Conceptualising CPD as the occupational therapy process:
accessing, intervening and evaluating your career

Lucas Morais reflects on, and RCOT members offer their views about, the use of the Career Development Framework to support continuing professional development.
With the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) re-registration and audit cycle less than a year away, the need to re-focus on continuing professional development (CPD) inescapably comes into sharp focus.

This concept has been strongly linked to the reality of maintaining professional registration. However, the main purpose of CPD is to keep yourself up to date with the latest knowledge and evidence informing practice, to enable you to provide the most effective service to those you work with, as encapsulated in this new definition on the process of CPD:

‘The way in which you continue to learn and develop throughout your career. CPD is essential. It adds to your skills, knowledge, professional identity and ways of thinking so that you stay up to date and practise safely and effectively, now and in the future’ (Broughton and Harris 2018).

Juggling a busy work routine and trying to embrace the process of CPD as an ongoing activity can be challenging. You might ask yourself some questions, such as: When will I have time to do CPD? What counts as CPD? What areas or skills should I focus on to develop? What should be the outcomes of my learning?

The RCOT professional development team has spoken with members about these concerns and this article shares some of their stories on using the Career Development Framework (RCOT 2017) to support the CPD process.

**Re-frame CPD as a daily process**

Dr Stephanie Tempest, RCOT professional development manager, suggests that: ‘If we apply the occupational therapy process to ourselves when thinking about CPD, and see the Career Development Framework as a model to guide our learning and development, then it helps re-frame CPD as a daily process. It then becomes inherent in the way we think, rather than a requirement of registration.’

So, let’s take the key components of the occupational therapy process – assessment, intervention and evaluation – and apply them to your own learning.

**Making the first move: the challenge of self-assessment**

Knowing where you are is the first step to identify where you want to go. As obvious as this may sound, it highlights an important fact; self-assessment is essential. Arguably, the hardest part of identifying our continuing professional development needs is taking this initial step.

Using the nine Career Levels across each of the four Pillars of Practice in the Career Development Framework helps you to make the leap, by mapping your current skills and experience to highlight your abilities.

This can initially be a challenging task, especially given the tendency to be too critical of ourselves and to identify with lower career levels than might actually be appropriate.

Dr Jenny Preston, consultant occupational therapist, says: ‘I found it hard to rate myself highly, tending to opt for the lower values wherever possible.’ However, she states: ‘I overcame this by jotting down some examples of the work that I do and also thinking about tasks and activities that I would be required to complete to “allow” me to progress to the next level.’

The reflection shared by Jenny is of great value and also highlights that, sometimes, the activities you do in your day-to-day work make a significant contribution to your CPD.

However, it is not always easy to know how to use a new tool such as the Career Development Framework.

So how do you know if you are using it appropriately and assessing yourself correctly? Lynette Reynolds, team lead occupational therapist suggests: ‘Read the descriptors for the pillars, there is no right or wrong answer.’ This is an encouraging reminder that at this stage you should not fear the career levels.

Mandy Sainty, retired occupational therapist, mapped herself against the Career Development Framework and agrees. ‘Don’t be too prescriptive when examining the career level statements; identifying the level you are at is not an exact science,’ she says. ‘Perhaps more important is the stimulation/insights it provides for self-reflection, and the assistance to explore your future direction of travel.’

Additionally, Annette Trehern-Walker, specialist occupational therapist recommends: ‘Be instinctive. Don’t be afraid to be critical or aspirational when scoring yourself. You may score a nine in one level and a five in another; it doesn’t matter, it’s about your development. Remember this is yours; it has nothing to do with your banding [if you work in the NHS], it’s about you and your professional development.’

So, occupational therapists using the framework agree that assessment should be personal, but not unduly critical, and also viewed as an enjoyable activity that will naturally enable you to progress and help you plan your CPD activities.

**Exploring different possibilities: planning and carrying out the intervention**

Once we have a clear perspective of where we currently are with our professional development, it gets easier to look at all the different possibilities and identify ways to move forward in a specific direction.

On a practical level this means it is now time for you to look at all four Pillars of Practice – Professional Practice, Facilitation of Learning, Leadership, and Evidence Research and Development – and establish your intervention plan to engage in CPD activities across all four.
Katherine Russel is an occupational therapist who works for the NHS, and confirms: ‘I have found using the Career Development Framework a really useful tool to help me to think and reflect on where I am in each of the pillars of practice and where my areas of development lie.’

‘I found the tool clear and simple to use and it was good to spend some time reflecting about what specific areas I would benefit from working on further, and to come away from the tool with a focussed development plan.’

At this point, it is important to remember that, when thinking about your development plan and future goals, a broad range of activities can be considered as CPD, from informal learning opportunities such as interacting in social media, watching a movie, listening to a podcast, reading a magazine, having a discussion with your work colleagues, to more complex activities such as undertaking a formal course or qualification.

Alison Gregory is an occupational therapist who works in social care and used the framework to organise her CPD folder, which helped her to identify learning gaps and justify the need for further training.

She says: ‘The framework has provided me with guidance and evidence to help me know which areas I need to develop in my career. When I had put all my evidence into sections it gave a succinct and clear overview of the attributes I have as a practitioner.’

‘I used the headings to structure the evidence in my CPD folder. The headings have helped me organise my evidence into what I have learnt and helps me identify things that I need to learn. It has led me to go on a management course which will help with the development of my career.’

Mapping yourself to the framework and defining short or long-term goals can be useful, not only for your personal development as outlined above, but also as a supportive tool for appraisals, to help you identify objectives and justify training and development needs.

Katherine Russel says: ‘I have used the framework to aid my annual appraisal, to focus on my goals for the next year and also to highlight the work I have been doing to my service managers.’

Finally, by planning and carrying out your intervention, you are also gathering evidence for the HCPC audit.

A practical example of that is given by Dr Jenny Preston. ‘Last year I was selected for the HCPC audit,’ she explains. ‘I used the Career Development Framework to help me to outline my current and future development needs across all four pillars. I subsequently took this document into my personal development review and used it as a discussion tool to review and adjust my personal objectives.

‘Through the various levels I was able to self-evaluate my current level of attainment against the descriptors and present this within.'
CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FEATURE

a clear and organised format illustrating the key areas for my ongoing development.’

So, just like occupational therapists across all career levels and sectors, the usage of the framework will enable you to reflect, to plan and to undertake your intervention, providing you a useful structure and evidence to measure the outcomes of your learning.

Measuring outcomes: the complexity of the evaluation
The final stage of the process is related with the outcomes of your learning and it can be a complex and also very personal process.

As the regulator, the HCPC requires registrants to ‘seek to ensure that their CPD benefits the service user’ (HCPC 2017). Therefore, when evaluating your learning and development it must be measured with this in mind.

As Stephanie reminds us: ‘Our service users are anyone who uses or is affected by our services, for example, patients, carers, families, students, research participants, staff members or colleagues. So when we evaluate our learning, we need to think about it in terms of articulating the impact of that learning for others.’

Evaluating CPD can be a complex process and the impact of your learning may not be fully appreciated at the time it occurs. You might go on a course or attend a networking event that might not benefit your service delivery immediately, but it may prove useful in a few weeks or even months afterwards.

It is possible to see the parallels with the complexity of measuring outcomes as part of occupational therapy process, where it is appreciated that change can occur within the future life course of a person and long after the occupational therapy process has ended (Pentland et al 2018).

On a practical level, the evaluation of learning needs to be frequent, not as an obligation, but more like a ‘check-up’ to make sure you are on track. Sarah Lawson, occupational therapy graduate tutor, draws attention to the need to review your plan periodically in order to check the impact of your actions: ‘Make use of the framework to identify and articulate areas to develop through your CPD. Regularly revisit these areas to monitor and measure the impact you have had.’

This regular review will help you in the process and make you reflect and evaluate if the short and long term goals established in the intervention phase are still current or if you think it is time to look for other alternatives.

In conclusion, it is important to always have in mind that sometimes it will take some time to see the impact of our learning, or even to decide to learn something new and improve another area of knowledge instead. But, the important factor is to keep the process going.

The CPD process: building a cycle
So, just as the occupational therapy process is cyclical we can view the same for the CPD process.

Lucas Morais concludes: ‘Upon reflection, I allow myself to metaphorically compare the CPD process with a trip. Different than a race where you are competing with others to cross the finish line, in the CPD process you define your own pace, you choose the means of transport and how long it will take to get to your destination, but remember, the world of development is broad and you need to keep learning and moving.’

References

Lucas Morais, on behalf of the RCOT professional development team. Please email: lucas.morais@rcot.co.uk to share your thoughts on the Career Development Framework, your personal examples, or to suggest ideas to help you use it in practice