

Renegotiating a Placement

Objectives

To guide you in preparing for a contracting meeting or meetings

Relevance

This would be most relevant to those renegotiating a placement with their supervisor

Specific Outcomes

The development of set of questions to consider regarding when to contract and the basis for recontracting

“I was embarrassed about needing to recontract and left it later than I should have. The actual recontracting stage wasn’t uncomfortable at all, and it wasn’t a big deal rather it was a casual chat with my line manager about what could be done and I went away with a better alignment between the projects goals and tasks. The newly negotiated tasks out of all my outputs received more positive feedback”
PHD Student

One of the few things you can be certain of in placements is that things will change. Whilst we try to look into our crystal balls when contracting to predict how the placement is going to go, there will almost always be unanticipated factors that mean recontracting is necessary. Typically this is done in an informal manner in project update meetings. But sometimes you may need to develop a more thoughtful approach to recontracting. This worksheet is designed to help you identify an issue (when it is not clear), and give you some options to consider when recontracting when it you aren’t sure what needs to happen.

When to re-contract

The first and perhaps hardest step in re-contracting is realising that you need to recontract. To help you identify if you need to recontract, you might like to fill out this cognitive appraisal questionnaire. Focus on either specific tasks or projects, or the placement overall. Write down a number from 1 (strongly disagree) through to 7 strongly agree for each statement.

Cognitive Appraisal Scale	
It will help me to learn a lot	
It will make the experience educational	
It will show me I can do something new	
It will keep me focused on doing well	
	Challenge Total
It will hinder any achievements I might have	
It will restrict my capabilities	
It will limit how well I can do	
It will prevent me from mastering difficult aspects of the work	
	Hindrance Total

“One of the most useful things I have developed during the placement process is having an awareness of how I frame my placement tasks. When I was appraising tasks negatively the quality of my delivery was much weaker and I was a lot more stressed. However, once I became aware of this I could talk to my supervisor, seek support and get creative in finding the solutions and reasons for this negative appraisal”
Masters Student

Challenge or Hindrance?

Look at your totals for the two subscales and decide if you are seeing the task, project or placement as a challenge or a threat (14 is a neutral score). A challenge is generally a good thing, and generally goes hand in hand with engagement and active learning. Whilst you'll be working hard, the stress that you'll be feeling is more positive. It's when you are viewing your task, project or placement as a threat or hindrance that you might like to think about recontracting. The first step in doing that is to figure out why you have a more negative appraisal.

Why is it a hindrance?

Hindrance appraisal generally occurs when you feel like you don't have the resources to meet your demands. You might like to consider the following questions that identify typical reasons for hindrance appraisal.

- Role ambiguity. Do I understand my role, project or task?
- Role over/under-load. Do I have too much or too little to do?
- Role conflict. Is there a conflict between how I need to behave in your different roles? (an example is when your ethical obligations and organisational obligations conflict)
- Supervisor support. Am I getting enough technical support? Enough professional mentoring?
- Organisational Support. Do I have the support and resources that I need from the organisation?
- University/Colleague Support. Do I have the support of the university, classmates and/or team members?
- KSAOs. Do I have the required knowledge, skills, abilities or personal characteristics for the role?
- Time. Do I have enough time?

Recontracting

Recontracting is a very normal occurrence, and usually doesn't require overthinking the issues. Sometimes though, you can feel uneasy and so using either the above challenge/hindrance appraisal process can help you to gain insight into where these issues are coming from. By understanding exactly what you need to feel good about this placement, you can now go on to recontracting your placement, in a formal or informal sense. If you choose to go formal, perhaps you might like to go through the associated contracting worksheet to develop an agenda for the meeting.

Examples of outcomes of recontracting include:

- Gaining clarification on your role, tasks and responsibilities
- Gaining additional mentoring or technical support
- Organising to spend time researching to gain the knowledge you need
- Gaining access to additional and a greater variety of opportunities or conversely reducing your workload
- Gaining the resources you need to complete the project from the organisation

Conclusion

The old saying "the best laid schemes of mice and men" is a phrase that really captures the fact that you can't predict the future and your contracting (and recontracting) will not stay relevant for very long. A key skill we all need to learn is to adapt to the inevitable failure of our plans by actively working to stay on the same page. Sometimes that is done with a quick chat, sometimes (and especially when contracting hasn't been done well in the first place) you have to go much deeper. This worksheet has been designed to help you gain insight into some of the more in depth recontracting needs you may experience.

"When I found myself in the recontracting phase of placement I was nervous that perhaps I had done something wrong to cause the recontracting. But I realised that recontracting is actually very normal. Not only does it benefit my growth as a young professional, but it also benefits the organisation. Which is after all is the reason why we are all here in the first place..."
PHD Student

"When I think of recontracting now compared to when I first started I am excited, because I know this is another chance to develop some really important skills and show my supervisor and placement organisation what I can do"
PHD Student