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FINDING YOUR WAY

This guide is for all students and graduates who are wondering what to do once they leave university, especially those who are completely lost and don't know where to turn (you are not alone!).

This section of the guide helps you determine what you want from a career and identify the route you need to take to get there.



Part I: FINDING YOUR WAY

- 1 Understanding employability and career planning
- 2 Choosing a role
- 3 Planning your journey

Part II: THE STEPPING STONES

- 4 Experience and internships
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Understanding employability and career planning

“Never look back unless you are planning to go that way.” *Henry David Thoreau*

Contents

- Taking control
- What is employability?
- What about career planning?
- The guidance model used in this book
- Finding out more
- What to do next
- Summary

What you will gain from this chapter:

- ▶ **Decision making:** An awareness of the key decisions involved in career planning.
- ▶ **Opportunity awareness:** An appreciation of the key skills required by employers.
- ▶ **Transition learning:** An introduction to what’s involved in finding work.
- ▶ **Self-awareness:** The foundations of personal career reflection.

Taking control

This chapter defines employability and career planning and establishes a theoretical foundation and framework for the rest of this guide. You will quickly see that the career journey is both an intellectual and an emotional process, which everyone can master by getting out there and taking control.

What is employability?

‘Employability’ means your ability to get a job and keep it. In the words of Hillage and Pollard (1998), it is:

the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers.¹

Therefore, employability is down to three factors – your knowledge, commitment and especially your skills. Whether you want to be a publican or a politician, you need an understanding of what you’re doing, the desire to succeed and the ability to perform. You can develop these qualities throughout your experience and qualifications. All experience gives you a chance to promote yourself but paid employment is especially attractive to employers because the knowledge, commitment and skills you gain are easily transferable. You will need both technical competencies related to your specific post and transferable abilities that can be used in a range of fields. These classifications are outlined below.

Technical skills

These are specific competencies related to particular jobs and are therefore fundamental to your success, so relevant experience is highly regarded. Technical skills required in one job/industry are not generally very transferable. For example, an ability to make cocktails may help you get a job in a posh bar but probably won’t help you become an automotive engineer!

Transferable skills

As the name suggests, these are skills/competencies, such as teamwork and organisation, that can be used in a wide range of roles. They are highly prized by graduate employers because they are a crucial element of success in every industry. There are numerous transferable skills and every industry/recruiter will have unique requirements, but the table below lists the most common competencies that are required. You should certainly be proficient in each of these areas. You can identify what’s involved in each of these skills on the companion website where there are also more details on the skills required in specific industries and roles.

Common transferable skills required by employers

• Enthusiasm and self-reliance	• Management
• Numeracy	• Creativity
• Teamwork	• Problem solving
• Research	• IT
• Organisation	• Commercial awareness
• Leadership	• Customer service

What about career planning?

Career planning can be seen as a subcategory of employability. It comprises a set of metacognitive competencies which enable you to reflect on your commitment, knowledge

and skills, identify appropriate roles and take control of your next steps in life. Various theories have developed over the last century to describe how individuals go about finding and choosing appropriate careers. It's worth quickly running through these to gain a useful understanding of the specific model of guidance used in this book.

Trait and factor theories

Vocational guidance theories were first established at the start of the last century. In 1909, Frank Parsons introduced talent matching by linking students with particular qualities to supposedly appropriate roles. In The 1930s, Edmund Williamson built on this pioneering work to develop a full-blown trait and factor theory. This model focused on testing students to identify their unique capabilities and potentialities (traits) so they could make rational vocational choices. In the early 1970s, Professor Alec Rodger developed a trait and factor working framework, which was widely adopted in the UK, called the Seven-Point Plan. This was used to build personal profiles of clients according to their:

- Physical makeup
- Attainments
- General intelligence
- Special attributes
- Interests
- Disposition
- Circumstances

Personality theories

Personality-based occupational theories emerged in the 1950s; these were largely based on the work of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). In the late 1950s, Anne Roe, and also John Holland, stressed the importance of early childhood experiences. Holland's Theory of Career Choice postulates that people find fulfilment in jobs by searching for work environments that fit their personality types. He categorised these as follows:

- Realistic
- Investigative
- Artistic
- Conventional
- Social
- Enterprising

Try the exercise below to reflect on your own abilities and aspirations.

Self-assessment: What are you like?

Describe your personality in three words and consider some relevant careers.

You in three words	Some relevant careers
●	
●	
●	

Keep these ideas in mind for the next chapter on choosing a career role.

Developmental theories

Shortly after the Second World War, much of the research into career planning and development focused on the process of personal development. In 1951, Eli Ginzberg concluded that people decide on occupations in three stages as they get older. Thirty years later, Donald Super moved this theory on by demonstrating that people gradually develop their vocational maturity in five clear stages as follows:

- 1 Growth (from birth to 14 years of age): When we become increasingly conscious of who we are and what's involved in the world of work.
- 2 Exploration (from 15 to 24): When we try out new experiences at school/university/work and during our hobbies.
- 3 Establishment (from 25 to 44): At which point we perfect our skills and establish ourselves in our roles.
- 4 Maintenance (from 45 to 64): When we focus on promotion and moving up in our field.
- 5 Decline (65 years of age and over): As we reduce output and prepare for retirement.

Post-1968, K. Roberts refined Ginzberg's and Super's development theories with an 'opportunity structure' model which highlights the restraints on young people in freely developing occupational choices because of difficulties connected to their home lives, environments, educational institutions, peer groups and the job market. For example, you may find the whole process too daunting, have limited aspirations or drink too much.

Self-assessment: What's holding you back?

Identify what's holding you back in your career and what you could do about it.

What's holding you back in your career?	What can you do about it?

Keep these reflections in mind for Chapter 3 on planning your career journey.

Recent viewpoints

Two more recent theories are John Kumboltz's Theory of Planned Happenstance and the narrative theories developed by Michael White, David Epsom and Gregory Bateson. These theories relate particularly well to university students and new graduates. John Kumboltz's theory propagates the benefits of putting yourself in beneficial situations and taking full advantage. He stresses the need for curiosity, persistence, flexibility, self-reflection, openness to feedback, networking and a positive attitude. Narrative theories stress the advantages of taking a step back from your life and interpreting your own career through the stories of others which give you the necessary perspective to trace a logical and fulfilling path.

The guidance model used in this book

In recent years a number of career guidance models have been developed to represent the various strands and theories of vocational choice within educational programmes. This guide broadly follows the DOTS/New DOTS model first postulated by Bill Law and A. G. Watts in 1977 and then updated in 1999,² because it encompasses elements of trait and factor, personality and development theories, and is very flexible in order to account for diversity.

What's involved?

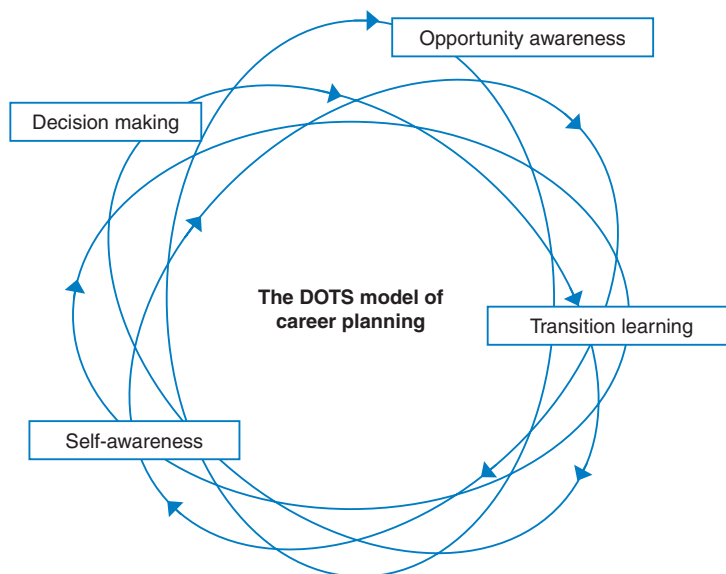
DOTS stands for the following four skills and understandings that Law sees as being at the heart of successful career planning and development:

Decision making: Choosing suitable career options and navigating the appropriate route to get you where you're going.

Opportunity awareness: Appreciating your full range of job options and the possible stepping stones to your destination.

Transition learning: Understanding the job market, finding jobs and making successful applications.

Self-awareness: Assessing your skills, commitment and knowledge.



The DOTS diagram portrays career planning as a constant lifelong process of 'sensing, shifting and focusing on' each of the four elements of personal growth outlined above. The four individual strands of development are interwoven in the diagram to demonstrate that this is not a straightforward cycle where you sequentially make decisions; learn about your opportunities; transit into a new position; and then learn more about yourself. It is, in fact, a dynamic, ongoing process in which each of us constantly and simultaneously addresses and readdresses each of these four core elements that drive our journey. This fluid DOTS model

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forms the backbone of this guide, so, by the end of the book, you will have a valuable skill that will help you throughout your life.

Practise your DOTS-related career reflection now by listing some of the key problems you have with each of the model's four elements of growth so you can look back at your answers when you've finished the guide and see if they have all been addressed.

Self-assessment: Your DOTS problems?

What are your key problems with each aspect of the DOTS model?

The DOTS architects of growth	Where you struggle with each one
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision making 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity awareness 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition learning 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-awareness 	

Finding out more

In this guide

- Choosing a role – Chapter 2.
- Planning your journey – Chapter 3.

On the companion website

- Skills linked to a wide range of graduate occupations.
- Examples of how and where you can develop specific skills.

On the web

On the companion website you will find up-to-date links for the websites of:

- The careers centres at Bradford and Kent Universities, which have excellent resources on employability skills.
- Careers New Zealand, which has a good summary of career development theories.
- The Open University's pages on the DOTS model of career planning as used in this guide.

What to do next

The following chapters of the guide show you how to use the guidance model to develop your employability and secure fulfilling positions. Start by focusing as clearly as possible on the specific career path you want to take, as this will help you systematically plan your next steps.

Summary

- Employability is your ability to get a job and keep it, so it's down to your skills, commitment and knowledge.
- Career development theories have developed over the last century, focusing on linking traits and factors, personality and personal development.
- This guide employs the DOTS model of career planning, which focuses on decision making, opportunity awareness, transition learning and self-awareness.

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