Never stop learning

Continuing Professional Development remains an important element of an engineer’s career. By Dick Bacon.

In a recent survey, New Electronics asked its readers what were the most critical issues facing the UK electronics industry in 2013. While many respondents were rightly concerned about the next generation of engineers, many were also concerned about meeting skills requirements.

In an industry like engineering, which has a significant impact on society, public confidence about the professionalism and competence is important. This has contributed to a raised awareness of Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

When we leave formal education, we don’t stop learning and CPD is quickly becoming the recognised way of ensuring professional competence can be demonstrated. The practice has become more widespread in recent years as both individuals and companies begin to realise the value of good CPD.

The role of CPD
The importance of CPD is recognised by professional bodies – many include it in their codes of conduct. Europe’s largest professional body for engineers, the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET), says: “Members shall keep their knowledge and skills up to date through planned professional development and seek to broaden and deepen that knowledge throughout their working life. Members shall also encourage persons working under their supervision to do the same.”

Professionally registered members (CEng, IEng, EngTech or ICTTech) must also follow the Engineering Council’s CPD Code.

The IET supports engineers and technicians throughout their careers. Not only does it encourage members to undertake CPD, but it also helps them with that development.

Through the CPD Monitoring Scheme, IET members can create a simple development plan and a record of their CPD activities. While the scheme is voluntary, those opting in will benefit from feedback, allowing them to benchmark themselves against how much and what type of CPD is undertaken by others. They will also receive individual tailored feedback on their CPD records through peer review, if selected for monitoring.

When developing this scheme, the IET ensured it was easy to follow and that members gained maximum benefit. The IET recognises that many different activities contribute towards CPD and has identified six categories to reflect this: training courses; work experience; academic study; volunteering; events and seminars; and self study, such as reading or internet research, are all valid.

Many schemes measure CPD using hours or points. However, input measures alone do not always give the full picture – simply attending a course may not signal that someone has advanced professionally; it is what was learnt on that course that contributes towards CPD. This can be monitored using output measures which focus on self reflection and analysis. What did you learn on your course? Do you feel more confident professionally now? What will you take away from today?

It is through this self reflection that individuals gain value from their CPD activities and satisfaction at seeing how they can progress. Many professional bodies are incorporating this into their CPD monitoring, either by combining it with an input measure or by moving to a purely output based measure.

The IET’s CPD monitoring scheme uses both hours (input) and reflection (output).

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Author profile: Dick Bacon is the IET’s manager of Professional Development.

Personal monitoring
The IET recommends all engineers and technicians undertake and record their CPD, providing a lifelong record for them to draw on. This can be used as a personal record and shared with employers, clients and peers to demonstrate competence for appraisals or interviews.

As technology advances, it is vital for the IET to provide its members with a professional development recording system. Career Manager is an online system available to IET members at any time. It allows members to manage their career profile with a structured and focused approach, providing an opportunity to improve existing job performance and update transferable skills.

Career Manager allows CPD activities to be logged quickly and easily. Members can record CPD hours and a reflective statement against their activities and produce high level or detailed CPD reports. While maintaining a CPD record requires little effort, it does need self discipline.

Career Manager offers the flexibility to record your professional history and manage your development. Knowing your strengths and weaknesses, means you can identify relevant opportunities and plan development objectives to address them, helping you make informed career decisions.

By joining the IET’s online Professional Development community, which is open to members and non members, you can engage with like minded engineers and technicians to discuss and share ideas, experiences and information about professional development.

For more information, go to: www.theiet.org/pd-community www.theiet.org/cpd

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