

Autonomy and Expertise in the English Workplace

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Workplace Context

- Poor productivity and productivity growth in the English economy
- Inadequate and fragmentary VET provision in England
- Overemphasis on task based skills and narrow focus of job specification in large sectors of the English economy
- Lack of autonomy affects job satisfaction and performance

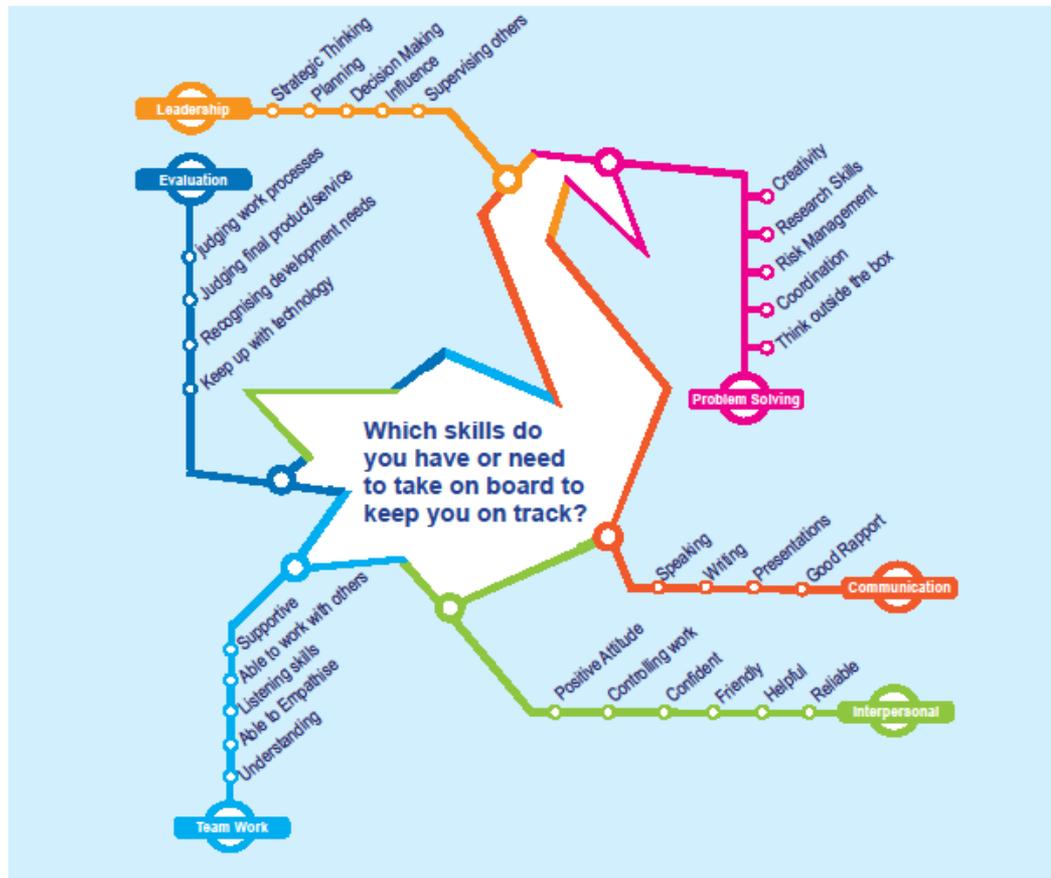
Transformers Project

- English context of employer led skills development
- Aimed to build connections between vocational educators and employers to support work based learning
- Identified and analysed a number of aspects of work based learning
- Emphasis on highlighting the significant dependence between skills and training, and workplace cultures and practices



Transversal Skills

Transversal knowledge, skills and competencies are relevant to all occupations and sectors. Often referred to as core skills, basic skills or soft skills, are you aware of all the skills that you have?



Problem Solving

Organise schedules / share information / arrange meetings / new ideas / judge risks.

Leadership

Deciding schedules / deciding specific tasks / deciding on budget / deciding what will be produced / making decisions / supervising / guide or advise others about their work / monitor the performance of others / set the type, amount and deadlines for the work of others.

Communication

Regularly communicate with line manager or supervisor / regularly communicate with a number of people / communicate with customers and clients / communicate to get advice or help / give presentations.

Interpersonal

Decide the amount of work you are doing / set the type of work you need to do / Set when to do various tasks / have a positive attitude.

Team Work

Plan with other people / deliver work with other people / contribute towards other people's work / listen to what others have to say.

Evaluation

Decide how good work is / sign off work as complete / reflect on how good work is / make sure work meets the standards of the customer or client / work meets the standards of employer / work meets the standards of the team

Many of these skills cross across platforms and are needed in more than one area of work.



Transformers Project Outcomes

The project refreshed thinking in participating organisations about:

- workforce recruitment
- workforce development
- apprenticeships both recruitment and development
- working with learning providers or in-house development and/or training teams
- working innovatively in collaboration across sector networks

Methodology

- Virtually no literature on methodologies for measuring autonomy in the British workplace
- New approach to measuring workplace autonomy in England using an application of the methodology of the Transformers Project
- Workplace know how broadly distinguishes into skills required to perform particular types of tasks and transversal level abilities
- Transversal level abilities are both those generally encompassed by planning and individual ones such as communication, critical thinking, evaluation, problem solving and teamwork

Methodology

- Methodological approach taken is based on the difference between know that and know how, the particular types and levels of know how, and their combinations within transversal abilities and project management

Autonomy, Agency and Expertise

- Expertise covers various kinds of practical knowledge, attention based knowledge, skills, decision making and action planning and the like
- Complex perceptual, judgement, and decision making skills are widely agreed criteria for vocational expertise
- Exercising autonomy in the workplace is a prerequisite for the acquisition of these
- Workplace agency is the formation and implementation of intentions over relatively extended periods. This agency is manifested as the ability to form and carry through projects involving planning and other transversal abilities

Autonomy, Agency and Expertise

- Conceptual approach to workplace autonomy taken here is that a reasonable proxy for and measure of it is the display of transversal abilities

Conclusion

- Worker agency, workplace autonomy and productivity are strongly related
- Scope for improving worker autonomy in the English workplace
- Research establishes proof of concept for exploring a new approach to measuring workplace autonomy in the UK
- Consider trialling it as an approach to increase workplace autonomy, improve VET and job redesign
- Major challenge to engage employers and organisations at scale with this kind of activity

Selected References

- Addis, M. and Winch, C. (eds.) (2018) *Education and Expertise*, Wiley Blackwell: Oxford
- Transformers Project (2019)
<https://neu.org.uk/transformers-project>
- Winch, C. and Addis, M. (2020) “Autonomy and Expertise in the English Workplace”, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* (www.tandfonline.com/eprint/PMACYHVG9ENN MJXBXX2T/full?target=10.1080/13636820.2020.1869808)