



Early Career Capability Development Tracker

A structured, practical tool for mid- to senior-level professionals who manage, mentor, or sponsor early career talent — and want to do it with rigour, consistency, and measurable impact.



What This Tracker Covers

This resource is organised into six core sections, each designed to be used independently or as part of a full development cycle. Together, they form a complete system for tracking early career growth from onboarding through to readiness for the next level.

1

Foundation Setup

Define the role, competencies, and success markers for your early career professional.

2

Capability Assessment

Baseline and periodic assessments across technical, behavioural, and leadership domains.

3

Goal Setting

SMART goals tied directly to capability gaps and business priorities.

4

Action Planning

Monthly development activities with clear owners, timelines, and resources.

5

Progress Review

Structured check-in templates for 30-60-90 day and quarterly reviews.

6

Readiness Evaluation

Final assessment framework to determine promotion or next-level readiness.

SECTION 1

Foundation Setup: Defining the Development Context

Before any development tracking can begin, you need a clear and agreed-upon picture of what "good" looks like for this individual in this role. Skipping this step is the single most common reason development plans fail — people track activity instead of progress.

Use the table below as a structured template to document the foundation for each early career professional you are supporting. Complete this in the first week of onboarding or at the start of a new development cycle.

Field	Guidance / Prompt
Name & Role Title	Full name and current job title. Include team and reporting line.
Start Date	Date they joined the role or the development programme began.
Development Horizon	What is the target timeframe? (e.g. 6 months, 12 months, 18 months)
Role Expectations Summary	In 3–5 bullet points, what are the core outputs expected in this role?
Key Stakeholders	Who else is involved in this person's development? (Mentor, HR, skip-level manager)
Primary Development Focus	Is the main priority: technical skills, communication, ownership, or stakeholder management?
Known Strengths (at entry)	What has already been observed or evidenced as a strength?
Known Development Areas	What gaps were identified at intake? (From interview, onboarding, or prior feedback)



Manager Tip: Share this completed foundation document with the individual themselves. Development is most effective when it is a two-way, transparent conversation — not something done to them.

Capability Assessment Framework

This section gives you a structured way to assess capability across the three domains that matter most for early career professionals: **technical skills**, **behavioural competencies**, and **professional effectiveness**. Rate each item on a 1–4 scale at baseline, mid-point, and end-of-cycle.

Rating Scale Reference

1 — Not Yet Demonstrated

Skill has not been observed or is significantly below expectations for the role level.

2 — Developing

Skill is emerging. Requires close guidance, makes errors, but shows intent to improve.

3 — Proficient

Skill is consistently demonstrated with minimal supervision. Meets role expectations.

4 — Exceeds Expectations

Skill is demonstrated at a level beyond the current role. Coaches others or drives innovation.

How to Use This Framework

- Complete the baseline assessment in week 1–2, before any formal development begins
- Reassess at the mid-point (typically month 3 or 6, depending on your cycle)
- Complete the final assessment at end-of-cycle to measure total delta
- Always gather self-assessment data from the individual before your own manager rating
- Look for patterns across domains — a low score on communication often explains a low score on stakeholder management
- Focus development energy on **2–3 priority areas**, not all gaps simultaneously

Capability	Baseline (1–4)	Mid-Point (1–4)	End of Cycle (1–4)
TECHNICAL DOMAIN			
Core functional / domain knowledge			
Tool and systems proficiency			
Quality and accuracy of output			
Problem-solving and analytical thinking			
BEHAVIOURAL DOMAIN			
Communication (written and verbal)			
Proactivity and self-direction			
Collaboration and team contribution			
Receiving and acting on feedback			
Resilience under pressure or ambiguity			
PROFESSIONAL EFFECTIVENESS			
Stakeholder management and communication			
Ownership and accountability for deliverables			
Time management and prioritisation			
Building visibility and professional reputation			

SECTION 3

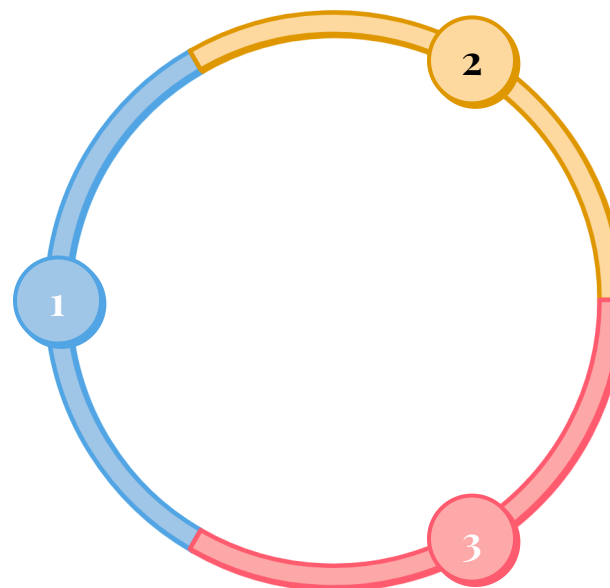
SMART Goal Setting Template

Goals are the bridge between a capability gap and real change. Without clearly written goals, development plans become wishlists. This section provides a structured template for setting 2–4 SMART development goals per cycle, each tied directly to an identified capability gap from the assessment in Section 2.

Limit goals to a maximum of four per cycle. Early career professionals who are given too many goals at once typically make meaningful progress on none of them. Prioritise ruthlessly. A good development goal describes **what** will change, **how** you will know it has changed, and **by when** it needs to happen.

Goal 1 — Template

- **Capability area targeted:** (e.g. Written Communication)
- **Specific goal statement:** "By [date], I will be able to [observable behaviour or outcome]..."
- **Success measure:** How will you know this has been achieved? What evidence will exist?
- **Key activities:** What 2–3 specific actions will drive progress? (courses, projects, feedback cycles)
- **Support needed:** What does the manager / mentor need to do to enable this?
- **Target date:** Specific date, not "end of year"



Goal 2 — Template

- **Capability area targeted:**
- **Specific goal statement:**
- **Success measure:**
- **Key activities:**
- **Support needed:**
- **Target date:**

Goal 3 — Template

- **Capability area targeted:**
- **Specific goal statement:**
- **Success measure:**
- **Key activities:**
- **Support needed:**
- **Target date:**

Example: "By the end of Q2, Priya will independently draft and send client-facing project update emails with no more than one round of manager review, as evidenced by a manager review log. Currently, all emails require two or more rounds of revision."

SECTION 4

Monthly Action Plan

Goals without action plans are aspirations. This monthly planner translates each development goal into concrete weekly and monthly activities. Use one table per month, updating it in your regular 1:1 or dedicated development check-in. The manager's role here is to remove blockers, not to do the work for the individual.

Each action should be specific enough that both the manager and the individual can independently verify whether it was completed. Vague entries like "improve communication" should be replaced with "complete one structured written brief for the Thursday team meeting and share for feedback with [name] by Wednesday."

Week	Planned Activity	Linked Goal	Owner	Status / Notes
Week 1	e.g. Shadow senior analyst on client call; note 3 observations on stakeholder communication style	Goal 1 — Stakeholder Mgmt	Individual + Manager	
Week 2	e.g. Draft first solo project brief; share with manager for structured feedback session	Goal 2 — Written Comms	Individual	
Week 3	e.g. Lead 15-min segment in team meeting; self-assess confidence and clarity afterwards	Goal 3 — Presentation Skills	Individual	
Week 4	e.g. Monthly development review: review goal progress, update tracker, identify blockers	All Goals	Manager + Individual	

✓ Best Practices for Action Planning

- Link every activity back to a named goal — no orphan tasks
- Assign clear ownership: individual, manager, or joint
- Include at least one stretch activity per month
- Review and update the plan at the start of each month, not just at the end
- Celebrate completion of activities — momentum matters

⚠ Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Scheduling development activities but never protecting time for them
- Only listing training courses — exclude 70% real work experience
- Skipping the monthly review when workloads increase
- Making every activity manager-led rather than individual-driven
- Treating the plan as a document to file rather than a live tool

SECTION 5

30–60–90 Day Progress Review Template

Structured reviews at regular intervals are what separate development trackers that actually work from those that gather dust. Use this template to run focused, evidence-based reviews at the 30, 60, and 90-day marks. Each review should take no more than 30–45 minutes and should always start with the individual's self-assessment before the manager shares observations.



The 30–60–90 cadence is particularly powerful for early career professionals because it catches misalignment early, before it becomes a performance issue. Research consistently shows that the first 90 days set the trajectory for the entire tenure in a role.

Review Stage	Manager Reflection Prompts	Individual Self-Reflection Prompts
30-Day Check-In	What early signals of capability have you observed? Where has the individual surprised you (positively or negatively)? Are expectations clearly understood?	What has felt most challenging so far? What do you wish you had known on Day 1? Where have you felt most confident?
60-Day Review	Is progress on the 2–4 priority goals visible? What behaviours have you observed changing? What is still stuck? Do any goals need to be revised?	Which goal are you making the most progress on? Where are you stuck and why? What support are you not getting that would help?
90-Day Assessment	What is the overall capability delta from baseline? Is the individual on track for end-of-cycle readiness? What does the next 90 days need to focus on?	What are you most proud of in this period? What would you do differently? What capability are you most focused on building next?

 **Pro Tip:** Ask the individual to complete their self-reflection section in writing 24 hours before the review meeting. This creates a richer, more honest conversation — and develops the individual's capacity for self-assessment, which is itself a critical capability.

SECTION 6

Readiness Evaluation: Next-Level Assessment

The final section of the tracker is the most consequential: determining whether an early career professional is ready to move to the next level, take on greater ownership, or be considered for promotion. This evaluation should be grounded entirely in evidence from the development cycle — observations, output quality, behaviour change, and stakeholder feedback. Avoid recency bias; use the full cycle data.

This is not a performance review. It is a capability and readiness assessment. The distinction matters. Someone can be performing well in their current role but not yet ready for the next level — and vice versa. Be explicit about which question you are answering.

1

Ready Now

Consistently demonstrates capabilities at or above current level. Has taken on stretch work successfully. Stakeholder feedback is positive. Clear evidence of growth from baseline.

2

Nearly Ready

Strong progress in most areas. One or two capability gaps remain. With targeted support and a defined timeline (e.g. 3 months), readiness is achievable. Specific conditions should be documented.

3

Not Yet Ready

Significant gaps remain in one or more critical capability areas. Development plan needs to be reset with increased intensity, clearer milestones, and potentially additional support resources.

Readiness Dimension	Evidence / Observations	Rating: Ready / Nearly / Not Yet
Technical capability at next-level standard		
Demonstrated ownership and accountability		
Communication and stakeholder management		
Self-direction and reduced supervision required		
Peer and stakeholder feedback quality		
Resilience and adaptability under pressure		
Overall Readiness Rating		

Real-World Scenarios: How to Use This Tracker

Theory is useful. Examples are essential. Below are three common early career development scenarios and how to apply this tracker in each context. These scenarios are drawn from typical manager challenges across professional services, technology, and corporate functions.

Scenario A: The High-Potential Who Struggles to Communicate

Arjun joined as a data analyst six months ago. His technical output is excellent, but he struggles to explain findings to non-technical stakeholders and frequently receives feedback that his updates are "too detailed" or "hard to follow." His manager uses Section 2 to rate him 4 on technical skills and 2 on stakeholder communication, then sets a focused Goal 1 in Section 3: "By end of Q3, Arjun will independently present monthly data summaries to the marketing team using structured narratives, with positive feedback from at least two stakeholders." The monthly plan includes shadowing, a communication workshop, and two practice presentations with structured debriefs.

Scenario B: The Proactive Professional Who Lacks Depth

Meera is eager, collaborative, and well-liked by her team. But after four months, her manager notices she frequently moves quickly between tasks without the depth or rigour needed for client-facing work. The foundation document (Section 1) flags "quality and accuracy of output" as a concern. Her development plan focuses on slowing down, building peer review habits, and using a structured quality checklist for deliverables. The 60-day review catches an early behaviour change — she now self-corrects before submitting work — and the plan is adjusted to stretch her with a solo client deliverable.

Scenario C: The Near-Ready Professional Preparing for Promotion

Rohan has been in his current role for 14 months and is performing well. His manager uses the readiness evaluation (Section 6) to document evidence across all six dimensions. Two gaps emerge: he has not yet managed a junior team member and has limited cross-functional stakeholder experience. The manager designs a specific 90-day plan to address these gaps — assigning Rohan to buddy-mentor a new joiner and lead a cross-functional project workstream. The next readiness evaluation is scheduled for three months later, at which point the promotion case will be formally documented.

Quick Reference: Cheat Sheet for Managers

Use this as your go-to reference throughout the development cycle. Print it, pin it, or keep it open during your 1:1s.

Development Cycle Calendar

- **Week 1–2:** Complete Foundation Setup (Section 1) + Baseline Assessment (Section 2)
- **Week 2–3:** Co-create SMART Goals (Section 3) with the individual
- **Month 1–3:** Run monthly action planning (Section 4); hold weekly or fortnightly 1:1s
- **Day 30:** First structured progress check-in (Section 5)
- **Day 60:** Mid-cycle review; reassess ratings and adjust plan if needed
- **Day 90:** Full 90-day assessment; update capability ratings
- **End of cycle:** Readiness Evaluation (Section 6) + next cycle planning

Manager Habits That Drive Results

- Always start reviews with the individual's self-assessment — resist the urge to lead
- Give specific, evidence-based feedback: cite what you saw, heard, or read
- Protect development time as rigorously as you protect project deadlines
- Focus on 2–3 capability priorities per cycle — more goals = less progress
- Document observations in real time, not just at review moments
- Celebrate progress explicitly — early career professionals often underestimate their own growth
- Involve the individual in updating their own tracker — ownership drives accountability

2–4

Goals per cycle

The ideal number of focused development goals for meaningful progress without overwhelm.

3

Domains assessed

Technical, Behavioural, and Professional Effectiveness — the full capability picture.

90

Days to trajectory

The first 90 days set the development trajectory for the entire role tenure.

6

Tracker sections

From foundation setup through readiness evaluation — a complete development system.

Key Takeaways & Next Steps

This tracker is designed to be used, not archived. The most effective development happens when it is systematic, transparent, and consistently prioritised — even when (especially when) business pressures are high. Here is what to do immediately after downloading this resource.

→ **Start with one person**

Pick one early career professional on your team and complete the Foundation Setup (Section 1) before your next 1:1. Do not wait to build a perfect process before beginning.

→ **Run a baseline assessment this month**

Use the capability assessment table in Section 2 to establish a baseline for that individual. Share your ratings with them and ask for their self-assessment. Compare and discuss.

→ **Set 2–3 SMART goals together**

Use the template in Section 3 to co-create goals — not assign them. An individual who helped write the goal is far more likely to pursue it with energy and commitment.

→ **Diarise the 30–60–90 reviews now**

Before you close this document, open your calendar and block the three review dates. Development reviews that are not pre-scheduled are the first to be cancelled.

→ **Revisit and iterate every cycle**

At the end of each 90-day cycle, review what worked and what did not. Adapt the tracker to your team's rhythm, culture, and the individual's pace of growth. This is a living tool.

The best development managers do not have all the answers — they ask the right questions, create the right conditions, and stay consistently present. This tracker is your scaffolding. The human relationship is the work.