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Developing a Descriptive Framework for “Occupational Engagement”

Abstract

“Occupational engagement” is a term often used within occupational science and occupational therapy literature. However, it has yet to be clearly and consistently described resulting in a lack of clarity in the use and definition of this term. This paper is derived from a larger piece of research, which used social constructionism to explore occupational engagement for five men living in a secure mental health unit from an occupational science perspective (Morris *et al*, 2016). This research required the development of a clear description of ‘occupational engagement’. Following an exploration and critical review of the literature, the process of developing a new description of ‘occupational engagement’ is outlined. Occupational engagement cannot be considered in isolation, so within this paper it is positioned within a descriptive framework of values and consequences. The development of the framework returned to the etymology of relevant terms, considering both the value of consequences of occupational experiences. This is the first published holistic description of this term as the framework fully acknowledges the negative as well as positive dimensions of occupation. The paper concludes with the implications of how this new framework could be useful to occupational science.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe and explore the development of a new description of the term ‘occupational engagement’. This description is supported by positioning ‘engagement’ within a framework of positive and negative values to visualise its positive nature. This paper is derived from a larger piece of research which used social constructionism (Burr, 2003) to explore occupational engagement for five men living in a secure mental health unit from an occupational science perspective (Morris, 2012). The year-long investigation enabled the development of a new understanding of the term ‘occupational engagement’ through a comprehensive literature review combined with case

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study methodology to tell the stories of five participants. The case study element of the research is reported elsewhere (Morris *et al*, 2016). The restricted environment provided an ideal setting to consider the changing nature of occupational engagement from both occupational science and therapy perspectives. Although the research was located within a secure setting, it is anticipated that the proposed descriptive framework will be of benefit more broadly.

Before positing the new description, this paper begins by exploring the different uses of the term 'occupational engagement' within the occupational science and occupational therapy literatures. Occupational engagement has been stated as a fundamental assumption of occupational science (Yerxa, 1980; Wilcock, 1998), but as yet there is no agreed single definition or description. As will be seen in the literature review below, definitions are emerging, such as Christiansen and Townsend (2010) and Sutton, Hocking and Smythe (2012). The shared understanding of this term is still developing, for example some authors have expressed 'engagement' as an observable entity (e.g. Yerxa, 1980), whilst others discuss it as a construct (e.g. Jonsson, Josephsson & Kielhofner, 2001). Additionally, '*engagement*' may be used interchangeably with '*participation*' or one word is used to define the other (e.g. Kielhofner, 2008). Finally, engagement can be viewed as a continuum (e.g. Reberio & Cook, 1999). This lack of a consistent formal definition of occupational engagement was problematic for the overarching research (Morris, 2012). Without providing a description of how the term was being used, it was not possible for readers to have clear understanding of the key terms used within the research to contextualise their perceptions of the research.

Methods

To explore existing definitions and uses of the term 'occupational engagement', a comprehensive literature review was completed. The search strategy consisted of electronic searches, hand searching of print copies and exploration of reference lists of articles and books found using the first two elements of the strategy. Following an initial review of

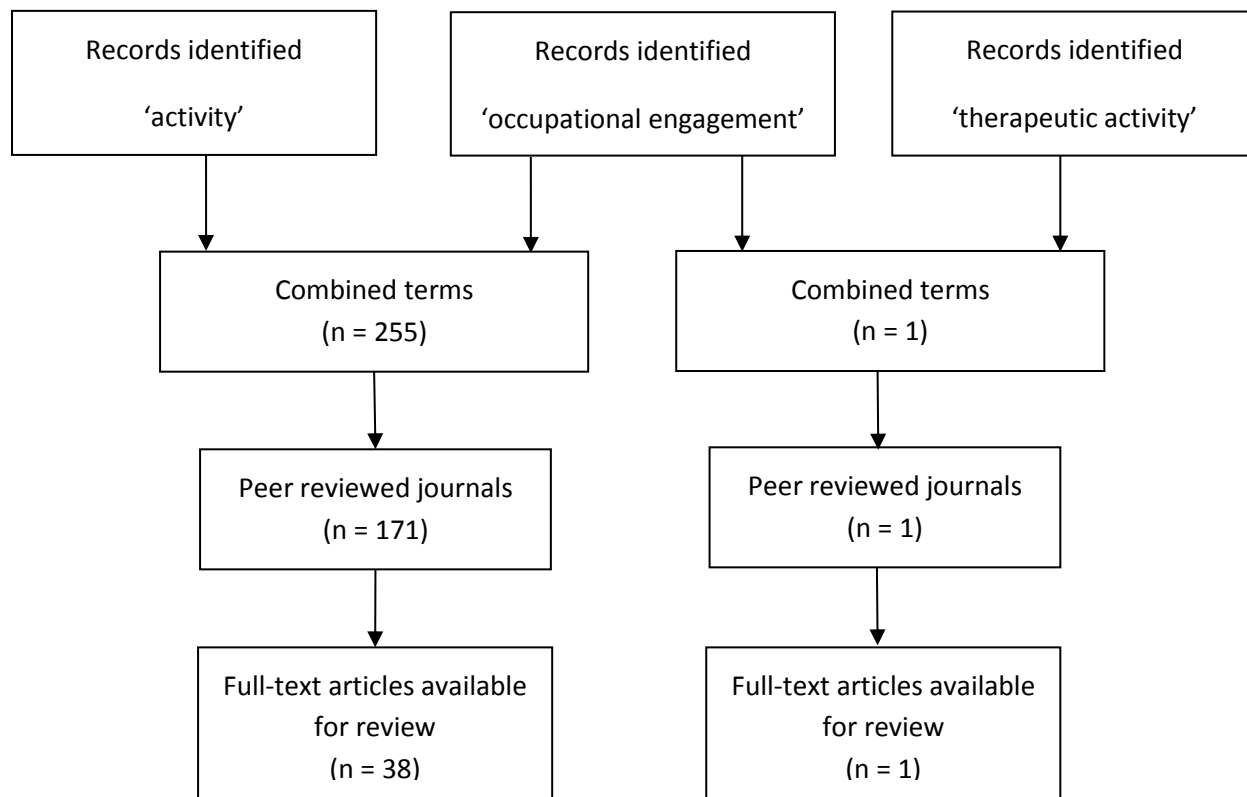
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literature containing 'occupational engagement' in the title or keywords, further keywords for searches were identified (Hart, 1998). The same search strategy was repeated several times over the course of the data collection and analysis phases of the research to capture new literature and enable reflection on these.

The search strategy used to locate relevant literature comprised of an electronic search of all Academic Search Complete databases from 1985 to present using combinations of the keywords: occupational engagement; activity; therapeutic activity (see figure 1). This start date was selected to capture the emergence of occupational science. Bibliographies of these articles were consulted for additional references. Articles not written in English were excluded as a translation service was not available. Core occupational therapy and occupational science texts were consulted, again references used within these were followed up. Literature discussing engagement in services rather than in occupation was excluded. Finally, email alerts for occupational therapy and occupational science journals were established and screened for potential new articles. Each item was catalogued, read and notes of key themes were made. Critical appraisal tools (CASP, 2013) were used to screen research articles.

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Figure 1: Literature search flow diagram

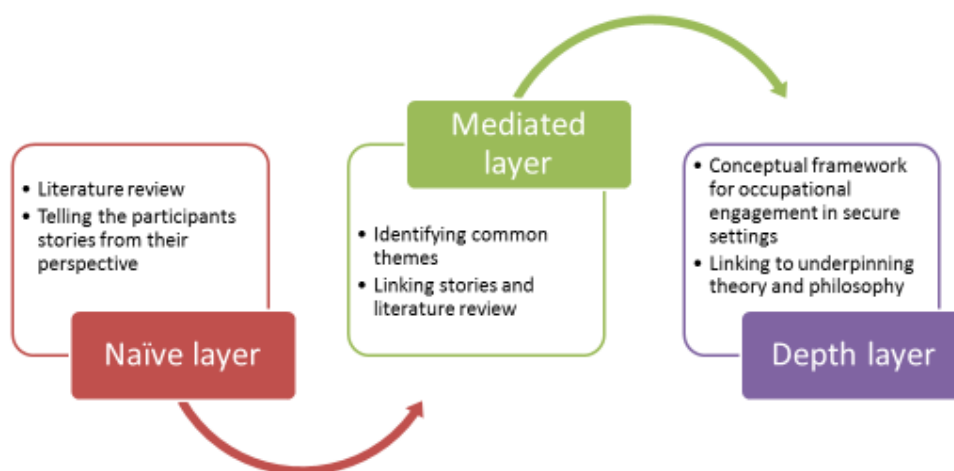


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Following the methodology of the overall research project (Morris, 2012), the literature was appraised from a social constructionist perspective (Burr, 2003) and reflected on heuristically (Moustakas, 1990). This process enabled reflection about the impact of researcher experiences and beliefs on interpretations of the literature and policy. Key features of such an approach are that understanding is the result of a subjective interpretation of our world and that 'truth' is the result of a negotiated common meaning between individuals. Therefore, understanding is culturally specific and time bound (Burr, 2003). This approach fits well with occupational science due to the shared belief that we interpret our world based on our own understanding of our environments and previous experiences. Using this perspective, it was important to consider the culture and time a definition or statement is made, as well as, how applicable it is to the readers in their own culture. It demanded detailed consideration of the rationale for definitions, descriptions and statements made by authors. Drawing on heuristic analysis, the literature was revisited several times during the research and reflected upon to consider the development of understanding of the literature within the context of the wider research (Moustakas, 1990, see figure 2).

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Figure 2: Data analysis framework



Findings from the literature

The first literature search, completed in 2000, revealed that ‘occupational engagement’ was, until recently, a term stated as one of our basic assumptions rather than being defined or described in detail. These assumptions, by their very nature, are not challenged and are without a substantial body of evidence (Townsend & Polatajko, 2007). This was reflected in core documents such as the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA, 1996) ‘Uniform terminology’ where ‘occupational engagement’ was stated as a term but not defined or explored. Within science, especially a relatively new science such as occupational science, it is not unusual for multiple or conflicting definitions to exist (Pierce, 2009). The subsequent literature searches revealed that alongside continued use of the term ‘occupational engagement’, definitions were beginning to emerge, but no article claimed to be focussed exclusively on exploring the development of a definition. Within this section, examples from the literature are used to chronologically illustrate these descriptions and definitions, to enable the reader to share understanding of the development of the term during the research.

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1990s

An early description of engagement from an occupational perspective was provided by Cynkin and Robinson (1990). They stated:

*“This kind of complete immersion in the process and progress of activities-the mind, will, and hands (body) fully occupied - is what we commonly call **engagement**.*

There is, of course, a greater or lesser degree of involvement at any one time with any one activity, which depends on

- 1. The nature of each **activity***
- 2. The mood, attitude, physical state, and idiosyncratic style of the **actor***
- 3. The context (**behaviour habitat/field of action**) in which the activity takes place” (p. 26).*

This description indicated the multifaceted nature of engagement and the internal and external factors influencing the concept. It considered engagement as an overarching concept for all activity rather than as one of several levels of occupational significance.

The meaning of occupational engagement was later explored by Rebeiro and Cook (1999). They presented their findings in terms of a conceptual model named “occupational spin-off” and discuss this in terms of occupation-as-means. They identified five stages (p. 180): Affirmation; Confirmation; Actualisation; Anticipation; and Spin-off. Spin-off was described as:

“a process of occupational engagement over time and attempts to explain the importance of the social environment to this experience...occupation is not necessarily an end, but instead, serves as a means to confirmation of self and to maintenance of self over time” (p. 183).

This description implied that participation can develop into engagement once an individual has identified subjective significance in an occupation which relates to a sense of wellbeing. By coming from the perspective of occupation-as-means, Rebeiro and Cook (1999) acknowledged that occupations do not always contain an element of subjective significance

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for an individual. Feelings of competence and confidence appear to be described as two features of sustaining occupational engagement (Rebeiro & Cook, 1999).

2000s

In this era, there was an increasing amount of literature published both within occupational science and occupational therapy literatures. As occupational science research techniques developed, the evidence base increased, as did the understanding of the complex nature of occupation and therefore 'occupational engagement'.

A longitudinal study supported the fluctuating nature of engagement. Jonsson *et al* (2001) defined engaging occupations as "*those that evoked a depth of passion or feeling that made them stand out in the narratives*" (p. 428). Participants also described how the significance of different occupations changed as they adjusted into the role of a retired person rather than a worker. This is an indicator of the potential fluctuating nature of the significance of occupations related to external factors such as social expectations of retired people and internal factors such as perceived roles. Jonsson (2008) went on to identify seven constituents of engaging occupations including "*infused with positive meaning and experienced as highly meaningful [and] involved intense participation both in duration and regularity*" (p. 5).

Chugg and Craik (2002) explored the subjective influences on occupational engagement for people with schizophrenia and found both external (physical and social environments) and internal influences (self-efficacy). They acknowledge that many factors influence occupational engagement and that the concept is poorly understood.

Townsend and Polatajko (2007) differentiated between engagement and participation. They asserted that all occupations require participation, stating that occupational therapists are "*concerned with the potential and possibility of occupational engagement*" (p. 27). They specified that meaning is derived from the individual and their culture and cannot be known only through observation, as it is a unique experience. Unlike many other authors who state that engagement has to be active, Townsend and Polatajko (2007) acknowledge that it is possible to engage in an occupation, without performing it.

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They define engagement as a much broader term – “*involve oneself or become occupied; participate*” (p. 24) and viewed it as a continuum dependent on different factors such as intensity, extent and competency. To support this assertion, they gave an example of a man pushing his son’s wheelchair round a marathon course, explaining that the son is engaging in, but not actively participating in marathon running. However, it can be argued that the son is actually participating in a different occupation to the father, defined as co-occupation (Pierce, 2009).

In 2007, detailed narrative research exploring people’s journeys of recovery from mental health problems was carried out on behalf of the Scottish Recovery Network. Engagement was identified as a key theme and was described as “*occur[ing] when the individual is ready and interested in taking part in an activity and the opportunity to do so presents itself*” (Brown & Kandirikirira, 2007, p. 4). Using this definition, ‘engagement’ is seen to be a positive and rewarding concept, with more meaning and value ascribed to it than ‘participation’. Activity, meaning, purpose and belonging were found to be central features. Both personal and external factors were seen to have an influence on engagement, some promoting and others inhibiting. Engagement was seen to be contributing to health and wellbeing, but also a somewhat fragile nature for people with mental health issues:

“Engagement was found to provide an enhanced sense of agency and belonging allowing individuals to find a role in society outside being the ‘person with ill health’. There was also recognition of the need for the rights of those who did not want to pursue traditional participatory activities in society to be supported and not challenged or stigmatised.” (Brown & Kandirikirira, 2007, p. 5).

However, inconsistency within the literature continued. For example, Kielhofner’s 2008 definition implied that occupational engagement appears to only occur within the context of therapy. He stated:

“...occupational engagement refers to clients’ doing, thinking, and feeling under certain environmental conditions in the midst of or as a planned consequence of therapy.” (p. 171).

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Occupational engagement has also been considered alongside other concepts such as occupational participation and occupational presence. For example, Reid (2008) defined occupational engagement as “*being occupied with doing an occupation and is viewed as a powerful determinant of a person’s well-being*” (p. 43). However, she acknowledged that how this happens is unclear. Whilst claiming that being absorbed in an occupation is a feature of high ‘presence’, she defined ‘occupational presence’ as:

“Occupational presence is a felt experience that people can have as a result of occupational engagement. This experience is not necessarily an optimal experience.”

(Reid, 2008, p. 46).

Reid described how presence can be experienced during both intense and mundane occupations, acknowledging how ‘presence’ is not always positive and is a fluctuating state influenced by environments. If there is distraction or limited choice and control over occupations, then ‘presence’ is limited. Lin, Kirsh, Polatajko and Seto (2009) differentiated between ‘*occupational engagement*’ reflecting participation in a range of occupations and ‘*meaningful occupational engagement*’ reflecting occupations which have more positive significance. Interestingly, one of the valued occupations was observing others engaged in social occupations and too much free time was seen as a barrier.

Hitch (2009) used Creek’s (2003) work to define occupational engagement as “*initial or subsequent participation in activities that form part of the individual’s identity*” (p. 483).

This wide use of the term ‘*engagement*’ led to identification of broad features, namely engagement as an interpersonal relationship and as being connected to time with elements of both process and outcome being significant with “*goals, choice and structure*” (p. 486) being key features. Not surprisingly, the clients were more focused on occupational engagement which was “*seen as a positive and empowering experience*” (p. 486); while the staff were more focussed on ‘*service*’ engagement which had more emphasis on solving problems.

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2010s

The 2010s represented a further complexity and sophistication within the understanding of 'occupational engagement' with an emergence of the consideration of the fluctuating nature of the value of occupation. In contrast to Kielhofner (2008), Christiansen and Townsend (2010) proposed:

"...full participation in occupations for purposes of doing what one needs and wants to do, being, becoming who one desires to be, and belonging through shared occupations in communities." (p. 420).

This reflects occupational engagement within the context of daily life. However, it did not fully consider whether the occupation has positive or negative significance or how 'full participation' is judged. Creek (2010) acknowledged the absence of a definition for 'occupational engagement'. She considered the historical development of 'engagement' within the occupational therapy literature and linked it to motivation and volition within a terminology framework with the following definition:

"...engagement is a sense of involvement, choice, positive meaning and commitment while performing an occupation or activity" (p. 166).

Occupational engagement has also been considered as more than a component of participation. Sakiyama, Josephsson and Asaba (2010) commented that the use of the term 'participation' was at times problematic due to its meaning being ambiguous in daily language in comparison with technical lexicons used by professionals (e.g. WHO, 2001) and for clients' participation was more than this, stating:

"We argue that this process element of participation is a common denominator between engagement in occupation and what we refer to here as participation."

(Sakiyama *et al*, 2010, p. 228).

They emphasised the need to reflect on metaphors used by participants in order to fully understand their needs in the context of their cultural and social environments, concluding that in order to avoid occupational deprivation, something more than participation is required.

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Although not citing them, Reid (2011) agreed with Lin *et al* (2009) in differentiating between 'occupational engagement' and 'meaningful occupational engagement'. Reid (2011) concluded that these concepts were interrelated, but that:

“Occupational engagement does not represent an absolute quality, and this is why individuals report having different experiences of being engaged in occupations” (p. 52).

Within this useful contribution to the debate, occupational engagement is clearly seen as part of a continuum which would benefit from further examination. Furthermore, Njelesani, Gibson, Nixon, Cameron and Polatajko (2013) provided a critical insight into the social dimension of engaging in occupations and Blank, Harries and Reynolds (2015) have more recently suggested that providing opportunities for engagement in occupations can facilitate identity and a sense of belonging within a health setting.

Summary

Whilst the literature review revealed a range of ideas about what exactly occupational engagement is, there is agreement that it has a positive meaning within both occupational therapy and occupational science literature. The definitions and descriptions used within the literature are developing in depth and complexity.

Developing understanding of Occupational Engagement

This section first outlines the process followed which led to the final description of occupational engagement and the development of a supporting framework. It explores the resulting description and framework which emerged as the creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990) which arose from a combination of the data gathered from five case studies (reported elsewhere; Morris *et al*, 2016) and the ongoing process of analysis (see figure 2).

Emerging understanding of Occupational Engagement

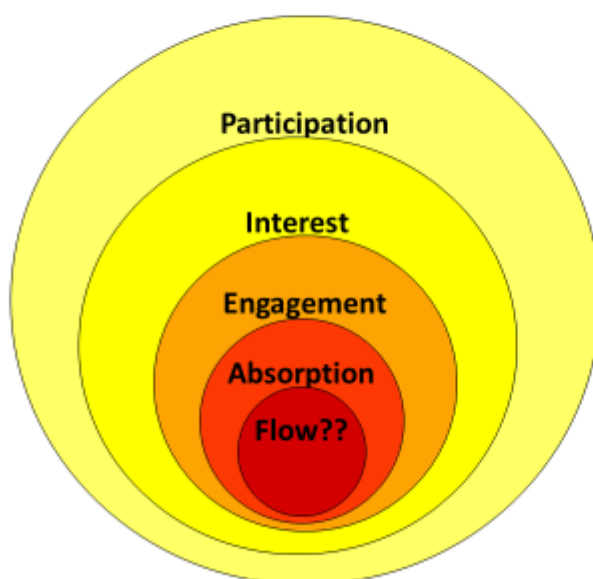
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At the beginning of the research in 2002, it was not possible to find a definition of the term 'occupational engagement' in either core occupational science or occupational therapy literature. Therefore, it was essential to explore the development of the concept of occupational engagement in order to develop a detailed description for use in the research. It was decided that a description and supporting framework rather than a short definition was more appropriate to fully explore the term due to its complex nature. As has been demonstrated in the literature review above, occupational engagement can be investigated in terms of all three areas of form, function and meaning in occupational science research as described by Larson, Wood and Clarke (2003). However, methods must be carefully considered as:

“to reduce engagement to component parts would diminish its study as it is the integrated complexities that require the most rigorous investigation.” (Wilcock 1998, p. 7).

An initial framework of terms related to occupational engagement was developed to aid reflection and data analysis. Etymology was used to help identify words for the framework.(see figure 3).

Figure 3: Initial framework of terms



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In response to the positive bias reflected within literature, initially only the positive potential of occupation was considered. This was highlighted during questions and discussion when this initial framework was presented at a research conference. At that time, it did not feel necessary to explore how engagement related with more negative concepts. However, this was reconsidered following reflection on interviews with one of the case study participants (Morris, 2012). He was so negative about his experience of the unit; it was essential to reflect on the impact of this contribution to the research. Initially a negative mirror to the positive framework was considered. This was developed using the same process as before, with opposites of the value statements being identified. As the case study stories were central to the evolution to the framework, reflecting on these allowed understanding of the elements within it to be reflected upon, their relationship to each other and their appropriateness throughout the research.

The initial positive and negative frameworks guided thinking and early stages of analysis and immersion in the data (Moustakas, 1990). Throughout these attempts to describe occupational engagement for the research, the concept of 'occupational participation' was questioned, considering whether this much used term was in fact a tautology – if occupation means “doing”, then participation is implicit within that. This reflects the view expressed by Townsend and Polatajko (2007). However, participation is a commonly used term in the literature and anchored this framework. The description of occupational engagement proposed by the framework at this early stage was summarized as:

“Occupational engagement is the participation in an occupation with current significant positive meaning.”

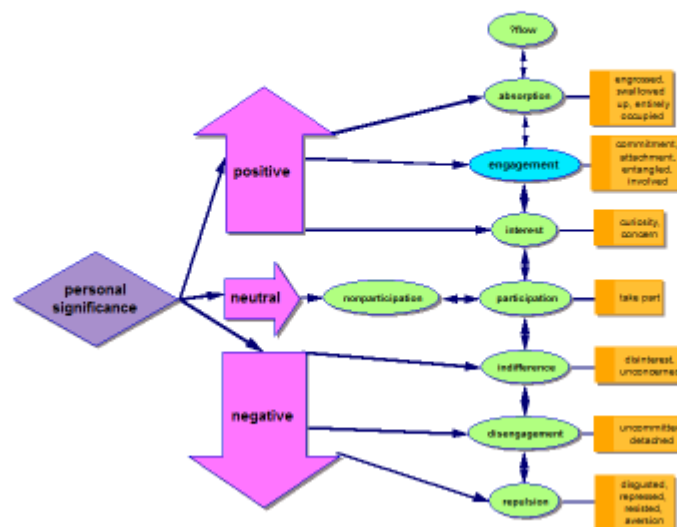
Although they were useful within the initial analysis, these mirroring frameworks were not satisfactory for two reasons. There was no specific link between the two frameworks to explain their relationship. Neither was their relevance to the experiences of the research participants clear. Using the heuristic reflection and analysis process, the frameworks were

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used to help explore the stories from the case studies. This increased insight and understanding of their experiences of the unit and occupational engagement.

Following another round of data collection and data analysis it became possible to link the two initial mirroring frameworks together to begin to explain their relationship (see figure 4). However, it was not possible to clearly define what was meant by 'meaning' in the initial description. Etymology was used again to help and came up with 'significance' as a replacement. 'Significance' is derived from the Latin '*significantia*' defined as "*meaning, force, energy*", and can be defined as "*consequence or importance*" (Hanks, McLeod, & Makins, 1988). It was also not possible to identify the opposite of the concept of 'flow'. Eventually, using the heuristic process (Moustakas, 1990), the two frameworks were linked together. At this stage the notion of personal significance also became clearer and explicit within the representation. Non-participation was also represented as there were times when the case study participants did not take part in regular occupations and it was relevant to explore and discuss the reasons and consequences of this. Attempts to identify an opposite of flow were abandoned as the link between this framework and flow had become uncertain.

Figure 4: Evolution of the framework



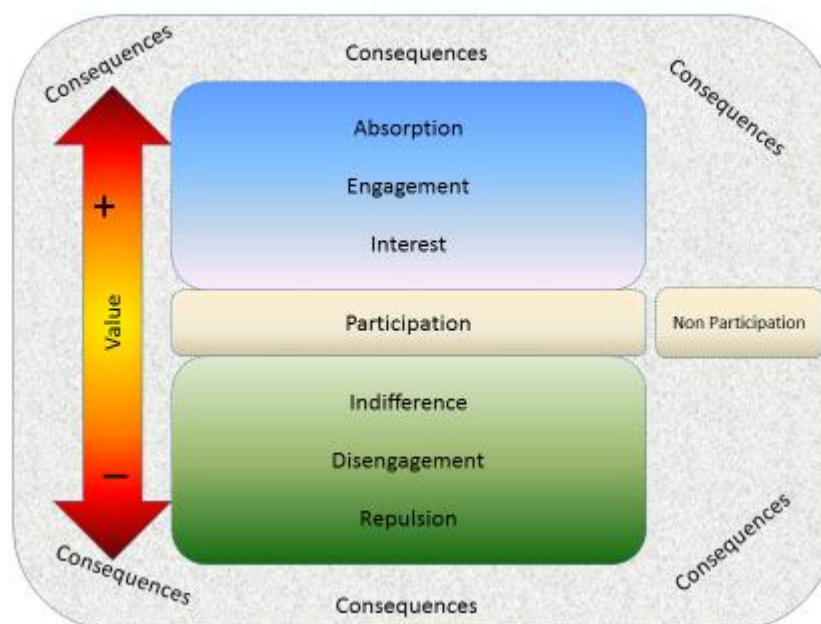
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This framework, although clearer than previous versions, did not explore the impact of the balance between the occupations the men were experiencing or the consequence of their participation. The term 'significance' also felt restrictive when considering some of the men's attitudes towards occupations.

These issues were addressed in the final version of the framework (see figure 5). The term 'value', derived from the Latin '*valere*' meaning "*to be strong, be worth*" (Hanks, McLeod & Makins 1988) was substituted to replace 'significance' as this seems a broader term. Within this version the link to 'flow' was removed as it was now believed that it was not directly associated with the other terms within the framework, although it is related. As previously discussed, there are clear distinctions as a 'flow' occupation has specific high skill and demand requirements (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), whereas an 'absorbing' occupation may not. 'Participation' is the anchor and entry point into the framework; this is simply doing without ascribing a positive or negative value. 'Non participation' is not considered to be occupation as the definition of 'occupation' used here is to be active. It therefore stands apart from the other terms; however, it must be remembered as it serves a purpose and may have either positive or negative consequences. There are occupations which we choose to, or are prevented from, taking part in which have consequences and therefore impact on our sense of wellbeing. For example, deciding to not go to work could result in a negative consequence of not being paid but also a positive consequence of being to watch an important sporting event on television.

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Figure 5: The descriptive framework for occupational engagement



Within this framework, each occupation has a level of personal value, but also has consequences in terms of feedback from physical, social and cultural environments. An occupation with positive value for the individual can have negative consequences and vice versa. For example, for a young person experimenting with drugs (interest or engagement), if caught by parents could result in being grounded (negative consequence); continuing to attend boring revision sessions (indifference) could result in increased chance of being accepted in the university of their choice (positive consequence). The colours are graduated to reflect the notion of increasing intensity implied by the descriptions described above. Positive concepts are grouped together, as are negative ones, to reflect their close associations and merging, rather than having obvious linear distinctions. The lines between the occupation and consequences are dotted to represent their interrelationship.

Description of occupational engagement

The framework is accompanied by the following description:

“Occupational engagement is positioned within a framework of personal value and perceived consequences to participation. Occupational engagement is the involvement in an occupation with current positive personal value attached to it. Engaging occupations require

more involvement than those occupations that just interest the individual, but not as much as those that absorb them. Occupational engagement is a fluctuating state influenced by complex and multiple internal and external factors.

The person will perceive positive or negative consequences to participation which may change over time in response to feedback from social, cultural and physical environments. Positive wellbeing occurs when people to participate in occupations with both positive personal value and positive perceived consequences for both the individual and the society in which they live.”

Etymology of words within the framework

Etymology is the study of how words are defined and how meaning has changed over time, influenced by factors such as traditional and emerging uses. The same word can have different uses to different groups, for example ‘bad’ can mean ‘bad’ or ‘good’ depending on who is using the word. Therefore, it is useful to explore the etymology of ‘occupation’ and ‘engagement’ and other related words in order to develop a consistent understanding of the term ‘occupational engagement’. In addition, the other terms used within the framework are also described here before the framework is explained and illustrated with an example.

Occupation is derived from the Latin ‘*occupare*’ meaning ‘*to seize hold of ...*’ and ‘*capare*’ meaning ‘*to take*’ (MacDonald, 1967). It is defined as a person’s regular work or profession; any activity on which time is spent by a person; or the act of occupying a country. The ‘public’ most common use of the term occupation is the first one about work. However, ‘*work*’ could be argued to be ‘*what you are doing at a particular time*’ e.g. keeping yourself occupied. Historically a more generic meaning of ‘doing’ was adopted by therapists (Meyer, 1922). All the dictionary definitions of ‘occupation’ include activity in some form and so within this paper activity is part of occupation.

The term ‘**value**’, derived from the Latin ‘*valere*’ meaning “*to be strong, be worth*” (Hanks, 1988) has been selected to describe the personal relevance of the occupation to the

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individual. The term '**consequence**', derived from the Latin '*consequens*' meaning "*following closely*" (Hanks, 1988), and is defined as the result of doing something.

There are neutral, positive and negative values associated with the framework.

There are two neutral values associated with the framework:

- '**Participation**' has a Latin origin and translated literally means '*part take*' (Tulloch, 1995).
- '**Non Participation**' is simply the opposite of 'Participation', meaning "*not taking part*" (Tulloch, 1995).

The three positive values associated with the framework are:

- '**Interest**' is derived from the Latin '*interesse*' meaning concerns and is defined as "*the sense of curiosity about or concern with something or someone*" (Hanks, 1988).
- '**Engagement**' is derived from the French '*engager*' meaning '*to commit*' or '*to involve*' (Tulloch, 1995).
- '**Absorption**' is derived from the Latin word '*sorbere*' meaning to suck and is defined as "*engrossed; deeply interested*" (Hanks, 1988).

The three negative values associated with the framework mirror the positive ones:

- '**Indifference**' is considered to be the opposite of 'Interest' with a meaning of "*disinterested*" or "*unconcerned*" (Hanks, 1988).
- '**Disengagement**' is the opposite of 'engagement'.
- Finally, '**Repulsion**' is seen to be the opposite of absorption, with a literal meaning of "*to push*" (Hanks, 1988).

Implications for Occupational Science

Occupational science developed as a result of a need to develop occupation based theory to understand why people do the things they do (Glover, 2009). This includes

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developing descriptions of commonly used terms. Using occupational science principles has helped develop new understanding of practice settings.

This new descriptive framework embraces the full value range of occupational experiences and helps us explore why people do the things they do. Whilst designed initially to support a description of 'occupational engagement', it also introduces language not commonly seen within occupational science (such as 'repulsion') to position engagement within the full range of occupational experiences. This helps us fully consider negative experiences as well as positive ones, for example why people choose to continue to do things they hate doing. It also develops our own terminology in relation to existing terms used within the literature.

Whilst caution is needed to avoid simply adding 'occupational' in front of a word to create a new term, there is potential for new descriptions to evolve out of the framework. For example, if adopted within the occupational science and occupational therapy lexicons, 'occupational absorption' could be used more accurately by occupational scientists than the psychological concept of 'flow'. It may be that, for occupational experiences meeting these specific requirements, occupational engagement and absorption are steps towards achieving a state of 'flow'. However, as 'absorbing' occupations are not required to meet the demands of 'flow', this allows us to consider the full range of highly positively valued occupations including those with relatively low physical or cognitive demands which may be comforting or used to aid relaxation.

The description and supporting framework acknowledge that occupational engagement is a complex, subjective and multifaceted concept which needs careful investigation to understand fully. Occupational engagement cannot be imposed on someone as participation can be. It seems that it is the experience of 'engagement' in an occupation that makes it a positive experience for an individual. Due to its complexity, occupational engagement cannot be investigated in isolation and needs to be considered alongside other related concepts such as attention using a holistic approach. Yerxa (2000) described how people respond to their physical, social and cultural environments through engaging in

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occupation. Pierce (2003) discussed the relationship between the individual, their environment and the therapist in developing therapeutic power through occupational engagement. The challenge is to untangle and understand the complexities of these multiple factors whilst still maintaining the essence of the interactions.

The starting point for the overarching research (Morris, 2012; Morris *et al*, 2016) was to explore if and how the value attributed to occupations change over time. The research demonstrated that changes in the value or the consequences attributed to occupations can influence each other.

Limitations

In order to contextualise understanding of definitions and descriptions of occupational engagement used by authors, this review focussed on occupational science and occupational therapy literature. Other disciplines are likely to also be able to contribute to the development of a definition of occupational engagement, but this was not possible within the timescale of the research. It was not possible to review literature not written in English. As the review was conducted within the context of a larger piece of interpretative research, this has also influenced the resulting description and framework. The description proposed is a contribution to the debate, reflecting current understanding of the researchers. Further discussion and debate is required to test and validate it. The creation and adoption of a definition for occupational engagement which is of use to both occupational science and clinicians requires further collaborative research and analysis over time.

Conclusion

Reilly (1961) called for increased understanding of all aspects of occupation, occupational science is making a significant contribution to this. The challenge for scientists and therapists is to be able to identify engagement in occupation rather than just participation in an occupation. This may be difficult, as participation may not be active and observable. For example, it is possible to passively participate in the occupation of watching television. However, if the programme is of interest then the person may become engaged.

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There may be little observable signs of either participation or engagement so it is essential to discuss the current value of occupations with the person. The literature has focussed on the positive value of occupation, although more recent literature has begun to acknowledge negative aspects of occupation (e.g. Twinley, 2013).

Within this paper the value and consequences of occupational experiences have been considered both during an experience and how this may change over time. Pierce (2009) explored how multiple definitions of terms can be acceptable, especially as occupational science develops. This paper has positioned the frequently used term 'occupational engagement' within a descriptive framework to enable occupational scientists and occupational therapists to be able to have fuller consideration of its key features. The holistic description of this term as the framework fully acknowledges the negative as well as positive dimensions of occupation. The aim has been to contribute to the debate, not to introduce a whole new taxonomy.

The framework serves as a reminder to occupational scientists to regularly reconsider the attributed value of occupations. It emphasises the relationship between the occupational preferences of people and the demands of society for successful community living. Using the framework as a tool could help occupational scientists to explore the changing value attributed to occupations and to consider the impact of a person's preferred occupations on their long term health and wellbeing.

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