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The employability benefits of peer-learning

Christie, F., Allen, M., Burke, C., & Thomsen, R. (2024). An exploration of the impact of different peer learning activities utilised to develop student employability. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 1-17.

This paper explores the benefits of employability sessions that focus or capitalise on peer-learning. We know that much of the push towards group guidance activities is pragmatic - a response to increasing demands on limited resources - but it was lovely to read this account which really highlights the value that comes from these kinds of group activities. The authors report a qualitative evaluation of some peer-focused employability sessions within the curriculum at a business school in the UK. The study identified two main benefits that come from peer learning. First, that students are able to develop their own career identity. The authors found that the process of comparing themselves with their peers and identifying shared concerns increased students' work-related self-awareness – described as 'career identity'. Second that the students enhanced their own cultural career capital. The authors found that mock assessment centre group exercises increased the students' confidence and their understanding of how to behave, as they could observe their peers, and reflect on their experiences together, allowing them to identify the kind of behaviour that is most effective in this context.

Career Writing

McNichol, A. K., Lengelle, R., & Poell, R. F. (2024). Career writing interventions for career learning: an integrative literature review. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 1-30.

Career Writing exercises can be really useful for clients, and can focus on expressive, reflective or creative writing. The authors of this article trawled through the published literature on this topic and found 45 academic articles which focused on career writing and the impact that it can have on clients. Writing is a very common therapeutic intervention and there is plenty of research that attests to its power to help reduce stress and prevent burnout, but despite what we know about the stress that can be caused by career development, writing not very widely applied in career support. Career writing can take different forms but often clients are invited to write and then re-write their story. Clients generate an initial narrative, and then they reflect on what they have written (alone, with a career consultant or in a peer group) and then they are encouraged to think about the story from different perspectives (for example, asking how would your best friend tell that story?). Writing often focuses on issues of career identity – with clients writing about their life themes and considering how they feel about the uncertainty associated with the modern labour market, but can be applied with different client groups in different ways. Overall,

career writing seems to bring some tangible benefits, with evidence suggesting that it can help with personal and professional development, with career development, and with mental and even physical health.

What does ‘career success’ mean to Gen Z?

Jackson, D., Bridgstock, R., Lambert, C., Tofa, M., & Sibson, R. (2024). Subjective career success among new graduates and the role of personal factors. *Education+ Training*.

There has been some focus in the literature recently on the difference between objective and subjective career success. Objective career success is generally conceptualised as salary and seniority, but increasingly it’s becoming clear that this isn’t necessarily the kind of success that everyone aspires to – particularly perhaps our younger Gen Z clients. This study was conducted with 350 recent graduates in Australia, and explored what would make these graduates feel that their career was a success. The most appealing features were the old favourites of financial security (as distinct from ‘financial success’) and work-life-balance, but the authors also identified a new long-term trend, away from ‘helping others’ and away from ‘innovation’. The authors put this down to a broader societal move away from collectivist values and towards individualist goals. They also identified three typical graduate ‘profiles’ grouping their participants into those who strive most for ‘humanistic success’ with a focus on supporting others, ‘balanced success’ for those who want to achieve both financial and entrepreneurial success and ‘self-made success’ for those who want to run their own businesses. There is clear evidence that ‘career success clarity’ can help students to set their own career goals, so this is a good reminder of the value of asking students to consider what ‘success’ means to them.

Cognitive flexibility and job hunting

Roux, E., Beccaria, G., & McIlveen, P. (2024). The role of cognitive flexibility in job search behaviour: a research agenda. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 1-18.

This paper looks at the idea of cognitive flexibility and the benefits that it can bring to a job hunt. Cognitive flexibility is all about the ability to make choices about what you think about and where you focus your mind - you might have come across the term or the idea if you have engaged with CBT. If you are cognitively flexible, then you can make the choice not to ruminate on past negative job search experiences, and can manage not to dwell on negative ‘what ifs’ – making the choice not to get fixated on what would happen if you didn’t manage to get this job. The authors of this paper propose that cognitive flexibility boosts confidence, and that this confidence then has a knock-on positive impact on your job search behaviour. Previous research has shown that if you feel more confident then you are likely to set yourself suitable goals and work harder to achieve them, so anything that can boost confidence is likely to have a positive impact on job hunting. The model these authors propose isn’t widely tried and tested yet although they make a convincing theoretical case

for it. Psychological flexibility isn't very widely covered in career education, but there are some straightforward approaches that can help people to increase it, including mindfulness and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, which might be worth exploring.