


If You are Serious About Impact, Create a Personal Impact Development Plan

Business & Society
2022, Vol. 61(4) 818–826
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DOI: 10.1177/00076503211014482
journals.sagepub.com/home/bas



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Summary

To achieve impact, academics need to create personal impact development plans, focused on what and on whom to have an impact and the necessary competencies to do so. Profession and university leaders play a critical role in the successful implementation of such plans.

Keywords

business and society, career advancement, human resources, performance, scholarly impact

An aspiration of most business researchers and educators is to have impact not only on academia (i.e., on theory, other researchers, educators, and students), but also on business and society (Aguinis et al., 2021). How can we turn this aspiration into a reality? Achieving this lofty goal will require purposeful planning and execution. We argue that theory and research in human resource management and performance management can help us address this challenge. Specifically, there is a substantial body of evidence showing that personal development plans are effective tools for improving individual

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performance (Aguinis, 2019). A typical individual performance development plan highlights strengths and areas in need of development—and includes an action plan for further developing these strengths and improving on weaknesses. We build upon this literature to introduce the new concept of *personal impact development plans* (PIDPs). Next, we describe why PIDPs are needed, their content, activities, and the role of profession and university leaders in their successful implementation.

Personal Impact Development Plans: Why We Need Them

PIDPs can be created by researchers and educators ranging from doctoral students to senior professors. Regardless of position and career stage, as is the case for performance in general, PIDPs are needed because there is always room for improving impact. A good PIDP allows business researchers and educators to answer questions such as:

1. How can I continually learn to increase my scholarly impact in the next year and how can I increase it in the future?
2. How can I avoid unsatisfactory impact from the past and what are barriers to enhancing my scholarly impact?
3. Where am I now and where would I like to be in terms of my impact journey?

As we describe in the next section, these questions are answered by targeting three pairs of *impact competencies* (Akkermans et al., 2015):

Reflective impact competencies: Being aware of one's impact. First, *reflection on motivation for impact* refers to reflecting on values, passions, and motivations regarding one's impact. You should ask yourself: On whom do I want to have impact and why? Second *reflection on impact qualities* refers to reflection on strengths, shortcomings, and skills regarding one's impact. You should ask: What are my skills, or lack thereof, regarding my impact?

Communicative impact competencies: Being able to effectively communicate with different stakeholders. First, *networking for impact* refers to cultivating and leveraging a network of a variety of stakeholders for impact-related purposes. That is, ask yourself the question: Do I interact with the people and groups I want to impact? Second, *impact circulating* refers to disseminating research through different channels such as social media, traditional media, and practitioner outlets. In other words, you should ask: Have I published and disseminated my research in outlets available beyond the academic community?

Behavioral impact competencies: Being able to shape one's impact by taking action and being proactive. First, *impact exploration* refers to actively exploring and searching for impact opportunities inside and outside academic circles. You should ask yourself: Am I scanning the environment looking for ways to increase my impact? Second, *impact control* refers to actively influencing learning and work processes related to one's impact by setting goals and planning how to reach these goals. The question you should ask yourself is: Am I learning new skills that will increase my impact in the future?

Now, pause for a few minutes and give yourself some time to think honestly about each of the six competencies by answering the questions we asked above. Where do you stand regarding those impact competencies? What are your weakest competencies? Now, take a deep breath and realize that if you are serious about increasing your scholarly impact, creating, and implementing a PIDP will help you get there.

Personal Impact Development Plans: Overall Content

What does a PIDP look like? Figure 1 includes a template. First, it includes which specific impact competencies are targeted. Second, it includes illustrations of developmental activities to target each competency. Third, it includes examples of resources and support needed. Finally, the PIDP includes a time frame for each developmental activity as well as evidence of development. That is, to what extent has progress been made, and how do we know that this is the case?

Personal Impact Development Plans: Developmental Activities

Clearly, PIDP activities are dependent on a university's strategic goals and objectives and also on resources that may or may not be available. The PIDP template in Figure 1 includes illustrative developmental activities such as the following:

- *On-the-job training.* Individuals are paired with a more experienced and impactful peer who designs a formal on-the-job training course. The design of these "mini-training programs" includes how many hours a day or week training will take place and specific impact learning objectives. For doctoral students, this can take the form of a seminar or workshop on impact.

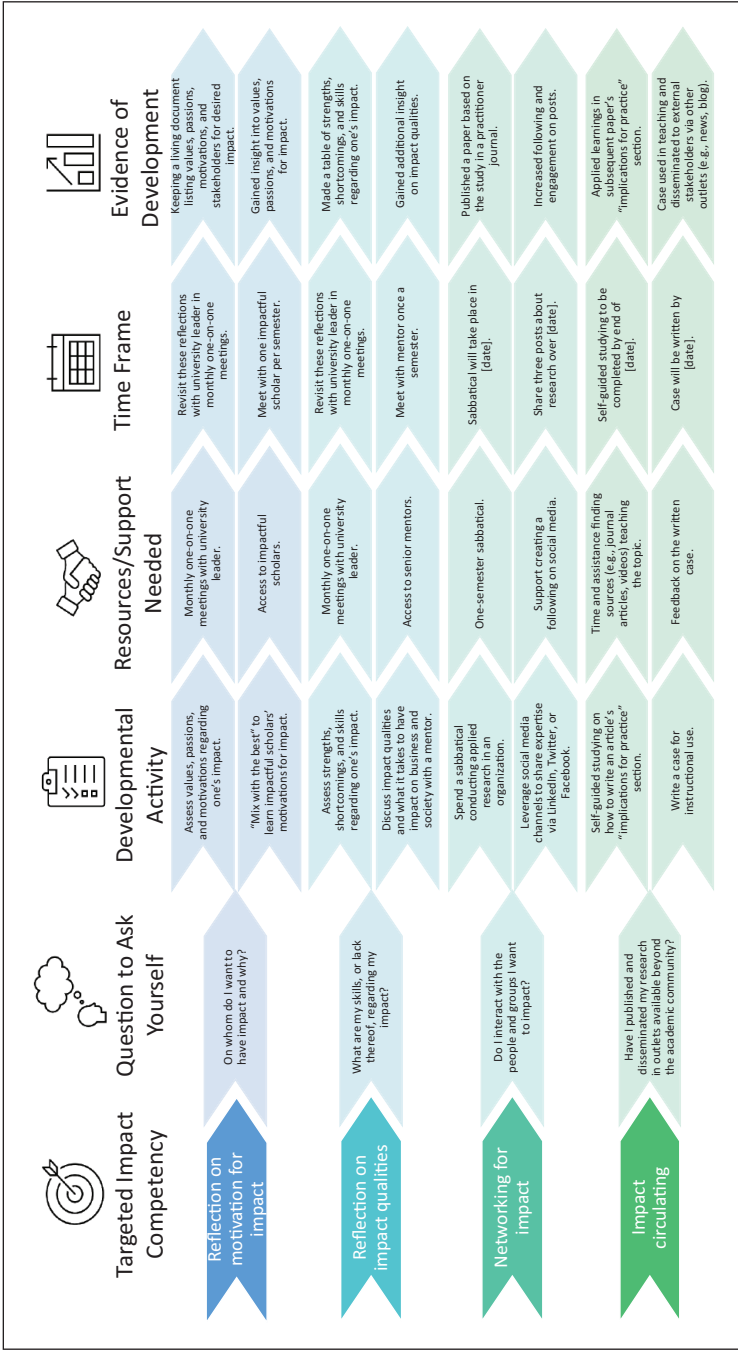


Figure 1. (continued)

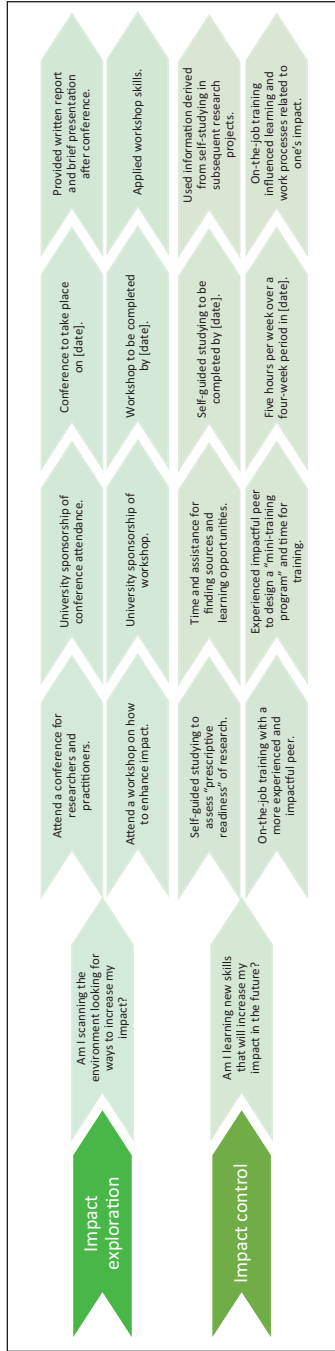


Figure 1. Personal Impact Development Plan (PIDP): Template.

- *Assessing “prescriptive readiness” of research.* Clearly, not all research will be readily applicable and potentially have impact on societal issues and their relation to business. For example, exploratory research is less likely to result in clear implications and prescriptions. Assessing prescriptive readiness involves researchers learning the different stages of prescriptive evidence: exploratory, preliminary, option, guideline, and standard (Banks et al., 2021).
- *Mixing with the best.* Having an opportunity to meet or work with highly impactful scholars provides important learning opportunities.

The PIDP template in Figure 1 can be adapted based on an individual’s context and needs. For example, a PIDP may include just two of the six competencies. Similarly, developmental activities and associated needed resources, as well as time frames and evidence of development, can also be adapted and/or added given a particular context. Moreover, an individual’s PIDP should be reviewed on an annual basis and updated based on having reached high levels of expertise in certain competencies but not others.

Personal Impact Development Plans: Role of Context and Profession and University Leaders

As the performance management literature demonstrates, development plans are unlikely to be effective, or put in place in the first place, without a supportive context. Thus, successful implementation of PIDPs requires the active involvement of leaders in the profession (e.g., elected officers, journal editors). Intrinsic motivation to increase business researchers’ and educators’ impact is certainly important, but there is a need for reward and compensation systems to acknowledge impact explicitly. Otherwise, we would fall into the proverbial folly of “rewarding A [exclusive impact on theory and research] while hoping for B [impact on societal issues and their relation to business].” Accordingly, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to successfully implement PIDPs if professional organizations, journals, and faculty reward and promotion systems do not define, measure, and reward scholarly impact more broadly. For example, if journal editors do not encourage authors to include text in their articles explaining their study’s impact on societal issues and their relation to business, it is unlikely they will do so. Or, authors will do so only in passing without too much detail or substance (Bartunek & Rynes, 2010).

At a local level, university leaders such as area heads, department chairs, associate deans, and deans have an important role in creating and implementing

a faculty member's PIDP. This starts by serving as role models: *university leaders should have their own PIDPs as well*. Doing so will also help university leaders understand the process from the faculty member's perspective, anticipate potential roadblocks and defensive attitudes, and create PIDPs for faculty members in a collaborative fashion.

We argue that university leaders play the following six roles in the development and implementation of PIDPs:

1. Explaining what is required of the individual to reach a required impact level.
2. Referring to appropriate developmental activities.
3. Reviewing and making suggestions about developmental objectives.
4. Checking on the individual's progress toward developmental objective achievement (i.e., "evidence of development" in Figure 1).
5. Removing barriers to progress when possible.
6. Offering the opportunity for regular check-ins and reinforcing positive behaviors.

A useful tool for university leaders to perform the aforementioned functions is the *feedforward interview* (FFI), which involves a meeting between the faculty member and university leader to understand what competencies individuals possess that allow them to achieve a high level of impact and how to use these competencies in other contexts to make further improvements in the future. The FFI goes as follows (Kluger & Nir, 2010):

1. *Eliciting a success story*. The university leader asks for: "A story about an event during which you felt you had a very high degree of impact on societal issues and their relation to business."
2. *Uncover the underlying impact success factors*. The second step involves understanding the factors that led to the success story: "What were some of the things you did or did not do, such as your specific personal strengths and capabilities, that made this impact success story possible?"
3. *Extrapolating the past into the future*. The third step involves asking questions that will identify an individual's ability to replicate the conditions that led to high impact from the past into the future: "Think about your current actions, priorities, and plans for the near future (e.g., next week, month, or quarter) and tell me how you think you may be able to replicate these conditions to be able to achieve the same level of impact as you did before."

University leaders play a key role in facilitating conditions for the successful implementation of PIDPs. But, leaders will not be fully engaged in the process if they themselves do not believe in the importance of impact. Also, leaders will not be fully engaged if they are not acknowledged for their efforts in helping faculty members increase their impact. Thus, the evaluation of leaders' performance should also include the extent to which they have been instrumental in helping faculty members increase their impact.

Increasing Impact: It's a Journey

Achieving impact on societal issues and their relation to business will not happen automatically or haphazardly. Using PIDPs, researchers and educators can engage in strategic and purposeful planning to increase their impact. We are fully aware that the effective implementation of PIDPs will depend on whether professional organizations, journals, and universities implement rewards and other support systems that motivate individuals to engage in activities to increase their impact. We are hopeful that given increased demand for accountability and contributions to society, we will continue to work on improving our collective impact. Impact is not a destination—it's a journey.

Acknowledgments

We thank Hari Bapuji and Frank de Bakker for highly constructive comments on previous drafts. Also, we are grateful for the feedback on the new concept of personal impact development plans at research seminars presented at the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business at American University in Beirut, Brunel Business School at Brunel University London, and Kogod School of Business at American University (Washington, DC). This article is based in part on concepts regarding personal development plans as described in Aguinis (2019) *Performance management* (4th edition), Chicago Business Press.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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