

Who do you think you are? Exploring professional identity

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Purpose of this webinar

- ◎ To explore professional identity in the context of OR professionals
- ◎ Encourage personal reflection of your own experiences
- ◎ Illustration of different experiences
- ◎ Discussion of emerging themes / topics

Identity.....

“.....a dynamic and continually changing, and active process which develops over time through interaction with others.....

.....is continually being formed and reformed through the way we internalise the external environment, negotiate interactions and externalise ourselves to others.” (Hong, 2010, p1531)

Professional identity in the literature

- ⦿ “Professions, such as medicine, law and accounting, arise when an organized group possesses esoteric knowledge that has economic value when applied to problems (eg sickness) faced by people in a society.” (Pratt et al 2006, p235)
- ⦿ “Professional identity is the individual nurse’s perception of her/himself in the context of nursing practice” (Ohlen & Segesten, 1998)
- ⦿ “Identity is not something one has, but something that develops during one’s whole life.” (Beijaard, D et al, 2004)
- ⦿ How does professional identity develop?
 - ⦿ “...the process by which identity evolves remains under explained” (Pratt et al, 2006, p 235)
 - ⦿ Identity changes accompany work role changes

Why is professional identity important?

“The importance of developing a professional identity within a sphere or field has been recognized as vital for professional salience and effectiveness. Acting as a key element in both the retention and motivation of the individual; linking strongly to performance and general job satisfaction.”

(Baxter, J (2011) Public sector professional identities: A review of the literature, The Open University, UK, p16)

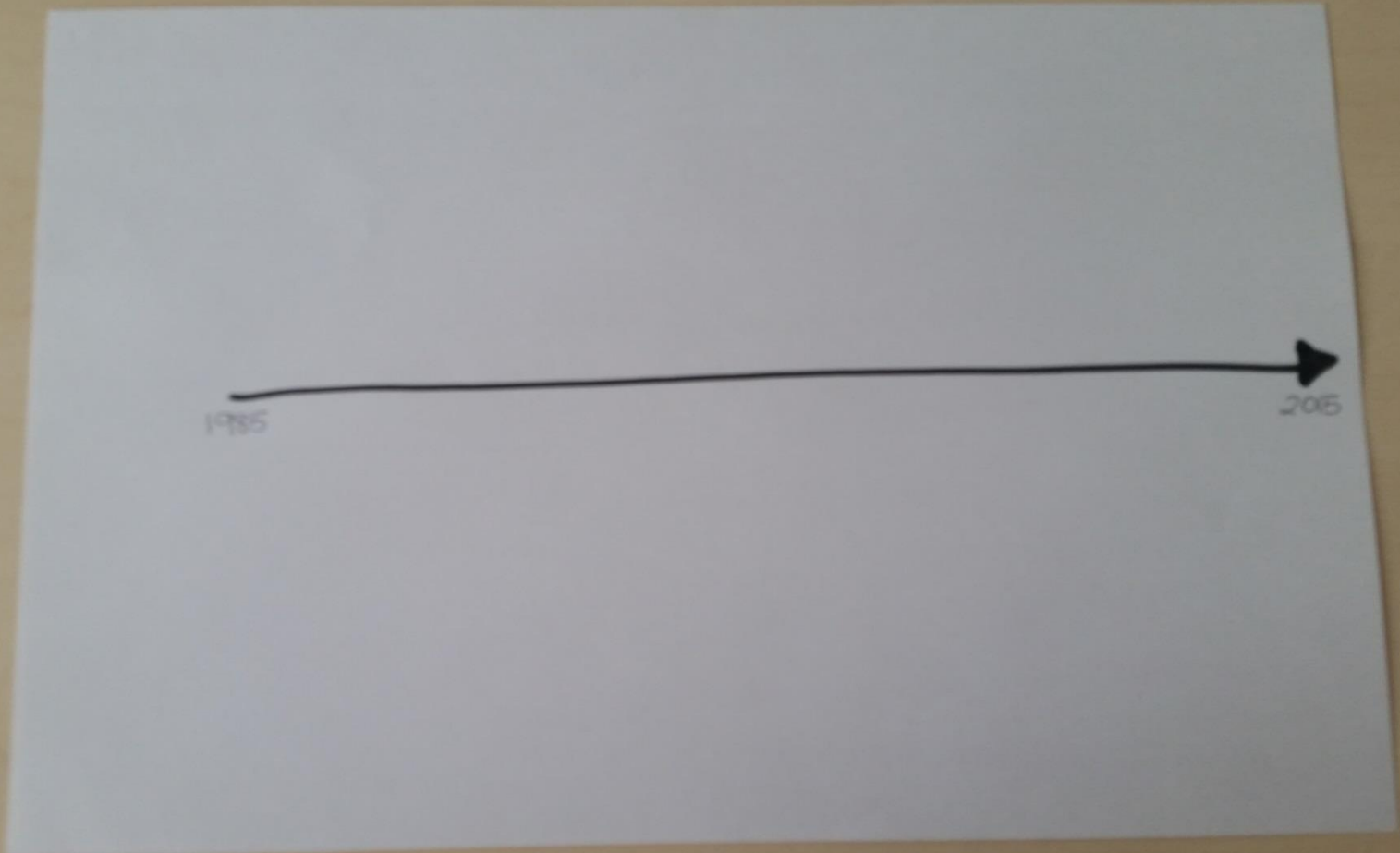
Your story in your words

Using words and/or symbols / imagery:

- ⦿ Draw a factual timeline showing your professional journey
- ⦿ On your timeline, note key choices / movements
- ⦿ Identify key transition points where something happened that influenced how you saw your trajectory
- ⦿ Capture key influences along the way, be it people, projects, locations, organisations, situations etc
- ⦿ Are you aware of any issues that may influence your story in the future?

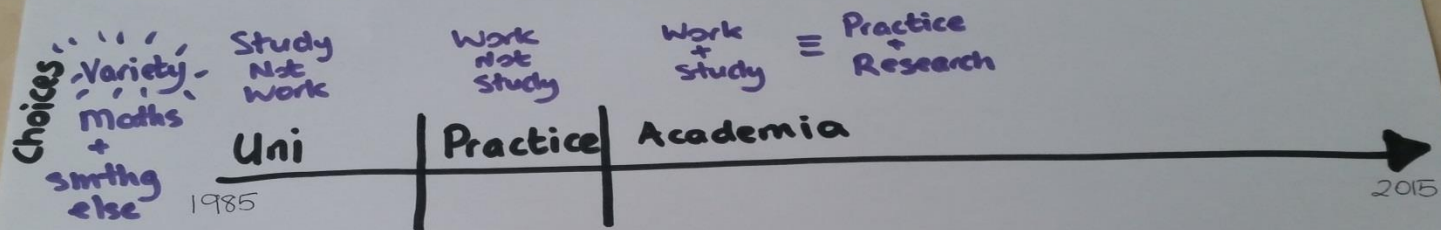
An example - my story

- ◎ Draw a timeline covering your professional journey



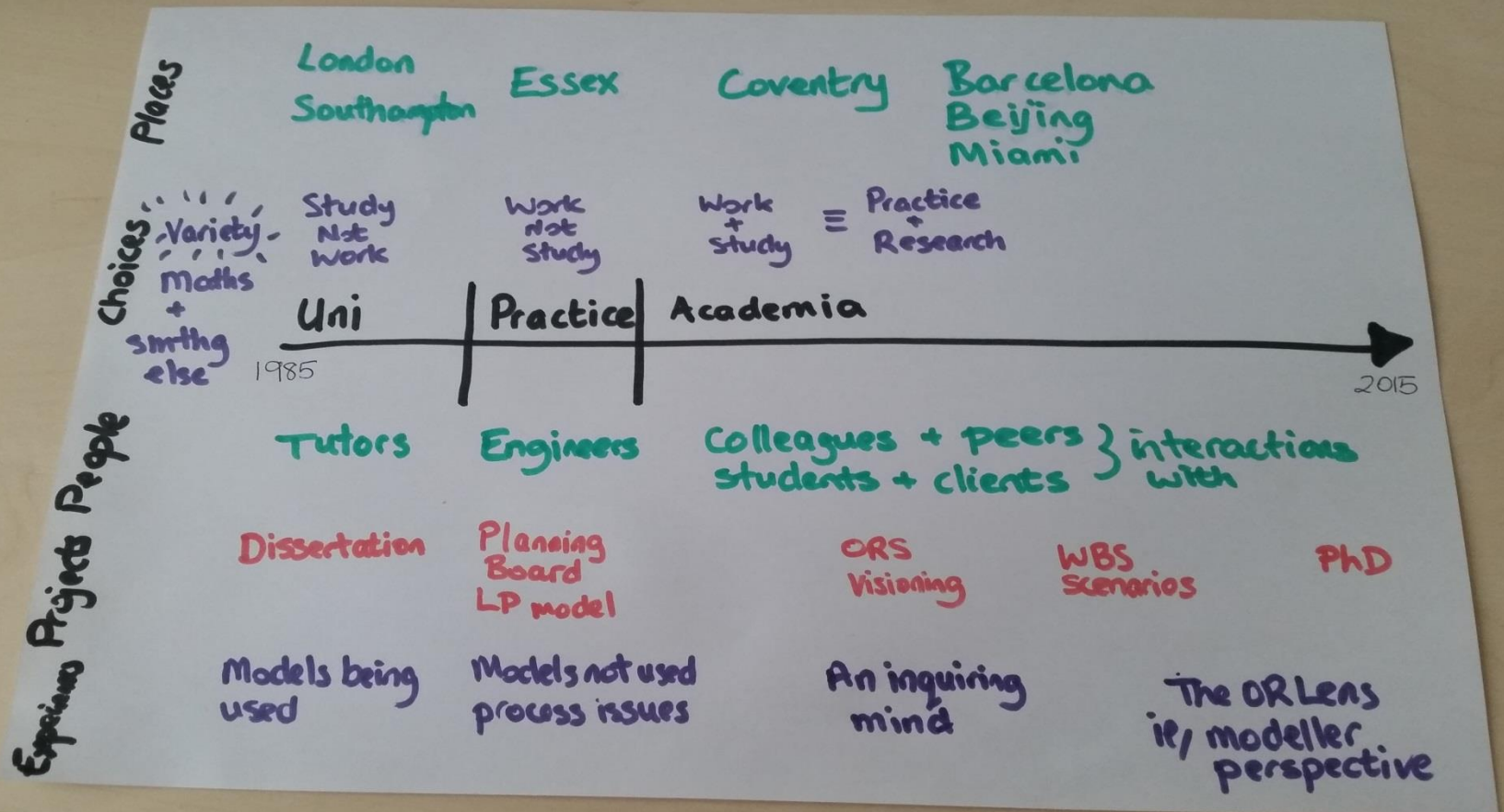
An example - my story

- On your timeline, note key choices / movements
- Identify key transition points where something happened that influenced how you saw your trajectory



An example - my story

- ◎ Capture key influences along the way, be it people, projects, locations, organisations, situations etc



Some other examples

Exercise – thinking about the stories

- ◎ Thinking about the stories you've heard so far.....
 - ◎ What are the key similarities / differences / interesting things?
 - ◎ Thinking as an OR professional, what are the various dimensions / characteristics we can use to capture / describe the identity of professionals in our field?
 - ◎ What can you do with this knowledge?

Shaping ideas: Identity development in OR

- ◎ Much has been written in the OR literature:
 - Historic reviews / cases of OR groups
 - Surveys capturing current practice.....
 - Location eg private...public sectors
 - Educational background
 - Internal vs external
 - Roles eg analyst/consultant, facilitator, educator etc
 - Nature of work eg facilitation, quantitative modelling
 - Tools eg soft ...hard
 - Relation to clients
 - Little research explicitly on identity in OR

(eg Fildes & Ranyard, 1997; Abdel Malek et al, 1999, Ormerod, 2014)

Shaping ideas:

Identity development in OR

- ⦿ Layers of influence:
 - ⦿ Individual(s) eg role models = sample identities I can 'try on'
 - ⦿ Organisational eg recruitment / retention / career paths
 - ⦿ External / client related – eg how I present myself / how I'm perceived
 - ⦿ Professional bodies – eg how OR is presented / perceived
- ⦿ Validating professional identity:
 - Via feedback from senior colleagues / mentors
 - Through observing/identifying role models
 - Professional accreditation

Shaping ideas:

Identity development in OR

- ⊙ Influence of work content (ie what you do)
 - ⊙ Association with hard / soft OR dimensions
 - ⊙ Use of tools from other OR field / other disciplines
 - ⊙ Focus of expertise eg tool focus / application area
- ⊙ Influence of work practice (ie how you do it)
 - ⊙ Nature of role - multiple models of OR practice
 - ⊙ Need to adapt role - Identity customised to fit work demands through:
 - ⊙ Enriching/patching/splinting
 - ⊙ How role is perceived by others & role adjusted to fit expectations eg:
 - ⊙ *“....lots more people know what analytics.....is, and think of me as that – so that’s probably what I am really.” (Practitioner, 2014)*

Shaping ideas: Identity development in OR

◎ Contextual influences – OR related

◎ How we see ourselves:

- *“OR = application of mathematical techniques to management problems”*
- *“OR = a set of analytical tools and techniques that help you think about the world.”*
- *“Taking an analytical approach to problems of business and government. It’s the whole approach to a problem”*
- *“Using analysis and models aimed at solving problems; structuring and analysing problems”*
- *“OR has this broad changing, variable, not very well defined, identity.” (Practitioners, 2014)*

◎ How others see us:

- ◎ The professional identity of OR practitioners is not clear to others since they don’t know what OR is nor what OR practitioners do eg:
 - *“I like to define myself as an Operational Research Analyst or an OR consultant. But I can’t because nobody has ever heard of OR” (Practitioner, 2014)*

Shaping ideas: Identity development in OR

- ◎ Contextual influences - externally driven change:
 - ◎ Developments such as technology & Analytics are influencing and affecting the way that they work eg:
 - Speed of computing & communications
 - Technology facilitates collaboration
 - Reliance on others to hold large datasets
 - Advanced software makes it easier to do things (but not changing the nature of OR)
 - Peoples' expectations are higher with better technology
 - ◎ Changing nature of OR within the organizational context eg:
 - Decline of internal OR groups
 - Rise of external consultancies / independents

So what can you do with this knowledge?

- ◎ Individually:
 - Supports reflection on how you can develop your sense of professional identity
 - Supports your career choices / personal development
- ◎ Organisationally:
 - Positioning OR & its offering
 - Relevant for recruitment / retention / mentoring
 - Useful for awareness/promotion of OR internally & externally
- ◎ Professional body
 - Claiming the territory – awareness / promotion / positioning OR & its offering
 - Supporting development of professionals

Sources / references

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