Conceptualising the Entrepreneurship Education and Employability Nexus

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1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the idea that entrepreneurship education is in many ways synonymous with the development of students' employability. The proximity of entrepreneurship and employability is expressed, for example, in the UK Quality Assurance Agency's (2018) proposition that:

"Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education provides interventions that are focused on supporting behaviours, attributes and competencies that are likely to have a significant impact on the individual student in terms of successful careers…" (Quality Assurance Agency, 2018: 2).

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For many readers the existence of this strong relationship between EE, employability and careers will come as no surprise, and yet this should not detract from a critical examination of this relationship. Perhaps precisely because of the apparent strength of the relationship, to date critical examinations have remained relatively scarce. We also believe a further examination of the relationship is timely given the place both entrepreneurship and employability assume in current higher education discourse, notably in relation to the preparation of graduates for the world of work. In an increasingly market-driven HE sector (Brown & Carasso, 2013), where policymakers expect a return on investment in education, employability has turned into an imperative (Tomlinson & Nghia, 2020) and is an indicator of educational value upon which universities are judged (Ustav & Venesaar, 2018). For example, in the UK graduates' employment outcomes are measured which feed into HEI rankings. Understanding the extent to which EE does in fact sit comfortably with the employability agenda, or at least how it relates to the employability agenda, is the subject matter of our conceptual review.

Although much of the literature and contextual focus in this chapter relates to the UK, we suggest the broader themes we discuss also relate to the delivery of entrepreneurship education across the globe: a focus on graduate employability, the expansion of higher education and entrepreneurship education, and ultimately the relationship between entrepreneurship and employability are issues that are certainly not unique to the UK.

2 Entrepreneurship Education

The rapid expansion of EE has been likened to an explosion by Morris and Liguori (2016). Not only has EE expanded quantitatively, i.e. in terms of provision, its remit has also broadened. "The aims of entrepreneurship education have been extending beyond business creation and management skills to students' preparation for work and life" (Ustav & Venesaar, 2018, p. 674). For example, Neergaard et al. (2020) identify multiple outcomes of EE in the literature, among them creativity, innovation, social and environmental concerns, as well as versatile skills, such as team building and design thinking. This presents a challenge to the researcher because it is difficult to operationalise what is amorphous. Researchers and educators have been trying to define the 'what', the 'why' the 'how' the 'for whom' and 'for which results' of EE for some time now (e.g.

Fayolle & Gailly, 2008) and this quest continues today (e.g. Fayolle et al., 2016). We acknowledge therefore that an attempt at clarifying the relationship between EE and employability will struggle to an extent with this 'fuzziness'.

The most fundamental distinction in the focus of EE is that between enterprise and entrepreneurship education (the previously-cited QAA study uses both terms and clearly distinguishes between them). Entrepreneurship education focuses on the processes and tasks associated with starting a new venture, becoming self-employed or growing a part of an established organisation. Enterprise education is more broadly understood as the development of enterprising behaviours and the capabilities and skills needed to adapt to changing circumstances in a flexible market economy (Jones & Iredale, 2007; Quality Assurance Agency, 2018). Historically, enterprise education may have developed out of entrepreneurship education [in Hynes' (1996) paper, for example, entrepreneurship education was very much about business start-up, with the consideration of relevance being extended to non-business students, but no mention being made of enterprise in a broader sense], today the calls for entrepreneurship education to be extended beyond business start-up are frequently made (Lackeus, 2018; Young, 2014).

While we agree with the view that EE can set itself apart from general business management programmes in its business start-up focus (Neck & Corbett, 2018), even with a start-up orientation EE can be seen to develop a common set of skills, attributes and competencies (Neergaard et al., 2020; Ustav & Venesaar, 2018). In fact, today, EE frequently includes enterprise too (Quality Assurance Agency, 2018). With regard to skills/competency development it is difficult to distinguish between enterprise and entrepreneurship outcomes. This is evidenced for example in Rae's (2007) list of enterprise skills which might be as useful in a start-up scenario as they would in an employment setting:

- initiative;
- problem solving;
- identifying and working on opportunities;
- leadership;
- acting resourcefully; and
- responding to challenges.

If we compare this to the UK's National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship's (NCGE) suggestion to embed entrepreneurship education because to 'add value' graduates need to have "the entrepreneurial skills that enable them to seize and exploit opportunities, solve issues and problems, generate and communicate ideas, and make a difference in their communities" (NESTA et al., 2008: 6) we can see that there is substantial overlap with Rae's (2007) list of enterprise skills. Enterprise skills in this broader sense could be said, in a nutshell, to revolve around the development of an 'opportunity identification logic' (Lackeus, 2018). Regarded through an entrepreneurial mindset lens (Scheepers et al., 2018), we suggest there is little that distinguishes enterprise from entrepreneurship education outcomes. The only notable distinction is where those attributes might subsequently be employed, either for oneself in setting up a business, or for another as an employee, suggesting that they can be applied in diverse contexts, such as new or existing commercial ventures, charities, non-governmental organisations, public and voluntary sector organisations and social enterprises (Quality Assurance Agency, 2018).

To illustrate this point further, an extensive set of entrepreneurial competencies were outlined by Bacigalupo et al. (2016) in their EU-funded and widely referenced report that aimed to build a bridge between the worlds of education and work. The Entrepreneurship Competency Framework, commonly referred to as EntreComp, comprises three competence areas: 'Ideas and opportunities', 'Resources' and 'Into action'. The reason for this segmentation is because entrepreneurship competence was defined as the ability to transform ideas and opportunities into action by mobilising resources. Each of the three areas is made up of five competences, resulting in fifteen competences in total. Given the very comprehensive nature of the EntreComp framework it has widespread applicability, certainly beyond solely business start-up. The potential downside is that it could be difficult to distinguish the numerous competencies from generic skills (or competences) and hence generic employability competences.

In sum, entrepreneurship education has expanded and is being promoted beyond its original focus on business start-up to students on a wide range of programmes. The competences (or skills, attributes) EE develops are deemed beneficial in a wide range of scenarios. Lists of specific enterprise skills have been offered (e.g. Bacigalupo et al., 2016; Rae, 2007) but at their heart lies what we, with reference to Shane

and Venkataraman (2000), describe as the ability to identify, evaluate and exploit opportunities, or what Lackeus (2018) terms an 'opportunity logic'.

3 Employability and a Changing World of Work

Employability is a contested concept. It has been variously defined (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Small et al., 2018), but the difficulties related to the concept are not solely about definitional details. Employability is a laden concept, one that strikes at the heart of the nature of the modern university and its place in society, being itself part of wider discourses surrounding the nature of knowledge in society and knowledge's contribution to economic development. This is directly referred to in Bacigalupo et al.'s (2016) EntreComp framework where the harnessing of the individual's entrepreneurial capacity is to prepare them for the 'knowledge-based society'.

Data from OECD countries indicate that the proportion of individuals with tertiary education grew from 26% in 2000 to 45% in 2019 (OECD, 2020).[1] This expansion of higher education is driven by notions of knowledge societies characteristic of post-industrial capitalism (Bell, 1973; Drucker, 1993). As Becker (2002) suggested, we are living in an 'Age of Human Capital' which explains policymakers' interest in expanding higher education to strengthen a nation's human capital base (O'Donovan, 2020). Although the relationship between the expansion of higher education and economic growth is recognised as being complex and growth in the former does not necessarily lead to growth in the latter (Brown & Lauder, 2006; Wolf, 2002) this has not led to a reduction of those participating in HE globally. HE understood here as strengthening a nation's human capital base has direct implications for employability. Creating employable graduates who can contribute to a nation's competitiveness is one of the key functions of HE in the knowledge society.

Viewed through the lens of policymakers, public sector investment in HE requires a return, which includes creating employable graduates (Tomlinson & Nghia, 2020). Here concerns have been raised about levels of graduate-level employment, specifically whether the increase in

[1] 25–34 year-olds, % in same age group.

graduate-level jobs has kept pace with the HE expansion (Battu et al., 1999; Brown & Lauder, 2006). This, as we discuss in greater detail below, relates directly to entrepreneurship because if proportionately fewer graduates are finding jobs with traditional graduate recruiters, typically large firms, then employment in SMEs (Gibb, 1996; Jones & Iredale, 2014), joining a family business and engaging in transgenerational entrepreneurship (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015), and even self-employment (Jones et al., 2017) is set to increase. Certainly this view was very much in evidence at the turn of the Millennium (Elias & Purcell, 2004; Holden & Jameson, 2002), and yet given the ongoing growth in HE participation the issue is likely to be true today also. Today it is understood that many graduates will not end up working for large corporations (Dhaliwal, 2017), and that they will not have linear careers within one organisation (Jones et al., 2017; Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020). However, fears of many graduates being overeducated for roles they end up working in persist (see, for example, the UK's Office for National Statistics, 2019).

Because policymakers' desire to ensure returns from investment in HE are realised, universities in the UK need to provide metrics on graduate outcomes (e.g. economic activity, salaries and occupational classifications). Pressure to 'produce' employable graduates also comes from prospective recruiters and graduates themselves and so universities have written the development of employability into their strategies (Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020; Small et al., 2018). This typically results in sets of skills or attributes that graduates should have developed that help them gain employment as well as contribute to organisational performance once employed. The frequently-used definition of employability provided by Yorke (2006: 4) captures this clearly: "A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy".

Moving from an acknowledgement that, from an employer-centric perspective, employability requires certain skills and attributes (Fugate et al., 2021) has, inevitably, resulted in lists of what these attributes should be. An example of such is provided by the Confederation of British Industry who worked with the National Union of Students to determine the following: self-management, team working, problem solving, communication, application of numeracy, application of IT, and business and customer awareness (CBI, 2017). It would go beyond the scope of this chapter to explore similarities in universities' employability strategies, or

indeed review the plethora of studies of employers' claimed skills needs, but it suffices to recognise that in the current environment employability is certainly 'writ large' in UK HEIs (Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020; Small et al., 2018).

Employability can also be understood from the perspective of the individual student, rather than from employers, policymakers or HEIs. Employability from the perspective of the individual (i.e. an employee-centric perspective) would include understanding one's own career interests and to find fulfilling work (Fugate et al., 2021). Work is a major activity in most working-age adults' lives. It provides livelihoods and also, for most people, offers a critical psychological function and a sense of identity (see, for example, Grint, 1991). Being employable might therefore be regarded as a key attribute of modern citizenship as it "is perceived as the way the individual can contribute to society, thus becoming an active citizen" (Mikelatou & Arvanitis, 2018: 501). It's converse, being unemployed and potentially even being designated unemployable is attached with stigma. Here it is important to recognise that employability and employment outcomes are a function of more than just graduate skills and attributes. Tomlinson and Nghia (2020) provide a list of 'capitals' (e.g. human, social, cultural and identity capital) that will influence employment outcomes, and structural factors (i.e. labour market circumstances) will also determine employment outcomes. As Rae (2007: 607) suggests, employability and employment outcomes may therefore go beyond solely knowledge, skills and attributes.

As the meaning of work and careers continues to change so does the nature of employability. Greater uncertainty surrounding careers has been captured in concepts such as the Protean career (Hall, 1996) or the Boundaryless career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Hall (1996) describes the demise of the traditional psychological contract between employer and employee and the death of the organisational career. In its place, the twenty-first-century career "will be protean, a career that is driven by the person, not the organization, and that will be reinvented by the person from time to time, as the person and the environment change" (Hall, 1996: 8). The concept of the boundaryless career, while drawing on different meanings (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) still has at its core the idea of "independence from, rather than dependence on, traditional organizational career arrangements" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996: 6). There is greater flux in modern careers, and greater onus on the individual to manage their careers—this could reflect a broader loosening of ties in

modern societies described in a number of key texts (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991) and in fact contributes to them (Sennett, 1998). Rather than focusing on employment, employability may therefore be understood today as a form of employment security (Fugate et al., 2021).

A further driver of change in the careers landscape that supports the idea of non-linear, fluid careers, is the rapid pace of technological development, especially developments in artificial intelligence (AI). The implications of AI for work in the twenty-first century (and beyond) are still strongly debated (Bootle, 2018). Some predictions are dramatic in terms of the impact on employment (e.g. Ford, 2015; Frey & Osborne, 2017; Tegmark, 2017), others are more sanguine (Nedelkoska & Quintini, 2018). What is clear is that technological developments and especially developments in AI will change the nature of work, especially if it brings about a change in the kind of jobs that exist and how these are undertaken. Taken together, continued expansion of HE, a weakening of the psychological contract and rapid technological developments will result in even more fluid, less stable careers.

This leads to our final point, or development, in the world of work with implications for employability. Generation theory (Mannheim, 1952) has been used to explain the varying attitudes to work and careers of different generational cohorts. We recognise the danger in over-emphasising generation as an explanatory variable for an individual's work values (Schröder, 2018), and yet it is worth reflecting on how today's graduates understand the world of work. Whereas it could be argued that the weakening of the psychological contract began with employers who were reacting with layoffs in the 1990s to poor economic circumstances, it has been claimed by some that for Generation Z (those born between the Millennium and today) there is a realisation that careers will unfold in a variety of organisations and roles. According to a report by the Lovell Corporation (2017: 6): "They are a fiery generation, determined to pursue their passions and chart their own career paths". Generation Z has also been described as 'independent and entrepreneurial' in a Deloitte report although the report suggests in contrast to Millennials, Generation Z would like to realise entrepreneurial opportunities in the safety of stable employment. 'Stability' also ranked highly in another study of 1,753 business students in the US but likewise results indicated a recognition that careers will be flexible and non-linear (Maloni et al., 2019). Notions such as autonomy, opportunity identification, dealing with ambiguity

and resilience frequently associated with entrepreneurship and arguably relevant in a fluid career environment might align with career values associated with Generation Z. If this is the case, then attempting to develop such attributes via EE should be supported.

4 The Entrepreneurship-Employability Nexus

Employability has attracted a substantial amount of attention from scholars in different disciplines but with limited cross-fertilisation (Fugate et al., 2021). The same lack of cross-fertilisation could be said to exist between entrepreneurship and employability. We suggest that despite wider recognition of the existence of a relationship between entrepreneurship and employability, the relationship between the two concepts is more complex than typically acknowledged. As was outlined above, employability is a laden term, but its contested nature has scarcely found its way into discussions of the relationship between entrepreneurship and employability where the two are assumed to sit comfortably together.

In fact, in some instances the apparent proximity of the two concepts has led to them being used interchangeably (Sewell & Pool, 2010). The close relationship between the two concepts goes back some time with Tate and Thompson (1994) setting enterprise skills on a par with vocational skills. Despite admittedly strong ties, there are grounds to contest the notion that the two concepts sit together unproblematically. If one adopts a narrow definition of entrepreneurship, i.e. in the business start-up sense, entrepreneurship and employability have very different foci. Unlike the employee who is by definition employed by someone else and therefore accountable to the employer, entrepreneurship relates to the individual who is their own boss, accountable in an employment sense only to themselves. Thus, employability is about preparing the individual, and in our case the undergraduate student, for the employ of someone else (Forrier & Sels, 2003). At the heart of EE is preparation of the individual for venture creation (Neck & Corbett, 2018). This is not a trivial point, because it would mean that rather than the three-dimensional 'employee-employer-society/economy' framework underpinning employability (Fugate et al., 2021), to which we would also add the HEI in our context, entrepreneurship would more appropriately be framed by an 'entrepreneur-society/economy' framework. Many of the issues that engage employability scholars such as the role of the psychological contract or remuneration would not apply to entrepreneurship.

A further consideration that in theory moves employability and entrepreneurship apart is EE's focus on developing autonomy (Bacigalupo et al., 2016; van Gelderen, 2010). Although entrepreneurs will have varying degrees of need for autonomy (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2018) autonomy is recognised as driver of entrepreneurship (Shane et al., 2003; van Gelderen & Jansen, 2006), and has been included in some models of employability (Sewell & Pool, 2010). However, there will be a limit to the extent to which autonomy is allowed to unfold within an employment situation, which is precisely why for some, the desire 'to do one's own thing' leads to entrepreneurship and may even lead to 'entrepreneurship addiction' (Spivack & McKelvie, 2018). This desire is likely particularly pronounced when entrepreneurship education prompts students to think that everyone should launch a business or if it reflects an overemphasis on venture creation leading to limited understanding of how to apply entrepreneurial skills in non-start-up environments (Bandera et al., 2021). While this point is speculative, it is worth considering at least the extent to which employability skills (or attributes) are always aligned with entrepreneurial attributes. There will be situations where too much autonomy is not desired by employers. On the point of autonomy, we should also consider that employment outcomes are in part at least determined by structural (labour market) factors. In a slack labour market the aspiring graduate employee may find themselves pushed into entrepreneurship out of necessity (Nabi et al., 2013).

On the whole however, despite these differences, there are strong connections between both concepts especially given that entrepreneurship education has moved beyond solely business start-up (as evidenced in the distinction between enterprise and entrepreneurship education discussed above). Even based on narrow definitions of entrepreneurship there are overlaps in terms of skills development: it is clear that those skills/competences helpful for starting a new venture are likely to be of use in a general business setting, or indeed more broadly in life (Neck & Corbett, 2018). For instance, they may prepare graduates for being change makers in established organisations (Neergaard et al., 2020), managing SMEs (Curtis et al., 2020; Gibb, 1996) or joining their family's business (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). We also suggest a third aspect relating to the changing nature of work and meaning of employability which binds the two concepts of entrepreneurship and employability tightly together.

A comparison of skills that are deemed critical to both entrepreneurship and employability indicates substantial overlap. In fact, looking at the Entrecomp framework and its fifteen entrepreneurship competences many of them would directly relate to employability skills as desired by employers. For some of these competences there appears to be no distinction in terms of suitability for entrepreneurship or for employability: 'motivation and persistence', 'taking the initiative' and 'ability to work with others' would all be regarded as generic competences that would apply in many employment settings. It could be argued that some of the identified entrepreneurial competences (e.g. creativity or coping with ambiguity, uncertainty and risk) would only apply in specific employment settings, and yet drawing a clear division between competences that are suitable only in one domain and not in the other would be a futile undertaking. This interpretation is supported by Rae (2007: 611) who describes enterprise skills as "the skills, knowledge and attributes needed to apply creative ideas and innovations to practical solutions". While not all forms of employment will need high levels of enterprise skills thus defined, many will. So, we can see that enterprise skills/competencies could be regarded as a sub-set of a broader set of employability skills/competencies. The extent to which enterprise skills are required in a particular job will depend on the nature of the job, just as the extent to which specific employability skills will apply to entrepreneurship will depend on broad or narrow definitions of entrepreneurship. On the whole, there is substantial overlap.

In addition to acknowledgement of the overlap, if not complete equivalence between the two terms, of interest is how developments in the world of work are shaping the relationship between entrepreneurship and employability. Technological advancements and the increasing digitalisation of operations create new opportunities for entrepreneurship, on the one hand; they affect the availability and content of jobs and require new forms of work and mobility across organisations and industries, on the other hand (Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020; Mikelatou & Arvanitis, 2018). An emphasis on the development of entrepreneurial attributes for all, not just business and entrepreneurship students, is based on the dynamic nature of the business environment. In such an environment there is a benefit to employers of employing individuals who demonstrate entrepreneurial competencies. Consequently, EE is being promoted beyond its traditional focus on undergraduate business/economics students (Lackeus, 2018; NESTA et al., 2008;

Williams, 2019). This is further demonstrated in the UK Government-commissioned 'Young Report' (Young, 2014), which argued for the inclusion of EE in all disciplines and all levels of education. In fact, Gibb (2002: 234) recognised this need for greater levels of entrepreneurship in all spheres of life when he wrote entrepreneurial behaviour would be required by, for example, "priests, doctors, teachers, policemen, pensioners and community workers and, indeed, potentially everyone in the community". Understood thus, entrepreneurship is encroaching upon the domain of employability with entrepreneurship skills/competencies finding greater recognition in those skills employees need today.

A dynamic, uncertain business environment may be interpreted as part of broader fluidity in modern lives (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992). This fluidity applies also to the world of work and therefore also employability. This fluidity requires entrepreneurial attributes. Not only are enterprise skills, e.g. Rae (2007) good for employers, they apply also to the individual in their attempts to navigate the fast-moving waters of the world of work. The shift from a focus on employment to a focus on employability (Fugate et al., 2021) will favour those able to identify, evaluate and exploit opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000) in the labour market, including business start-up. The idea that graduates need to be more self-reliant also aligns with entrepreneurship education's focus on autonomy (van Gelderen, 2010) and the role of self-efficacy beliefs in entrepreneurship (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994; Chen et al., 1998). The first sentence in William's (2019) report on engaging students in EE demonstrates this dual connection between entrepreneurship and employability:

"Entrepreneurship education has grown in recent years. In part, this is due to debates regarding the employability of graduates, with enterprise and entrepreneurship being seen as a key route to securing future jobs, either by the graduates creating jobs themselves or applying entrepreneurial skills to employment opportunities" (Williams, 2019: 4).

EE may then help the graduate both to secure employment and to add value to the organisation once employed.

5 Conclusion

Having reviewed the relationship between entrepreneurship and employability we propose three dimensions that characterise it: business start-up, intrapreneurship and career development. Here we summarise these dimensions whereby it is acknowledged that the categories themselves are

related (the development for business start-up and associated skills will also be relevant for intrapreneurship, for example).

1. a business start-up (entrepreneurship) dimension

Because of the ongoing expansion in particular of tertiary education, entrepreneurship education will play an important role in preparing graduates for self-employment and also for employment in other contexts, such as SMEs, family businesses, non-governmental organisations, the public sector or social enterprises. An emphasis on entrepreneurship here relates also to the role SMEs, and particularly entrepreneurial ventures, can play in driving forward economic growth and development. In the UK current measures of graduate outcomes appear to favour employment, rather than business start-up. This is an ongoing issue whose persistence could be explored further (e.g. should non-traditional career paths be set on a par with employment outcomes upon which universities are assessed?).

2. an intrapreneurship (enterprise) dimension

Fundamentally, entrepreneurship education develops employability skills/competences although not all entrepreneurship skills/competences will be equally useful in all employability situations. Given the progressively dynamic business environment, driven in part by rapid technological development, enterprise skills, especially an 'opportunity logic' (Lackeus, 2018) are likely to be increasingly in demand by employers.

3. a career developmental ('life skills') dimension.

Entrepreneurship education supports career development in particular in relation to navigating a turbulent world of work. Where long-term careers with one organisation are increasingly rare, where the idea of having multiple careers is no longer regarded as extraordinary, entrepreneurship education can prepare the individual for this type of labour market. As Fugate et al. (2021) argue, employability is moving towards the notion of maintaining one's employability rather than having employment.

There are some potential contradictions between entrepreneurship and employability, rarely acknowledged, which support the rationale

for the distinctions made above. Entrepreneurship has an empowering function, one that focuses on developing in an individual a sense of autonomy. Much of the emphasis in current employability discourses is about meeting the needs of employers, and employers tend to desire employees who will 'fit in'. While in theory autonomy, creativity and questioning the status quo may be beneficial to business, it is not clear whether all employers are happy to accept an empowered employee who furthermore seeks to push for greater autonomy. In addition to this, entrepreneurship education may contribute to dynamics that are changing the nature of careers specifically the erosion of long-term careers within one organisation. It is possible employers too are more attuned today to temporary employment contracts and are thus less likely to expect loyalty, but for employers who are expecting loyalty and long-term commitment then entrepreneurship education may not be operating entirely in their favour. Perhaps the key thing to acknowledge on the part of (prospective) graduates is that employment outcomes are not simply a function of one's individual skills and attributes but include a wider range of capitals (Tomlinson & Nghia, 2020). Here entrepreneurship education can play a key role in ensuring these capitals are developed and which will place the graduate in a strong position, irrespective of whether employment or self-employment is the desired outcome.

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