



# Personal development as a PhD researcher

**Dr Karla Tersago**

**ADS Doctoral Day**

**October 2024**

# Vision



**Becoming an excellent researcher and  
a broadly trained professional**

## To think about...

1. How can you become an excellent researcher?
2. How can you become a widely employable professional?
3. What do you want to do after finishing your PhD?

- Which skills and competences do you need to develop to make this possible?
- Which of those can you develop during your PhD?

**Share your thoughts:**

[Pollev.com/karlatersago661](https://Pollev.com/karlatersago661)



## At this moment, I think that after finishing my PhD:

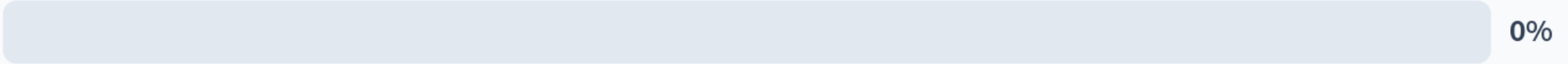
I want to find a job outside academia

I want to find a job in academia

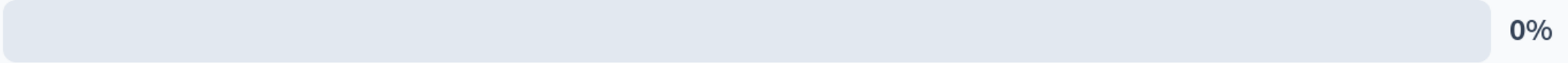
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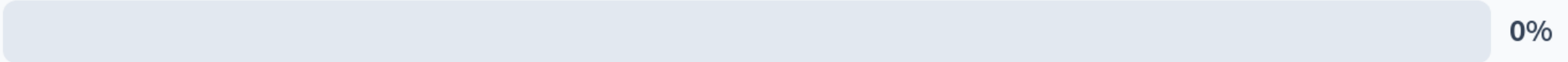
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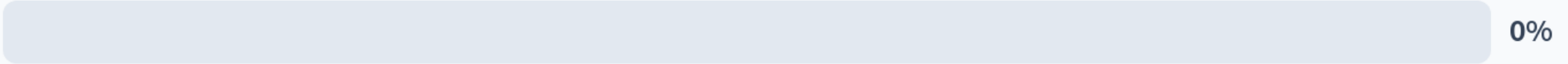


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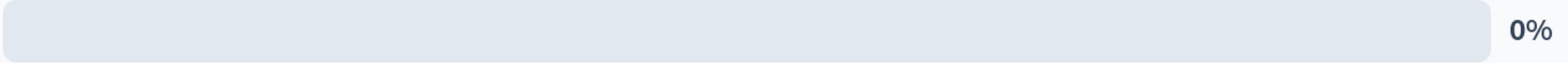


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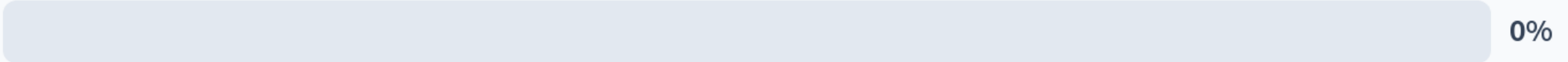
I want to find a job outside academia



I want to find a job in academia



I really don't know yet what I want to do after finishing my PhD



## My dream job after finishing my PhD is...

Nobody has responded yet.

Hang tight! Responses are coming in.



Which skills and competences can I develop during my PhD trajectory to become an excellent researcher?

Nobody has responded yet.

Hang tight! Responses are coming in.

Which skills and competences can I develop during my PhD trajectory to become a broadly trained professional?

Nobody has responded yet.

Hang tight! Responses are coming in.



**Almost 90% of PhD  
holders build a career  
beyond academia**

[LERU position paper – June 2018](#)



# The importance of Personal Development

- Competence development
  - Improving skills and experience
  - Growth
- 
- AS IS -> TO BE
  - Professional goal(s)

# Where are you now?



➤ SWOT analysis



## Why setting professional goals?

- Productivity
- Knowing where to start
- Clearer focus
- Practicing a growth mindset
- A sense of purpose

# S



## SPECIFIC

Be clear and specific so your goals are easier to achieve. This also helps you know how and where to get started!

# M



## MEASURABLE

Measurable goals can be tracked, allowing you to see your progress. They also tell you when a goal is complete.

# A



## ACTIONABLE

Are you able to take action to achieve the goal? Actionable goals ensure the steps to get there are within your control.

# R



## REALISTIC

Avoid overwhelm and unnecessary stress and frustration by making the goal realistic.

# T



## TIMEBOUND

A date helps us stay focused and motivated, inspiring us and providing something to work towards.

# SMART GOALS EXPLAINED

**THE COACHING**  
TOOLS COMPANY.COM

# Competence profile

## A. Research skills & techniques

- **Knowledge** (e.g. subject knowledge, research methods, data-analysis)
- **Cognitive abilities** (e.g. creativity, critical thinking, analysing problems, evaluating research)

## B. Research environment

- **Professional conduct** (e.g. ethical code and legal requirements, health and safety guidelines, guidelines regarding authorship,...)
- **Funding** and evaluation of research
- Understanding **publication** and **valorisation processes**

## C. Research management

- **Project planning** (e.g. setting goals, prioritisation)
- **Information seeking** (e.g. use of bibliographical resources)
- **Information literacy and management** (e.g. database management)

## D. Personal effectiveness

- **Personal qualities** (e.g. inquiring mind, perseverance, innovative thinking)
- **Self-confidence and self-awareness**
- **Result-oriented focus** (e.g. strive for a publication)

## E. Communication skills

- **Academic literacy** (e.g. learning to adapt your writing for the purpose and audience)
- **Communication methods** (e.g. learning to articulate ideas clearly using different techniques)
- **Teaching** in higher education
- **Public engagement** (e.g. popularizing science communication)

## F. Teamwork & networking

- **Teamwork**
- **Networking** (within the institution and the wider research community)

## G. Career management

- Continuing **professional development**
- **Career management** and **employability**
- **Transferability of skills**
- **Job interview skills**



# Personal Development Plan (PDP): Template

1

## My Personal Development Plan - PDP

The goal of this document is to describe your goals as concretely as possible, as well as the actions needed to reach these goals. Below you can find some tips to get you started.

- Make use of the SMART principles when defining your development goals:

Specific	Describe your goal clearly and make it very concrete. The six w-questions can help you in doing so. For behavioural changes: describe behaviour that is observable, as if you could record it in a video or behaviour or result.
Measurable	How can you measure that your goal is reached?
Action oriented	The goal has to be an invitation to action and call up on your energy. The goal should be formulated in a positive manner. E.g. Don't: I am not motivated. Constructively (behaviour: normal tone of voice, smiling, ...).
Realistic	Is the goal realistic but challenging enough? Is there an executable, action plan? Can you personally influence the defined goals?
Timing	Define a clear start date and finishing date. When will you start? What is the frequency of action? When is your goal reached? Tip: plan it in your agenda.

- Reflections before getting started:
  - Past: Where are you coming from? Which path did you already follow? How did this go in the past?
  - Current situation: Where are you today? What did you already learn?
  - Future: Where do you want to go? What are your next steps? What are your long term goals?

Goals  
SMART principles  
Reflections before getting started

2

## My Personal Development Plan - PDP – My concrete development goal

		Name: _____	Date: _____
What is your concrete goal?	Describe as concretely as possible when you consider your development goal reached.	Formulated using the SMART principle?	
Action plan	Which actions do I undertake to reach my goal? In case of behavioural change: in which context, situation is this applicable? What am I going to do (differently)? If I ... then I will ...		
Resources	What do you need to reach this goal? To be able to grow? Which resources and support do you need? Who can help you?		
Frequency/ Deadline	Does this require a one-shot action? What is the deadline? In case of behavioural change: At what frequency do you take action? Weekly? Bi-weekly? Monthly? At each meeting?		
Plan B	What can go wrong and how will you react? Go about it? If I ... then I will ...		
Possible roadblocks	What keeps you from doing this? What keeps you from taking action? (Competences - 'can I?', Knowledge? - 'do I know enough?', Motivation - 'do I want to?', Fear? - 'do I dare to?') If I ... then I will ...		

Empty template PDP

3

## My Personal Development Plan - PDP

Extra tips: how can you positively impact the chances that you will reach your goals?

- Make sure the PDP document is stored in a place where it is easily reachable so you can use it as a 'working document'.
- Plan the follow up of your development goals, learning points in your calendar.
- Share this document with a colleague, mentor, buddy, coach, supervisor so they can support you and help you stay motivated.
- Dealing with setbacks. Through trial and error. It is perfectly normal that you experience setbacks. If it does not go as expected, start over again at the next opportunity.
- Intermediate monitoring of your goals. Some questions that can help you get started:
  - What is my level of progress? How far along am I in reaching my goals?
  - What elements, (success) factors made you get this far? How can you further build on these?
  - What were the bottlenecks/roadblocks you came across? What was standing between you and your goal?
  - Split your final goal into reachable smaller, intermediate steps.
  - What are your next steps, the follow-up for reaching your ultimate goal?

Some extra tips

4

## My Personal Development Plan - PDP – example of a concrete development goal

Below you can find an example of a personal development plan (PDP) that can help you to get started on getting your own goals clarified and get you into action.

- Reflections before getting started:
  - Past: As a master student, Tarik (he/him/his) combined the work for the sailing school with his studies and he managed quite well to do this.
  - Current situation: At present, Tarik seems to have too much responsibilities and seems to lose the overview. He doesn't always take the time to do the important things.
  - Future: He wants to finish his PhD successfully and that means he has to find a way to keep the overview, set priorities and understand which things he has to do when.

What is your concrete goal?	Describe as concretely as possible when you consider your development goal reached.	Formulated using the SMART principle?
Specific	Tarik wants to learn to set priorities, by gaining insight into time management principles. He wants to focus on the important tasks, so he will be able to finish his PhD successfully, give timely feedback to students, has his poster ready in time for (international) conferences, has his publications ready in time, ...	
Measurable	When he is able to keep the overview and set priorities, he knows he has achieved his goal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Meeting deadlines, drop of stress level because of good time management, clear view on priorities, students don't have to wait for feedback as long as they used to</li> <li>○ Certificate of participation to ADS course</li> </ul>	
Action oriented	see next box / Realistic: all the above is realistic (following a course, scheduling (regular) meetings), finding a buddy, ... / time-bound: Start next week and attain goal by December 2024.	
Action plan	Which actions do I undertake to reach my goal? In case of behavioural change: in which context, situation is this applicable? What am I going to do (differently)? If I ... then I will ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He will enroll for an ADS course on time management/ personal effectiveness.</li> <li>- He will schedule a meeting with his supervisor to inform him about the fact that he gets really stressed out by the situation.</li> <li>- He will propose that he discusses the priorities, ... on a regular basis with his supervisor.</li> <li>- He will search a buddy to challenge him and meet them on a regular basis.</li> <li>- He will plan follow-up moments in his agenda for self-reflection.</li> </ul>	

Example of a concrete PDP for a PhD researcher

Plan B	What can go wrong and how will you react? Go about it? If I ... then I will ... <p>When Tarik notices he does not succeed in meeting the deadlines, he will schedule a meeting with his supervisor to discuss the situation and ask for support. He will also ask for support, e.g. personal coaching on personal effectiveness.</p>
Possible roadblocks	What keeps you from doing this? What keeps you from taking action? (Competences - 'can I?', Knowledge? - 'do I know enough?', Motivation - 'do I want to?', Fear? - 'do I dare to?') If I ... then I will ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Share planning with buddy &amp; supervisor</li> <li>- Share with extra buffer time</li> <li>- Prioritization behaviour – plan with extra buffer time</li> <li>- Motivation: see the long term advantages of certain tasks</li> <li>- Not being assertive enough when supervisor gives you an extra assignment. Buy time to overthink an extra assignment and make a draft planning to discuss with supervisor</li> </ul>

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- Make use of the **SMART principles** when defining your development goals:

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<b>Measureable</b>	How can you measure that your goal is reached?
<b>Action oriented</b>	The goal has to be an invitation to action and call up on your energy. There has to be an action plan. Describe the result, not the effort. The goal should be formulated in a positive manner. E.g. Don't: I am not going to yell at him. Do: I will stay peaceful and tell my story calmly and constructively (behaviour: normal tone of voice, smiling, ...).
<b>Realistic</b>	Is the goal realistic but challenging enough? Is there an executable, actionable plan with an acceptable level of effort? Can you personally influence the defined goals?
<b>Timing</b>	Define a clear start date and finishing date. When will you start? What is the frequency of action? When is your goal reached? Tip: plan it in your agenda.

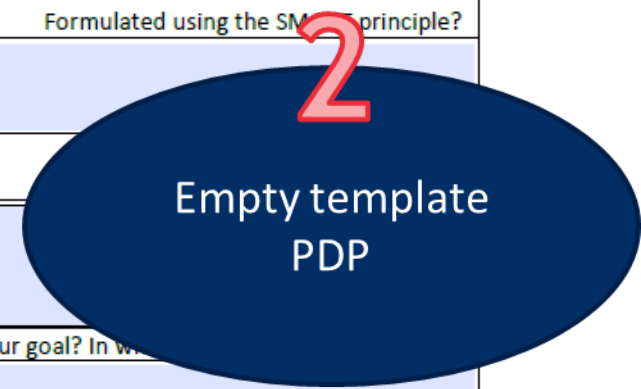
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1

Goals  
SMART principles  
Reflections before  
getting started

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Resources	What do you need to reach this goal? To be able to grow? Which resources and support do you need? Who can support you to attain your goal? In what way?
Frequency/ Deadline	Does this require a one-shot action? What is the deadline? In case of behavioural change: At what frequency do you take action? Weekly? Bi-weekly? Monthly? At each meeting with person x? <span style="float: right;">Planned in your agenda?</span>
Plan B	What can go wrong and how will you react? Go about it? If I ..., then I will...
Possible roadblocks	What keeps you from doing this? What keeps you from taking action? (Competences - 'can I?', Knowledge? - 'do I know enough?', Motivation - 'do I want to?', Fear? - 'do I dare to?') If I..., then I will...



## My Personal Development Plan - PDP

**Extra tips: how can you positively impact the chances that you will reach your goals?**



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- **Dealing with setbacks. Through trial and error.** It is perfectly normal that you experience some setbacks, it can't go well every day. Look at it as a learning process. If it does not go as expected, start over again at the next opportunity.
  
  - **Intermediate monitoring of your goals.** Some questions that can help you get started:
    - What is my level of progress? How far along am I in reaching my goals?
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    - What were the bottlenecks/roadblocks you came across? What was standing between you and your goal? How can you avoid this in the future?
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Template PDP – version 06.10.2023 – Talent Center University of Antwerp

4

Example of a concrete PDP for a PhD researcher



Resources	What do you need to reach this goal? To be able to grow? Which resources and support do you need? Who can support you to attain your goal? In what way? - ADS course on time management/ personal effectiveness (approval from supervisor) - Supervisor: support & feedback - Other team members could become his buddy and support and challenge him, give him feedback when needed or asked for
Frequency/ Deadline	Does this require a one-shot action? What is the deadline? In case of behavioural change: At what frequency do you take action? Weekly? Bi-weekly? Monthly? At each meeting with person x?  - Meeting will be scheduled before the end of the week. - Frequency of meetings with supervisor: three-weekly - Frequency of meetings with buddy: monthly - Timing of course: asap, if possible before summer in May or June  Planned in your agenda?
Plan B	What can go wrong and how will you react? Go about it? If I ..., then I will...  When Tarik notices he does not succeed in meeting the deadlines, giving timely feedback to students, ... -> re-evaluate planning, redefine priorities, he seeks support within his research group, e.g. asks feedback from buddy and supervisor, identifies where it went wrong through self-reflection. If this would not be enough, then he will seek one-on-one support, e.g. personal coaching on personal effectiveness.
Possible roadblocks	What keeps you from doing this? What keeps you from taking action? (Competences - 'can I?', Knowledge? - 'do I know enough?', Motivation - 'do I want to?', Fear? - 'do I dare to?') If I ..., then I will... - Share planning with buddy & supervisor - Plan with extra buffer time - Procrastination behaviour -> plan with extra buffer time - Motivation: see the long term advantages of certain tasks - Not being assertive enough when supervisor gives you an extra assignment: buy time to overthink an extra assignment and make a draft planning to discuss with supervisor

# So, what to do?

Reflection on your professional goal

SWOT analysis of your competences and skills

Reflection on how to develop your competences

Personal Development Plan – as concrete as possible!

Talk about it (with your promotor, colleagues, friends, family, ...)

Reflect and adjust

A first step in your career development!



# Let's get started on your own personal development plan

- **Pick one competence:**
  - Why do you want to work on this competence?
  - Are there any other resources you can think of?
  - Is there somebody else who knows more about this?
  - When do you plan to do that (e.g. register for a course, talk with ... , ...)?
  - What do you need to really do this?
  - ...
- be 'SMART'
- Use the template

# What after today?



## More information

- Develop **your PDP** and focus on the competences you need
- Discuss it with your **supervisor/mentor/buddy/...**
- Plan **reflection time** in your schedule
- More support needed?
  - **ADS course 'My Personal Development Plan as a PhD Researcher'** (a co-operation between ADS and the Talent Center) – 3x/year
- **ADS Website:** [www.uantwerpen.be/ads](http://www.uantwerpen.be/ads) (NL/Eng)
- **Talent Center:**  
<https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/projects/talent-center-early-career-research/>
- **PhD Talent Pool Flanders:** <https://phd-talents-be.jobteaser.com/>

## Any questions, remarks or suggestions?

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