

Doing, being and becoming – the synergetic relationship of occupational therapy principles and employability

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Employability – what is it?

There have been endless debates over the definition of employability, but there is a consensus that it is more than a set of skills, and includes attributes knowledge and experiences and to take an holistic approach. Employability is unique to each individual, an important part of career development and is a life-long and life wide journey that we are all on. Employability is not employment – employability is the journey with multiple destinations of employment along the way in our careers (Taylor, 2016).

We all need to take ownership of our own employability to know who we are, what we have to offer and what we want in relation to our employability and career development. My ethos as Associate Dean for Employability has always been to support students in their employability throughout their studies from day one, so they know and can evidence their individual employability, to apply for jobs that are more meaningful to them as individuals rather than just applying for any job. That is not to mean that the “perfect job” exists, and you need to hold out until it comes along. It is about an awareness of your individual employability journey and what is important to you, exploring opportunities that exist to match some of your individual core requirements for meaningful employment. It is important to consider how you will maintain occupational balance and ensure a work life and health balance given your own personal circumstances. Compromises often need to be made in your employability journey to achieve career aspirations. The process of self-discovery of what you have to offer and want to achieve in your career, is important to consider alongside any compromises that you are willing to consider in life more widely.

The relationship between employability and occupation

It is striking to consider the similarities of the ethos of life long and life wide employability to the concept and theoretical underpinning of Occupational Therapy. Meaningful activity is important as part of your occupational balance. We spend a lot of our lives in our employment so that needs to be meaningful to you. Occupational balance is so individualised

and highlights the importance of you having a clear sense of your own occupational identity – who are you and what have you got that you want to offer the world of work and wider society? Your individual occupational identity needs to be married with your professional identity as an occupational therapist. Occupational Therapists have “macro” professional identities as Occupational Therapists which are more prescriptive with professional standards and guidance from the Royal College of Occupational Therapists and the Health and Care Professions Council. However, in a world of changing health and social care - “micro” nuanced professional identities need to be developed by individuals at a local level. Multiple facets contribute to your individual employability alongside the more generic skills that all Occupational Therapists can demonstrate. Terminology such as “person centred” and “holistic” approaches rolls off the tongues of Occupational Therapists, but have we ever considered a person centred and holistic approach to our own and other’s employability?

Transformative learning

Transformative learning plays a part in facilitating you to be able to translate learning into a shift in your values and identities, which all contribute to your employability. The process of doing being and becoming (Wilcock, 1999) resonates with the process of employability and career development for us all. You need to be supported in your process of transformative learning, to recognise how everything you do contributes to who you are, establishing what is meaningful to you and what you have to offer within the work context. This support can be achieved through supervision and reflection. Reflection is a key part of an Occupational Therapist’s personal and professional journey and is also key in the process of employability. A widely used

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Key aspects of the USEM model of employability (Yorke and Knight, 2006)		
		Explanation
U	Understanding	Subject understanding
S	Skills	Including key skills and also known as skilful practice
E	Efficiency beliefs	Personal qualities and a belief that you can make a difference
M	Metacognition	To reflect upon learning and make/implement action plans as a result

employability model within higher education is the USEM model of employability.

The USEM model acknowledges the multiple facets of employability, appreciating not only the importance of understanding, skills and qualities and attributes – but the reflection on these and the transformative learning achieved as a result of the reflection. Reflection supports you to consider your personal and professional development and aspirations and is a crucial element of life long and life wide employability, and not just for students (Taylor, 2021).

Doing, being and becoming

Just like occupation, employability is individualised and cannot be compartmentalised to a point in time or single term – they are both holistic, personal but synergetic life-long concepts that change as you are doing, being and becoming who you want to be in the workplace. The career development framework (RCOT, 2021) is very comprehensive, providing guiding principles for career development. However, a challenge exists to support individuals at a local level to implement such frameworks and to ensure that the external day to day work

related factors referred to in such frameworks are translated into transformative learning at an individual level to encourage true individualised and person-centred employability.

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