Spiral Identity Employability Tool

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What is the main barrier to translating a university degree into a fulfilling career? No, it’s not interview skills or application skills. Research shows that the top barrier is – Identity. Students and graduates need to know, and be able to tell, who they are, what they have learned through university, and how they are the best person for the job and for this particular employer. In other words, they need to know, and be able to express, their distinctive identity and unique value proposition.

But how do students get in touch with their identity to be able to talk about it? How can university academics help them develop and practice this important employability skill?

The Spiral Identity Employability Tool is based on the spiral model of self-concept, designed and researched by authors such as Marsh (1990), Mendaglio and Pyryt (1995), Pyryt and Mendaglio (1994) and Rosenberg and Kaplan (1982). This model says that people are complex and have many facets to their identity. These facets vary from person-to-person and change across the person’s life as they meet new people and try new things.

Some of the elements of our identity matter more to us than others. There are three main ways in which the identity of people is informed. Becoming aware of these ways can help us become more self-informed and allow us to change and thus become more confident and more employable.

(a) Self-Attribution – When we do well at something (e.g. university assessment) and there are positive consequences (e.g. a good mark), this tells us what we are good at, and this can become part of our identity.

Pay attention to what you do well at, as this might help you decide what kinds of career work might lend themselves to successes and confidence.

(b) Social Comparisons – People are constantly comparing themselves to others. Sometimes we compare upwards (e.g. Wow! She’s really accomplished. I’m not there yet, but I strive to be.) Sometimes we compare downwards (e.g. I received a better grade than him and I deserved it. I’m better at that than he is.)

Pay attention to who you are comparing yourself to and in which direction. Find some role models and inspiration. This can help you decide who, what and how you want to become. Try not to always compare upwards, as it can be intimidating and shake our confidence in ourselves.

(c) Reflective Appraisals – Important figures in your life influence the way in which you feel about yourself. What is important to realise, is that it is actually our impression (and not necessarily the reality) of what others think of us that influences our self-concept (identity) which does not always match how they actually feel about us. Even when it does match, it is important that individuals sort out the source of influence and form our own identities. A common example, in relation to university and graduate careers, is that some students choose degrees based on what their parents want them to study (seeking parental approval and esteem) and can end-up unhappy in a career that does not match their own identity.

How can the Spiral Identity Employability Tool help students shape their own identity? How can academics use the Spiral Identity Employability Tool to support the employability of their students?

Think about the following facets of your student life and identity: sport/athletics; performing arts; music; club and/or society membership; chosen career/discipline/industry; family; spirituality and/or religion; social justice; money/income; being a leader; entrepreneurship; love; my friends; technical skills; being good at spoken and written communication; my reputation; my heritage/culture; my love of adventure; travel; my need for security/stability; personality/getting along with others; creativity; getting good grades; health and fitness; my hobby or hobbies; my social media profile; my sense of humour; advocating for rights; love for animals; desire to be successful.

References


Write down any other facets that this list made you think of – that you didn’t see here. For each of these facets, give yourself a score from 0 to 3 –

0 = Not at All
1 = A Little Bit
2 = Somewhat
3 = Absolutely!

(1) Overall (including how you expect to feel 5-10 years in the future) [INSERT FACET] defines me.
Then insert as a little SPIRAL on the overall big SPIRAL. Write the words of this facet on or near the little spiral.
3 = Close-in near the I
2 = On a big ring, a little further out, but still somewhat close
1 = On the outer edges of the big spiral
0 = Don’t include on your big spiral

(2) How important and relevant is [INSERT FACET] to you right now (i.e. this month).
Insert a dot on the little SPIRAL.
3 = Close-in near the centre of the little spiral
2 = On a little spiral, a little further out, but still somewhat close
1 = On the outer edges of the little spiral
0 = Don’t include a dot on this little spiral

Filling-in this identity tool can help you decide who you are, what matters to you, and who you want to become through your education and into and through your career. This tool can also help you find the words to describe yourself to future employers on your resume and in interviews.