them to make a few notes on why they have chosen to size the squares in the way they have. You can

Figure 0.2   Impact map
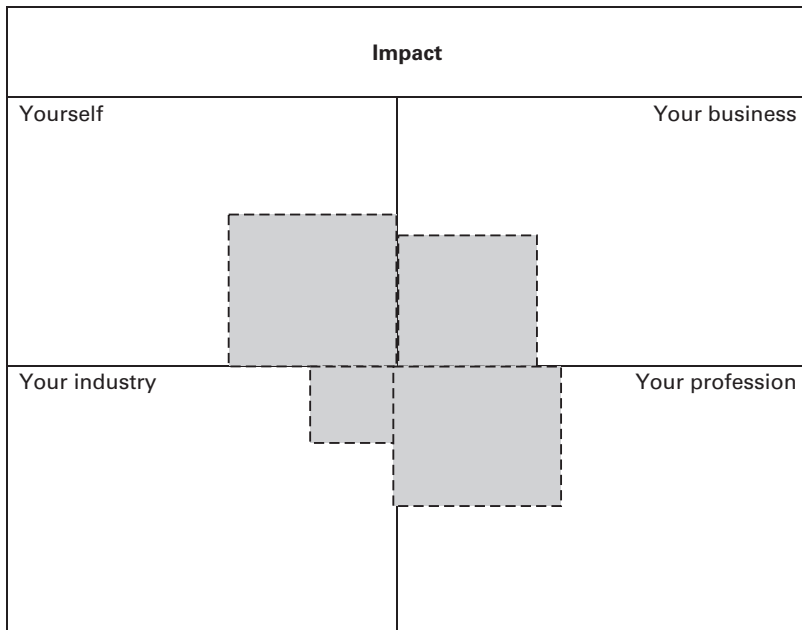
then cross-reference your perception with theirs and then, taking onboard their feedback, consider what this means for your personal development planning. Make a list of any development areas that have been highlighted for you and then rank them in priority order in terms of impact. Take the top three from the list as action points to get started on immediately and (for the moment) ditch the rest!

By completing this activity you should now have a good idea of your priority areas of development so feel free to skip ahead and jump right into the section and chapters of this text that support your learning in these areas. Of course, you're welcome to read this text cover to cover and I sincerely hope you do. I also know that if you're like me you want results *fast* and as such I wholeheartedly support you skipping ahead and dipping into the info that meets your immediate needs in the moment

Reference

Collinsdictionary.com (2018) Toolkit definition and meaning, available at: www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/toolkit [accessed 17 October 2018]

PART ONE
Know yourself

Continuous personal development

Introduction

In this chapter we look to explore the importance of ongoing and meaningful personal development activities for individuals working within Human Resources. We will identify some vital components to include within your own personal development strategy and suggest some tools you may wish to sharpen up or deploy in order to accelerate your learning and career. With development planning being such an intrinsic element of most HR roles it's not only important to role model great practices here, it's also essential if you hope to remain current and credible in the environment within which you operate.

How will this chapter shape my thinking?

- It will encourage you to clarify the 'purpose' behind your plan and ensure that activities you undertake are meaningful and supportive of that core purpose.
- It will provide you with a framework for your own personal development which incorporates elements of Agile project management.
- It will promote the importance of accountability in development planning and establish models through which this can be delivered.

Purpose

I think of myself as a serial learner. Seriously, I can't switch off this drive for knowledge and even if I could I don't think I'd want to. This is something you need to take very seriously if you want to make a real impact in your career. You need to own it!

I know, maybe you got this far without a plan, right? Maybe you did, but what you'll never know is how much further you could have got and how much more you could have achieved if you'd taken time to map things out and apply a little more focus to setting and achieving stretching goals and targets for yourself. Also, think of this as a reflection of how you view business development too; you wouldn't run a multimillion-dollar business without a plan, so why would it be ok to run your career and life without one? Trust me, it's worth investing in yourself here and taking some time out to create the action plan that's going to enable you to achieve your potential.

People often suggest that successful development planning starts with some basic goal setting; I'm going to take a step back from there and encourage you to think instead about the *purpose* for your plan as the very first point. You need to be clear on *why* you are doing something for it to be truly meaningful and you need it to be meaningful if it's going to be effective. When you go back to think about your 'why', think of it as a process of discovery, not invention (Sinek, 2009). By that I mean I encourage you to remain connected to your own identity and be authentic in what you set out to achieve. To move forwards it's important to reflect on the past and ensure we are pursuing a career that we want because we want to and not because someone is pushing us into it or because we have a mistaken belief that it's the only path available to us.

Goal setting

To get going here, think about setting some short-, mid- and long-terms goals; you define the timespans so that they are meaningful and relevant for you. It can be useful to articulate your goals in a specific way in order to be clear with yourself about why that goal

matters to you. Why this goal, why now and what will it give you? Think about how your goals link to your personal and professional strategy, and consider this: 'A winning strategy combines analytically sound, ambitious but logical goals with methods that help people experience new, often very ambitious goals, as exciting, meaningful and uplifting – creating a deeply felt determination to move, make it happen, and win, now' (Kotter, 2008).

A common test that most will be familiar with for goal setting utilizes the 'SMART' model, which asks, is this goal specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound? I also take inspiration from the world of Kanban in formulating mine. For example, instead of formulating the goal as per example one or example two below, I add a little more depth to shape it in the format of example three.

Example One: Starting goal

– Learn how to use webinar technology.

Example Two: SMART goal

– Specific: I'd like to learn how to use Zoom (other providers are available) webinar technology and ensure that 40 per cent of employees access my webinar.

– Measurable: I'll know I've completed it when I have delivered my first webinar.

– Achievable: Yes, it seems pretty straightforward and info on how to do it is readily available.

– Realistic: Yes, I know other people who are less tech-savvy than me who run webinars.

– Time bound: Within three months.

Example Three: Kanban/user story goal

– As a human resources director, I would like to deliver a webinar on the subject of personal development planning within my business so that more people can access information to enhance their careers and learn skills to help them drive the business more quickly at a time and place that suits them.

– My acceptance criteria for this will be that the webinar will be delivered within three months and 40 per cent of employees will access it.

When you have your goals, write them down and keep them somewhere you can see them. Then consider how you might add a 'stretch' goal into the mix if there isn't one there already. Something that's going to take you beyond your comfort zone and accelerate your progress. It's important to remember that every activity you put on your development plan should take you a step closer to achieving your ambitions so be sure you're being brave enough here in order to keep yourself on track.

Something to consider adding to your toolkit here is a physical or virtual planning journal to help you keep track of and manage your goals. Trello is a good starting point if you're looking for a digital option but with the pace of transformation in this arena a quick Google search will bring up many other solutions for you to investigate. If you're looking to build pace and momentum with your development activity it can be useful to work in 90-day blocks as a maximum to ensure you have the clarity of focus needed to gain traction. This method should add value to longer-term goal setting as opposed to replacing it completely. Within the 90-day plan you can then break down your development activity further into realistic timescales that keep you motivated at the appropriate level without layering on any undue stress and pressure. Consider two- or four-week 'sprints' to achieve set objectives within your development plan.

Going Agile

Personally, I bring in elements from Agile software development to my plans; it works for me but you really need to try out a few styles to find the approach that's best for you. The Agile Alliance defines Agile as 'The ability to create and respond to change in order to succeed in an uncertain and turbulent environment' (Agile Alliance, 2018). Essentially, Agile is a way of working that combines a number of set routines and practices with the end result of delivering more useable work, more quickly in an organizational context. In relation to personal development planning I find it useful to take inspiration from this methodology both in terms of my own practice and also

when I'm working with other people. Table 1.1 shows an example of the template I use to structure an Agile Development plan.

I'm also going to let you in on another secret to creating an effective development plan: the secret is to limit the amount of activity you have going on at any one moment. Again, this takes inspiration from the world of Agile and Kanban; you need to limit your work in progress if you want to get things done. The way to do this is to create a backlog of activities that you want to take on, and next to remove any that don't take you a step closer to your established goals. This narrows down your focus to the things that really matter; then prioritize the remaining activities in order of importance. This is the list that would be added to the first column in Table 1.1.

Next, from your backlog, select three activities to move into the 'discovery' phase, explore these options in turn, and then if after further research you still believe it's the right course of action move it into an 'in progress' column. Again, limit yourself to only having three things live at any one time. Don't worry – as soon as it's done (meeting your acceptance criteria for 'done') you can move it on to the next column and take on another one into the 'in progress' phase. By managing your development activity in this way, you stand a better chance of ensuring your focus and effort are directed in the right way and stand a greater chance of success in achieving your goals.

You'll also note in the template there is a column that is headed 'blocked'. This is where the activities move to if they are stalled or blocked beyond your control. For example, maybe you've identified a development activity that requires you to attend a training course, you researched options for it in the 'discovery' phase, then went on to book a place on the course in the 'in progress' phase but now you need to wait five months before the course starts. At this stage you haven't completed the activity but there's also nothing further you can do to move it on at the moment either. Therefore, it now sits in the 'blocked' column until the course begins. When it begins it moves to the second 'in progress' column before finishing in 'done' when it has been completed.

In addition to my plan, I also have a vision board to feed my creative soul. It's an A1 board with images, motivational quotes and ambitions on it. This can be a great option if you've tried multiple

Table 1.1 Agile development plan

	Backlog of activities	Activities in discovery phase	Activities in progress	Blocked	In progress	Done
Example action	Read *Transformational HR* book.	Investigate options for org design qualification.	Agile HR training.	Leadership development programme (next intake in 9 months).	Read *Tribe of Mentors* book.	Attend CIPD conference.

variations of text-led plans in the past and they haven't worked for you. It's simple enough to put together and you can use any images that resonate with you. Someone I know has a picture of their dream car on theirs next to the date they want to own it by. I see mine every day and it reminds me what all the hard work is for. If you're more of a visual person, give it a go and see how it works out for you.

Accountability

There is no one better placed in this world to drive your personal development than you. It seems like a simple thing but I've lost count of the amount of conversations I've had with people where they've been happy to hand over their own personal development to someone else or to 'fate' and then complain that no one has ever helped them or *made* them do it. They explain that the reason their career hasn't progressed is because no one gave them a development plan and they carry a sincere perception of injustice and resentment because of this. Now, I'm all for helping people who want to progress but we can't own anyone else's development or responsibility for it any more than we can (or would want to) own any other element of their personality. Self-development starts with yourself so if you want a development plan, you need to motivate yourself to create it and be accountable for it. So, When you're talking to people about your plan you need to be coming from the angle of creating tangible *results* from it and talking about those, not talking about *excuses* for not having it and for not delivering results here.

Another common thing I encounter is people who commit to create their own development plan as part of a coaching or mentoring programme, then guess what? They never do it. Don't be that person; if you commit to do something, do it! It's in your interest to do the work. It doesn't matter what format it's in, the only important thing is it works for you and gives you the type of goals and motivation you need to achieve the things you set out to achieve.

So, it's your responsibility to do the work, but it does also help to have someone you can call on as an accountability partner from time to time. There are a couple of ways you can do this. Either set

up something informal with someone you already know and trust, or sign up to work with an experienced coach or mentor who can support you with this in a professional capacity. Also, look for social media groups that encourage this as part of their community.

Reflection

It's also important to remember the value of reflection and allowing time and space for the learning to sink in. If you are a planner, plan in some time to rest, and have some points where you take a bit of time out to consolidate what you already know. It can feel frustrating at times but trust me, your mental health will thank you for it in the long term.

Conclusion

We're fortunate to live in a time where the sources of personal development material are abundant. There really are no limits on options so have fun and explore which works best for you. Whether you choose books, journals, newspapers, podcasts or blogs, there's really no excuses for not getting started today.

There are multiple options for how to structure and plan your development activity and no right or wrong approaches as long as your method passes the 'results not excuses' test.

As we now live in a time where it will be the norm for people to work into their 70s and 80s (Gratton and Scott, 2016) the implications of this on the need for continuous personal development are profound, particularly when viewed in the context of the changing world of work and accelerated advancements in technology. For example, imagine a scenario where an organization chose not to investigate trends and developments around artificial intelligence – that would be unheard of for most commercial operations. However, in context very few individuals will be looking at this in terms of what it might mean for their own personal development and what

the arrival or mainstream AI might mean for the way they work in the future. It's not beyond reason to expect that at some point we will all become 'managers' of AI agents in some capacity and that this will be the norm and expected. Learning how to best utilize digital technology now and incorporating this into your development plan will ensure you are better placed to remain current and be progressive throughout the duration of your career, even if it spans into your 80s. Investment in CPD activities for employees will also become a determining factor in the success of organizations in light of these factors and even now businesses are reaping the rewards from supporting the personal development of the individuals working within them. There is no better time to start and no better time to prioritize your own development in order that you can advance your career and help others as they seek to develop theirs.

Toolkit essentials: 10 steps to successful personal development

1 Define the purpose of your development plan and consider the timeframe for it.

2 Own it! Accept that the best person to be responsible for your development is you.

3 Ask for help or a second opinion when you need it.

4 Set goals and stretch goals that link in to your purpose. Be clear on your definition of 'done' for these goals.

5 Choose development activities that suit your personal learning style.

6 Limit your work in progress, and only actively work on a maximum of three things at once.

7 Create a vision board to remind you what you're working towards.

8 Find an appropriate accountability partner, mentor or group.

9 Factor in time for reflection on learning and for rest in your planning process.

10 Start today!

Questions for reflection

Q. If you could only work on three development activities at this moment in time, which three would you choose?

Q. How do these three development activities compare to the ones you created in Activity 1?

Q. Can you define in one sentence the purpose of your current development plan?

Q. Have you clearly articulated your goals for the next 30, 60 and 90 days?

Q. Who is your accountability partner for your development activity?

References

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