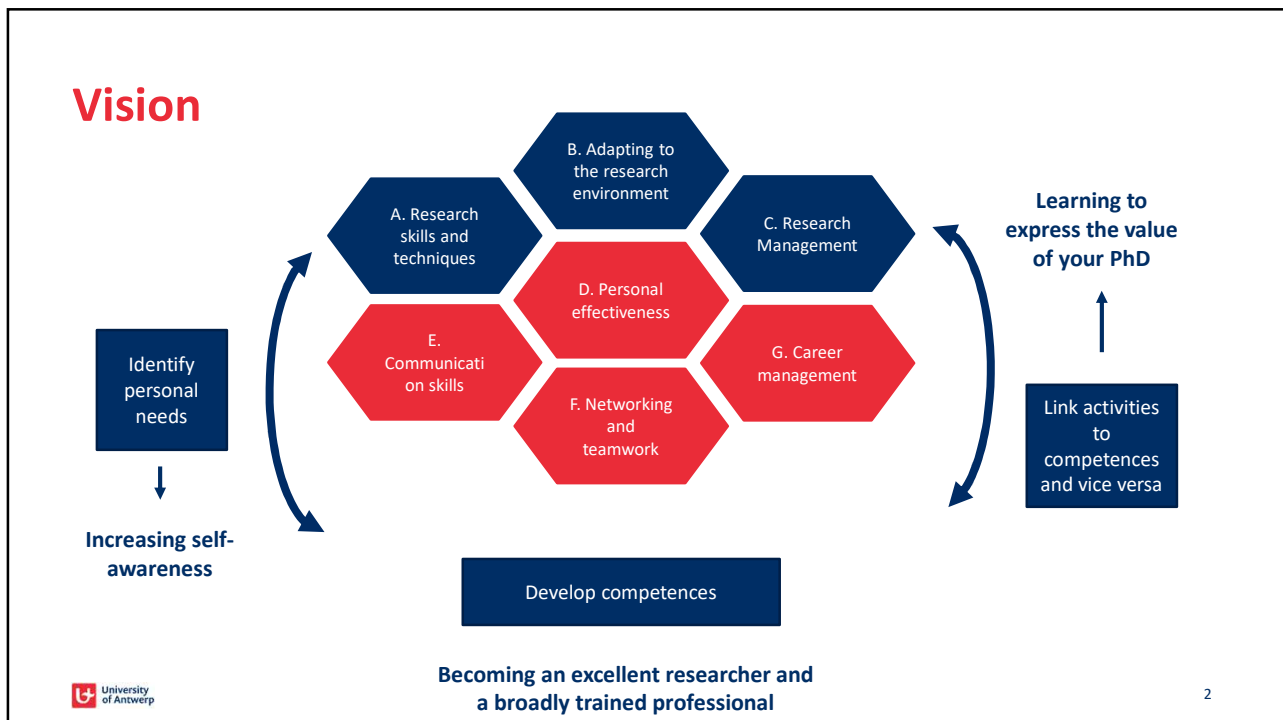


Personal development as a PhD researcher

Dr Karla Tersago
ADS Doctoral Day
11 March 2025

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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?



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)

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Where are you now?

- SWOT analysis






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Why setting professional goals?

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

7

S	M	A	R	T
				
SPECIFIC	MEASURABLE	ACTIONABLE	REALISTIC	TIMEBOUND
<p>Be clear and specific so your goals are easier to achieve. This also helps you know how and where to get started!</p>	<p>Measurable goals can be tracked, allowing you to see your progress. They also tell you when a goal is complete.</p>	<p>Are you able to take action to achieve the goal? Actionable goals ensure the steps to get there are within your control.</p>	<p>Avoid overwhelm and unnecessary stress and frustration by making the goal realistic.</p>	<p>A date helps us stay focused and motivated, inspiring us and providing something to work towards.</p>
SMART GOALS EXPLAINED				THE COACHING TOOLS COMPANY.COM

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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**



<https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/centres/antwerp-doctoral-school/doctoral-study-programme/>

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. Before 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 less questions can help you in the behavioural domain, the better. Describe behaviour that is observable, if it you could measure behavioural or not.
Measurable:	How can you measure that your goal is reached?
Action-oriented:	The goal has to be actionable to action and call up on your energy. The goal should be formulated in a positive manner. E.g. Don't be an over-ambitious behaviour (instead use of active writing, ...)
Realistic:	Is the goal realistic, but challenging enough? Is there an obstacle, which can you already influence the before goal?
Timing:	Define a clear start date and finishing date. When will you start? What is the frequency of action? When is your goal reached? Do you still do your research.

- Reflections before getting started
 - o **EQ1:** Where are you coming from? Which path did you already follow? How did this go in the past?
 - o **EQ2:** What obstacles (where are you today? What did you already know?)
 - o **EQ3:** 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)

Name: _____ Date: _____

What is your research/professional goal?	Describe as concretely as possible when you consider your goal reached.	Formulated using the SMART principles?
Deadline:	When do you want to have your goal reached? What is the deadline?	o Specific o Measurable o Realistic o Time-bound o Personal goal/subject?
Actions:	What is/are the (learning) activities do you undertake to reach your goal? (What are the sources of actions/ direction of your needs)	o Relevant o Feasible o Measurable o Time-bound o Personal goal/subject?
Resources:	What do you need to complete these actions? (What resources can support you to complete these actions?)	o Relevant o Feasible o Measurable o Time-bound o Personal goal/subject?
Monitor/feedback:	How do you know when you have reached your goal? (What steps can you take to monitor your progress?)	o Relevant o Feasible o Measurable o Time-bound o Personal goal/subject?
Plan B:	What could you do if you need to reach/reach your goal? (What alternative goal do you have in mind?)	

Empty template PDP

3

My Personal Development Plan - PDP

Extra tips: how can you possibly expect the chances that you will reach your goal?

- Make use of the PDP document in order to plan when it is most suitable as you can use it as a working document.
- Place the PDP in your development plan, making copies for your studies.
- Share the document with colleagues, mentors, family, peers, supervisor or those who support you in your research.
- Do not get stuck in setbacks. Through the setbacks, it is perfectly normal that you experience setbacks. It does not get in research, start over again at the next opportunity.
- Intermediate monitoring of your goals. Some questions that can help you get started:
 - o What is the level of progress? How far are you in reaching your goal?
 - o What are the obstacles? Can you overcome them? How do you overcome them?
 - o What are the resources? Can you use them? What are your strengths?
 - o What are the next steps? How do you plan to reach your goal?
 - o What are your next steps? How do you plan to reach your goal?

Some extra tips

4

My Personal Development Plan - PDP - example of a concrete development goal (exact sciences)


How can you use the concept of personal development plan (PDP) that can help you to get started on getting your own goals clarified and get on with the action.

- Reflections before getting started
 - o **EQ1:** As a former student, I have been involved in the world of research and I have been able to do this.
 - o **EQ2:** At present, I still seem to have too much responsibilities, and seems to have the time to do this.
 - o **EQ3:** I want to finish my PhD successfully and that means I have to find a way to keep the overview, set priorities and manage my time.

What is your research/professional goal?	Describe as concretely as possible when you consider your development goal reached.	Formulated using the SMART principles?
Deadline:	When do you want to have your goal reached? What is the deadline?	o Specific o Measurable o Realistic o Time-bound o Personal goal/subject?
Actions:	What is/are the (learning) activities do you undertake to reach your goal? (What are the sources of actions/ direction of your needs)	o Relevant o Feasible o Measurable o Time-bound o Personal goal/subject?
Resources:	What do you need to complete these actions? (What resources can support you to complete these actions?)	o Relevant o Feasible o Measurable o Time-bound o Personal goal/subject?
Monitor/feedback:	How do you know when you have reached your goal? (What steps can you take to monitor your progress?)	o Relevant o Feasible o Measurable o Time-bound o Personal goal/subject?
Plan B:	What could you do if you need to reach/reach your goal? (What alternative goal do you have in mind?)	

Example of a concrete PDP for a PhD researcher





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 that: what, whom, where, when, why, which? For behavioural changes: describe behaviour that is observable, as if you could record it with a video camera. It has to be an observable action, behaviour or result.
Measureable	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. 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, ...).
Realistic	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?
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.

1

- **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


Template PDP – version 24.05.2024 - Talent Center University of Antwerp


11

My Personal Development Plan (PDP)

Name: _____ Date: _____

What is your concrete (professional) goal?	Describe as concretely as possible when you consider your goal reached.		
Deadline	When do you want to have your goal reached? What is the deadline? If applicable: in case of habitual changes: for frequency of your actions: see action plan below		Formulated using the SMART principle? <input type="checkbox"/> Specific <input type="checkbox"/> Measureable <input type="checkbox"/> Actionable <input type="checkbox"/> Realistic <input type="checkbox"/> Time bound -> Planned in your agenda?
Action plan	Actions Which (multiple / recurring) actions do you undertake to reach your goal? <i>(Adapt the amount of actions in function of your needs.)</i>	Resources What do you need to complete these actions? Which resources and support do you need? Who can support you to complete these actions? In what way?	Timing / frequency <input type="checkbox"/> Time bound How often/frequently do you need to follow up on these actions? -> Planned in your agenda?
	Action 1:	Resources:	Frequency:
	Action X:	Resources:	Frequency:
Possible roadblocks	What (or who) 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?') How can you prevent and/or overcome this? (If I..., then I will...)		
Plan B	In what cases would you need to revise/reformulate your goal? What alternative goal do you have in mind?		

2
Empty template
PDP



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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 give you feedback.
- **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?
 - What elements, (success) factors made you get this far? How can you further strengthen this effect?
 - What were the bottlenecks/roadblocks you came across? What was standing between you and your goal? How can you avoid this in the future?
 - Split your final goal into reachable smaller, intermediate steps.
 - What are your next steps, the follow-up for reaching your ultimate goal?

Personal Development Plan: Template



My Personal Development Plan - PDP – example of a concrete development goal (exact sciences)

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/reach.	Formulated using the SMART principle?
	<p>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) conference, has his publications ready in time...</p> <p>Measurable: When he is able to keep the overview and set priorities, he knows he has achieved his goal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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 ○ Certificate of participation to ADS course <p>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.</p>	
Action plan	<p>Which actions do I undertake to reach my goal? to state of behavioural change... in which context, situation is this applicable? What am I going to do (difficult)? If... then I will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He will enroll for an ADS course on time management/ personal effectiveness. - He will schedule a meeting with his supervisor to inform him about the fact that he gets really stressed out by the situation. - He will propose that he discusses the priorities... on a regular basis with his supervisor. - He will search a buddy to challenge him and meet them on a regular basis. - He will plan follow-up moments in his agenda for self-reflection. 	
Resources	<p>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?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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 	

Template PDP – version 24.05.2024 - Talent Center University of Antwerp

Frequency/ Deadline	Does this require a one-shot action? What is the deadline? In case of behavioural change: In what frequency do you take action? (weekly? Bi-weekly? Monthly)? At each meeting with person x?	Planned in your agenda?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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: see if possible before summer in May or June 	
Plan B	<p>What can go wrong and how will you react? Go about it? If... then I will...</p> <p>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. still 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.</p>	
Realize roadblocks	<p>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... then I will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Procrastination behaviour => plan with extra buffer time - Lack of 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?



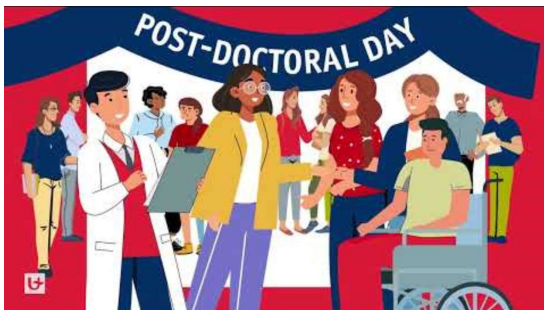
Next steps

- 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

More information

- **ADS Website:** 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/>

Some final inspiration



Talent Center



Careers beyond academia



 University of Antwerp