

## Career journey as river

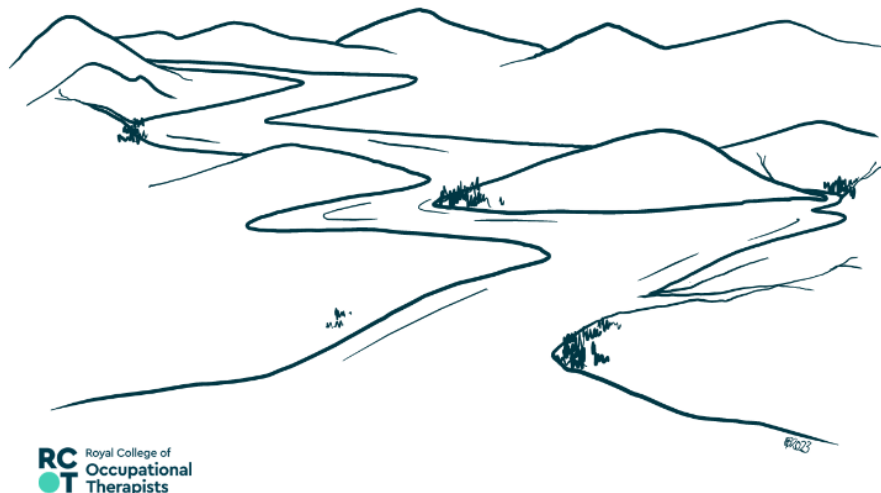
A reflection tool based on the Kawa model (Iwama et al, 2009)

A series of RCOT career conversations vodcasts (video podcasts) sharing the career narratives of our diverse workforce began in early 2023. The series highlights a range of possibilities and opportunities in occupational therapy. Vodcasts are also available in traditional audio podcast format and/or text transcription via the RCOT website and linked platforms.

Many of the career conversations captured in the vodcast series use the analogy of career journey as a river as in the [Kawa model](#) of occupational therapy. The following tool repurposes the prompts used for these conversations for individual reflection and discussion, alongside a selection of illustrations as visual prompts.

Please use this tool in whatever way works for you as an individual; as a creative and visual prompt, as a structure for conversation, a written reflection template... any number of possibilities.

A brief overview of the Kawa model is found below, and template illustrations at the end of the document (also available as a separate .pdf files).



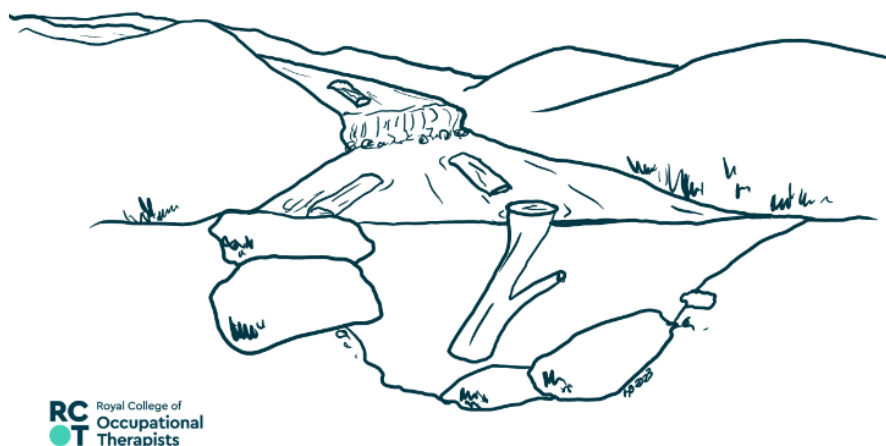
### The Kawa model

With its' nature analogy, creativity and visual/experiential potential, the Kawa model served as ideal guide for the career conversations series and who have participated so far and have valued opportunity to reflect on and share their own career journey using the Kawa guided prompts.

The [Kawa model](#) of occupational therapy was devised by Professor Michael Iwama. Kawa is the Japanese word for river and the Kawa model conceptualises life flow as a river. The path of the river flowing from source to the river mouth is a metaphor for life's journey. In its original form, the water represents life flow, the riverbanks and bed are its multifaceted environment. Challenges or obstacles are represented by rocks or boulders and influencing factors such as personal values and

so on, which can either help hinder or both are defined by the driftwood. The spaces between these elements are considered as the opportunities to enhance the life flow (Iwama et al, 2009).

The metaphor can evolve in endless ways or take an entirely different form led by the individual and their perspective and understanding. The Kawa model can be used in a number of ways, for example, looking back at the river course or looking at the here and now in a cross-section snapshot of the river course. The river course of life and career, inseparable from the environment, is something that's consistently changing and evolving; it's unique for each individual and not necessarily linear.



## Inclusive engagement

All members of our occupational therapy workforce, irrespective of background and/or characteristics, should feel valued, respected, and supported to develop their talents to the full. The career conversations series began through ongoing work by [CPD@RCOT](mailto:CPD@RCOT) to improve inclusive engagement and the support offered to increase representation across all levels and scopes of practice. We want to challenge the barriers to career development and progression that can be and have been experienced by those historically underrepresented in our profession. That river course of life and career, inseparable from the environment, is something that's consistently changing and evolving; it's unique for each individual and not necessarily linear. The Kawa model lends itself as ideal lens to highlight the breadth and depth of roles, life circumstances and experience, workplace context and career possibilities across the diversity of occupational therapy.

## References

Iwama M.K, Thomson N. A, Macdonald R. M. (2009) 'The Kawa model: The power of culturally responsive occupational therapy', *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 31:14, 1125-1135, DOI:10.1080/09638280902773711

Rolfe G., Freshwater D, Jasper M (2001) *Critical reflection in nursing and the helping professions: a user's guide*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

**Further information and resources relating to the Kawa model can be found at <http://www.kawamodel.com>**

Date:

**Let's start with some introductions. The space below is for an introduction to yourself and your current role/roles.**

The purpose of this reflection tool is around your career journey and to prompt and aid your thinking about your occupational therapy career and your experiences in getting to this point. The tool uses the analogy of career journey as river/river course and uses the Kawa model to guide your thinking.

**What drew you to occupational therapy? Can you pinpoint the source of your occupational therapy river?**

**The tributaries: What skills, experiences and opportunities have contributed along the way?** These may be from within and beyond occupational therapy; previous careers, life experiences, additional roles etc.

**How has your environment enabled or restricted your career journey?**

Environment in this sense is multi-faceted and includes social, institutional, cultural aspects.

**What role has supervision had in this?**

**What have been the boulders in the flow of your career journey as river?  
What has or would have helped?**

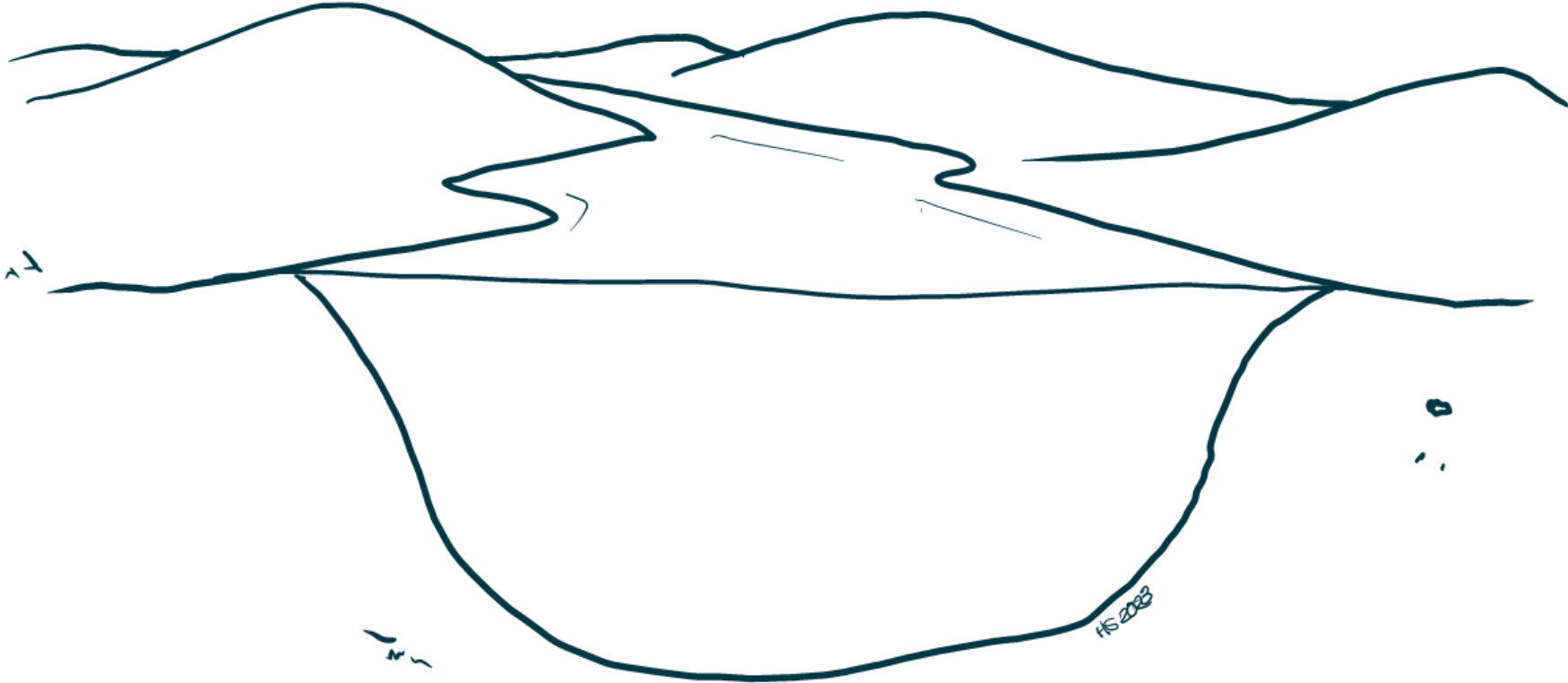
**Have there been points where your river has turned or changed course in a way that you'd not anticipated?**

**What has been/is most important and/or helpful for you in your development and progression in occupational therapy?**

**Where are the spaces; the opportunities and possibilities for enhancing the flow of your occupational therapy career journey?**



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**Notes/Reflections**

What? So what? Now what? (Rolfe, Freshwater, Jasper, 2001)  
Is there any action to be taken? If so, by whom and by when?