



STUDENT RESOURCES

How opportunity awareness can help you plan your career

Perhaps the single quality that differentiates a solid from a highly successful career is opportunity awareness. Achievers are over-represented among the ranks of those who are not only able to spot opportunities that others miss, they act on those opportunities where others prevaricate or decline. (Jim Bright, 2018)

In this activity, you will consider

- How opportunity awareness can help your career planning;
- Sources and types of information about opportunities;
- How to identify trends and challenges that could influence your future work and career;
- Strategies to discover opportunities you hadn't thought of.

What is opportunity awareness?

Opportunity awareness is having detailed and clear information about what opportunities exist in a particular field, industry or occupation, or for a person with particular capabilities and qualifications.

Why is opportunity awareness important?

Our understanding of potential opportunities can be based on incomplete or inaccurate information. This can come from rumours, social media posts, and even fictional portrayals of a career such as the TV dramas about lawyers or doctors. We also get a lot of advice about jobs and employment from immediate family and friends. This is not a bad thing, but it can be limiting. To overcome these limitations, you need to create opportunity awareness.

How can I create opportunity awareness?

If you don't know anyone who works in a particular field, how can you learn what it is like? Developing opportunity awareness can be similar to the research you do for an assignment or project. It involves:

- Finding and evaluating information;
- Analysing the influence of societal or technological trends;
- Documenting your findings; and
- Reviewing your understanding based on what you have discovered.

Jim Bright¹ makes some great suggestions:

1. Expand your network and renew it continually: “know who’s in the zoo”.
2. Be curious: “ask why and what if, and importantly, why not”?
3. Take calculated risks: use trial and error to try new things, and remember that “taking an opportunity may be less of a risk than doing nothing”.
4. Be agile, because change creates opportunities.
5. Look for the possibilities in an idea, rather than the probabilities: “it is impossible for there to be a probable without a possible!”
6. Work out a luck strategy: plan to be in the right place at the right time with the right people.

¹ Jim Bright is Professor of Career Education and Development at the Australian Catholic University and owns Bright and Associates. The six suggestions come from his 2016 article, [‘Awareness of opportunities key to career progression’](#).

Activity

The following activity will help you to break down the complex task of developing opportunity awareness. The activity can be done in a group or as an individual research project.

The first step is to identify a field or industry (or a specific occupation or role) that is of interest to you. Take some time to decide on the scope of your opportunity research. Try not to make your initial search too narrow as you may miss out on some good opportunities. Similarly, don't make your search so wide that it yields too many different roles to do effective research. You can always adjust the scope of your search if needed.

Start the activity by brainstorming everything you know already about your field of interest. Complete as many of the boxes as you can and then fill in the gaps by doing some basic web research.

Field of interest: _____

KEY INFORMATION

Consider the size of the industry, number of graduates entering the labour market, types of jobs or roles, entry and progress pathways, and the capabilities, skills and qualifications need to secure work. Look also at salaries and projections for that industry. If you intend to enter an accredited profession, look at the accreditation requirements.

<p>TRENDS <i>Consider society, environment, demographics such as an ageing population or diverse culture, trends for the industry as a whole, and the technology influencing work in that field.</i></p>	<p>CHALLENGES <i>Consider what your work might entail and think specifically about issues impacting new entrants. Consider whether your work might involve long hours, casualised work, the need to work on a roster or away from home, and stress or health issues related to work in that field.</i></p>
<p>NICHES <i>Consider sub-fields or specific positions, roles, locations or interest areas. You will find examples by looking at the career stories or profiles of people who work in that field, and by talking to those people.</i></p>	<p>NETWORKS <i>Consider professional associations, ways of connecting with people in the field, and who could put you in touch.</i></p>
<p>SOURCES OF INFORMATION <i>For any or all of the points you note above, think about the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How you know this: what is the source of the information?</i> • <i>How reliable is your source: is it current, authoritative, factual, objective, and relevant to your location/intended location?</i> • <i>How could you find out more, or find more reliable sources?</i> 	

Further resources

There are many sources of help available. Seek out your careers office or careers counsellors, look online at the websites of professional bodies and companies, and talk to professionals.

Map out your existing networks by using the [employABILITY networking tools](#).

Think about the kind of work you want to do by completing the [Lifestyle Quiz](#).

When you set out to talk to someone, use the [informational interview](#) resource to prepare.

Developed by Andrew Johnson - Monash University - 2019