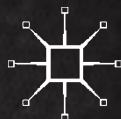


Graduate Employability in Context

*Theory, Research
and Debate*

Michael Tomlinson
and Leonard Holmes



Graduate Employability in Context

Michael Tomlinson • Leonard Holmes
Editors

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Introduction: Graduate Employability in Context: Charting a Complex, Contested and Multi-Faceted Policy and Research Field

Michael Tomlinson

INTRODUCTION: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

Very few issues have gained such attention and caught the imagination of those who have an interest in higher education as graduate employability. The debates over how ‘work-ready’ graduates are and what economic contribution they can make have been around for many decades, yet since the start of this century interest in this area has exploded. The very term ‘graduate employability’ has become synonymous with the ways in which the relationship between higher education and the economy is now understood. Across all countries there is a widespread concern that their higher education systems are attuned to the changing economic environment, shaped profoundly by the challenges of economic globalisation. In all cases, higher-education systems have evolved from a relatively loosely coupled relationship with both state and economy to one where their role

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is cast as highly integral to economic prosperity. Graduates have invariably been positioned as key players on the economic stage whose role and input in the labour market is of huge significance.

There is, of course, variance across countries in how widespread the discourse of employability has become. The concept has become very much established in so-called liberal economies such as the UK and Australia, but is now clearly a topic of much interest other parts of the world (Crossman and Clarke 2010; Mok and Wu 2016; Tran 2015; Cin and Neave 2014). In the UK, since the Dearing report in 1997, which explicitly called for higher education to actively enhance graduates' 'employability skills', there has been a plethora of initiatives within higher education geared towards improving how 'employable' graduates are upon graduation. Most major government reports in the UK on higher education have since made references to this, typically accompanied by strong allusions to the economic purpose of universities. Increasingly, university career services have reframed themselves as both careers and 'employability' units and are seeking to develop institutional strategies that enhance the employment outcomes of their graduates.

The issue of graduate employability is clearly a key theme, both in the changing political economy of higher education and on how the relationship between higher education and the economy has become articulated. At one level, graduate employability can be understood to have a strong economic dimension linked to the changing nature of work and movement towards a reportedly high-skilled, knowledge-driven economy. As recipients of higher-level knowledge and training, graduates are often depicted as 'knowledge workers' who will add considerable economic value through the application of their advanced skills and knowledge. But whilst the so-called knowledge-driven economy may offer new affordances and opportunities for well-qualified workers to trade off their talents and expertise, it also brings new risks and uncertainties. It is widely acknowledged that individual career paths have become less stable owing to a combination of organisational restructuring, company divestment to cheaper production locations and continued downsizing of professional core workers. Consequently, employees' career progression has been reframed in what have variously been termed 'protean', 'boundaryless' and 'portfolio' careers (Arthur 2008; Baruch 2014). The traditionally more stable pathways of managerial-level employees, often developed within a single workplace context, have given way to more variegated and fluid patterns of job movement whereby professionals are likely to work in a variety of

jobs over the course of their working lives. As a consequence of changing career patterns, the so-called ‘psychological contract’ people developed towards an organisation or a particular internal job market, built upon some degree of organisational affiliation and rootedness, has ruptured and given way to a more free-agent mind-set.

Changing labour market and career structures are further taking place at a time of growing geo-political competition as new economic players, particularly in East Asia, evolve their higher education and the indigenous skills base of their economies. More and more graduates, it appears, are competing for the prizes of fulfilling and high-reward employment, but have to work harder in negotiating the many challenges along the way.

At another level, graduate employability has a strong political dimension as growing emphasis is placed on policies which can enhance the economic value of graduates and the degree-level qualifications they hold. As the political narrative continues to present higher education as a catalyst for economic growth and central to nation states’ skills formation strategies, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been placed under scrutiny over what they do to maximise graduates’ economic potential upon leaving university. Policy-level approaches are influenced heavily by the logic of the economically-centred *human capital theory* which is predicated on the notion that educational systems effectively drive the economy. The more governments and individuals ‘invest’ in higher education, and approach it as an economic utility, the more they stand to gain. The knowledge and skills graduates acquire from higher education are seen as productive resources which can be traded-off in return for highly paid, high skill work.

The political and policy-level pre-occupation with graduate employability pays considerable attention towards what is often referred to as the ‘supply side’ of the labour market. As an institution which produces higher-level knowledge and expertise, higher education is often taken to be central to the supply of future human resources. Higher education has become viewed by policy makers, to use Keep and Meyhew’s (2010) term, as a ‘supply trigger’ in boosting national economic growth and competitiveness. This is reflected largely in three main policies’ areas: the expansion of higher education into a mass system; a focus on skills-based and vocationally-aligned curricula and increasingly the shifting of financial costs on to individual graduates. These policy movements have had major impacts on the shaping and internal organisation of contemporary higher

education systems as they strive to adapt to the changing external context and become more economically competitive and efficient.

In many countries, especially in liberal economies, there has been a clear tendency towards governance principles of the ‘managed market’ (Palfreyman and Tapper 2014), informed largely by the policy mechanisms of New Public Management. Accordingly, universities have been subject to greater forms of performance management, audit, evaluation and comparison which are designed to ensure that their activities best serve the markets in which they operate. In this way, graduate employability has become associated with institutional performance metrics that seek to capture how effectively institutions are providing added value to graduates’ formal experiences. In the UK, employability is strongly linked to the ‘key information’ pertaining to HEIs’ relative performance in terms of the alleged success rate of graduates finding employment fairly soon after leaving university. Whilst there are inevitable problems in linking institutional activities to graduates’ longer-term job market success, these policy approaches have clearly raised significant challenges for HEIs in formulating appropriate strategies to increase graduates’ labour market success.

At another level, the political dimension of graduate employability drives a range of inter-related discourses around the value and purpose of higher education and students’ and graduates’ relationships to their institutions. In the spirit of human capital theory, it has become common to depict students and graduates as rational economic actors (a *Homo Economicus*) whose primary goals are optimising their future economic outcomes. As higher education becomes increasingly framed as a ‘private good’ – something which is privately funded, consumed and utilised for future economic return – students may inevitably internalise economically-driven discourses around getting a positive return on their investment. In the UK and in other national contexts, the costs of participating in HE has fallen increasingly on to individual graduates and their families. Consequently, many now perceive themselves as having higher stakeholder purchase in demanding that HEIs fulfil their market needs (Tomlinson 2016). The language of the ‘student-as-consumer’ appears to have fuelled these expectations, reinforced by a policy framework that protects students’ service-level entitlements under consumer law (DBIS 2016). The expansion of market principles in higher education and their related drivers towards competition, consumerism and declining state expenditure have placed more pressures on individuals to do all they can to stay ahead in a less certain environment.

Taken together, the political economy of graduate employability is one of high stakes for graduates, universities and employers alike. The changing post-industrial economic context exists in parallel to a post-welfare settlement that accentuates an ethic of personal responsibility and ownership for one's educational and economic fortunes (Jessop 2003). Whilst utopian visions of the 'knowledge economy' invokes images of self-empowered human agents enjoying an Aristotelian economic good life where they are free to choose who they wish to become, the new economic context also carries discernible challenges and risks. If one side of the employability coin projects a vision of flexible opportunity and fluid mobility, the other side shows one of precariousness and uncertainty in a fast-changing and competitive labour market environment. The responsibility for employability increasingly rests on individuals' shoulders and has become a lifelong challenge beyond the point of leaving formal education. In the economic climate of the early decades of the twenty-first century, it is clear that prospective employees need to exercise increasing levels of self-responsibility and adaptability in navigating a less secure labour market and effectively manage the challenge of lifetime employment.

LOCATING THE PROBLEM OF GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

A recurring debate around employability has ensued over where the balance lies between the individual and labour market in determining labour market opportunities and outcomes. There are a number of definitional challenges to employability, not least concerning the precision and accuracy of the term. Such challenges are often compounded by the multiple perspectives in which employability can be approached, as well as the disciplinary angle adopted. Popular and well-cited definitions have tended to emphasise individual dimensions – for example, skills acquired, attributes possessed, attitudes formed and how these are presented and deployed in the labour market (see Hillage and Pollard 1998). An underlying theme to such approaches is the matching-up of individual-level features to job-related demands. The closer the matching, the more employable one is likely to be. Commonplace definitions which speak of individual-level capacities have taken on a somewhat tautological quality: it would be hard to argue that without some appropriate ability for employment, people stand much chance of getting far in the labour market. A more fundamental issue at stake is more to do with how this ability is converted into job market outcomes and how this is played out in the various contexts

that invariably shape the extent to which people's employability can be actualised.

An alternative approach therefore is to see employability as not simply a measure of an individuals' potential for employment, but also the social and economic context which enables this potential to be realised or otherwise (McQuaid and Lyndsey 2005; Forrier and Sels 2003). Thus, not to consider the wider context, including prevailing opportunity structures, supply and demand equilibrium, inter-group (and, increasingly, intra-group) competition for high demand jobs, means that understandings of employability become somewhat reducible to the level of individuals. As the above introduction has outlined, employability needs to be seen in its wider political and economic context, not only linked to conditions of national labour markets, but also the dynamics of mass higher education. As more graduates compete for jobs, issues about how 'employable' they are take on a new dimension compared to the situation in previous generations.

In the same way that there is no neat dichotomy between those who are 'employable' and those who are 'unemployable', employability is not simply either absolute or relative in the sense of being determined either principally by individuals' potential *or* conditions of the labour market. Instead, these dimensions interact in a way that makes employability a highly contingent problem. To this extent, employability captures the enduring interaction between individuals' agency on one hand and social structure on the other (Tholen 2015; Tomlinson 2010). It concerns individuals' relationship to a wider context beyond their immediate control, but one on which they have variable capacity to act upon and exercise relative degrees of choice and intentionality. The inner dialogues individuals form, including their labour market hopes, desires or indeed anxieties, provide a framework for action (or otherwise) that shapes how they approach their involvement in the economy. Without agential capacities, individuals' scope for realising their labour market potential is minimal, including the ability to exercise any meaningful level of volition and personal goal-setting. Yet some fundamental social structures anchor these and shape how individuals position themselves, and are positioned, within the economy.

When looking at social structure in relation to graduate employment, we can identify a number of key structural elements, all of which in some ways inter-relate. The economic context linked to the nature of late capitalist modes of production and organisational forms is clearly a significant

frame of reference, as well as an enabler or constrainer in how far individuals can realise their employability. Furthermore, the fact that there are variations across national contexts in the ways labour markets are organised (Hall and Soskice 2001) shapes not only opportunities, but the specific ways in which higher education systems regulate future job allocation. This is an important dimension as it crucially impacts on the ways in which graduates' higher education qualifications shapes subsequent outcomes in the market. In so-called 'regulated' labour markets, there is more in the way of 'occupational-specificity' between what a graduate has studied and what they do subsequently, compared to more open, flexible economies such as the UK and Australia. If national labour-market contexts are more flexible and competitive as they are in these countries, this will impact greatly on how graduates understand the meaning of their employability, how their credentials can be exchanged in the labour market and what they need to do to enhance them.

Another key structural dimension is the changing nature of higher education systems. The movement towards mass higher education is a structural shift of major significance as this also shapes the ways in which the relationship between formal educational experience and subsequent returns are regulated. The massification of higher education has not only resulted in greater diversity amongst graduates, the modes of provision they experience and types of institution they graduate from, but also the social meanings attached to being a graduate. If an individual's so-called *graduateness* in elite higher education was reflective of their relatively distinctive status as high-achieving future members of the managerial classes, mass higher education has very much ruptured this identity (Scott 2009).

Mass higher education has clearly pluralised the student experience, and in ways that make the simple warrant of being a graduate who can easily slot into appropriate future employment harder to sustain. There is a paradox at work in the student condition in mass higher education which relates to what Beck and Beck-Germesheim (2002) refer to as the 'individualisation amongst equals'. As more people acquire similar credentials, in a pluralised mass higher education context, additional work is required to demonstrate one's unique employment value. Furthermore, in mass higher education the value of someone's graduateness may also be derived from other spaces outside formal higher education, including life projects and interests that have minimal connection to any formal learning experience (Brennan et al. 2010).

Another salient structural dimension that continues to exercise a considerable influence in the ways in which individuals' experiences of education and the labour market is mediated is socio-cultural; linked to class, gender and ethnicity. We have seen how dominant policy discourses have tended to frame employability as the relatively rational matching up of individuals' employment-related assets to job market demands. A related policy motif used in relation to people's relative chances in the labour market is *meritocracy* and the notion that future outcomes are principally determined by their personal achievements, abilities and personal endeavors. This is to some extent superficially appealing as it downplays any form of structural barriers in mitigating people's relative labour market outcomes, whilst at the same time depicting the allocation of labour market rewards as fair and rational. It is the individual and their achievements which shapes employment fortunes, rather than any contingent features of their cultural profiles and identities.

However, it is clear that socio-cultural dimensions, particularly social class, have a considerable influence in shaping individual's formative experiences, which in turn shape subsequent educational experiences and beyond. This process has been shown to have occurred over a considerable period of time (Halsey et al. 1980; Reay 2001, 2013). Even though there has been more recent analysis in sociological literature on the changing constitutions of social class, as well as more nuanced distinctions between and within class groups, it is clear that higher education continues to reinforce class divisions (Savage 2015; Archer et al. 2003). This has been shown to be very much the case in liberal economies where persistent class-cultural hierarchies map strongly onto higher education systems. In such contexts, class shapes educational experiences and outcomes, mediating to a large degree the time-honoured relationship between social origins and economic destinations.

A number of insightful government-commissioned reports from the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission in the UK (SMCPC 2013) have highlighted the continued inequalities in accessing various forms of higher education and subsequent occupations amongst people from lower socio-economic groups. Some key findings in these reviews emerge: that the composition of students accessing prestigious, high-ranked universities is disproportionately linked to higher socio-economic status and ethnicity; that access to high-ranked universities and elite professions remains an enduring challenge for lower socio-economic students; and that students' differential resources in terms of networks and wider social opportunities

significantly impacts decision-making, experiences and future outcomes in relation to both higher education and future employment. In terms of gender, whilst there is an overall higher participation rate of females in higher education, continued wage and career outcome differentials continue to exist amongst male and female graduates (Future Track 2013). Differences remain in subject choice, extra curricula activities and job choice areas which appear to impact on future orientation and early careers strategies (Stevenson and Clegg 2012).

The socio-cultural perspective on employability clearly reveals much about the relative distribution of opportunity and its relationship to subsequent outcomes. At the same time, when applied to graduate employability it also presents what Holmes (2013) has termed a ‘counsel of despair’: individuals are simply ‘positioned’ within a prevailing social order which they and others (sometimes unwittingly) reproduce. At its extreme, this approach presents a situation where people’s economic fates are determined almost exclusively by pre-given cultural arrangements, around which they have limited scope for making any real difference. This renders any chance of absolute social mobility barely achievable if enduring cultural barriers ensure that the best opportunities are unequally distributed to those with existing advantages and resources. These issues aside, the influence of class, gender and ethnicity remains an important structural mediator of graduate outcomes and is clearly in need of policy attention and action.

LEVEL OF ANALYSIS IN GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

In summary, we would argue that there are three main levels through which graduate employability can be understood:

- Macro level: at this level, employability is located in wider structural, system-level shifts in capitalism and how educational systems are co-ordinated within that framework.

As we have already observed, employability is fundamentally located in wider economic and educational changes and these crucially frame people’s relationship to, and within, labour markets. The ways changes in the economy intersect with structural changes in the educational system and class structure provide a highly significant frame for understanding future job-market opportunities. This is also differentially experienced across

national and local political-economics context often providing a collective interpretative frame for how people understand and manage their employability and career progression.

Second, graduate employability can also be explored at the:

- Meso level: at this level, employability and people's work-related activities are mediated by institutional-level processes located within both educational and organisational domains.

This middle-range level is clearly important as it reflects processes occurring at an institutional level and through different modes of practice and provision, all of which can influence to some degree the shaping of graduates' labour market experience and outcomes. Institutions, and the activities occurring within, bridge broader macro-level shifts and individual experience. Two key institutions are central to the regulation of graduate employability: higher education institutions and those of the workplace. Both of these interact to some degree, although there are also many apparent disconnects between them.

At one level, we can focus attention at the level of higher education and the activities which seemingly feed into the job market and which serve graduates' personal career development. The forms of knowledge and curricula which graduates experience, as well as the status of their degree-level credentials, clearly has a bearing on their ability to access desired future employment (Brennan et al. 1996). This can be extended to additional forms of supplementary learning that is more explicitly geared towards further improving graduate outcomes, typically under the remit of employability-based provision. Considerable institutional investment has been made towards initiatives that seek to additionally complement and build on graduates' subject-specific knowledge and skills.

At another level, graduate employability is further influenced by the work organisations that graduates enter. Work organisations clearly mediate the ways in which graduates' career progression and employability is played out in context, including the transfer of knowledge and skills and their further development. The supply-side of the job market, namely higher education, is one part of the equation and foundational to what will take place over a longer period of graduates' working lives. The other side of the equation is the 'demand-side' and the features of work organisation which may enable or constrain individuals' career progression; not least key aspects such as workplace design and culture, working conditions, the

regulation of learning opportunities and professional development and supervisory/management-level support (Keep and Mayhew 2010). The organisational context also gives rise to a range of other significant experiences that impact on career progression, not least graduates' interactions with significant others within the socially-rich environments of workplaces. Individuals' relationships with significant others such as colleagues, managers and supervisors, all set within the dynamics of organisational cultures, have been shown to have a potentially considerable impact on the shaping of employment trajectories (Felstead et al. 2009; Eraut 2007; Fuller and Unwin 2010). If employability is mainly about the actual 'practice' of skills and knowledge then the workplace is a key context where such practices are realised.

Employability can be seen:

- At a *micro level* the focus is more on how employability is constructed at a personal level and its relationship with a range of subjective, biographical and psycho-social dynamics, and which are also informed by individuals' cultural profiles and backgrounds

It is at the micro level where we get the strongest sense of what employability means to individuals, the personal relationships and experiences they form towards the job market and the bearing this had on their understandings and approaches towards their individual employability. This context centres on people's subjectivities and personal frames of reference by recourse to exploring motivations, emotions, values and emergent identities. Also significant here is the way in which individuals engage in the task of managing their transition from higher education to work, including their impetus for continuous learning and their engagement in learning during the early stages of their professional life. The so-called 'subjective' dimension of employability introduces another way of looking at the relationship between individuals and economic context in the shaping of employment trajectories.

Traditional individual-level approaches have couched graduate employability in largely technical terms, for instance the matching-up of specific skills to areas of employment. However, by adopting a broader perspective on individuals' relationships to paid employment, including their motivations, values and affective responses, we move employability beyond merely technicist issues and locate it instead more fully in people's social experiences. It may also be the case that individuals are more than suitably

employable for particular jobs but may makes choices that steer them away from these. In short, graduates not only develop subjective awareness of their own absolute employability and where this might take them, but also subjectively mediate the context in which this is played out, including how their relationship with others – employers and fellow competitor graduates – in the employment field.

EMPLOYMENT VERSUS EMPLOYABILITY

Another key conceptual challenge is picking apart distinctions between employment and employability. This is where problems can arise when assessing how effective institutions are in enhancing employability. This interest has gathered new momentum under current UK government proposals to link teaching effectiveness to how successfully graduates attain employment soon after graduating (DBIS 2015). Relatedly, a higher responsibility is placed onto HEIs for ensuring graduates experience a return in the labour market. This largely follows the logic that graduate employability is proxy to the forms of institutional provision graduates have received. A clear causal link is therefore often suggested between modes of curricula, teaching and assessment and graduates' immediate and longer term prospects. However, whilst any link between educational experiences and employment outcomes may be mediated by factors outside formal provision, considerable significance is nonetheless attached to institutional provision for generating value-added to graduates' post-university outcomes. The more immediate these outcomes are, the better this is seen to reflect the quality of institutions' provision and practices.

One of the main challenges in equating employability with formal provision is working out specifically how this has impacted on graduates' outcomes. Even though there may be little doubt that good quality provision can significantly enrich student experience and provide valuable benefits to ways students engage with their institutions, explaining how this specifically enhances graduate employment outcomes is somewhat harder to ascertain. It is clear that policy makers and university managers continue to place continued faith in the role of institutions in generating better overall graduate employment outcomes. This institutional effect, or what Harvey (2001) has famously termed the 'magic bullet' formula, rests mainly on how effectively institutions coordinate activities that ultimately enhance students' future employment requirements. The success of these activities can be gleaned from how well graduates fare in employment as

measured by their initial job destinations, which in the UK is captured by Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE). Similar measures are used in other countries, for example in Australia.

Measurement tools such as DLHE also indicate a growing trend within modern HEIs; namely the increasing pressures most experience to market themselves and present a public account of their institutional quality and effectiveness. If one of the effects of attending a particular institution is to better enable graduates to get a sound return on a three-to-four year investment, this makes them more attractive to prospective students. Capturing graduates' reported employment success is clearly a strong feature of the new performance-driven higher education context and is increasingly used to indicate institutions' relative success.

The debate over HEIs' role in boosting graduate employability is now well-established and will continue for some time. However, it also feeds into a more challenging conceptual challenge, which is to unpack the distinctions between employment and employability. It is now widely recognised that they are not the same thing, even though they may be two sides of the same coin. In emphasising the importance of graduates' employment outcomes, inferences are likely to be drawn about how employable graduates are and how this may predict longer-term employment success. Yet if we view employability as simply an outcome that provides a fairly accurate picture of a graduate's employment strength, some further analysis is required on how they achieved such outcomes, as well as their overall sustainability. Attaining employment is clearly not the same as sustaining employment, and the actual attainment itself reveals limited information on the nature of that employment and what a graduate is actually doing that may reveal how employable they actually are.

Some useful distinctions can therefore be drawn when separating employment from employability. One of these is between short-term and longer-term labour market outcomes. The former can provide a snapshot of a graduate's outcomes at a particular, albeit fairly transient, point in time. They do not however tell us how they managed to achieve this outcome or where it will lead to over the longer-term course of their careers. It is therefore not particularly easy to infer whether outcomes achieved not too long after graduating will reflect those over a longer duration. This, in turn, leads to a wider distinction between what might be seen as outcome and process. Employment captures a recognised outcome but it is largely a formal status, often linked to fairly objective markers such as a formal job title, salary and assumed level of responsibility. We would argue

that it is more useful not to look at a graduate's formal outcomes, *prima facie*, as an end outcome in itself but as an unfolding event including, on-going processes of performance and activity and future processes of development and sustainability. The depiction of employability as a *social process*, one which is fundamentally recursive in its nature, helps us draw out the relationships individuals develop with the job market and how this is played out over time.

Invariably, discussion, debate and related research on employability is often divided between normative and critical approaches, or between that which takes the individual as the main unit of analysis and that which looks at the cultural and economic context. Normative research has tended to work from the more pragmatic pre-occupations with *what works*, which when applied to graduate employability concerns questions about what can be done to further enhance graduates' employability. Such approaches themselves raise a number of critical questions over why this might be necessary. Is this because there are genuine problems with the existing level of employability that graduates have when entering the labour market and does this genuinely reflect employer responses or related research? If this is the case, what specifically is the role of HEIs in producing better graduates, and to what extent does planned provision impact on graduates' subsequent employment outcomes? What is the actual role of employers in further enhancing graduates' early economic potential and, if there is one, how can the relationship between higher education and employer organisations be better understood and coordinated? Is it the case that all graduates' employability needs to be enhanced, or is this specific to some graduates and particular areas of the graduate labour market?

We can see how critical approaches emerge from a fairly basic drilling down into some of the main suppositions that underpin a common understanding of graduates' relationships to the labour market. A recurring critique in this debate is the way in which relationships between individuals, educational institutions and future employment have been depicted. At one level this can be seen in a relatively straightforward way. Individuals have limited employability until they participate in further education and/or training. The institutions they have attended provide the appropriate knowledge and skills which then make them employable. They then transfer this into the labour market in return for better overall returns and career prospects. Yet even policy discourses which encourage more people

to ‘invest’ in higher education raise questions over this logic as the continued call for further improving graduates’ employability skills attests.

There are related critical angles. If higher education was to further develop the additional employability skills that their general education does not necessarily provide, would this then solve the supply problem and lead to whatever purported existing skills demand in the economy being fully matched? Human capital theory has often treated divisions of labour and the segmented nature of labour markets as a function of variable skills levels across the workforce. As such, inequities in career opportunity, pay and status are a reflection of the differential levels of education and training, people have acquired and are subsequently able to trade off in the labour market. At its extreme, it could explain different job market outcomes as a failure to invest in higher education and, increasingly, additional skills. Alternative perspectives to this approach have emphasised how economic inequities are not simply a reflection of individual deficits but also wider structural laws that reward individuals differentially.

QUALIFICATIONS AS DECLINING CURRENCIES: SKILLS, CAPABILITIES OR CAPITALS

Many suitably qualified people continue to embark upon higher education and see it as a worthwhile pursuit. The reasons may be varied, including a genuine desire for further knowledge, fulfilling prevailing cultural expectations to participate or not knowing what else they might do in the immediate term. It is clear that one of the core underlying reasons for embarking on higher education is the chance of greatly improved job prospects on graduating. Whilst lots of students may not be entirely clear as to where their degrees will lead them, most are of the general understanding that it will be advantageous to hold higher education qualification. Higher education opens up the parameters of future choice and opportunity and this drives its continued demand amongst students and their families (Dyke et al. 2012). A widespread perception remains that higher education is a worthwhile investment, albeit one that is also a ‘risk investment’ (Ahola and Kivenen 1999; Tomlinson 2016), bringing with it added financial pressures and related pressures to succeed during and beyond the higher education.

The massification of higher education has nonetheless altered the currency of degree qualifications and how graduates perceive their role in

shaping future outcomes (Tomlinson 2008; Roulin and Bangater 2013). Massification in some ways has become associated with the notion of ‘credential inflation’ (Dore 1976): as more people climb the qualifications ladders and acquire higher-level credentials, the distinguishing value of these credentials declines. The very expression, ‘the degree is not enough’, captures a range of challenges at the heart of the current student and graduate experience. One is the limitations of personal merit: no matter how well graduates have worked towards successfully achieving desired educational outcomes, this will still not guarantee them a return on their investment. Graduates also face inevitable competition with others in congested markets for the highly qualified, bringing its own pressures to succeed when the odds for finding sought-after employment have risen. These challenges relate to a wider issue which is the paradox of opportunity itself: without a degree qualification, people’s chances of acquiring desired jobs is limited, yet this very qualification (and its related costs and challenges) increasingly plays less of a role in determining employment outcomes. This process of ‘running to stand still’ is also self-perpetuating: withdrawing from the competition for higher level jobs by not pursuing higher qualification in the first place puts individuals at even greater disadvantages (Brown et al. 2011).

If degree qualifications no longer equate to employability, what else is needed on the part of graduates to succeed and what can higher education further do to facilitate this? One salient approach which has been popular amongst policy makers and within certain quarters of the higher education community has been the promotion of graduates’ so-called ‘employability skills’. The underlying assumption here is that whatever deficits graduates continue to have after acquiring technical or subject-specific knowledge can be plugged by the acquisition of additional sets of skills which add value to their profiles. The restricted role that formal subject-centred degree qualifications have in shaping graduate employability can therefore in part be solved by the formula of: higher education + degree qualification + employable skills = graduate employability.

Simplistic as such a formula appears, it is one which has informed considerable amounts of practice and provision in universities. Nearly all UK HEIs present lists of skills and attributes that they regard as central to the promotion of their graduates’ employability. Skills and attributes such as ‘teamworking’ and ‘problem solving’ so prevalent in the 1990s and early 2000s have been recently been accompanied by newer ones such as ‘global citizenship’ and ‘digital literacies’. The challenge facing

programme designers and careers educators is finding ways of embedding these into current curricula so that they can be readily acquired and deployed amongst the graduate population.

A number of authors have expressed some concerns with the ways in which the language of skills has been pursued within the university sector and the somewhat uncritical fashion in which these issues are framed (Hyland and Johnson 1998; Bridgstock 2009; Holmes 2013). Whether referred to as ‘key’, ‘transferable’ or ‘generic’ skills a common concern is the conceptual vagueness and the lack of explanatory value as to how they specifically impact on graduate employability (Mason et al. 2009; Lowden et al. 2011). Thus, a key issue with ‘generic’ skills is precisely that: they are so generic as to have meaningful currency, or indeed firm application, in graduates’ future work. Simply applying a notion such as ‘team-working’ and ‘problem-solving’ to what graduates need to be adept at when they enter the labour market tells us little about the nature of their work activities and how they have been able to transfer skills-sets from one domain to another. Neither does it particularly reveal much about the kinds of on-going work-related activities graduates undertake and the particular domains through which their professional learning and competencies are actually formed.

There may be some better alternatives to understanding what may shape graduates’ transitional activities and early career experiences, even when leaving aside the role played by the labour market and/or organisational environment. Whilst graduates may have limited control over the state of the labour market, they can still indeed exercise some element of volition in how they approach it, including strategies and key decisions, all of which need to be developed in good advance of leaving university. If we are to continue to see employability as being about individuals’ relations to the labour market and what they need to draw upon to succeed, as well as how universities may facilitate this, it might be better to utilise the concept of employability *capitals* rather than skills. Capitals can be understood as key resources, accumulated through graduates’ educational, social and initial employment experiences, and which equip them favourably when transitioning to the job market. Some of these are clearly rooted in graduates’ formal education and socio-cultural milieu and are converted into subsequent economic value (see Bourdieu 1986), although being aware of these and findings ways of further enriching them is significant.

Three dominant forms of capital are likely to exercise some significant influence in graduates’ employability. One of these is the *human capital*

and relates to the hard skills and technical knowledge graduates have acquired through their degree, as well as other career-related awareness and skills, including knowledge of target employment. This is no doubt foundational and a first marker used by employers, but is clearly insufficient on its own and needs to be mobilised through the *social capital* have acquired through social relations and contacts. Social capital creates a bridge between graduates' educational, social and labour market experiences and helps broker their access to job openings. The networks and social ties graduates form are potentially enabling if they bring them closer to targeted employment. Once these ties have been established, graduates have to demonstrate the valued forms of cultural knowledge, behaviours and awareness that make them attractive to employers: their *cultural capital*, exemplified in embodied and symbolic forms. The closer this is fashioned towards the cultures of their target employer organisation, the more advantageously it will equip the graduate.

Each of these salient forms of capital are differentially acquired and utilised across the graduate population, and their value will be largely contingent on the markets they enter (Burke 2015; Bathmaker et al. 2013). Two other important capitals also have relevance in the contemporary labour market and complement the other dominant ones which graduates have acquired. One of these, identity capital (Cote 2005), relates to the ways in which graduates invest in their future careers and harness their sense of personal identity around targeted employment(s). This also entails channelling existing life and extra-curricular experience towards future careers and packaging these in ways which align to wider identity profiles of a targeted employer organisation. The other capital, *psychological capital*, constitutes the levels of resilience and adaptability graduates are able to develop in the face of what has become an increasingly challenging labour market context, which also includes periods of unemployment. They need therefore to be able to withstand set-backs, endure and navigate an uncertain careers landscape that has perhaps never been more pertinent for contemporary graduates. Both these forms of capital may be significant if they enable graduates to approach the labour market proactively and align their goals and expectations to these challenges accordingly.

The issue of identity development and its related forms of identity capital are clearly significant if employability is to some degree shaped by the ways in which graduates approach their future careers. This is also a process that occurs not only before and during graduates' higher education

(which might itself play a role in mediating on-going identity and self-formation (Brennan et al. 2010)) but also during crucial periods after graduation. If we take the transitional process to be a social process which entails meaningful encounters and interactions with significant others in the field, then the maintenance of well-defined and cohesive modes of identity becomes crucial. Holmes' (2001, 2013 and 2015) model of 'graduate identity' offers some important insights into this process and its relationship to graduate identity formation, departing from more descriptive skills-based approaches.

A central issue in the development and presentation of employability is the warranting and active affirmation of the emergent identities graduates take to the jobs market. It is this process which enables graduates to cross the boundary point between being a potential graduate and one who is legitimised and integrated into a chosen field. A potentially competent graduate simply remains such until such competence is performed and demonstrated, and then recognised and affirmed by employers. Similarly, a graduate may lay claim to being a potentially employable management consultant or civil servant, but until this is warranted in practice, for instance in an assessment centre or job trial period, their identity in this domain remains largely indeterminate. The sense of oneself as a prospective employee within an employment domain is significant in orientating an individual to a job area. Maintaining this through the course of significant interactions and episodes is what enables individuals to build identities and related forms of identity capital which carry them through their early careers.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE GRADUATE LABOUR MARKET

Much of the wider picture on graduates' employment outcomes is based on large-scale survey data, such as the cross-national survey European REFLEX (Reflexive Professional in the Knowledge Economy Survey (see REFLEX 2008) and the Future Track (2013) survey in the UK. These have provided a very comprehensive overview of graduate employment outcomes, based upon longitudinal surveys which begin with students in university and tracking their progression up to five to seven years into graduation. The time-scale of these surveys provide a fairly robust basis to understanding outcomes and the ways in which, higher education experience and credentials, have served to shape these.

A number of key features emerge from this data, mainly that:

- Graduates continue to enjoy an earning premium over non-graduates, i.e. the so-called ‘graduate premium’;
- Graduates experience more favourable job-market outcomes, including better working conditions, greater job quality and opportunities for professional development;
- Graduates generally draw upon particular skills pertaining to their higher education and perceive higher education to have provided a positive platform to seek out and undertake graduate-level work;
- Graduates see the relationships between their higher education and the current work as a worthwhile investment in their futures;
- Graduates’ values around employment encompass more than merely extrinsic and economic concerns such as pay and status, and instead include rewarding and satisfying work, making a difference and having some professional autonomy and creativity;

Similarly, this large-scale data also indicates that:

- The diversity of graduate employment is very wide, encompassing a vast range of employment sectors;
- Graduate outcomes vary across a number of areas, including gender, social background, ethnicity, subject of study and area of employment;
- The problem of graduate under-employment, or graduates in non-graduate occupations has risen over the past decade.

The above outcomes indicate a largely positive picture for graduates and their scope within the labour market; yet, whilst graduates clearly enjoy a ‘graduate premium’ this is dispersed across the graduate population and there is a marked variation in terms of rates of return (see Green and Zu 2010). The diversity of graduate jobs is well-established and has led to classification of graduates into different occupational schemas (see Elias and Purcell 2004). This highlights at one level that the graduate labour market is a segmented one, reflecting variegated career trajectories and outcomes. An interpretation of the diversity of occupations within the graduate labour market is that it parallels the diverse educational and social profile range in the graduate population. Graduates of a vocational programme from one particular type of university may well not pursue similar

occupational pathways to someone graduating in a traditional academic programme at another institution. But this of course might not necessarily be construed as an inequality of opportunity if occupational outcomes match expectations, or indeed educational and training profiles. The nursing graduate has enrolled on a specific programme so that he/she can subsequently embark upon a fairly modern graduate career, in the same way as someone who chose a medicine degree did with the intention of entering a well-established 'traditional' graduate career. Thus, the diversity of graduate employment is a realistic representation of the modern graduate labour market, including a range of occupational growth areas which have emerged from the expansion of service and technology-based labour markets. The diverse graduate labour market has led many to the conclusion that, with the exception of graduates in 'non-graduate' jobs, the overall majority of graduates are drawing upon graduate-level skills, including communicative, decision-making and specialist technical capacities gained through higher education.

A more critical analysis of these relative outcomes might interpret the segmented nature of graduate employment as representing a tiered labour market structure for the highly qualified, also engendering different structures of opportunity, return and overall career prospects. Dual labour-market theories (Doeringer and Piore 1971) postulate that well-qualified segments of the labour force such as graduates are located within the privileged primary core of fairly stable and rewarding jobs, whereas those less qualified are more contingent, precarious and subject to continuous displacement. This does not leave room for the possibility that dual processes may occur at similar levels, including amongst those with seemingly equal educational profiles. This interpretation therefore would take divisions into graduate market as indicating, at one level, strongly positioned, well-resourced and mobile graduates, and at other levels, those in transitory, precarious or 'sub-graduate' jobs, or even disenfranchised from the labour market altogether. Modern labour market conditions have potentially reinforced this pattern. As Lauder (2011) discusses, the rise in Digital Taylorism (i.e. the automisation and standardisation of skilled work through digitalisation) means that, even within knowledge-centred employment, increasing segments of the labour process has seen a standardisation of what might once have been seen as skilled and discretionary work. The 'grunt workers' of the modern economy are no longer manual workers, but growing numbers of well-qualified staff who are performing not particularly skills-intensive work activities.

One of the themes which has gained continued attention is that of *graduate under-employment* and the extent to which graduates are utilising their level of education and essentially realising their potential as graduates (Scurry and Bleckinsopp 2011). Whilst this phenomenon may not be widespread, it has been growing and it is reported that more graduates perceive some disconnect between their education level and the types of jobs they have attained (ONS 2013). The Future Track survey in the UK also revealed that up to thirty per cent of graduates are in non-graduate occupations, sometimes referred to as a GRINGOs, and that the issue has risen over time, coinciding, somewhat paradoxically, with the introduction of higher tuition fees.

The problem of graduate under-employment relates to the recurring debate about supply and demand and whether the occupational structure has been sufficiently upgraded to accommodate the increasing amount of highly qualified individuals. If it has, then under-employment might be seen as less a structural issue and more to do with issues such as the application of graduates' skills and their career management strategies. If there are, however, structural mis-matches in supply and demand, then more graduates may be forced to 'trade down' their qualification in the search for more loosely matched job openings. Trading down is clearly a compromise, but one which a graduate may be prepared to make if it allows entry to a targeted sector, even though the job itself is not commensurate to their qualification level. A related issue concerns time-scale and how transitory or longer-term is the experience of under-employment. Shorter-term underemployment may function as either a 'stop-gap' until more sustainable opportunities arrive, or even a developmental early career phase that provides graduates with some level of experience that can serve them for a future role where their graduate-level skills come to the fore. In an internal labour-market setting, a graduate may be horizontally under-employed – being in the right job market but wrong job – but might transit within good time to one where there is a better fit to their profile. Graduates' perceptions of job quality and relative opportunities for development are also clearly important (Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2013).

There are also potential differences therefore between what might be seen as objective and subjective aspects of under-employment. The former can be measured fairly directly in terms of pay, status, level of responsibility and actual skill utilisation. Subjective dimensions of under-employment, on the other hand, capture the overall perceptions graduates have of their job circumstances. This again may be relative given that there are various

mediating factors involved when evaluating the scale and impact of under-employment. The graduate who enters an elite legal firm as a trainee barrister is clearly experiencing a different level of objective opportunity and early career outcomes to one who has spent the past year working as a barista in a local multinational coffee shop. However, we would need to further explore their actual experiences and perceptions to make a firmer inference about what these different outcomes means to each.

Whilst the latter job situation indicates vertical under-employment – being in a job area below one’s qualification level – the differences in early career outcomes may not reveal a full picture of their early career experiences and how these shape their career perspectives and longer-term trajectories. Perceptions of job quality, how much it concords with initial expectations and its role in establishing credible career identities can significantly frame the meaning of how suitably employed or under-employed one may be. The barrister’s early career outcomes may appear more favourable but only to the extent to which his/her expectations are aligned to his/her actual experiences. If the barista’s actual experiences surpass expectations and are accompanied by perceptions of job satisfaction, intrinsic reward and future career opportunity then the meaning of under-employment becomes substantially altered.

EMPLOYERS AND GRADUATES

One of the major stakeholders in the area of graduate employability are the employers. There are a number of important issues when addressing the role of employers and their relationship to graduate employability. These have dominated the discussion of employers in this area. One relates to the views employers have about graduates and universities, the extent to which they meet the demands of their organisations, as well as their involvement in higher education institutions. The second is their role in selecting graduates to their organisations, including the means by which they do so and how effective and equitable these are. The final main issue concerns their role in subsequently regulating graduate labour, including facilitating career development. These are all pertinent and each raises wider sets of issues, although the first two appear to have gained most attention in this area.

There is no shortage of literature on employers’ views on graduate employability and perceptions of universities. This has been presented in academic research and popular policy documentations, often through a

discussion of employer survey responses (AGR 2013). There is no particular uniformity in these responses: different employers, or indeed employer surveys, appear to reveal different perceptions. When employer surveys started to appear, signs of discontent emerged with typical charges of graduates not being sufficiently ‘oven ready’ and universities not pursuing the appropriate curricula. The recurring supply-side logic rears up once again in such charges: universities have to supply employers with skills to meet their needs and fill their skills gaps. The debates have become somewhat more nuanced in recent years. Employer reports often reveal a largely positive appraisal of what graduates can offer, including social, problem-solving and communicative competencies but with some areas of concern, including business acumen and adaptability. But it appears overall that employers in the main are satisfied with what graduates can offer (Keep 2012; AGR 2013; Mann et al. 2014). The potential moral panic over universities failing to meet the needs of industry has, for now at least, been kept at bay.

The second issue concerns the ways in which employers recruit graduates. This raises important questions about the nature of the recruitment itself, what function it has, how fair and rigorous it is and what wider social and cultural processes underpin this process. In any labour market, recruitment is a necessary function to ascertain the most appropriate candidate for a job (Sackett and Lievens 2008). The two main selection criteria in this process have largely been job-specific and person-specific matching – that is, the extent to which candidates meet the technical requirements of employment, as well as have the behavioural and personal qualities deemed necessary. The extent to which recruitment is fair rests largely on the efficacy of recruitment techniques in assessing these criteria, and from which the appropriate candidates are then hired.

Recruitment has also been seen to have a largely ‘screening’ function that utilises both elementary and more sophisticated criteria to filter large applicant pools (Bills 2003). The status of ‘graduate’ or ‘non-graduate’ is one such screening strategy as it provides a marker of one’s qualification level upon which job criteria may be based. But in the likely situation that the qualification level of the candidate is a pre-given, employers will look for more information to see how well candidates match job criteria and how to set apart those with fairly similar profiles. In order to undertake a detailed screening, employers use more specific recruitment techniques to establish which candidates to recruit. For graduates, particularly those seeking to enter competitive and higher entry jobs with supply-demand

ratios of 50 plus graduates per vacancy, the importance of ‘signalling’ very soon comes into play. The concept of signalling (Spence 1973) refers to the job market information candidates provide that makes them more attractive and distinct from other candidates and which conveys their relative potential. Signaling processes therefore provides salient information about a candidate’s profile from which employers can infer future organisational value, even if not directly how their profile will translate into actual performance.

In openly competitive markets this clearly has a significant impact and can work both ways. Prospective employees can also provide ‘warning signals’ (experience gaps, time away from work, a poorly composed CV and covering letter!) that employers use to discard their application. Conversely, they can provide advantageous signals in the form of additional experiences and qualifications that mark them out as potentially attractive future employees. It is not surprising that the CV has become a major tool and it appears that students and graduates are aware of engaging in extra-curricula activities in order to project more favourable signals of ‘marketability’ to an organisation. These wider social experiences in turn may enable candidates to depict broader personal qualities and dispositions which can be extrapolated to potential future job roles and performances. Once candidates have got to the stage of recruitment, they have to increasingly demonstrate this in terms of behaviours and self-presentations that embody what employers have inferred from a formal application.

The nature of the recruitment process itself has also gained attention in terms of the ways in which employers make decisions to hire or not different applicants and the criteria, formal or otherwise, upon which these are based. The evidence indicates that graduate recruiters are increasingly making use of assessment centres on which to base their hiring decisions (Williams et al. 2015). A dominant rationale for the use of assessment centres is that they provide more holistic means of appraising a graduate’s profile. They are effectively live processes whereby candidates have some scope to demonstrate their employability in action, be that through the way they talk about their abilities and experiences, the way they interact with the recruiters, or the way they perform in activities that have relevance to a future role. This process entails a suite of activities, ranging from an in-tray activity, a group exercise and presentation through to technical and ‘personal’ interviews. Even the seemingly casual coffee break is a good opportunity for employers to infer whether a prospective candidate exudes the right kinds of ‘chemistry’ and conveys potential organisational fit.

A good body of research has brought into question the efficacy and equity to recruitment (Garavan and Morley 1997; Thornton and Gibbons 2009) not only in terms of how equitable it is, but also how well it predicts future employment performance and outcomes. Nearly all relevant studies on graduate recruitment over the past few decades have shown that one of the salient criteria is ‘social fit’ between applicant and employer (see Brown et al. 2011; Morley 2007; Bolander and Sandberg 2013). This refers to the extent to which graduates are able to convey the appropriate cultural signals about how well they will fit into the cultural milieu of an organisation, or at least be readily mouldable into the type of employee who is valued in a specific job context. Thus, whilst technical or job-specific ability is clearly of importance in framing hiring decisions, person-specific criteria related to the behavioural and cultural codes of an organisation are even more salient. Hincliffe and Jolly’s (2011) research linked this to broader dimensions, including values, social engagement and general intellect – all of which convey aspects of graduates’ identities. The challenge for graduates is to be able to capture these in the form of convincing personal narratives and self-presentations that give them advantages over others.

The graduate recruitment research clearly raises wider equity challenges and these have been intensified in exclusive and competitive labour markets which have traditionally been accessed by a relatively limited cadre of graduates. The growing stringency of employers’ hiring decisions has further been legitimised by what has been seen as an ideological discourse of the ‘war for talent’ (Micheals et al. 2001). This is predicated on the notion that talent is a rare commodity, the preserve of the few and usually possessed by those who have enjoyed relatively elite forms of education. This has meant that, in elite occupations at least, the decision to recruit certain types of graduates, often from elite universities and with stronger cultural and social resources and networks, has been given renewed legitimacy. Consequently, the talents of a large corpus of suitably qualified and able graduates may not be being properly recognised (Ashley et al. 2015). Whilst firms may be starting to acknowledge this and adapt recruitment criteria to reach a wider graduate body, there appears to be some way to go before the process becomes more equitable and efficient. These issues in turn raise significant issues – at a time when more graduates have made a significant investment towards their higher education and have been primed by governments and their wider societies for economic and social success, the problem of equitable entry and return could not be more salient.

ORGANISATION OF THIS BOOK

The wider overall aim of this book is to offer novel and alternative ways of thinking about the problem of the graduate employability agenda. This book provides no particular answers or solutions to the employability challenge and does not set out to do so. It provides no how-to-do formulas, or definitive and ready-made tool-kits that assist us in making our graduates more employable. Instead, chapters within the book open up original and thought-provoking conceptual and research-based discussion and invite reader to think more broadly about the issue of employability. The first section of the book is concerned with the conceptual debates in this area and pays particular attention to the wider socio-economic and policy context. The main part of this section also places the issue in context and offer some rich conceptual insights, but has a stronger leaning towards the more applied and empirically-focussed research findings.

The first two chapters of this book place the graduate employability agenda in the wider political and economic context and explore it through different levels of analysis. As the first two chapters by Andrew and Frances Rothwell and Staffan Nillsons discuss, there are multiple levels of analysis and foci to the employability agenda, encompassing multiple stakeholders. The analysis developed by Andrew and Frances Rothwell locates graduate employability in four dominant contexts, the first two of which are at the level of national policy and human resource development strategy, and the latter two are at the level of higher education policy and curricula and then at the level of individual graduates' career perspectives. In examining the concept against wider policy and political developments, Rothwell and Rothwell are able to chart the politico-economic trajectory of the concept from its fairly functional manpower job-matching labour market function through to more recent policy and Human Resource approaches which are focused on enhancing individual employees' proclivities towards lifetime employability. The post-welfare neoliberal framework which the authors critically engage with has put the emphasis on individuals, rather than states or employers, as being the key agents of job creation and opportunity. By extension, the actual role played by human resource development in work organisations in formally structuring lifetime employment is all too *ad hoc* and subject to very localised modes of provision.

In the context of employment precariousness, diminishing training resources and the erosion of strong internal labour market structures through competitive outsourcing, there remain critical questions over the

extent to which companies are incentivised to ‘train their own’. In relating discussions to more graduate-level issues, they conclude with a focus on their concept of ‘self-perceived’ employability which is based on graduates’ own perceptions of their employability and it links to both ‘internal’ perspectives (including self-efficacy and motivation) and external (the state of the labour market and the value of their particular degree programme).

In a similar vein, Staffan Nillson’s chapter develops an analysis which explores the complexities in the relationship between higher education and the labour market, making an explicit connection between the supply of graduates to their demand in the labour market. He uses many examples from his own research context of Sweden to develop his discussions. On the former issue, he points out that the international massification of HE has both intensified the competition for jobs and dislocated the traditionally reciprocal interplay between HE and the labour market. The supply-demand dynamic is made more complicated by the variety of provisions and related skills and competences which higher education offers, including vocational and academic pathways, as well as the variegated skills-sets different graduate occupations requires. Nillson discusses the differences between potential and realised employability, arguing that whatever competencies and potential graduates have must be given flight in working life. Here, the actual ‘operationalisation’ of a graduate’s employability becomes paramount both in terms of negotiating access to jobs and sustaining them over time. Nilsson’s argues that: *“A central aspect of being employable is the ability to obtain a job and one important aspect of employability, especially in areas with high competition for jobs, is the ability to market oneself, to negotiate and to accentuate the appropriate forms of individual competence, personal capital, social capital and cultural capital to a recruiter”*.

Sociological concepts clearly have value in understanding graduate employability as the earlier discussions reveal, largely because they capture the relational nature of graduates’ experiences and place them into the context – educational, socio-cultural and labour market – of the way through which graduates transit from HE to working life. Moreover, they connect structural dimensions with graduates lived experiences and how the former shapes personal frames of reference. The chapter by Burke, Scurry, Bleckinsopp and Graley offers an explicitly structural analytical lens, drawing upon two key social theorists, Pierre Bourdieu and Margaret Archer. The theme of employability as a social process, but one which is further located in the socio-cultural context of graduates’ wider cultural

milieus, frames their discussion. Their chapter presents some illuminating discussions on the ways in which Bourdieu's key conceptual tools of capital, habitus and field can be applied to graduates' transitions and early experiences in the labour market. These raise further critical questions about dominant economic paradigms on employability, namely human capital and skills biases approaches, given that they do not particularly acknowledge way of these becoming socialised or at least socially mediated in graduates' transitional and job-search activities.

As Burke et al discuss, Bourdieu's theorising is potentially helpful in showing the ways in which different graduates (often via their class, gender and race) are positioned within the wider labour market field. The habitus they form through their wider socio-cultural and educational experiences shapes perceptions and subjective opportunity structures, which in turn clearly anchor decisions and outlooks. The 'unthinkability' some individuals have about participating in university, or at least certain 'types' of university, clearly precludes them from even applying to certain institutions. Yet in many instances this extends to post-graduation decisions; and in the case of graduates from lower socio-economic home background who self-select from job markets which are seen as beyond their own socio-cultural milieu, this appears to be very real.

The application of the Critical Realism theoretical lens informs the chapter by Paul Cashian. This offers an original and potentially very insightful way of understanding graduate employability. Cashian makes a case for an alternative understanding to the dominant 'causal' accounts of employability which are highly implicit in many skills-based and metrics approaches which link specific provision to alleged employment 'outcomes'. Critical realism posits that any complex problem, such as graduate employability, exists in a 'deep social structure' of reality rather than being based on linear and one-dimensional sets of events and occurrences which lead to very specific and predictive outcomes. Social structures have multiple dimensions, including students' home background, their university and their target workplace, but these are also further mediated, and are also partly constitutive of, other structural or 'indirect' variables, including students' age, gender, social background, subject area and degree type. Cashian therefore argues that: *"Under the critical realist lens employability becomes a multifaceted phenomenon at the heart of which are individual students/ graduates consciously, and unconsciously, creating and developing their employability in response to the surrounding social structure"*. Central to the employability process is the acting, agential graduate trying to

negotiate the parameters of a pre-existing social reality called the graduate labour market, and their outcomes are constrained or enabled by factors closer to home which may influence the extent to which they are realized.

The chapter by Donald, Baruch and Ashleigh explores highly pertinent conceptual themes relating to career flexibility and mobility in the context of the new 'protean' career settlement that the current graduate body are likely to experience over their working lives. Drawing upon UK and international research in this field, they discuss how for younger cohorts of employees the average movement between jobs appears to be every four years. As these authors discuss, there are multiple forces behind the movement towards career mobility, not least economic globalisation and the more fluid geo-economic flow of labour towards new and cheaper production locations. They also extend to social changes linked to changing family structures, dual-wage households and an aging workforce. In their chapter, Donald, Baruch and Ashleigh outline the different dimensions and meanings of the protean career as well as its variant, the 'boundary-less' career. Their chapter discusses the implications this movement has for graduates who, at one level have embarked upon a programme of study that sets them on a potential career pathway and, at another, have increasingly become socialised towards greater flexibility. The old 'bounded' graduate careers of yesteryear have given way to the boundaryless trajectory of the modern job market. This may now also be born of choice and preference than necessity as the old image of 'corporate man' appears to carry less appeal.

In a thought-provoking chapter, Phil McCash explores graduate employability from a number of focal points, including 'accounts', 'formulas', 'typologies' and 'metaphors'. Each of these in some ways act as organising heuristics for understanding the issue but also, perhaps more significantly, they reflect different intellectual approaches and traditions. Yet even within each category there are some marked differences in approach, reinforcing the notion that a common, agreeable employability definition or approach may be eternally elusive. In the 'accounts' heuristic, human capital accounts present a very different explanatory and analytical account of graduates' career decisions and subsequent outcomes than, for example, accounts of careership. Similarly, metaphors are never far away in employability discourse; and as with other areas of social and economic life their appeal is often based on spatial and visual images which convey salient details about the phenomena they depict. Metaphors around 'competition', and their related images of 'playing games' in labour market

'fields' may not explicitly speak to other metaphors relating to 'drama' and their associated images of 'stages' and 'audiences'. But there are shared points of references in each – not least the key players and actors who are the centre of the metaphors. In exploring the many focal angles to employability and careers, McCash opens up a wide body of literature. Drawing upon the traditions of depth psychology, his chapter considers how much of the current employability discourse often works at meta-level, often subliminally channelling unconscious signifiers of how we feel we should relate to ourselves and the world at large.

The relationship between graduate employability and professional development and formation is highly relevant to the current discussion, not least because we need to pick apart the difference between professional development taking place in formal educational settings and those in the actual professional context itself. Mariana Gaio Alves presents an outline of the meaning of professional learning and how this has taken increased prominence in discussion of career development in the flexible modern labour market context. As Alves points out, *"the trajectories of higher education graduates within this context have become marked by a growing number of situations in which students work while studying, as well as by the increasing number of adults who engage in learning in its various forms while being employed or when unemployed"*. Her chapter develops some important themes in the area of professional learning, in particular the awareness most graduates have of needing to embark on lifelong learning and the ways in which this is both formally and informally achieved. If graduates embark upon formal learning, which may include gaining further qualifications, they will wish to see how well this equips them for future employability. This in turn carries implications at a time when more graduates feel the need to invest further in their education to acquire more credentials (including post-graduate study). If lifelong learning becomes instrumentally orientated then the intrinsic value of learning for its own sake – which may be very beneficial and stimulate further learning – becomes marginalised. Alves' chapter develops some important themes on the role of informal learning, including the various dimensions (including time, spaces) through which they occur and relates these to recent graduate employability discourses.

The impacts of internationalisation and the global mobility of graduates is a highly pertinent issue and is addressed in Zhen Li's chapter. Much has clearly been made of the global skills race, the increased movement of highly qualified graduates across geo-political borders and the

development of emerging economies' skills bases. In this context, further attention needs to be given to the experiences of international students, what they learn and acquire when studying abroad and how this is then used in their transitions to their own or other countries' labour markets. As Li discusses, the evidence on international students is variable with some data indicating that repatriated graduates enjoy better prospects and returns in the labour market, others perceiving that the currency of an international degree is starting to decline. Her chapter outlines the cultural-specific modes of capital which enhance graduates' access to jobs, using the Chinese example of the concept *suzhi* to illustrate the qualities pertaining to whole-person development and capabilities formation which adds value to Chinese graduates' experiences and future outcomes.

One of the enduring challenges for graduates is not such their ability to simply 'transfer' their knowledge, but also to reflect on what they have learned and then articulate it in compelling ways to employers. Much of what is implicit in students' learning could be made explicit, and it is perfectly legitimate for students to conceive their learning through an employability 'lens' if they are able to see the value in extrapolating this more widely to future lives. Hinchliffe and Walkington's chapter explores these issues, focussing on a significant area which they argue as key to graduates' employability: judgement-making. This is also constitutive of other important capabilities, including decision-making and argumentation. In most graduate jobs, these are drawn upon fairly routinely and across most levels of graduate occupations. As these authors argue: "Making and defending judgements helps students to learn how to become *responsible for those judgements*". Hinchliffe and Walkington's chapter draws upon several case studies, exploring a number of problem-based learning activities designed to encourage student reflection. In the cases they outline, students are involved in research dissemination and evaluation and real-world scenario planning. Significantly, judgment formation and the appraisal of complex and multiple levels of information are exercised at length. These authors make a convincing case for the cultivation of judgement formation and continued *reflection on learning*; and far from these capabilities being at the softer end of the soft skills spectrum, they are integral to the kinds of choices and judgments graduates make. This is not only applicable to specific job tasks, but also to career decision process and judgments and values about jobs they wish to pursue.

The chapter by Paul Greenbank reveals some interesting tensions in the ways in which many graduates plan and think about their careers and

their management: whilst getting on the graduate ‘career ladder’ is a key rationale for entering HE, students do not always engage in strategies and planning that enables them to do so. One of the challenges is that students may be inclined to adopt present-focused rather than future-focused orientations, partly based on an anticipated serendipity that the future will, somehow, work out. Drawing upon the decision-making concepts of System 1 and System 2 thinking, Greenbank discusses how, in the research he conducted in his own English institution, there was greater evidence of students’ career outlooks being guided by systems 1 modes (i.e. intuitive, instinctive and impressionistic) rather than system 2 one (i.e. rational, deliberative, objectively based). His chapter shows therefore that there are still many challenges for both graduates and careers counsellors in encouraging students to develop more flexible and goal-driven post-university decision and planning. His chapter points to some potentially valuable action-orientated approaches which may help graduates in this area, ranging from important ‘unfreezing’ techniques through to formulating personal and career objectives and developing reflective approaches to dealing with potential career challenges.

The chapter by Paivi Sivvonen presents findings from biographical case studies with mature graduates. The focus of this study is all the more relevant given that this group of graduates has often been neglected in employability research. Moreover, if the workforce is ageing and employers are adopting more flexible approaches to recruitment workforce development, then we might expect more successful integration amongst older graduates. There is much rich biographical material in Sivvonen’s study, based on longitudinal material that engages with graduates’ educational biographies and early career experiences and the interplay of both. There are overlaps here with some of the themes developed by Burke *et al* in that mature graduates are often ‘positioned’; and in ways that do not always allow them to be sufficiently ‘match’ employers’ preferences. Sivvonen’s data further reveals that there is often a critical intersection between age, social class and gender—all of which are played out, affirmed or challenged in these graduates’ early career stages. Perhaps most importantly, as her rich biographical case material shows, there is no clear homogeneity amongst particular ‘types’ of graduates such as those of more mature age. Whilst mature graduates face common challenges and potential barriers, and look to draw on their agency to negotiate them, there are still differences in how each are positioned. This is often influenced not only by specifics of their biographies but also crucial events and interactions within their early careers.

We have discussed throughout this introduction how analysis is often weighted towards ‘supply-side’ discussions which typically focus on the skills and knowledge provided by HEIS which is then matched in the labour market. Rather mysteriously, the ‘demand side’ appears to take care of itself and the skills actually acquired in the labour market which are ultimately of longer-term career value are given less attention. Lindberg and Rantatalo’s chapter addresses this issue and explores the ‘practice’ dimensions of graduate employability. Drawing upon fieldwork within the medical and police professions, their research focuses on two key demand-side issues: selection and early career integration. Both are important areas where judgements of ‘competence’ come to the fore and where the symbolic and affective levels of communication and interactions between graduates and significant others is paramount. In this conceptual vein, it is harder to view the notion of competence as merely about meeting objective criteria of job-specific demands, and instead is referenced against the symbolic and affective institutional constitution of a workplace. The more graduates can practice these and execute them through desired behaviours, the more favourably their employability is likely to be judged. Lindberg and Rantatalo provide a compelling illustration of how this works in organisational contexts such as medicine and the police services, both of which are steeped in behavioural codes and where judgments about employee calibre is often pervasive. As these authors show, employability is not simply performance-orientated but also socially-orientated in the sense of being located in the socially-rich occupational environs in which professional competencies are acquired, developed and deployed. The social make-up of graduates is important in the appraisal of appropriate competences, employees’ integration and adjustment. It clearly plays an important role in any process of occupational socialisation.

As we discussed earlier in this chapter, employability also needs to be analysed at the micro level and how graduates individually perceive and manage their career development. In her chapter Lorraine Dacre-Pool applies her and her colleagues’ CareerEdge model which has clearly been influential in the UK and many other national contexts in working through more practical aspects of employability and careers provision. In her chapter, she focuses chiefly on two of the model’s most significant dimensions, which she argues have become crucial in graduate post-university transitions: emotional intelligence and self-efficacy. In the post-industrial context, it is widely believed that many of the people-orientated, customer-facing and communication-driven forms of work necessitate the

skills of empathy, reacting effectively to situations and projecting one-self convincingly – all of which are clearly important in the recruitment process. As Dacre-Pool writes: “*developing emotional competence is something of vital importance to future graduates who, let us not forget, are our potential future leaders, both in workplaces and society in general...*” In terms of self-efficacy, graduates clearly need to carry forward positive beliefs about themselves around their abilities and what they can offer – more so in tough environments where early set-backs may be inevitable.

The chapter by Melinde Coetzee is also very much in the psycho-social mould of linking employability to graduates’ own self-evaluations of their employability. The career ‘pre-occupations’ involved in graduates’ development, entails some key components pertaining to attitudes, motivations and emerging identities, all of which can explain how well graduates adapt to the challenging employment context they enter. A key issue here, as Coetzee explores, is that of career adaptability. Without such a resource it becomes harder to sustain an employability narrative beyond fairly limited domains. Most significantly, this gives rise to further capacities, including the ability to move jobs, make work-life adjustments, cope with change and engage in continued professional learning. The need for a more proactive and open mind-set has perhaps never been more important and Coetzee’s chapter provides clear evidence on the relationship between graduates’ levels of career adaptability and career-related psycho-social orientations; and again, the issue of self-efficacious beliefs and attitudes that graduates have formed is shown to be a key influence in how graduates approach their career development more broadly. Such findings clearly have relevance for career guidance and helping graduates understand their own pre-occupations and dispositions, including the areas they need to work on. As Coetzee discusses, “*well-developed employability capacities help graduates to function successfully within a rapidly changing work environment and to contribute to a range of employer requirements over the course of their working lives*”.

Graduate employability raises significant issues for not only curriculum development but also how we think more widely about the future of university provision as we move through this century, and this does not appear to be lost on policy makers and university managers. Ruth Bridgstock’s chapter brings together some major themes in a timely discussion of curricula innovation and the changing nature of knowledge (co)production and application. Her chapter places this in the context of highly pertinent discourses on the changing nature of professional work

in the digital economy, most of which she argues is based on the creative and knowledge capital a graduate can harvest. This is also played out in a boundaryless careers landscape where the importance of knowledge networks and relationships becomes paramount. In this context, the challenge of aligning university curricula to future employment takes on a new dimension, requiring innovative thinking which challenges status quo ideas about skills provisions. As Bridgstock argues, “...*there is limited value, and possible danger, in providing decontextualised and genericised lists of desired individual skills and capabilities. While very difficult to avoid, this practice encourages a superficial ‘tick box’ approach to curriculum, and promotes a lack of specificity and depth in conceptualisation and teaching*”. Her chapter puts forwards a new model of university learning which in its nature is social, experiential, situated and, significantly, trans-disciplinary. This, she discusses, has relevance across all disciplinary domains, including those whose pedagogies have been largely anchored around traditional disciplinary knowledge.

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Graduate Employability: A Critical Oversight

Andrew Rothwell and Frances Rothwell

INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers what is meant by employability, provides an overview of the main dimensions, and critically examines whether the attention given to graduate employability in particular has delivered its potential policy, educational, business and individual outcomes in the context of a complex economic situation. The term is used widely and loosely, and has been the focus of a rapidly expanding body of literature. Consequently, we begin by offering some definitions of employability then clarify this in four broad categories. Two of these are contextual: employment policy, principally at national level; and the notion of employability as a human resources management strategy. A further two are considered in much more detail first, employability in the higher education (HE) context both

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in terms of HE policy and the HE curriculum. As the last of the four categories we focus on the individual perspective: self-perceived employability, or how individual graduates can make an evaluation of their own career potential going forward. This is not the end of the story. While our work is somewhat Anglo-centric, and rooted in the post-industrial economies (Bell 1976), we also intend to demonstrate that these are increasingly global concerns. We suggest that employability has a ‘smoke and mirrors’ quality that has distracted attention from some fundamental issues in relation to graduate employment, including the offshore migration of graduate-level jobs, potential mis-selling of the extent of graduate-level opportunities (Scurry and Blenkinsop 2011), and as yet unknown threats to employment sustainability posed by predicted high levels of automation of many types of work (Oliver 2015).

WHAT IS EMPLOYABILITY, WHERE DID IT COME FROM? WHAT ARE THE MAIN DIMENSIONS WITHIN THE BROAD SPECTRUM OF THE EMPLOYABILITY LITERATURE?

Despite the development (in the last two decades) of a sizeable field of literature the validity of employability as a construct has been consistently challenged (Hillage and Pollard 1998; Garavan 1999). More recently Thijssen et al. (2008, p. 167) suggested it might be ‘an attractive but confusing professional buzzword’. Thijssen et al. also suggested that sometimes the term has negative connotations, sometimes positive, often referring to individual characteristics, sometimes under-valuing the importance of the external labour market but generally referring to the notion of ‘employment as an outcome’ (p. 174). One of the most widely cited definitions is from Hillage and Pollard (1998, p. 12):

Employability is about the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (eg. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work.

Previously, we have suggested that employability might simply be the ability to keep the job you’ve got or to get the job you want (Rothwell and Arnold 2007). However in paid-for higher education in a recessionary

context, employability may find itself with a contractual tone, as suggested by Oliver (2015, p. 56):

Employability features more prominently on the agenda of higher education institutions when the economy falters or changes: the majority of students, and their families, expect a degree to deliver a career pathway as well as an education.

We will discuss Hillage and Pollard's suggested link between employability and skills below, as well as the impact of the context – work and careers, especially for graduates, in the twenty-first century.

A BRIEF MODERN HISTORY OF CAREERS, WORK AND (UN) EMPLOYMENT: THE CONTEXT OF EMPLOYABILITY

Concerns about work and employment in the western industrialised world resulting from economic, technological and social change are not new. There has been significant turbulence in these labour markets since the 1970s, which accelerated following the recession of 2007–2008. In post-industrial societies, downsizing and delayering, eradicated many of the structures that supported long term careers. New flexible models of work shifted the burden of risk to the individual (Ekinsmyth 1999). In the UK, 84% of job losses between 2008 and 2009 were in manual, unskilled and administrative positions (Wright et al. 2010). In the west, there has been a decline in manufacturing: in all developed countries the proportion of workers employed in manufacturing halved by 1990 (Watkins et al. 1992). According to Manyika et al. (2011), manufacturing represented just 12 per cent of United States GDP and 11% of employment by 2011, with 5.7 million jobs lost in the first decade of the twenty-first century, this being a dramatic acceleration of an existing trend and reflecting (p. 28) “the effects of automation, process redesign and off-shoring”, all factors which we suggest will also increasingly affect graduate level work.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, getting or keeping work has remained a challenge for many individuals. Torres (2012) suggested a 50-million jobs deficit worldwide, noting that (2012, p. vii), “*employment has become more unstable or precarious. In advanced economies, involuntary part time employment and temporary employment have increased in two thirds and more than half of those economies, respectively.*” Hence, the rationale for continuing interest in employability is clear, but

there are also hints of structural issues and deeply concerning international issues which we will return to later. Having established the context for employability, the following sections discuss how these changes to work and employment were reflected in employability related public policy and organisational human resource management (HRM) strategies. This is followed by a more detailed consideration of employability in a Higher Education context.

EMPLOYABILITY IN PUBLIC POLICY, THE SKILLS DEBATE

In the UK, government policy from the late 1970s marked a move away from a commitment to full employment. As Orton (2011, p. 353) noted, “-government no longer saw itself as responsible for job creation or protection, and what policy development there was focused overwhelmingly on the supply side”. Similarly Chertkovskaya et al. (2013, p. 701) suggested that:

- individuals’ capacity to – constantly work on their employability, has come to be understood as the crux of national, organizational and individual prosperity.

This neo-liberal approach marked a shift in responsibility towards the individual, mirrored (in academic literature) by notions such as the protean career (Hall 1976) as being under the proactive control of the person seeking to sustain or acquire work. By the mid-late 1990s concerns about the impact of rising unemployment in Western economies led to research supported by government departments (eg. Hillage and Pollard 1998), the European Union (eg. Berkeley 1995) or internationally (e.g. OECD 1996, 1998; UN 2001), promoting the notion that unemployment could be ‘durably reduced’ (OECD 1995, p. 12). Researchers often emphasised the role of government as ‘enablers’ (Cherkovskaya et al. 2013, p. 703) in stimulating the development of skills in the working population (who should now take the initiative to upgrade their skills) appropriate to perceived employer needs (NCIHE 1997, UK Commission for Employment and Skills 2009). This perception also influenced 1990s public policy (e.g. in the UK) with a focus on higher education expansion, which also happened to reduce youth unemployment especially when linked to widening participation – encouraging working class youth into Higher Education, with a promise of a rewarding career and social mobility. Specific ‘graduate skills’ were listed comprehensively in nine areas by Lowden et al.

(2011, p. 6), including such (simplistic?) categories as a ‘positive approach’ and ‘using numbers accurately’. Yet even such simple skill-sets may themselves be unstable. The ‘World Economic Forum’ (2016, p. 3) noted that skill requirements for jobs were changing, “*shortening the shelf-life of employees’ existing skill-sets*”, and noted the need for “*technical skills to be supplemented by strong social and collaboration skills*”.

The recognition of potential shortcomings in a new proactive approach to work and skills are far from new. Hillage and Pollard (1998) noted the lack of ‘employability qualities’ in school leavers. Similarly the OECD (1997) observed that initial education and training no longer guaranteed what they optimistically called lifelong employability. The actual creation of jobs is often overlooked: Brown (2005), in a review of UK public policy attributed (p. 13) the ‘failure of economically inactive people’ to find jobs to ‘poor employability’ and discrimination against them: the absence of suitable jobs for them to apply for was not mentioned. McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) however offered a critical perspective on ‘supply side’ employability policies (i.e. policies which aimed to enhance individuals’ employability skills) in that these shifted the onus of ‘blame’ onto the individual and their: “– inadequacies, rather than acknowledging a lack of opportunity within the labour market” (p. 204).

Within the UK literature in particular, the notion of employability in public policy became inextricably attached to that of skills development. Wright, Brinkley and Clayton also (p. 10) noted that as long ago as 1970 around twenty cent of the UK workforce were ‘knowledge workers’: this doubled by 2010, as knowledge-intensive industries increased by around 90% to almost half of all employment in the UK. A reasonably contemporary view of the UK employment scene was offered by Birdwell et al. (2011, p. 18):

Five trends shape the current labour market – the dwindled but relatively stable supply of lower-skilled jobs, the diminished number of semi-skilled manufacturing jobs, the continuing rise in service sector jobs, the growing need for jobs at a ‘technician level’, the rise in the number of jobs at professional and managerial level.

Wright et al. (2010, p. 3) suggested that “skills shortages, skills gaps and skills under-utilisation are cited as the main problems facing the system”. They expressed frustration with the ‘glacial speed’ of the system (page 35) and concluded (page 6):

The debate about employability and skills has been long standing – after many years there has been no revolution and we are still discussing a lack of ‘employability skills’, with education providers remaining focused on qualifications targets rather than preparation for the workforce.

The report went on (page 7) to suggest that “skills-hungry knowledge intensive sectors (are) critical to the future growth of the UK”, suggesting that there would continue to be strong demand for individuals with higher skills and qualifications due to the advance of the knowledge-based economy (KBE: OECD 1996). This derived from a common perspective at the end of the twentieth century that due to demographic change and the rise of the KBE there would be a limited pool of talent with the potential to fill higher level positions, thus creating a ‘war for talent’ (a term first used by McKinsey consultants: see Michaels et al. 1997). At the same time the increasing sophistication of work would create a need for additional skill requirements, thus creating jobs to be filled by graduates, a notion known as job-upgrading (CIPD 2015b) or up-skilling (Felstead 2013). In fact, Felstead acknowledged that the up-skilling process was weakening by 2012, while the supply of graduates continued to grow, but clearly stated his perspective that: “the economy’s prosperity is based on the skills of its jobs” (p. 17).

More recent perspectives have challenged the notion of up-grading or up-skilling. First, automation may have the opposite effect of de-skilling work by replacing discretionary decision-making with intelligent systems, ‘making knowledge work more routine’. Second a diminishing demand for labour may mean that more skilled and qualified candidates (graduates) displace the less favoured, even where the graduates may be under-employed (CIPD 2015b). The same source described this phenomenon of graduate employment in what were formerly non graduate jobs as ‘occupational filtering down’ (page 28), a nicely euphemistic term for what could also be called de-professionalisation. Espinoza (2015) noted that one-third of UK graduates from the previous year were in roles that did not require a degree. Goldwyn-Simkins (2015) in the UK’s ‘What do Graduates Do’ publication, noted that although the number of graduates in what was called ‘professional-level employment’ had risen, this was still only 68%. At the same time the CIPD’s Labour Market Outlook for the fourth quarter of 2015 noted that 49% of employers had hiring difficulties, especially for engineering and managerial roles (CIPD 2015a), suggesting a mismatch between supply and demand in the labour market.

It has been suggested that the focus on skills as a “social and economic panacea” (Keep 2010, p. 565) has diverted attention away from considering other practical policies and strategies. Challenges to contemporary policy approaches, included Orton (2011, p. 357) who suggested that: “ – employability without employment does not make sense in a capabilities perspective”. Orton suggested that the real issue was to raise the number of jobs available and a need for alternative policies to the neo-liberal orthodoxy. Chertkovskaya et al. (2013) suggested that:

governments, rather than creating jobs, helped the unemployed to improve their employability, as well as making benefits dependent on it, with getting out of unemployment becoming the individual’s responsibility.

What actually appears to have happened in post-industrial societies in the last decade (accelerating in the last five years) is further cost-based job migration but not just of routine-level jobs. The outsourcing of professional work and the rapid rise of professional shared service centres, many of which are outside the UK, has seen higher-level work migrate overseas as well (Rothwell et al. 2011; Herbert and Seal 2014), satisfying demand for professional service work by a rapidly growing, technically literate and educated population in the developing world. Thus there may continue to be strong demand for individuals such as graduates with higher skills and qualifications due to the global advance of the knowledge based economy, but it won’t necessarily be in the post-industrial nations. We suggest that by committing to a KBE based on ‘graduate work’ and professional services, the post-industrial nations have missed the point: skills deficits may persist, and worsen, but in technical skills (which aren’t being delivered by many education systems, notably the UK) to a greater extent than skills for professional services. There will be no net increase in high level domestic jobs, they will simply migrate overseas, encouraged by surpluses of graduate labour in lower-cost economies such as India and China (Sharma 2014).

As concluding comments, employability as policy has fallen victim to a series of oversights, and one cannot escape the feeling that either little has been achieved or that the debate has not sufficiently evolved. Our principal challenge, which we will return to later, is that an ‘upskilled’ economic future premised on the KBE may be at best unsustainable and at worst a myth. The next section briefly considers employability as a strategy within Human Resource Management, after which we focus our attention on Higher Education.

EMPLOYABILITY AS A HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Employability also exists as a concept within the managerial toolkit. Changing labour market conditions throughout the western world in the 1990s signalled the end of employment security (Doherty 1996). Employability emerged as a possible way forward (Garavan 1999). Pascale (1995, p. 21) noted a somewhat idealistic view:

Employability has been advanced as the mechanism to restore a healthier *quid pro quo* – In exchange for the employees’ dedicated efforts in a shorter-term employment relationship, the company pays higher wages and invests in the employees’ development. This makes them more marketable when it is time to move on.

Tamkin and Hillage (1999) emphasised what employers could potentially do to enhance the employability of their workforce suggesting that if they could not offer a job-for-life (still a cherished notion in the 1990s!) then it would be good practice to give employees the ability to get other work should this be necessary including an emphasis on learning and development, coaching, mentoring and developing key contacts. Similarly Thijssen et al (2008, p. 169) suggested a focus in the 1990s on ‘companies offering facilities to improve the responsibility and initiative of employees’, linking this to the notion of the boundaryless career. Baruch (2001, p. 553) was blunt in his conclusions:

employability’ as a managerial concept is flawed. In the short term people will not believe in it; in the long term it will damage the company.

His assessment was based on research with HR managers whose views included the idea that promoting employability would de-stabilise the company, that they wanted people to develop “skills for us, not for others” (p. 560), and the notion of promoting employability as a benefit “would be completely illogical”. Despite these potentially negative perceptions, there are some contemporary examples which illustrate the persistence of the HRM perspective. Nauta et al. (2009, p. 233) examined the ‘push and pull’ motives related to the turnover intent of Dutch health care workers and concluded that an ‘employability culture’ would help organisations adapt to change while ‘simultaneously decreasing turnover intentions’.

Finally, as a philanthropic perspective, Dobbs et al. (2012) cited (p. 67) the beverage company Diageo which set up a UK charity to help long term unemployed people find jobs, education or training.

An overall evaluation is of a complex picture relating to employability within HRM, worthy of further research. For graduates, the implications are that while they may expect development in their ‘first destination’ appointments, employers may be reticent to provide this unless some trade-off can be made such as training (essentially lock-in) agreements. As a counter-view, the World Economic Forum suggested that the expectation on the part of employers that they be “consumers of ready-made human capital” (WEF 2016, p. 7) was unrealistic, and that they should put talent development “front and centre to their growth”.

GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY AND THE HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

From the 1980s onwards a focus emerged on employability within the Higher Education (HE) context including the promotion of initiatives to develop employability such as internships and work experience. In this section of the chapter we commence with some observations on graduate employment (not just in the UK), followed by some sector-level developments such as those promoted by the Higher Education Academy. We will then consider selected examples of specific curriculum initiatives, and a selection of employability measures or psychometric tools that are relevant to graduates. We consider the relationship between employability initiatives and subsequent employment outcomes, concluding with some challenges to the phenomenon of graduate employability. Is it a potential solution to a global jobs crisis, or worse, as Cherkovskaya, Watt, Tramer and Spoelstra suggested (2013, p. 707): ‘a promise empty of any substantive meaning – that empties all it touches’.

Some of the earliest references to employability could be found in an educational context (Robbins 1963). The term was to re-emerge in the 1980s in the context of concerns about rising graduate unemployment in the UK (Haigh and Gibbs 1981) and graduate suitability for employment (NCIHE 1997) at the same time as ‘massification’ of the higher education sector. Wright et al. (2010, p. 11) noted that 36% of the employed UK workforce had a degree or equivalent in 2010, and that the Labour party had aimed to get 50% of young people to enter higher education

(or equivalent) and 75% to enter post-secondary education (Leitch Review of Skills 2006).

In the UK context graduate salaries, employment rates and expectations are variable and the outlook for graduates has been mixed for some time. Scurry and Blenkinsop (2011) explored the notion of graduate under-employment, and emphasised the importance of managing expectations. Unemployment or under-employment may well be due to qualitative and quantitative mismatches: in the former case subject knowledge (not just skills) that do not match labour market requirements (Woodman and Hutchings 2011), and in the latter case simply too many graduates. A report entitled ‘Over-qualification and skills mismatch in the graduate labour market’ (CIPD 2015b) noted the increasing proportions of graduates in professional and ‘associate professional’ (p. 3) occupations between 1991 and 2014, but also (p. 4) that the UK has witnessed one of the highest rates of Higher Education expansion across Europe in recent decades’, with (p. 15) 58.8% of graduates in non-graduate jobs, one of the highest proportions in Europe. The CIPD acknowledged a generally higher level of skill requirements in the workforce, and that some degree courses were delivering training once the preserve of vocational education. They suggested that in some cases jobs have upgraded “as graduates moved into them in increasing numbers” (p. 5) whereas in other cases graduates have simply replaced non-graduates in less demanding jobs. They (2015b, p. 11) cited the notion of ‘Digital Taylorism’ as graduate level jobs were subjected to increasing automation, including of decision-making processes. A contrasting view (at first impression) was presented by Goldwyn-Simpkins (2015) whose findings suggested that the UK graduate labour market had recovered from the recession (2014–2015 cohort, surveyed six months after graduation), with mean salaries of £20,637 and 68% of graduates in graduate-level jobs. Notwithstanding the mismatch in information, this presents a challenging contemporary picture overall for UK graduates.

The UK HE sector responded to challenges described by investing significantly in employability initiatives. The greatest body of work was developed by the UK’s Higher Education Academy (HEA), specifically their ‘Subject Centres’ and ‘Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning’ (CETLs) and there are numerous examples of good practice across a very broad spectrum of subject areas. The CETL activity was summarised by Butcher et al. (2011) and claimed impact at a number of levels including embedding employability in institutional strategy, promoting innovation

in teaching and learning, enterprise education, research to inform practice and employer engagement. In that account employability appeared to have subsumed a number of other activities including work-based learning (p. 9) and entrepreneurship. A comprehensive perspective on employability for university students was offered by Redmond (2010) who suggested that University reputation could impact on an individual's future employability (a view not widely acknowledged in the UK academic community), and that employability could be represented by the formula: $E = Q + WE + S \times C$. This being, Employability = Qualifications + Work Experience + Strategies x Contacts. The inclusion of 'contacts' is interesting: could it be that despite widening participation initiatives, individuals from more affluent backgrounds are more likely to attend highly ranked universities and to have the contacts to acquire entry level positions or internships? Illustrative of works that focus on key employability-creating factors, Lowden et al. (2011) found that their research (p. vii) 'overwhelmingly highlighted' the importance of work experience to promote the employability of graduates.

Holmes (2015) focused on the formation of 'graduate identity' through analysis of personal narratives of individuals who had engaged with graduate selection processes. Their success or otherwise either confirmed or refuted their sense of 'worthiness' to be considered suitable for what they perceived as a graduate level role, and indeed the value of being a graduate in the first place. In the context of widespread concerns about graduate under-employment, Holmes presented some important issues: is higher education over-selling the promise of graduate employment, and if this is not achieved is the consequence psychologically damaging for individuals?

There are numerous publications which directly describe employability initiatives in various Universities. Many are claimed to be successful, and undoubtedly rest on exceptional efforts by dedicated individuals, but there are relatively few longitudinal studies that actually capture the impact of employability initiatives. We present a small selection here, identified as much for their differences as their similarities. For example, Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) described the 'CareerEDGE' model as including curriculum components to develop employability, including (page 49) career development learning, experience, the degree subject, skills and emotional intelligence; they also emphasised the value of opportunities to develop work experience. They concluded (p. 287) that 'self-esteem is a major part of the key to employability'. A later publication (Dacre Pool and Qualter 2013) introduced an element of longitudinal study in that it examined the

perceptions of 'working graduates' (alumni) to retrospectively consider the impact of a range of variables within self-perceived employability, including career satisfaction and including emotional self-efficacy (an alternative label for trait-emotional intelligence: p. 215). The latter was found to be important for both employability and career satisfaction, supporting an argument for EI to have more curriculum emphasis. Smith et al. (2014) reported a substantial study undertaken in Australia with more than 3000 responses in one of the five separate phases, including over 1400 responses in what was described as a 'proxy longitudinal study' (p. 21). This very diverse (in terms of subject) study focused on employability and especially work-experience provision within the curriculum. It had a longitudinal aspect in the sense that the phases included students at different stages of their degree programme, individuals close to completion of a 'work placement', and a qualitative phase with alumni who had benefitted from 'work-integrated learning' (p. 22). The first phase examined employability related curriculum initiatives: recommendations included the fundamental importance of work experience in shaping employability in the long run.

Maxwell et al. (2015) described the 'Employability Plus' initiative at Northampton University based to a large extent on voluntary community action and 'social learning', which blended curricular and extracurricular activity and included reflective aspects as well as 1:1 meetings between advisors and students, as part of a wider strategy of curriculum innovation and employer engagement. Despite a claimed 97% employability rate among the University's graduates, only 65% of these were acknowledged to be in graduate level jobs. Ball (2015, p. 4) noted that 'graduate level' meant (in terms of UK statistical returns and definitions as reported in 'What do Graduates Do?', jobs falling under the 'professional' banner. Even this can be problematic: Ball cited 'shop-keeping' as being considered 'professional', when finance and veterinary work were not, necessarily.

What has become noticeable in the last two to three years has been the level of interest in graduate employability worldwide, generally driven by Higher Education expansion and a corresponding concern about graduate unemployment or underemployment. Across Europe, the CIPD (2015a) noted that high-skilled jobs had generally tended to increase more slowly than the number of high-skilled workers available with some countries, notably Greece, reporting particular problems. Further afield Sharma (2015) reported that 30% of this year's graduating cohort (2.3 million individuals) in China could be unemployed, with graduates more willing to take non-graduate jobs. In India, according to the Indian

Ministry of Labour and Employment (Labour Bureau 2014, p. 7): “In the case of graduates and post graduates the unemployment rate is about 14 per cent and 12 per cent respectively.” Sharma reported high levels of alienation and discontent in both India and China among the large numbers of educated young people unable to join the middle class. Two key differences here are the rapidly increasing population of India, with slower growth in China as a legacy of the now- relaxed ‘one-child’ policy. Rufai et al. (2015) described a model of graduate employability in the context of Malaysia, also experiencing rapid population (and graduate) increases which may (p. 43): “out-pace the generation of employment opportunities”. There is evidence of significant interest in graduate employability in Australia, with government-led initiatives to identify and promote best practice (see eg. Jackson 2013; Kinash et al., 2014) with the former paper noting (p. 2) “persistent gaps in certain non-technical skills in business graduates”. 19 such skills were identified and more than 45 behaviours.

Readers familiar with the UK’s Higher Education Academy’s work on employability may well be surprised at the brevity of this section. Our aim is not so much to present a comprehensive view of employability good practice, as to offer a balanced consideration including some limitations: in this vein some shortcomings of the HEA’s output have been observed. Pegg et al. (2012) presented an update of the numerous earlier HEA publications on ‘pedagogy for employability’ which aimed to develop (p 45) “the creative, confident, articulate graduate” They concluded that this would be based on action in respect of learning, teaching and assessment to develop employability, work experience or simulated work-based learning, and an institutional commitment to employability. They noted the development of an explicit connection between study and the workplace, including student and employer expectations, but at the same time a – “lack of evaluation of initiatives and approaches to teaching and learning employability skills” (46). A further view was offered by Waltz (2011) who suggested that in attempting to force a fit of individual values with organisational values in the name of employability, individuals may experience cognitive dissonance due to the need to subordinate their own values to that of the organisation.

A report summarising the proceedings of a teaching and learning summit (Tibby 2012), also documented some of the key issues and was relatively frank about the challenges of employability, noting among others (p. 3):

(a) lack of clarity as regards the concept of employability – lack of student engagement with employability – training and resource issues for staff involved in delivering employability support – the challenge of assessing the impact of employability provision.

A further observation could be that employability approaches take an overly simplistic consideration of the development and manifestation of graduates' skills. According to James et al. (2013) skill acquisition may not just be in higher education, but prior to it and even parallel to it, some of the best examples including volunteering or extra-curricular activity (Rothwell and Charleston 2013). Similarly, Williams (2012) expressed a concern that teaching employability skills was actually a distraction for subject-specialist academics, in a context where students saw university as the only option (due to a lack of jobs) rather than a positive choice. Wilton (2011) introduced a note of concern in his observation that despite employability initiatives, graduates were still likely to encounter barriers attributable to 'traditional labour-market disadvantage', such as social class. There is nonetheless a perception that many publications on employability related to UK higher education in particular tend to be repetitive, descriptive and uncritical (Pegg et al. 2012).

We suggest that despite the immense amount of energy and effort that has been expended on university level employability, this may actually disguise some issues of concern. First, universities in the UK (and elsewhere) expanded dramatically in the early part of the twenty-first century but not always in the shortage 'STEM' subjects required for sustainable economies. Second, in some cases graduates apparently still lack many of the basic skills employers require (Lowden et al. 2011). Third, universities have been complicit, globally, in promoting the notion of 'graduate employment' in mass Higher Education when the prospect of attaining success from a not inconsiderable investment is not always a realistic aspiration. Fourth, the increasing global concern about graduate employability suggests a bigger over-supply problem, exacerbated by a global jobs shortfall.

THE INDIVIDUAL FOCUS: EMPLOYABILITY MEASURES AND SELF-PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY

In the three approaches to employability discussed so far, employability has been viewed in a detached way: as applied to individuals or groups within society as a whole, within the education system, or an organisation's

workforce. A fourth perspective on employability examines the individuals' understanding of their own situation and opportunities. It mainly evolved from the 1990s literature on changing careers and the 'new psychological contract', echoing earlier notions of less government intervention and more employee pro-activity. Broadly, within the literature self-perceived employability (SPE) appears to have internal and external aspects. The internal dimension includes the individuals' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), knowledge and skills (Engelberg and Limbach-Reich 2011), mastery of career management and job search (Hillage and Pollard 1998), individual attributes such as age which was also linked to promotions (Van der Heijden, 2009), and internal job-promotion opportunities (Rothwell and Arnold 2007). Van Emmerik et al. (2012) also noted the importance of aspects inherent within the job such as autonomy, variety and feedback, mediated by individual motivation. The external dimension includes the general state of the labour market and the demand for one's occupation at a particular point in time (Hillage and Pollard 1998, Rothwell and Arnold 2007). Positive perceptions of one's employability may be advantageous: Berntson and Marklund (2007) found through longitudinal study that it predicted mental well-being and general health due to a perceived ability to escape work situations seen as unfavourable.

Self-perceptions of employability (SPE) apply to individuals in the context of transitions between education and work. Rothwell et al. (2008) examined SPE for business students in low-ranked, middle-ranked and high-ranked universities based on a four-component model comprising the individual, their course of study, the status of their institution and the general state of the labour market. They found, perhaps counter-intuitively, that respondents from the highest ranked university actually had the lowest employability expectations. This was initially attributed to these individuals having a greater reality-sense and awareness of the real challenges in the labour market. Their views contrasted with those of students in the sample from post 1992 Universities, who were found to be from a 'widening participation' background, with lower grades on entry and the first in their families to engage with higher education. The students from the high-ranked institutions also reported greater selectivity in the jobs they were willing to apply for. Their uncompromising 'red-brick, blue chip' approach indicated that they were less easily satisfied than their peers. Rothwell et al. (2009) replicated the above study with international post-graduate students. In each of the latter studies actual scale items used were appended to the papers, with factor analyses and details of scale construction.

Picking up on the international note above Potgeiter and Coetzee (2013) analysed the attributes of their ‘employability attributes scale’, which they used in conjunction with the Myers-Briggs Type indicator (MBTI™) in their South African study. This was based on a model which accounted for (p. 3) personal agency, career success and sustained employability, as well as the employment context. Individual factors included career self-management, cultural competence, self-efficacy, career resilience, sociability, proactivity, emotional literacy and entrepreneurial orientation. This paper also looked at postgraduate employability – arguably an under-researched area. Nwogu and Momoh (2015), also utilised the MBTI alongside their (p. 245) “graduate employability qualities and personality preferences” scale, noting (p. 242): “-increased concerns about the employability of young adults in the Nigerian context”. While these are by no means the only international examples, they do illustrate the increasing global concern around graduate employability. As with other categories, research on SPE presents a mixed picture with some potentially contradictory results. Despite a growing body of literature the actual impact of the above research has been modest, and has yet (for example) to inform significant practical tools that could be used in an employment context, such as career counselling.

Employability: Potentially Helpful, But Not the Answer?

We have suggested that there has been extensive attention paid to employability, but not enough to employment. Our arguments here have a special resonance for graduate employment. Despite predictions that there will be increased demand for ‘highly skilled talent’ in advanced economies (e.g. Dobbs et al. 2012), this demand may be moderated by continuing job migration. Dobbs et al. also noted (page 43) that as China moves towards ‘wealthy nation status’, it will create up to 64 million more knowledge-intensive jobs in the service sector, including in ‘education, finance and business services’. The work for these jobs was not likely to be entirely home-grown. Subsequent commentators (e.g. Sharma 2014) have noted high levels of graduate unemployment in China attributable to over-supply hence meeting the demand for such work is not likely to be an issue. Nor have governments given adequate protection to employment. Kochan (2012 p. 3) noted that a U.S. corporation might close a plant and send the jobs overseas to be undertaken at lower labour costs, but society “picks up the tab for their lack of investment in human capital: slow economic growth, unemployment, welfare, and so on”. Looking further afield, we

have suggested that increasing levels of global education, including graduate education, may simply create more pain and more unmet expectations of employability, described by Valenzuela (2013, p. 863) as: “mortifying guilt arising from a lack of knowing how to realise it”.

Few of the analyses discussed so far have even mentioned the potential consequences of widespread automation. Indeed, this appears to be an ‘elephant in the room’ so far as economic and employment policy is concerned, despite increasing attention to the subject (Frey and Osborne 2013; Manyika et al. 2015). In Australia, Oliver (2015, p. 57) suggested that five million jobs (there) could be replaced in the next decade.

How did we get to where we are today in a business and policy sense? Torres (2012) noted (page x) the “imbalance between the voice of the real economy and that of the financial sector” (or ‘financialisation’, Palley 2007); Huffington (2010) a political system in the USA (but it could be applied elsewhere) in thrall to a small financial elite. Similarly Kochan (2012, p. 9) described the importance of rebalancing “shareholder and stakeholder considerations”; while Featherby (2012) argued for: “mega-businesses, those business that control the way we live, to be given a civic responsibility as well as a private purpose”. Although not specifically mentioned, this responsibility could include for example not being so ready to ship jobs overseas in search of lower labour costs, and business having a sense of community responsibility. Finally, despite the emergence of a considerable body of academic and practitioner knowledge on employability and a sophisticated understanding of the labour market, we suggest that academics may also be culpable in that they have not fulfilled an intellectual and moral leadership role to guide policy makers and entrepreneurs in respect of sustainability and responsible stewardship.

CONCLUSIONS

In the present century many of the former world-leading economies of the twentieth century have been scarred by unemployment, welfare dependency, the desolation of communities, the displacement of people and the creation of ‘lost generations’, including many graduates, for whom sustainable employment remains a distant aspiration. Globally, such phenomena have the potential to lead to unfulfilled potential, demotivated and disenfranchised youth, an epidemic of drug dependency and mental health issues, an increasingly fragile balance between the haves and have-nots both within and between nation states and an increasing risk of political

and social unrest. Even the most relentless optimist would agree that the structural changes (in the west) that lie behind these challenges will be extremely difficult to undo, while in emerging economies it is difficult to argue against rising numbers of graduates having aspirations to match.

Clearly having some understanding of what contributes to graduate employability is important at an individual, institutional and international level. However, the (now) vast body of literature on employability generally under-estimates the importance of the employment context where there are major concerns. First, developing nations have every right to rising educational attainment levels, and the western nations have no more ownership rights than anyone else to graduate jobs and employment. These, if left to market forces, aided by the emergence of sophisticated global logistics and a levelling technological playing field in terms of most business processes, will tend to follow lower labour costs. Hence our overall conclusion is that a focus on employability misses a key point which is the creation, acquisition and retention of good quality, sustainable jobs – globally. Initial concerns about the validity of employability as a construct are best described as ‘valid in part’. From a critical distance, employability does indeed appear to be a well-intentioned construct that is applied to a range of related topic areas. In respect of education and especially Higher Education, a not insignificant body of knowledge has emerged which aims to support student transitions to the workplace. There are still areas for potential research. There are still relatively few longitudinal studies that assess the impact of employability initiatives on graduate employment. There is considerable potential for international replication of existing studies especially in emerging economies. A further aim might be to provide an evidence base to underpin public policy and in turn to promote sustainable employment. While this potential has yet to be realised and is now the employability challenge for the twenty-first century, we suggest that global graduate employment itself will now present far greater challenges, and should be a focus for long overdue attention.

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Employability, Employment and the Establishment of Higher Education Graduates in the Labour Market

Staffan Nilsson

INTRODUCTION

The world of work in Sweden and other OECD countries has undergone major structural changes in recent decades. There has been a shift from a commodity-based industrial society to a knowledge-based economy (noted decades ago) driven by technological innovation, increased demands for efficiency and productivity, new ways of organising work and increased international competition. The labour market structure varies between different countries. In Europe there has been a polarisation over the past several years, with increasing numbers of top-paying and low-paying jobs, and slower growth in the middle due mainly to a loss of jobs in manufacturing and construction. There has been a shift in the labour market, in for example Sweden, that will become even more prominent in the coming decades when an increasing number of people will be working in the service sector (both private and public, predominantly the

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latter) and fewer in industry or agriculture and forestry. The most resilient jobs are in knowledge-intensive services in both the private and the public sector, such as health and education. Jobs are being upgraded and in Europe increasingly require longer periods of study. This development is prominent in Sweden, where workers report experiences of reorganisation or structural changes and the introduction of new technology in the workplace to a greater extent than in most other European countries (Eurofound 2015).

Working life is also increasingly characterised by low job security and different kinds of short-term contracts. Transformation of the labour market has led to demands for new and different qualifications including a greater need for generic competences. The shifts in the labour market have resulted in a more intensive focus on the impact of higher education, the employability of graduates and the relationship between higher education and the labour market (Baker 2009; Brown and Hesketh 2004; European Commission 2010; Moreau and Leathwood 2006). Recurrent formal education is increasingly necessary, as well as continuous learning in the workplace. Higher education has proved to be important for continuous learning and the development of the labour force.

This chapter will focus on the employability of different groups of higher education graduates. Attempting to measure employability is complex and the potential validity of the measurements related to how employability is defined. The aim of the chapter is to explore the employability of different groups of higher education graduates by analysing how they become established in the labour market. The study will draw on a Swedish context, but with international comparisons.

THE PURPOSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education has expanded extensively in most OECD countries in the past half century. Today about half of each age cohort will participate in a higher education programme during their lifetimes and about a third will attain at least two years of tertiary education (Fig. 3.1). There are differences between the educational levels in OECD countries (OECD 2015).

It should be noted that international comparisons should be made with some caution. There are considerable variations in the way educational systems are organised as well as in the way education, for example, is financed, how the welfare systems are organised, the structure of the

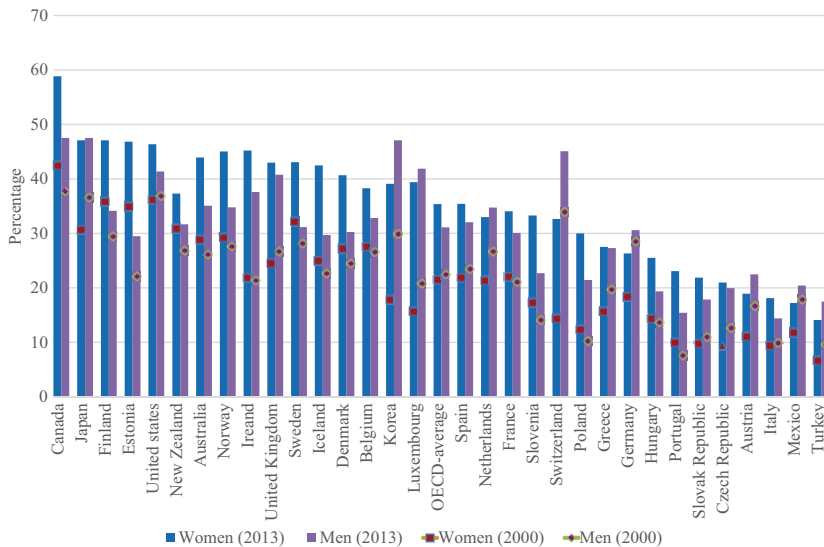


Fig. 3.1 Proportion of women and men aged 25–64 with at least two years of tertiary education in 2000 and 2013 (UKÄ 2015)

labour market and the status of different professional groups, all of which contribute to differences in labour market outcomes and how these can be measured (Swedish Government 2015). Therefore, this chapter will draw on examples from Sweden to illuminate the aggregated international data. Sweden is in many ways close to the OECD averages, but like the other OECD countries is in other ways unique.

Higher education has undergone considerable expansion in Sweden and many other OECD countries over the last decades. In Sweden the number of students has increased since the end of the Second World War. The expansion of higher education was especially prominent in the 1960s, when new higher education institutions (HEIs) were established and the number of students increased threefold, as well as after a reform in 1977 when most tertiary education, including nursing and teacher education, was incorporated into higher education. The reorganisation of the education system resulted in a 50 per cent increase in the number of students. In Sweden about 80 per cent of all tertiary education, vocational and general, is incorporated in higher education (Swedish Government 2015). In other OECD countries higher education is paralleled by other forms of tertiary

education. There are significant differences between different higher education systems that make international mobility and comparisons difficult. In the 1990s collaboration developed between the European countries regarding the harmonisation of systems of higher education. Known as the Bologna process, its aim is to ensure that higher education in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) will be comparable, compatible and coherent. This process is based on a technical- and rational-oriented perspective on higher education and with a focus on the mobility of students and the relevance of higher education in relation to labour market and other societal needs.

From 2000 to 2013 the proportion of the adult population participating in tertiary education increased in the OECD countries. On average a third of the adult population (aged 25–64) in the OECD had at least two years of tertiary education in 2013, which is an increase of 10 percentage points in the last decade. The increasing number of higher education graduates is most prominent among the young in the population. In the last decade the median age of the Swedish student population has dropped from 26 in 2004/05 to 25 in 2013/14. The women were on average about a year older than the men (UKÄ 2015).

Women are better educated in most OECD countries. The educational attainment of men has historically been higher and 23 per cent of the men in the adult population (25–64) had at least two years of tertiary education compared to 21 per cent of the women in 2000. In 2013 on average 35 per cent of the women had attained this level of education, while the corresponding figure for men was 31 per cent. The educational levels of women have therefore risen more rapidly than men's and the gender differences are even larger in Sweden, where 43 per cent of the women in the adult population had at least two years of tertiary education although the corresponding figure for men is the same as the OECD average, i.e. 31 per cent. The reform of higher education in Sweden in 1977 meant that several large education programs dominated by women were incorporated into higher education and the share of women therefore also increased (Swedish Government 2015). The other Nordic countries are similar, but in some countries educational attainment remains higher for men than for women, e.g. South Korea, Switzerland and Germany (OECD 2015).

It is important to note that higher education has different purposes. Vocational and professional higher education programmes are designed to prepare students for specific occupations or professions or more broadly for the labour market (Nilsson 2010a). Educational programmes in the

arts and humanities may contribute to societal needs that do not necessarily have to be related directly to labour market requirements in the same way as professional programmes. The purpose or qualitative targets vary for different educational programmes and students on programmes in the fine, applied or performing arts almost certainly have other objectives than those on programmes leading to the award of a professional qualification. It is important therefore to stress that employability and outcomes linked to the labour market and other social values need to be interpreted in different ways for different programmes and in relation to their specific contexts.

The groups of graduates from different educational programmes are not homogenous and there are substantial differences in individual employability within these groups. Individual employability depends on the employability of other members in the group (Brown 2003). For example, an engineer's employability is rated in relation to the employability of other engineers competing for the same positions. It is not meaningful to compare graduates from the fine, applied and performing arts or the humanities with engineering graduates. At the same time the employability of all members of the group depends on structural balances in the labour market related to demand and supply, competition between different occupational or professional groups etc. In order to understand an individual's employability it is important to analyse her or his competence in relation to other members of the professional group, but this employability is also related to the employability of the group in relation to other groups (Brown 2003). From a societal perspective it is therefore relevant to analyse the employability of different groups in relation to each other. Knowledge about structural mismatches may be gained, for example, from analysing employment statistics or unemployment rates in different groups.

Knowing how individual competence is matched to the qualifications required in the workplace helps to increase our understanding of what and how students should learn in order to be employable to enable evidence-based curricular development and to enhance the quality of higher education from an employability perspective (Holmes 2001). However, measurements of individual competence are less helpful when it comes to describing and understanding mismatch in the labour market on an aggregated group level and identifying structural imbalances. Competence and qualifications are not enough for graduates to obtain jobs. Individuals may be employable, but still encounter difficulties in finding jobs due to

structural mismatches of demand and supply in specific labour markets and these are important for qualitative and quantitative planning of education, i.e. what programmes should be offered and how many students should be admitted to them.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY

Employability has become a central concept in discussions of the relationship between higher education and the world of work and has acquired increasing prominence in both national and international political debates and academic papers in various disciplines over the last 20 years. The concept has also become one of the cornerstones of labour market policies as well as educational and employment strategies in Europe, such as Europe 2020 and Education and Training 2020 (see for instance the European Commission 2014). The concept of employability has largely been defined and developed by politicians and employers and the focus is generally on the supply side and on individual competence (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005).

Since the beginning of the twentieth century a number of different perceptions and definitions of the concept of employability have prevailed and these reflect different perspectives and assumptions as well as changes in the labour market. Earlier definitions of employability viewed it as a dichotomous concept. Individuals were considered to be either employable or unemployable (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005; Nilsson and Ellström 2012). An individual who was able to work and wanted to do so was employable, others were not. With time the concept has been extended and different definitions of employability have been proposed that have reflected different changes in the labour market and its demands (Knight and Yorke 2004; McQuaid and Lindsay 2005). More recently, employability has been related to different kinds of skills and qualities considered important to be able to meet the varying demands of a rapidly changing labour market that is dynamic and exposed to intense competition (Holmes 2001).

Employability has been studied from an organisational and an individual perspective with a focus on different groups (both the unemployed and those with jobs) in order to identify various potential employability factors. There are for example studies based on surveys of the competence of higher education graduates and of employers' requirements and analyses of the interaction between individuals' competence and the

qualifications for their jobs (Holmes 2001; Nilsson 2010a, b). From an organisational point of view, the content of employability has shifted from mainly involving an individual's health and age to greater focus on how their occupational skills match the demands of employers.

Employability is a complex, relational and multidimensional concept encompassing different definitions and approaches. The meaning of the concept depends on its context and involves the relationship between educational background, occupational structures and the demand for and supply of qualified workers in the labour market (Holmes 2001; Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Tomlinson 2008). It is possible to distinguish between the aspects of employability that involve an individual's preparation for a career, the ability to cope successfully with the tasks their occupations will involve and the factors that play a role in acquiring employment (Hillage and Pollard 1998; Knight and Yorke 2004). Employability comprises an individual's resources, for instance in the form of competence (including knowledge, skills, attitudes and personal qualities), which are also defined as human capital in human capital theory (Becker 1964).

Employability is operationalised in recruitment processes. A central aspect of being employable is the ability to obtain a job and one important aspect of employability, especially in areas with high competition for jobs, is the ability to market oneself, to negotiate and to accentuate the appropriate forms of individual competence, personal capital, social capital and cultural capital to a recruiter (Smith 2010). Even if an individual is employable, she or he may not be considered suitable for employment. For example, the selection mechanisms adopted to determine who to employ are tougher for individuals attempting to return to the labour market after long-term sick leave or unemployment (Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Nilsson and Ekberg 2014).

OUTCOMES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Employability has been emphasised in relation to discussions of the match or mismatch between higher education and the labour market (e.g. Branine and Avramenko 2015). The mismatch has been linked to imbalances in supply and demand in the labour market and has been identified, for instance, using statistics on employment and unemployment in different groups in the labour market. Different explanations have been given for this alleged mismatch in different contexts and there is no consensus as to how the gap should be described, explained or potentially be bridged.

It has, for example, been attributed to problems associated with transference of knowledge between contexts (Eraut 2004), to knowledge being contextually situated (Lave and Wenger 1991), and the need for resituating knowledge in professional practice (Guile and Griffiths 2001). The different rationales (Jørgensen 2004) or languages (Dunne et al. 2000) characterising higher education and the world of work (Nilsson 2010a) have also been invoked. Higher education is characterised by a school rationale that is process-oriented and associated with theoretical subject-based knowledge grounded in scientific criteria. The labour market, on the other hand, is characterised by a production rationale that is result-oriented and based on the logic of the market, where practically applicable knowledge is valued. This means that it may neither be possible nor desirable for higher education to prepare graduates directly for the demands of the labour market, as these are generally more short-sighted and do not consider the generic skills needed to meet change and development in the long run. Instead, it may be more appropriate for HEIs to focus on enhancing the general employability of graduates, who are then prepared for quickly learning job-specific competence in the workplace (Jørgensen 2004). How the match or mismatch is interpreted depends on the theoretical understanding of knowledge and learning, and on what function higher education is expected to have in relation to the world of work.

Higher education systems are organised in different ways and in some countries different educational tracks have different aims. There are those that focus on more direct vocational preparation while higher education is intended to provide generic skills. Within different systems expected outcomes are also likely to vary for different educational programmes and professional practices. Higher education is heterogeneous and has a variety of functions in relation to the labour market. Different jobs are associated with very different competence requirements across different sectors and the nature of different educational programmes can render the competence they provide more or less applicable in the world of work (Nilsson 2010a).

Employability is a broad concept that is used to describe the different dimensions of the relationship between higher education and the world of work. Definitions of employability can focus on individual competence and ability (Pool and Sewell 2007) or on employment (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2014; Hillage and Pollard 1998). There are thus competence-centred and employment-centred definitions of employability. The first kind is more common when an individual

perspective is in focus and the second when a societal or structural perspective is adopted. In European policy, for example Education and Training 2020 and the Bologna process, the focus of the employability concept is generally on employment (European Commission 2014; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, Eurostat and Eurostudent 2012). The Council of the European Union has, for instance, adopted a benchmark on graduate employability in which the proportion of graduates (20–34-year-olds) who are employed within three years of leaving higher education and training should be at least 82 per cent (European Council 2012).

Employability can be operationalised and measured through competence-centred approaches or employment-centred approaches. Competence-based approaches focus on what is learned and how graduates' competence relates to workplace requirements, i.e. the qualitative aims of education. Employment-related approaches focus on the demand and supply of graduates in different fields in relation to labour market needs, i.e. the quantitative aims of education.

ON THE DEMANDS OF THE LABOUR MARKET AND WHAT IS LEARNED IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In previous research different kinds of studies have been conducted on what students should learn in relation to the demands of their respective professional practices according to both employers and employees (De la Harpe et al. 2000; Knight and Yorke 2004; Pool and Sewell 2007). What is needed in the workplace obviously varies across different sectors, branches and types of business and for different types of positions or jobs within an organisation (Harvey 2005). There is no fixed universal set of skills/competences required by all jobs, but some generic skills/general competences seem to be repeatedly noted as commonly required in the world of work (see e.g. De la Harpe et al. 2000).

In rapidly changing workplaces driven by technological innovation the demands made of employees change continuously. The changing work environment has led to changing organisational needs. A principal challenge for employees is to be capable of rapidly orienting oneself to new contexts and learning what is needed when it is needed and be ready to deploy a wider range of competences than has previously been required (Tomlinson 2008). Jobs are learned in the workplace and employees must be ready to invest continuously in learning and developmental activities (Guile and Griffiths 2001; Jørgensen 2004). There has been a shift from

a focus on discipline-specific technical skills that become outdated rapidly and therefore deemed to be less relevant towards a focus on generic meta-skills, especially for knowledge-intensive work. In other words there has been a shift from know-how to learn-how (Eraut 2004).

Workplace requirements vary for different professions and make different kinds of demands on higher education programmes. HEIs face the challenges described above in different ways and aim to supply graduates with generic skills and with the vocational skills needed for the labour market. Nevertheless, different kinds of mismatches and gaps have been identified. Increased complexity in the world of work has led to further division of labour and differentiation and the need for more specialisation in many areas. The purpose and impact of different general and professional education programmes vary, as do demands in different areas of the labour market. The overlap between what is learned in different higher education programmes and the demands of the labour market differ depending on the professional area being examined (Nilsson 2010a). This also means that it is more difficult to monitor how far graduates are employed in positions for which their education is relevant. For example, graduates of programmes in engineering and economics become established in a wide variety of positions in the labour market shortly after graduation (Swedish Government 2015). This means that they should be prepared to encounter a wide variety of potential tasks and demands. It may, therefore, be difficult and even undesirable for the programmes they take to provide direct vocational preparation. Specialisation in relation to the professional practice occurs primarily after graduation. The specifics of a job, such as tasks, routines and vocational and professional language registers must be learned in the workplace (Jørgensen 2004; Nilsson 2010a). In contrast, the labour market is comparatively restricted for individuals who graduate from some other professional programmes, such as medicine or law. Both the vertical and horizontal dispersion in the labour market of graduates from these programmes are relatively homogenous after graduation and they encounter similar demands in their work. Their programmes can therefore provide more direct vocational preparation and specialisation (Nilsson 2010a, b).

EMPLOYABILITY ON A STRUCTURAL LEVEL

Reports of mismatches between higher education and the world of work have alternately focused on the individual level and on the societal/structural level. In the first case, the competence of graduates is related

to requirements for specific jobs (described above) and in some higher education programmes there may be gaps between the competence of the graduates and these requirements. In the second case, the focus is on how many graduates are leaving different higher education programmes in relation to the needs of the labour market. It is possible for too many or too few to qualify in certain fields in relation to these needs, which is linked to the numbers of places offered in higher education programmes. The structural imbalances may not be apparent in unemployment rates for different groups. Finding a job is not the sole concern of graduates. It is also important for the job to match their formal qualifications and that they become established in the labour market.

On the whole the supply of graduates has risen during recent decades as has demand for them and this is expected to continue in the coming years. The number of graduates entering the labour market each year is considerably larger than the number leaving and this trend is predicted to continue in for example Sweden. The number of individuals with higher education qualifications in the labour market in a country is also affected by immigration and emigration. Today, graduates are sought after in more vocational areas and for more occupational tasks than previously in Sweden. The increasing demand for formal qualifications is also one outcome of the rise in the number of graduates in the labour force. In many vocational areas those who have retired during the last 10–20 years have been replaced by individuals with more advanced formal qualifications than their predecessors possessed (Swedish Government 2015; UKÄ 2015).

Credentials and diplomas acquired from higher education have become more important regardless of what is actually learned and have come to be regarded as the currency of opportunity (Brown 2003). With the expansion of and a broader access to education, there has been an increase in the competition for all kinds of positions requiring higher education (Brown 2003; Collins 1979). Increased access also means larger numbers are expected to participate so that an individual's performance in absolute terms is not enough as employability and opportunity depends on that of others. In other words, the market value of credentials acquired from higher education is affected by the credentials of others. This is also called the opportunity trap (Brown 2003). As the entry requirements to the labour market are raised individual employability has to be augmented by participation in education and diplomas have to be acquired to certify individual educational

attainments in order to remain competitive. Education has become a tick in the box among other qualifications (Tomlinson 2008).

This means that the relative importance of a higher education qualification may be declining when it comes to allocating individuals to different positions in the labour market as well as in society. As competition increases, strategies for closure and exclusion, in the neo-Weberian vocabulary, are becoming more central for many professional groups. The power of credentials as a sorting and selection mechanism is augmented by exclusion and reduced by inclusion. When the value of credentials is weakened, other selection criteria will be used for sorting and selection in the labour market (Brown 2003; Tomlinson 2008).

Moreover, there are considerable challenges associated with identifying and defining the qualifications that are actually required by a job and the competence of the individual and matching them to each other. Organisational practices are developed and applied with the aim of objectively identifying organisational needs by detailing taxonomies of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary for each job. However, some aspects of competence, such as generic competences or tacit knowledge, are not easily measured (Nilsson and Ellström 2012).

Traditional human resource development (HRD) practices have been defined on the basis of job structures and identifying, assessing and analysing sets of redefined job-related tasks and the demands that are required in relation to different positions in the organisation. However, there has been a shift from an emphasis on jobs and tasks to an emphasis on individuals and their competence. Competitive advantages are increasingly associated with change and flexibility and on a long-term dynamic organisational fit rather than a short-term task-based match. Increasing focus is given to personal characteristics and behavioural traits rather than to technical skills alone (Soderquist et al. 2010). However, HRD practices in organisations also take place in the context of intra- and inter-departmental conflicts regarding resources and power within the corporate hierarchy and can be unsystematic, ad hoc, and used as a symbolic way to legitimise for example recruitment and career-management decisions. From an institutional perspective HRD processes can be regarded as a method for creating an image of rationality as a foundation for legitimacy and status (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007). It is inconsequential if a model or practice is formally outlined, described and validated if it is not fully adopted and implemented in the process of identifying and developing employability (Soderquist et al. 2010). The process of recruiting, developing and training individuals to

secure a long-term competence supply in an organisation is complex and the actual requirements and needs of an organisation may become loosely linked to formal requirements and to the competence and qualifications of the employees (Nilsson and Ellström 2012).

The principal means of developing employability has often been considered to be through formal learning and education. Education and labour-market policies as well as organisational practices on supply of competence are based on a relatively narrow functionalistic market-oriented perspective derived from the human capital framework (Becker 1964). From this perspective education is primarily regarded as an investment in individual employability that is assumed to proportionally increase the productive capacity and income of individuals (or a linear relationship between learning and earning). Formal education is regarded as a proxy for an individual's knowledge and skills.

EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS

Higher education increases the chances of employment and obtaining a better job. In all OECD countries the chances of being employed are higher for individuals with tertiary education compared to those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education, who in their turn have better employment chances than those with below upper secondary education. In the OECD countries on average 80 per cent of those with tertiary education are employed, compared to 70 per cent of those with secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education. There are considerable differences in employment rates among those with tertiary education in the OECD countries (Fig. 3.2) (OECD 2015).

A similar pattern can also be found for unemployment rates and the risk of becoming unemployed is generally lower for those with more education. In most of the OECD countries unemployment was lower in 2014 for 25–64-year-olds who had tertiary education compared to those educated only to upper secondary level who were in their turn less frequently unemployed than those with only lower secondary education. There are, however, exceptions (among them Mexico, Korea and Turkey) where there was less unemployment among those who had spent less time in education than for those who had studied for longer (OECD 2015).

In all OECD countries a higher level of education is also associated with greater relative earnings. Education provides formal credentials that can be used as a signal to employers. Education is assumed to increase individual

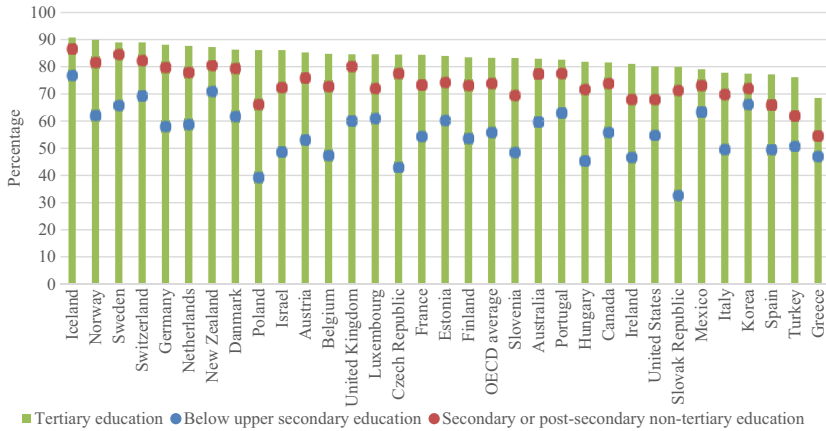


Fig. 3.2 Employment rates of 25–64 year olds in the OECD countries in order of employment rates of those with tertiary education (OECD 2015)

competence and productivity. A linear relationship is commonly assumed to exist between education and productivity or between learning and earning. The Survey of Adult Skills conducted by the OECD programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) has also shown that individuals with greater literacy proficiency earn the highest wages and individuals with poor literacy skills earn least (OECD 2015).

The relative earnings of those with different levels of education vary in the OECD countries, where the relative earnings of those with tertiary education compared to those with upper secondary attainment are highest in Chile and Brazil and among the lowest in Sweden and the other Nordic countries (OECD 2015). The distribution of earnings within groups with different levels of education can illustrate how tightly the wage structure is centred on the national median. The wage returns on literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills are also relatively low. In contrast the risk of unemployment decreases more sharply for those with more advanced education in Sweden than the OECD average. In an international comparison the Nordic countries are relatively highly skilled knowledge-economies with equality in the distribution of knowledge. Sweden has a high proportion of people employed in knowledge-intensive jobs, and Swedish industry invests heavily in research and development. The adult population performs well on tests of literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills.

Differences in earning vary greatly in the OECD countries. For example, in Sweden women with tertiary education earn 80 per cent as much as their male counterparts or more while in Brazil and Chile women with tertiary qualifications earn 65 per cent as much as similarly qualified men or less.

Statistics on employment, unemployment and the earnings of different groups provide limited measurements of employability at group level. When focusing on the employability of graduates, it is also important to consider whether their education is relevant for their careers and their degree of establishment in the labour market.

ESTABLISHMENT IN THE LABOUR MARKET IN SWEDEN

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) has conducted regular surveys of how different groups with first and second-cycle qualifications have been able to establish themselves in the labour market on completion of their studies. To be categorised as established in the labour market a graduate must not have been unemployed during the year monitored and also have had an annual income of at least € 22,800. The data collected about the graduates not only include labour market status but also, for instance, whether they have obtained jobs requiring skills that match their formal education. The most recent study analysed establishment in the labour market in 2013 for all graduates from first or second-cycle programmes at any Swedish HEI during the academic years of 2011/12, 2009/10 and 2007/08 as well as how the corresponding figures have changed since 1994/95. This means that the data has been compiled one, three and five years after graduation. The survey also includes chronological data series based on corresponding figures from preceding years. The data for the survey has been taken from the national registers containing population data and were compiled by the Forecast Institute at Statistics Sweden on behalf of the Swedish Higher Education Authority. Data about income, occupation, unemployment, labour market measures and continued studies taken from different registers have made it possible to depict the situation of different groups in the labour market. The study revealed that 78 per cent of those who graduated during the academic year of 2009/10 had a stable footing in the labour market one year after graduation and the rates increased over time. Virtually all graduates, however, 97 per cent, had had some kind of job during the whole year or part of it (UKÄ 2015).

The proportions of those established vary to a relatively large extent for graduates from different disciplines. Graduates in the fields of technology, medicine and health care had the highest establishment rates. More than 90 per cent of the graduates who had established themselves had jobs that demanded a qualification from higher education and most of them were also established in jobs that were closely linked to their degree specialisations (UKÄ 2015).

Generally speaking, the more advanced the qualification, the better the chance graduates have of establishing themselves in the labour market. Establishment in this study encompasses the capacity of different groups of graduates to acquire employment relevant to their educational qualifications. Employability is a broader concept than labour market establishment and even though the way this is measured in this chapter does not provide an overall view, the results offer indications of what can be relevant for decision-makers at different levels. This applies in particular, perhaps, to the major programmes leading to the award of professional qualifications. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the employability of graduates with different qualifications establishment rates need, however, to be supplemented with other information.

DISCUSSION

It is generally agreed that education pays. Higher education provides no guarantee of actual employment but it generally increases the chances of becoming employed, reduces the risks of unemployment and leads to higher earnings. Higher education is also connected with greater opportunities for social and economic progress, which is positive for democratic participation. Higher education has a role in developing employability but also in fostering democratic critically reflective citizens and increasing the 'bildung' in the population (Nilsson and Nyström 2013). Higher education is also associated with increased productive capacity and, provided there is equal access, is often considered a fair and objective way of allotting people to different positions in the labour market and in society on the basis of individual achievement. Employability is closely linked to higher education. Even so, employability is also related to individual socio-economic conditions and class (Kossek 2000). Formal and informal learning is not equally distributed in the working population and employability is most relevant for those with certain forms of human, social and

cultural capital, as some individuals encounter more barriers to participation than others (Rubenson and Desjardins 2009).

Employability has been emphasised in relation to discussions about the match or mismatch between higher education and the labour market, which can focus on the individual level when describing different kinds of skills and individual attributes or the societal/structural level when measuring and describing employability in the labour market or the labour force as a whole. It is not uncommon for the two different levels to be confounded in analyses and policy discussions. In the first case, the competence of graduates is related to requirements for specific jobs. In the second, the focus is on how many graduates are leaving different higher education programmes in relation to labour market needs. Gaps may exist between the competence of the graduates from some programmes and workplace requirements. There may also be different kinds of structural imbalances in the labour market related to the number of students graduating from different higher education programmes and to labour market policies. The structural imbalances may not be apparent in unemployment rates for different groups. Finding a job is not the sole concern of graduates. It is also important for the job to match to their formal qualifications and that they become established in the labour market.

Previous research has shown that the actual competence of the workforce may exceed the formal educational employment requirements (Livingstone 2010). It is not easy to argue that there is over-qualification or rather underutilisation in the workforce in general. Neither the labour market nor specific jobs are static but are continually subject to changes. Employees and graduates from higher education not only learn their own tasks but adapt and develop them as well and also contribute to the reorganisation of the labour market at a more structural level (Baker 2009). Much learning also takes place outside organised and formal contexts (Nilsson and Rubenson 2014). A perfect initial match between the individual's competence and the demands of the workplace would, even were it possible to attain, hardly be desirable in a longer perspective. Organisations often define their specific requirements from a more short-sighted perspective and the rapidly changing demands of the labour market would fairly quickly make the competence of the employees obsolete. Individuals may be underutilised in their jobs if these are characterised by limited possibilities to influence their work. However, employees engage in continuous learning in the workplace and given the opportunities they can use their competence to reshape and enhance their jobs and the qualifications

needed to perform them. Education is a driving force for development and is an active agent of change in the labour market and in society. New kinds of jobs can be created by the competence available in the labour force and higher education graduates can become self-employed entrepreneurs creating new markets. Thus, supply also shapes the market and affects demands for different kinds of qualifications.

It is difficult to predict future demands for different kinds of competence and qualifications. Nevertheless, higher education is associated with significant costs. It is therefore important from a societal and individual perspective when planning and organising the extent and types of higher education needed and to be offered to do so in a rational way in relation to different quantitative and qualitative targets.

Sweden's HEIs have relatively extensive autonomy and are responsible for planning what programmes to provide and how many students to enrol. However, in their planning they must also consider student demand for education and labour market needs (Swedish Government 2015). The HEIs are responsible for assuring the quality of the programmes they offer. In Sweden, the Swedish Higher Education Authority monitors quality assurance and evaluates all higher education courses and programmes on the basis of the criteria outlined in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area by the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA). The authority has the power to approve and revoke an HEI's entitlement to award qualifications if the quality requirements are met or not met. This is related to planning the content of educational activities and curricular design, i.e. what should be learned in an educational programme and how.

This chapter outlines the importance of not confounding different aspects of employability, i.e. the structural and the individual aspects, in analysing the match between higher education and work. For example, it is important to separate issues concerning how to plan the number of students that should be enrolled in different educational programs from issues concerning the content and structure of educational programs. Conceptual clarity is central for collecting relevant information on which policy decisions on how to improve graduate employability are based. Appraising the qualitative aspects of higher education and employability on an individual level is a complex task as it involves procedures that require considerable resources, such as surveys of competence. This is why, for example, educational attainment, employment, unemployment and earnings are used as proxies for employability on a more aggregated level. Administrative data or

data from labour force surveys are regularly collected, for example by the OECD, Eurostat and the Swedish Higher Education Agency, so that they can be used as indicators for skills assessment and anticipation. Statistics can be used to analyse employability in terms of structural imbalances in different labour markets and serve as an important basis for analysis for quantitative planning in education, for example what educational programmes to provide and how many students should be enrolled. In order to create a more comprehensive map of the match between education and work and the employability of the labour force it is useful to utilise both data on individual employability and statistics.

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Critical Perspectives on Graduate Employability

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INTRODUCTION

Fundamental changes in the nature of UK Higher Education have led to an increased emphasis on the notion of Higher Education (HE) investment ‘paying off’ for individuals and society with graduate labour market outcomes increasingly being used to evaluate and demonstrate the value of this investment. For example, one of the four UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs) for HE is the employment of graduates (HESA 2016), some however, question the appropriateness of this as a goal of HE, arguing that there is a need for universities to emphasise the importance of

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university education beyond employability and ‘pay cheques’ (Redmond 2014). This is not a new debate and given the increased cost, both economic and social, of HE to individuals and society, graduate employability is an increasingly high-stakes issue. We argue that the significant focus on labour market outcomes as a proxy measure of the value of higher education – by individuals, policy makers and institutions – makes a critical reconsideration of graduate employability timely. We examine existing conceptualisations of graduate employability and consider the value of applying alternative theoretical perspectives to provide a more nuanced approach to conceptualising graduate employability, allowing us to move beyond the dominant perspectives of graduate employability that over-emphasise individual agency.

Drawing on Margaret Archer’s concept of ‘morphogenesis’ and Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘theory of practice’ we aim to encourage our readers to pause and reflectively consider graduate employment experiences and trajectories in the context of the directive nature of agency and the regulatory effects of structure to better understand this pressing *problematique*. This chapter will conclude with a discussion on the future application of such theories to graduate employment research.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

In the UK in recent years there has been a growing emphasis on the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in relation to graduate employment. This is unsurprising as from New Labour onwards, there has been a clear political agenda to encourage and increase participation in higher education. Employment destinations of university graduates has become an important proxy measure of the value of a university education, and institutions in the UK use their ‘destinations’ data to highlight their success in this area, and therefore increase their attractiveness to prospective students. Whilst this is just one measure of performance, it has gained prominence given the increasing level of fees and higher levels of competition between institutions for attracting the highest performing students. Increasingly employability statistics are being prominently displayed on institutional websites and play a significant role in league table rankings. This has augmented the focus on the notion of employability and increased pressure on universities and their role in ‘delivering employability’. Higher Education, now more than ever, is underpinned by assumptions of investment in human capital. This durable assumption is founded on a “conventional wisdom among politicians, parents and students alike that all education remains ‘a form of investment’

and that it will in a sense ‘deliver the economic goods’” (Brown and Scase 1994: 16). This stems from societal and individual-level expectations of the kind of employment that individuals should be entering after graduating (Scurry and Blenkinsopp 2011). Against this backdrop there is widespread agreement that the concept of employability needs further development and analysis (Holmes 2013).

Dominant Perspectives of Graduate Employability

As previously established, the HE environment is dominated by a discourse of employability. However the notion of employability, and more specifically graduate employability, is not uncontested (cf. Holmes 2013; Tomlinson 2012). This is unsurprising given the numerous stakeholder groups – students, graduates, parents, employers, HEIs, careers and employability services, curriculum developers, training providers in the private sector and of course politicians. Despite this complexity, graduate employability is often represented in simplistic terms as an objective labour market outcome rather than a complex problem featuring a number of different actors and comprising various institutions with differing levels of rules, hierarchy and structures. Such representations reflect the human capital perspective that views HE as an investment which ‘pays off’ in subsequent employment opportunities and earnings. This ‘returns to education’ perspective emphasises employment destinations and earnings of graduates – and is reflected in the prominence of statistics such as the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE). Such surveys act as measures of institutions’ success in delivering employability to the individual which they can then ‘put to use’ in the labour market. These proxy measures of graduate employability are presented by HEIs and policymakers as ‘evidence’ of the value of individuals investing in HE and underpin major policy decisions linked to the significant expansion of the sector in the late 1990s and the recent increases in tuition fees (DfES 2003; BIS 2010, 2011).

Holmes (2013) argues that this context has led to a ‘possession’ approach to employability – the HEIs provide the opportunity for individuals to develop skills, attributes and competences such as self-management, team-working, communication and problem solving (CBI/NUS 2011) that will provide them with a level of ‘graduateness’ to their human capital that increases their employability and is reflected in their employment outcomes. As a consequence there has been an increased emphasis on embedding employability within the curriculum, for example the development of graduate skills and attributes frameworks (see for example the Leicester Transferable Skills

Framework <http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/careers-new/build-your-skills/skills>), and extra-curricular employability offerings. This aligns with what Tholen (2015: 767) describes as ‘mainstream’ perspectives on graduate employability which emphasise “the individual content that makes a person successful in the labour market”. Through this lens, investment in HE to develop individual ‘human capital’ is presented as a rational investment as the financial returns will be higher than the investment made. Within this dominant perspective of graduate employability, whilst it is acknowledged that HEIs provide individuals with the opportunity to enhance their human capital, the emphasis is on individual responsibility for ensuring labour-market success – in this case obtaining employment commensurate with the investment made i.e. a graduate job. Such perspectives, perhaps unsurprisingly, present an image of meritocracy in relation to higher education and graduate employment, serving to emphasise unfettered individual choice and freedom in relation to decisions about human capital investment and the deployment of that human capital in the labour market.

Critique of Dominant Perspectives of Graduate Employability

The dominant perspective of graduate employability continues to emphasise objective employment outcomes and the development of human capital to achieve ‘appropriate’ labour market outcomes for a graduate. Aside from the challenge of defining what an ‘appropriate’ labour market outcome is for a graduate, such perspectives are increasingly subject to scrutiny as they imply that individual agency is unconstrained and decontextualised and that failure to achieve the labour market outcomes commensurate with the human capital investment i.e. non-graduate employment, is related to the (in)ability of the individual to develop, articulate and mobilise their employability in the ‘appropriate’ manner. In response to this, more critical alternative perspectives of graduate employability have emerged, which question these assumptions by highlighting “the relational, contextual and conflictual nature of employability” (Tholen 2015: 770).

This more critical work highlights the limitations of human capital perspectives, arguing that the development or deployment of other forms of capital (social, cultural and personal) and how this interacts with the wider structures of the labour market needs to be acknowledged and explored (Holmes 2013; Brown et al. 2003). A key argument within this perspective is the need to explore the potential for discriminatory practices, intended or otherwise, of graduate employers as a means to explain variations in

employment outcomes between different graduates who arguably ‘possess’ the same skills. This ‘positional’ perspective (Holmes 2013) emphasises how, as the supply of graduates has increased, new forms of credentialism have emerged which serve to stratify human capital through the development of ‘hierarchies of universities’ (Holmes 2013). This is concerning as not only is participation still dominated by the most advantaged groups, it is argued that social class plays a significant role in the institution attended and the degree classification achieved (Reay et al. 2009; Tomlinson 2012). As a consequence, rather than HE providing a means to reduce social inequalities and increase social mobility, individuals from more advantaged social backgrounds obtain more prestigious credentials; and in doing so are able to position themselves better within the labour market (Brown et al. 2003). Whilst there have been reports of some employers attempting to reduce social bias in the process by introducing ‘blind’ recruitment and selection processes which remove the institution at which the individual studied and in some cases whether the individual attended state or independent schools (Garner 2014) such moves might merely serve to emphasise less tangible forms of capital – for example social or personal.

In recent work by McCracken et al. (2015) graduate employers emphasised that a degree was no longer enough to demonstrate ability and potential and they looked for evidence of work experience and the development of additional skills. However, there is a lack of consensus on what such skills, competences or attributes are and how they can be evidenced or assessed (cf. Holmes 2013). Furthermore, McCracken et al. (2015) found that when making selection decisions subjective aspects such as having something ‘extra’, an ‘edge’ and ‘standing out from the crowd’ played a key role. This reflects earlier work by Brown and Hesketh (2004: 35) which highlighted the rise of ‘personal capital’ within the graduate labour market. Personal capital emphasises “the importance of who you are as much as what you know” and is seen to be a combination of hard currencies (e.g. credentials, work experience and extra-curricular achievements) and soft currencies (e.g. interpersonal skills, charisma, appearance and accent). This is concerning as differences such as social background, gender and ethnicity become more prominent leading to greater inequality in the graduate labour market (Tholen 2015).

That is not to say that individuals are merely passive recipients of structural constraints, individuals’ careers and employability are part of a dynamic process. Giddens (1991: 75) argues “we are not what we are but what we make of ourselves” and Watson sees identity creation as being an

emergent and dynamic process for “as we move through different situations and circumstances and interact with different ‘others’ so we adjust ourselves to achieve a sense of self-hood – our self and social identities ... shape and reinforce each other.” (2003: 195). This aligns with the processual perspective of employability (Holmes 2015) which conceptualises employability as the actions and decisions that individuals take as part of an ongoing and emergent identity project. This perspective explores the interaction between individuals and ‘gatekeepers’ (recruiters) to employment opportunities. The graduates claim an identity that is affirmed, or not, by the gatekeepers within the recruitment and selection process. Career self-management is the process by which employability is developed (Brigstock 2009; Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2015) and is the effort individuals put into the realisation of their career goals, encompassing both reflective (development of career aspirations) and behavioural (enacted career management behaviours) components (De Vos and Soens 2008). It is clear from the competing positions that a more accurate understanding of graduate employment can be fostered through the combination of perspectives appreciating both structure and agency

Alternative Theoretical Perspectives

In an effort to achieve this above goal, we consider the heuristic values of applying critical social theory to help us critically think about and examine graduate employment experiences and trajectories. By making the familiar unfamiliar, facilitated through a theoretically driven epistemological break, the application of theory will allow us to consider the friction between structure and agency and question the dominant assumption of meritocracy that underpins higher education policy. It can be argued that the re-examination of the dominant meritocratic narrative is increasingly pertinent, as ‘traditional’ UK university undergraduates will have exclusively been raised, educated and inculcated in a late modern/meritocratic policy bubble – whether through New Labour, the UK coalition government or the current Conservative government who took power in 2015. It is not our intention to reify our chosen theorists – nor astound our audience with abstract arguments complicated for the purpose of complication – but, rather, to put these theories to work and consider their practical use in providing a better understanding of graduate employment as Stephen Ball argues “theory is the language of rigour” (1995: 266). In the section below, we examine Pierre Bourdieu’s structural constructivist position and

Margaret Archer's specific form of critical realism. From the comparison of their theoretical positions and a consideration of their application to graduate employment research, we will move on to discuss future applications and their potential role in the formation of a critical agenda.

STRUCTURAL CONSTRUCTIVISM AND BOURDIEU

Bourdieu's fecund career is the opening section for many commentaries of the man's work; he covered a broad range of topics, including anthropology, politics, economics and cultural consumption. The breadth is even further demonstrated by the range of topics to which his work has been applied by researchers too numerous to mention. However, it is his work on (higher) education and, in particular, the three volumes – *The Inheritors*, *Reproduction* and *The State Nobility* – that are particularly significant and popular, cementing many to understand Bourdieu as, first and foremost, a philosopher/sociologist of education. His central thesis sees the educational system as a key site for social reproduction, via symbolic violence, as, through a narrative of meritocracy, the higher education system provides a subtle version of inheritance, allowing the dominant group within social space to retain their position for generations to come.

The majority of Bourdieu's career and the subsequent application of his work have been driven by a structural, constructivist ontology – seeing social reality as characterised by both choice and constraint. At the heart of this project to combine two sides of the coin (structure and agency), Bourdieu applied a number of, as he referred to them, thinking tools. These heuristic devices were used to observe, explain, understand and track this complex and seemingly contradictory ontology. While there are various tools¹, the three fundamental tools are: habitus, capital and field.

Habitus can be most succinctly – but not simply – defined as an individual's norms, values and dispositions. How we see the world and what we take for granted will, in part, affect our subjective expectations and our ability to strategically manoeuvre within social space – collectively termed practice. The source of the habitus comes from formative sites and institutions to which we are exposed throughout our life history – namely, family, education, social environment, peer group, etc. To practice the structural constructivist ontology that Bourdieu claimed the habitus was both a source of structure and regulation and an opportunity for agency and choice. Rather than acting as a reinforced iron cage, as proposed by Jenkins (2002) and Archer (1996), the habitus operates in a fluid and

inter-penetrative manner, offering space and structure for ‘regulated improvisations’ (Bourdieu 1977: 78). In other words, rather than practices being exclusively directed by an external force, beyond influence, there is choice within the habitus; however, options available will be based on access to resources and environment.

For Bourdieu, early influences on the habitus – in particular, family and school – are especially potent and durable; however, the habitus *is* open to change if it is met by a different environment for a sustained period of time (Bourdieu 1992). The likelihood of this happening, Bourdieu is quick to point out, is limited, as individuals, in part due to their habitus, will continue to occupy complementary environments. It is the concept of complementary or shared environments that supports the extension of habitus towards a group dimension. While the habitus is individual, Bourdieu (1977) contends the environment individuals share and the experiences within those environments are likely to be similar, leading to a collective of habitus with enough overlapping norms, values and dispositions to count as a group – at least, as Nash (1999) argues, for empirical ease and generalisability.

If we consider the habitus in relation to the graduate labour market, individuals’ ability to access certain occupations or roles will not only be determined by the possession of a degree but how they are able to deploy this hard-earned resource. This issue is most clearly illustrated through Furlong and Cartmel’s (2005) research on the classed experience of, and attitude toward, the graduate labour market. Whilst the members of Furlong and Cartmel’s working class sample all possessed a degree, there were structural barriers regulating the moves or directions they could make in the graduate labour market. Indicative of a working class habitus, characterised by limited/capped levels of confidence and expectation, the working class graduates in their study expressed quite low expectations of their earning potential and often took the first job they could find (generally non-graduate), as they were concerned about their ability to secure *any* job after graduation.

Habitus represents a significant portion of Bourdieusian sociology; whether it is future application or critique, habitus is seen as the primary concept when examining Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Reay 2004). Alongside habitus we also have capital – the three main forms of which are economic, social and cultural (Bourdieu 2004). Economic capital is comprised of access to resources (money and property), while social capital is based on access to various social networks and ways in which these can be

used; cultural capital includes knowledge, practices and tastes. In addition, Bourdieu discusses symbolic capital, which can be read as a legitimate form of types of capital. Capital has three purposes or roles within Bourdieu's theory of practice. First, the composition of different levels of capital allows us to locate an individual's position within social space on economic, social and cultural grounds (Crossley 2008). Second, the subsequent position within social space will influence the level of confidence/aspiration an individual has –what Bourdieu terms '*field of the possibles*' (1984: 110, emphasis in original). Third, the use of the term capital allows us to think about how these resources are exchanged (Burke 2015a). Serving as a critical extension of both Marx and Engels' (1846/1970) economic model and human capital theory (Schultz 1971), the appreciation of social networks and cultural tastes having buying power and being exchanged for goods and services provides a contemporary account of the position within and the experience of social space beyond an out-dated purely economic model. In the specific context of graduate employment, the role and buying power of social capital can be clearly appreciated through the increasing importance placed on internships in order to not only establish connections but also to offset the devalued degree. Bradley et al.'s (2013) comparative study on the classed experience of UK HE illustrates the ease in which their middle class sample were able to convert the 'right type' of social capital into access to the best internships in comparison to their working class counterparts.

The final tool within Bourdieu's theory of practice is field; the social arena in which habitus and capital interact. Thompson (2008) reminds us that we should not view the field as merely the staging area of habitus and capital, but rather, a significant and active element within practice. Field is particularly significant when considering the norms, values and dispositions that make up the habitus. If there is a fit between the expectations and requirements of the field and the habitus, a mutually beneficial relationship can be engendered; Bourdieu likens a congruent habitus and field to a 'fish in water' (1992: 127), as the level/form of practical mastery directed by the habitus will be welcomed and be generally successful. Equally, an incongruent habitus and field can lead to a negative relationship and quite damaging consequences.

In the context of graduate employment research, it could be argued that all that is required is the logical extension of Bourdieu's work with Passeron, on access to higher education. The lack of access to higher education for working class students that the two authors discuss in *The Inheritors* (1979)

suggests that the vast majority of working class students do not make it as far as higher education, and those students who did have cobbled together enough resources and experience to successfully move from one stage to the next – including graduate employment trajectories. However, while Bourdieu's work on higher education can be extended to graduate employment through the argument that barriers to higher education create barriers to graduate employment, and indeed has been through the positional perspective, we would contend that this is quite a narrow interpretation and application. In the context of increased absolute mobility in the UK (Devine and Li 2013), increasing levels of working class students in higher education (Ross 2003), the general upward trend of higher education participation (BIS 2012) and the apparent non-linear social composition of the UK (Savage et al. 2013), we argue that graduate employment research needs to re-examine social barriers to centres of knowledge and the knowledge economy. As such, Bourdieu's thinking tools should be applied to the particulars of the graduate labour market, as too, can his seldom-referenced work on graduate employment (Burke 2015b).

On a handful of occasions, Bourdieu makes specific reference to the graduate labour market, characterised by graduate inflation and increased deregulation, and discusses how his thinking tools can help unpack issues concerning the market that underpin experiences and inequalities within it. Bourdieu and Boltanski (1981) discuss the increasingly deregulated and uncertain graduate labour market within a neo-liberal post-industrial context. The authors contend that growing ambiguity towards the composition, structure and function of the graduate labour market requires individuals to base their employment strategy on a new set of rules. Bourdieu (1984) considers that the ability to negotiate and manoeuvre within a market based on tacit rules and regulated often by the unsaid is aided by a habitus 'equipped' to 'play the game'. Such a habitus is often located within the dominant sphere of social space, supported by a complementary fit with the field – dominant (middle class) graduates will be able to navigate and steer this 'runaway' graduate market. The congruence between middle class graduates' habitus and the requirements of the labour market can be seen in a succession of literature spanning the last 20 years (Brown and Scase 1994; Brown et al. 2003; Bradley et al. 2013; Burke 2015a). A recurrent theme in existing research is the frustration expressed by working class students at the intangibility of the labour market. Many of these students'/graduates' declarations of wanting to take their first step toward a graduate position but not knowing how, were

in sharp contrast to their middle class colleagues' comfort and confidence in their future trajectories. Alongside the market's ambiguous structure/set of rules lies a predisposition to move or shift without the need for agentic pushing and shoving. In other words, the graduate labour market can independently change, altering both the requirements for entry and the rules for success. Bourdieu (1977) provides a theoretical framework to account for this alteration in the market or field – and the friction and anxiety left in its wake – through the concept of *hysteresis of habitus*. While the concept was most famously attributed to understanding changing relationship patterns in the Bearn² (Bourdieu 2008), it is applicable and relevant when considering graduates' ability to successfully negotiate the graduate labour market (Burke 2015b). Once again, beginning with the position that habitus provides a 'feel for the game', hysteresis of habitus is the time/gap between a shift in the composition of social space or the rules of the game and an individual/group understanding the changes and reformulating their strategy to meet the new requirements. The length of this gap is influenced by the habitus, where the dominant group is in a better position to realign with the field due to their increased practical mastery and resources/capitals. In the context of graduate employment, hysteresis takes the form of a change in the market's requirements, leading to a devaluation of certain degree subjects. Members of the dominant group appreciate this shift and invest in subjects with the necessary buying power while their dominated classmates and counterparts expect the same market value for now-disbanded subjects and, as such, indiscriminately invest in degree programmes (Bourdieu 1984). As Burke (2015b) illustrates through the comparatively high levels of anger and confusion his working class graduate sample expressed at their inability to immediately and easily 'cash-in' their degree for a graduate position, hysteresis of habitus can extend beyond devalued subjects to devalued degrees in general and the need to incorporate additional resources.

A key resource in a graduate market, characterised by increased participation in higher education, is capitals beyond the scholastic capital provided by a university degree. Bourdieu and Boltanski (1978) discuss the leading role *a priori* capitals play on graduate pathways when scholastic capital has reached a critical mass and can no longer be used to distinguish oneself from a significant proportion of the population. For the authors, *a priori* capital reproduces position and division within social space, as it is those capitals which are inherited and disproportionately enjoyed by the dominant group that offset the devaluation of 'earned' capital open to all.

The importance of *a priori* capitals in the contemporary graduate labour market is clearly articulated by Smetherham's (2006) comparison of graduate employment pathways by HEI attended (a form of institutionalised cultural capital – denoting your ability to complement expected norms and cultural practices of an institution). In contrast to the meritocratic narrative prevalent in much social policy, Smetherham reports a clear disparity between graduate employment outcomes and institutions where their degree was read. Graduates who possessed 1st class degrees from elite HEIs were four times more likely to take a position in a graduate fast track trainee programme than graduates who possessed 1st class degrees from lower status HEIs. This trend was not only evident at the top end of academic achievement; Smetherham found that graduates from elite institutions were twice as likely to be in a position which formally required a degree compared to graduates from lower status HEIs. A classed anxiety toward the increasing requirement of *a priori* capitals has been captured by Morrison (2014). Working class students in his study expressed an understanding of the need for soft skills/cultural capital articulated as 'speaking properly'; however, many students were concerned about their inability to apply such capitals, reducing the employment pathways they were considering.

Limiting the application of arguments/concepts from Bourdieu's long career to those which he specifically linked to graduate employment is arbitrary and unnecessary; there are a number of other concepts that would lead to further illumination on this subject, such as doxa and symbolic violence; however, something which sticks out is the field of the possibles (Bourdieu 1984). As discussed, the concept posits that position within social space will provide particular norms and levels of expectations/aspirations. These possibles provide caps above *and* below (depending on position within social space) on legitimate trajectory/lifestyle. In the context of graduate employment, the powerful force of self-exclusion before *a priori* capitals are cashed or hysteresis of habitus is recognised provides a potential starting point for the dominated/classed nature of graduate underemployment – as working class graduates limit their scope and ambitions (Burke 2015b).

CRITICAL REALISM AND ARCHER

The second theoretical tradition at which we wish to look in order to unpack graduate employment is Margaret Archer's *Morphogenic* project. While Bourdieu's own particular logic of practice, combining structure

and agency, can be filed under structural constructivism, so Archer's concepts have a natural home within Critical Realism. As Case (2013) has pointed out, critical realism, like many contemporary belief sets, is a broad church incorporating a large array of interpretations of what it means to be a realist and what it means to be critical. Most notably attributed to the work of Roy Bhaskar (1975, 1989), critical realism's fundamental characteristic is the simultaneous acceptance and rejection of a realist ontology – an external reality, one that directs practice but is removed from influence. This contradictory position is not the result of a reactionary ontology, and certainly not of a fickle relationship with reality, but is caused through a desire to retain an appreciation for an external reality while also respecting and recognising the role of the subjective – in other words, structure and agency. Critical realism is based on understanding reality as not being comprised of either open systems or closed systems but, rather, a combination of both. Through the application of metaphor and philosophical excavation via transcendental arguments, critical realists are able to consider the subjective experience of reality and provide a causal account of observable phenomenon. In doing so, critical realists maintain the realist tradition's natural arm of empiricism – positivism's preoccupation with description – while also providing opportunity for Weber's concept of *Verstehen* (1949). Importantly, the recognition of structure's presence within reality does not degenerate into a linear relationship between structure and agency (Sayer 2000). Structure requires the active or passive acceptance from agency to engender practice; it can equally face an agentic challenge to the structural status quo (Case 2013).

In a bid to occupy a centrist position within the structure/agency spectrum, Archer's own grand project and, ultimately, her own theory of practice is based on the concept of *morphogenesis* (1996). In a similar vein to habitus, morphogenesis is concerned with the interaction and interrelation between structure and agency. For Archer, practice – whether that be reproduced practices or pioneering actions – is the product of the relationship between the individual/groups (agency) and the socio-cultural system (structure). In a traditional critical realist position, the relationship is not characterised by a linear process or by the socio-cultural system's overwhelming influence on individuals/groups. This interrelated relationship between structure and agency can be expressed as 'Cultural Conditioning → Cultural Interaction → Cultural Elaboration' (Archer 1996: 106). The rules and norms of the socio-cultural system influence or condition the members within that system; however, members (on an

individual or group level) also interact and actively engage in discussion and thought. These interactions can lead to an elaboration or, essentially, an alteration of structure. Rules and regularities come from repetitive actions/thoughts (Bourdieu 1986), but where Archer and Bourdieu part ways is the opportunity for members of that social space to critically discuss the relations and conditions in which they live.

A central component or process required to allow for a fruitful cultural interaction leading to elaboration is reflexivity or internal deliberation articulated through internal conversations (Archer 2007). For Archer, we are all able to have internal conversations or to be reflexive; however, the tone and content of these conversations will differ on the type of reflexive we are. Archer provides a typology of reflexivity characterising individuals as either – communicative, autonomous or meta-reflexive (2003, 2007, 2012). Communicative reflexives are individuals who rely on external validation and reassurance to plug the gaps left by their internal dialogues. This type of reflexive will typically accept the conditioning/rules of the socio-cultural system and reproduce that system. Autonomous reflexives, on the other hand, are able to question the structural conditions and elaborate/alter the structural relations. Meta-reflexives also conduct their internal conversations without any need of assistance; the difference is that they are value-orientated, whilst autonomous reflexives operate on a means/ends continuum. Not all of Archer's reflexives are congruent with her morphogenic model – communicative reflexives support a system of morphostasis. Importantly, Archer (2012) argues that our particular period of history, aided by various resources including access to (higher) education, is witnessing the increase in self-contained autonomous reflexives to the demise of communicative reflexives, providing increased opportunity and scope for morphogenesis. Within Archer's overall project, we can see the directive role of structure and the mediating influence of agency.

The question is 'where to?' for Archerian social theory and graduate employment. The agentic qualities within a morphogenic system, stemming from interaction and leading to elaboration, point to a system of individual influence and power. Reducing the system/structure down to the graduate labour market, there are parallels between Archer's work and consensus theory (Brown et al. 2003). In the context of a knowledge economy, consensus theory advocates that knowledge, skills and innovation are the driving factors of our society. Individuals own both the means and tools of production; they are in control to the extent that the market must placate them to ensure that they continue to apply their

much needed expertise. Employability is both a problem and solution. Individuals see the increase in inequality within a global market, and, to counter this inequality, they increase the knowledge capital they are able to exchange this for employment. In a similar vein to human capital theory (Schultz 1971), future leaders are the technical elite, moulding the market/structure rather than passively existing within one. In the right historical period, such as post-industrialisation (Bell 1973), Archer's project demonstrates the process required for these individuals/groups to alter the structure. Beyond the blueprints for alterations in the market, Archer also provides the source: reflexivity. The rise of autonomous reflexives, according to Archer, since the 1980s demonstrates the character and dispositions of individuals – in particular, those individuals who have been educated (in our case, graduates). The presence and need for graduates to conduct internal conversations when attempting to navigate the graduate market can be seen in Tomlinson's (2007, 2008, 2013) work. Here, Tomlinson argues that graduates are required to 'decode employers' recruitment criteria' (2013: 197) and piece together a bespoke graduate identity or graduateness. While the current composition of structure and agency within the graduate labour market is debatable, it is clear that an ever-growing cohort of individuals approach the market from an individual and critical manner, questioning not only its structure and direction but also their position within the market now and in the future.

Developing a Critical Agenda: Implications and Challenges

The dominant perspective on graduate employment, what Holmes (2013) terms the possessive perspective, has shaped HEIs' employability policies and is the underlining basis and rationale for HE policy in the UK. Beyond the official narrative of graduate employability, stakeholders, including prospective students, graduates, employability units, families and employers, need an accurate illustration and explanation of the paths to employment and the barriers graduates will face. We argue here that the epistemic reflexivity which the application of social theory requires provides us with the opportunity to consider structure and agency or regulation and reflexivity – essentially, what Mills meant in his seminal work *The Sociological Imagination* (1959).

In our discussion of both Pierre Bourdieu (et al.) and Margaret Archer, we are aware that very little attention was given toward the limitations of their work and the extensive critique the authors have received, sometimes

even from each other. While this piece is not the appropriate platform for an extended discussion of their critics' charges, both have been criticised in terms of the balance they offer between structure and agency. Bourdieu has been widely labelled a structural determinist (Jenkins 2002; Archer 1996), as his thinking tools – in particular, habitus – are understood to limit the effect that individuals' actions can have on the socially reproductive system he advocates. At the other end of the spectrum, the cultural interaction and cultural elaboration stages of Archer's morphogenic system are seen to gloss over the structural barriers that could affect these processes (Zeuner 1999; Burke 2015b). While both theorists would fiercely counter their detractors, there is an issue of balance for both their theories. Rather than labouring over semantics or the niche reading of one theorist by another, we look to the possibility of occupying the middle ground and to the future. By middle ground, we do not advocate combining these two theoretical traditions but, rather, finding a compromise within one position to develop a critical agenda. Although Archer's work has enjoyed increasing application (Case 2013; Porpora 2013), there have been clearer developments within the Bourdieusian canon to position itself in a more palatable 'structure off centre' space. From the work of those Burke (2015b) has dubbed 'Bourdiesian modernisers', there is a shift toward providing greater room for agency, whether that is through a permeable habitus (Reay 2004), increased reflexivity (Atkinson 2010, Sayer 2005), resistance stemming from the habitus (Ingram and Abrahams 2015) or the subjective and transitory character of capitals (Burke 2015a). It is these developments within Bourdieusian social theory that we find more convincing and useful when considering graduate employment.

Returning to Holmes' (2013) contrasting employability perspectives, the contemporary reading, adaption and application of what is now an established theory allows us to bridge the two competing perspectives: positional and processual. As Holmes has previously highlighted, Bourdieusian social theory falls within his umbrella term of the positional perspective on employability. Bourdieu's thinking tools – in particular, the structural facets within his theory of practice – and his empirical work on the role of *a priori* capital articulates the reproductive argument at the heart of the positional perspective. While we agree with Holmes' characterisation of Bourdieusian social theory as pessimistic, that does not mean it is not an accurate depiction of social space and the graduate employment market more specifically. A key limitation stemming from Bourdieusian social theory, and experienced more generally

by the positional perspective is the lack of consideration for those who do develop and manage a graduate employment trajectory. The processual perspective, or the concept of an ever-emerging graduate identity (Holmes 2013, 2015), is premised on the contention that, upon graduation, students do not simply become graduates immediately qualified and suitable for a graduate position. Rather, a graduate identity is constructed over time through interactions and experiences with employers, family, peers, institutions, etc. There are parallels between this perspective and Goffman's *interaction order* (1983); graduates, over a period of time, are attempting to craft a successful interaction order to meet the expectations of their employers. However, as Goffman (1983: 5) acknowledges, the source of what is deemed legitimate – no matter how transitory – within these interactions or the process of acquisition is not clear. Within the processual perspective, the Bourdieusian commitment to structure can help us trace the genesis of the accepted forms of identity and signpost barriers in the development of graduates' ability to play the game. In the context of the positional perspective, the contemporary application of Bourdieu, with a greater focus on the agentic side of this theory of practice, lessens the fatalistic tone from social reproductive theories. It provides space for individuals to develop and tend their graduate careers whilst not forgetting the role of structure. The close application of social theory, in particular Bourdieusian social theory, in the combination of the positional and processual perspectives requires 1) a theoretically driven critical examination of trajectories and 2) a close inspection of those trajectories. Recent examples of large scale research that provides such an opportunity can be found in both the Future Track study (Purcell et al. 2013) and the on-going Paired Peers study (Bradley et al. 2013). Paired Peers, which initially followed a cohort of students from Bristol and Bristol UWE through their time in university is now examining their graduate employment trajectories. Through this (albeit short) longitudinal approach and close qualitative inspection, the research, and hopefully future research, will be able to observe the emerging graduate identities while also appreciating the barriers students may face.

NOTES

1. Many of which are discussed at length in Grenfell's (2008) *Bourdieu: Key Concepts*.
2. A province in south west France.

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Developing a More Coherent and Robust Basis for Employability Research: A Critical Realist Perspective

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Over the last couple of decades the area of student employability has led to a plethora of research papers, funded projects and policy documents involving university academics, Government bodies, professional body organisations and careers organisations. Since the mid- 2000s the notion of student employability took on a new dimension with the introduction of the Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) survey and the resulting metrics being incorporated into Higher Education Institutions' set of key performance indicators. This has led to an increasing number of Institutions developing employability strategies and putting in place (and resourcing) structures to deliver the strategic objective of improving their performance in the DLHE survey.

Taking a broad overview of all this work relating to employability, three inter-connected themes emerge and one area is largely missing. The missing area relates to the exploration of the relationship between employability and economic growth. The employability debate, certainly from the

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Government policy perspective, is based on the taken-for-granted assumption that higher levels of graduate employability are needed to enhance economic growth. The basis for this view lies in work done by macro-economists in the 1960s and 1970s (Solow 1994; Romer 1994) in developing a range of neo-classical growth models. These models are based on the notion of a staged-development process for national economies and the importance of human capital in the post-industrial stage of development – referred to more commonly as the ‘knowledge economy’. With a few notable exceptions (Wolf 2004; Keep and Mayhew 2004) this remains an unchallenged assumption underpinning the employability debate.

The three inter-connected areas that have emerged and continue to dominate work on employability are:

- The outlining of lists of employability ‘skills’ from work undertaken with, or by, employers and professional bodies
- Research around the factors influencing employability
- The development of a number of employability frameworks.

A degree of consensus has emerged to some extent in each of these areas. Lists of employability ‘skills’ (or ‘competencies’ or ‘attributes’) tend to be similar to those included in reports such as the CBI’s “Future fit: Preparing graduates for the world of work” (CBI 2009). The wide range of work on factors impacting on employability (Smith et al. 2000; Holmes 2001; Blasko et al. 2002; Brown et al. 2003; Chevalier and Conlon 2003; Brennan and Shah 2003; Brown and Hesketh 2004; Smetherham 2006; Cranmer 2006; Tomlinson 2007; Mason et al. 2009) consistently reflect a clear link to a student’s degree class and whether they undertook work experience, plus a less well-defined link to a student’s social background. The employability framework which seems to have gained most traction is the ESECT (Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team) USEM framework (Yorke and Knight 2007) although the careerEDGE development framework (Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007) is also widely referred to. Similarly the ESECT definition of employability as being:

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 (Yorke 2004).

is widely quoted in the literature and forms the basis for many Institutional definitions of employability.

However when looking at the work around employability of the type discussed above it is difficult to discern a sense of an evolving body of work which is yielding new insights or deepening our understanding of employability. Much of the work revolves around bespoke data sets, context-bounded case studies or simple ‘show and tell’ examples of practice, driven by the desire to find out ‘what works’ or, from the Institutional perspective, addressing the question ‘what’s going to improve our DLHE metrics?’ The key underlying issue with much of the current employability discourse is the lack of a conceptual base around which a proper research agenda can be built. The ESECT ‘definition’ is more of a passive statement of what a student should have to be ‘employable’ than a conceptual definition of ‘employability’. Without a stronger conceptual base to the research to move employability research on from the present variations on the three themes discussed there is a danger that employability research will stagnate through lack of inertia.

The purpose of this chapter is to present one possible approach to developing a more robust research framework by considering employability from a critical realist perspective. The next section will present a broad (hopefully) non-technical overview of critical realism before applying this perspective to student employability. The chapter concludes by considering how a critical realist conceptualisation of employability not only provides a stronger basis for research but also challenges some current beliefs and Institutional practices.

THE CRITICAL REALIST PERSPECTIVE

Essentially critical realism (as represented by Outhwaite 1987; Sayer 1992, 2000; Bhaskar 1998, 2008; Lawson 1998; Lewis 2000; Scott 2005, 2007) is a philosophical perspective which sees the world as a series of pre-existing social structures which have emerged from the past actions and decisions of individuals within the social structure (commonly referred to as ‘agents’). The actions and decisions taken by agents in the present are partially constrained by the pre-existing social structure. Bhaskar (1998, 2008) has played a central role in developing the critical realist perspective and he outlines the critical realist perspective in the following terms:

People do not create society. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce and transform, but which would not exist unless they do so (Bhaskar 1998, p. 36).

The pre-existing ‘structures, practices and conventions’ which underpin any social structure can refer to both tangible and intangible elements. The tangible elements will include the legal, political and organisational institutions that exist within a society, which Pring (2004) regards as being “social facts” that clearly exist and are not simply socially constructed. Equally importantly a social structure will also reflect less tangible elements related to a society’s ethical, moral and general societal attitude. Included in these less tangible elements will also be each individual agents own ethical and moral attitudes. Agents within the social structure are likely to be less aware of the influence of these intangible elements on the decisions they take. However a social structure has no independent agency it is only reproduced and developed through the actions of individual agents interacting with the ‘social facts’. Equally a social structure is non-deterministic; it influences and constrains an agent’s actions but doesn’t pre-determine what actions will be taken. In addition the strong temporal basis to social reality means that actions and structures develop and evolve in a linear, but dynamic manner, through time.

The interdependence between structure and agency, and the resulting embeddedness of human action within pre-existing social structures, places the critical realist view of the nature of social reality somewhere between the interpretist’s and positivist’s views. Critical realists recognise that, in a positivist sense, there are entities in the social world which have an independent existence outside of each individual agent’s consciousness. However, as in interpretivism, individuals still have to make active choices about their actions. What the critical realist ontological perspective also recognises though, is that these choices may well be constrained by existing social structures. Also, as in interpretivism, individual agents in making these choices construct their own reality, however again this is a reality which reflects the underlying ‘structure, practices and conventions’ of the social structure. Therefore although critical realist researchers will focus on individual agents and examine how they construct their social reality there are fundamental differences between this critical realist approach and an interpretist’s approach.

From the above discussion it is clear that a key consideration within critical realism is the causal impact which social structures can have on the outcome for individual agents. Causality arises from the actions taken by agents as they interpret and respond to the social structure. However the non-deterministic nature of the social structure means that each agent's behaviour will be mediated by the social reality they create in response to the social structure. The social reality an individual creates will be unique to them; there is no reason to expect that the subsequent action they take will be the same as the next person. Indeed there is no reason to expect that the same individual will actually behave in the same way when faced with a similar set of circumstances at different times. In making a choice second time around, the outcome of their previous decision will impact on how they respond this time and it may lead to a different decision being taken. Equally important is that the social structure will have evolved over time between the two decisions. In other words the actions taken by individual agents within a social structure are context specific and equally, causality will also be context specific.

Therefore when analysing data rather than looking for predictive causality, as positivist researchers do, critical realists will look for similarities in behaviour within social structures, sometimes referred to as 'demi-regs' (Lawson 1998). This leads to a view of causality which for critical realists is much less rigid than in the positivist's perspective. Whereas positivist research deals in absolutes, X *always* leads to Y, for critical realists the relationship is of a weaker form of; X *tends* to lead to Y. In addition the context specific nature of causality (or 'contingent causality') means that unlike positivists, critical realists will not extrapolate from one research context to claim the same causal effect will be observed in *all* contexts. Indeed we cannot even claim that the causal effect will always happen *within* the same context.

For critical realists however the observed behaviour of agents within a social system is only one of several levels of causality which operate at different ontological depths or domains (Outhwaite 1987; Bhaskar 1998; Fleetwood 2005; Al-Moudi and Willmott 2011). The 'actual' domain exists in time and place and is where the event of X causing Y takes place, whereas the 'empirical' domain refers to the observed outcome of X causing Y. The discussion above on the identification of tendencies or demi-regs relates to context-specific causality which takes place in the empirical domain. However, for critical realists there is another domain beyond the 'actual' and 'empirical' which critical realists refer to as the

‘real’ (Bhaskar 1998; Kempster and Parry 2011) or the ‘deep’ domain (Fleetwood and Ackroyd 2004). The deep domain is where we need to look for underlying generic ‘generative mechanisms’ (Pawson and Tilley 1997; Bhaskar 1998; Lawson 1998; Scott 2005, 2007) or “the ways of acting of things” (Bhaskar 2008, p.14). Generative mechanisms are causal relationships within the social structure which are context-free; they exist within a social system irrespective of a specific context. This is not to say though that if X leading to Y is found to be a generative mechanism in the ‘deep’ domain that X leading to Y will always be found in the empirical domain. As with demi-regs, generative mechanisms are based on contingent causality not constant causality.

At its core critical realist research is concerned with investigating the relationships between the elements of the underlying social structure and the potential impact these may have on the actions of individual agents. Therefore, as with positivist research, critical realist research begins by assuming there is an underlying theoretical causal social structure which needs to be analysed and ‘tested’. The purpose of the research may be to identify the relationships within a social structure by, for example, using the methods associated with grounded theory (see for example Kempster and Parry 2011). Alternatively the researcher may hypothesise a set of causal relationships within a social structure based on previous research as the start point. However the key point is that, unlike positivist research, the starting point is the identification of an observed phenomenon with evidence of an underlying causal relationship which research “... needs to identify and illuminate” (Lewis 2009, p.111). In other words you start with an observed issue or outcome and work back to try and identify the relevant social relationships leading to the observed phenomena. Once identified the nature of the relationships may be explored through the perspective of existing theories and concepts. This emphasises the point that critical realism is a philosophical view of social reality not a research method. Indeed the idea of starting with an observed phenomenon and working back includes not only the decision on the identification of existing theories but also the most appropriate research methodology to use.

A CRITICAL REALIST VIEW OF EMPLOYABILITY

Looking at employability we seem to have all the ingredients for developing a research approach from a critical realist philosophical perspective. We have the phenomenon of ‘student employability’ which we need to

“...identify and illuminate” (Lewis 2009, p.111). Previous research suggests that in addition to their university experiences, ‘student employability’ is also underpinned by a set of causal factors relating to a student’s pre-university educational experience and their family and wider social background. In other words there is an indicative linear-temporal social structure which underpins the phenomenon we refer to as ‘student employability’. From a critical realist perspective ‘student employability’ relates to students interpreting and taking actions in response to the surrounding employability social structure, both pre-university, during university and indeed, post-university. In other words employability as a concept becomes socially constructed by individual students actively engaging with the social structure. Central to developing a critical realist basis for employability research is therefore the need to clarify both the elements that constitute the underlying social structure and the relationships between them.

In considering employability, elements of Bhaskar’s ‘structures, practices and conventions’ can be readily identified. The tangible structures, or Pring’s ‘social facts’, are the institutions of School, University and Workplace plus the practices and processes associated with these institutions and also with moving between them. Moving from School to University involves, for example, the UCAS and University selection processes and the convention of attending open days. Similarly moving from University to the work place involves a range of processes around recruitment and selection, and sets of conventions associated with particular employment sectors. These core institutions with associated transition processes and conventions are clearly aspects of the employability social structure with which any student has to actively engage. However successful engagement with the institutional structures and making the second transition from University to graduate Workplace is only one outcome of the employability process, it does not explain the underlying causal factors which lead to the successful transition.

As indicated at the end of the previous section researchers can either use inductive or deductive methods to determine the underlying causal relationships that define a social structure. In the case of employability the plethora of research associated with identifying the factors which impact on employability actually provides us with the basis for developing an encompassing framework which allows us to hypothesise an employability social structure.

However before considering the employability social structure there is one issue which needs to be resolved. As discussed in the previous section

critical realists take a contextualised view of causality. The regularities found in one study apply to the context of that study alone, they cannot be generalised to all cases. Thus building a social structure to frame research across contexts presents us with a philosophical issue. However Pawson and Tilley (1997) offer a way forward by suggesting the following:

... a process in which we move from one specific empirical case to a general theory and back to another case and so on. What are transferable between cases are not lumps of data but sets of ideas. The process works through the development of a body of theory which provides an organising framework which abstracts from a program a set of essential conditions which make sense of one case after another (Pawson and Tilley 1997, p. 120).

Therefore one method for developing a framework which can be used as an employability social structure is to return to the previous ‘factors affecting impact’ research strand and see if the same variables seem to be re-occurring. In some ways it could be argued that given the bespoke nature of, and range of methods used, in previous research if some relationships seem to be occurring repeatedly then there is a pretty strong case for this being a potential impact factor on student employability.

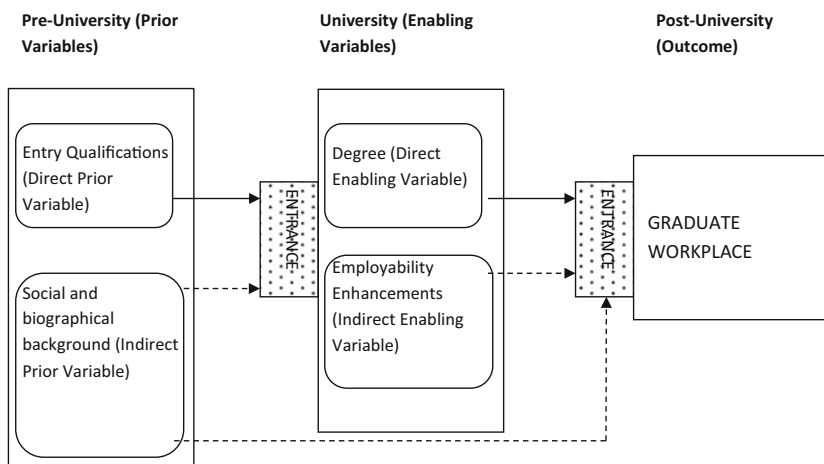
Table 5.1 below summarises reoccurring factors which previous research has identified as key elements of the employability social structure across a wide range of work adopting a range of research methods.

What appears to be emerging from this work are tentative signs of a social structure with certain variables reoccurring across different research contexts. In other words an organising framework, in the sense used by Pawson and Tilley (1997), is becoming apparent. When these are combined with the institutions (schools, universities and employing companies) and embedded practices (such as those related to graduate recruitment or university entrance) then a critical realist ‘organising structure’ for employability begins to emerge.

Figure 5.1 combines all these elements to present a generic social structure for employability together with the additional variable relating to the employability enhancement activities of Universities. Looking at the elements in Fig. 5.1 it can be seen that they fall into three temporal groups – pre-university, university and graduate workplace. The social structure also contains two transition points, or ‘entrances’, with their associated processes and conventions referred to previously - one into university and one into the graduate workplace.

Table 5.1 Elements within the employability social structure

1	Class of degree	Smith et al. (2000), Mason et al. (2003), Blasko et al. (2002), Brennan and Shah (2003), HEFCE (2001), Smetherham (2006), Moreau and Leathwood (2006), Purcell et al. (2005)
2	Prior educational attainment	Smetherham (2006), Smith et al. (2000), Purcell et al. (2005)
3	Age	Smith et al. (2000), Blasko et al. (2002), Brennan and Shah (2003), HEFCE (2001)
4	Social class	Blasko et al. (2002), Brennan and Shah (2003), Mason et al. (2003), Smith et al. (2000)
5	Gender	Smetherham (2006), Mason et al. (2003), Purcell et al. (2005)
6	Ethnicity	Blasko et al. (2002), Brennan and Shah (2003), HEFCE (2001)
7	Parental background (income and HE contact)	Blasko et al. (2002), Brennan and Shah (2003)
8	Institution attended	Blasko et al. (2002), Brennan and Shah (2003), Brown and Hesketh (2004), Purcell et al. (2005)
9	Degree	Required by definition

**Fig. 5.1** The social structure of employability

Taking the student's time at University as the central focus the set of factors pre-university are referred to as 'prior variables' (elements 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 from Table 5.1). These are elements of the social structure which,

although they might impact on employability, are determined before going to University. Hence they are part of the pre-existing real aspect of the social structure hypothesised in Fig. 5.1 by the time a student enters University. These prior variables are split into two types, direct (element 2) and indirect (elements 3 to 7). Within the context of the social structure the term 'direct variable' is used to indicate pre-requisites which can be regarded as being essential for the graduate to make the transition to the next stage. In other words they provide the means to pass through the two entrances shown in Fig. 5.1. Thus for entry into University the only direct variable is 'entry qualifications' shown by an unbroken arrow leading to entrance onto their chosen degree course at university. Similarly a degree is a pre-requisite for entry into the graduate labour market so again is shown as an unbroken line. In contrast 'indirect variables' are those factors in a student's social and biographical background which previous research (summarised in Table 5.1) suggests may have a significant indirect (and possible unacknowledged) impact on both entrance to university and the graduate labour market. These are shown by the dotted lines.

The elements of the social structure influencing employability whilst at university are defined as 'enabling variables' (incorporating elements 1 and 8 in Table 5.1). These are the factors within a graduate's university experience which may have had an impact on the graduate's transition into the graduate labour market. As with the prior variables they are classified into two types, direct and indirect. The direct variable in this instance is the graduate's degree which, by definition, is an essential pre-requisite for obtaining a graduate level job. The indirect enabling variables are shown as 'employability enhancements', as these are other aspects of a graduate's university experience which may have an impact on their transition into graduate employment. Employability enhancements are the opportunities provided to students, both within and around the curriculum, aimed at enhancing their chances of achieving a successful transition into the graduate workplace.

The other point about the direct variables in the framework is that they are, in critical realist terms, 'generative mechanisms'. As was discussed previously critical realists make the distinction between different levels of causality. Although all causality is contingent there is a distinction to be made between causal relationships tied to specific contexts (demi-regs) and those which occur across all contexts (generative mechanisms). In this case generative mechanisms relate not just to the obvious case of needing UCAS points and a degree to successfully negotiate the thresholds but also the higher your UCAS points and degree class then the better your

chances of entering University/obtaining a graduate job. However one other factor also emerges as being a possible context-free generative mechanism. Looking across all the previous employability-impacts research, both quantitative and qualitative, there is one other element within the social structure which occurs repeatedly as having an impact on enhancing employability and this is students undertaking a work placement as part of their course. Sandwich placements seem to have a contingent causality which occurs not just in one research context but across all research contexts. In critical realists terms a course-related sandwich placement would appear to operate in the deep domain, rather than just the empirical domain, as a context-free generative mechanism.

The view of employability which therefore emerges is one of employability as being socially constructed by students as they engage with the elements within the employability social structure shown in Fig. 5.1. This presents employability as something which is an active student-centric phenomenon where each student will interpret and respond to the elements within in the social structure in their own way based on their own experiences. The framework could be used in a number of ways as either a means of drawing together and exploring existing research into various elements such as the two ‘entrances’, or exploring individual elements within the framework in more depth. However it needs to be recognised that the employability social structure presented in Fig. 5.1 is only a hypothesised generic framework which it is open to, even requires, further research and development.

By adopting a critical realist perspective a number of aspects of employability are brought into sharper focus which has relevance for research into the area. The employability social structure shown in Fig. 5.1 highlights the developmental aspect of employability. The figure has the University experience at its centre, but this merely reflects our focus on student employability. In fact the university experience is only one stage in the process, the pre-university and post-university stages are equally valid stages in developing an individual’s employability. This is a view which is echoed in recent work on the development of graduate identity and Holmes’ (2013) ‘processual’ approach to employability where “... higher education is merely one stage, albeit an important one, within the biographical trajectories of students and graduates” (p. 548). Figure 5.1 illustrates this, showing the temporal nature of employability development as individual’s journey through, and interact with, the social structure in a linear manner.

Perhaps a useful way to illustrate further how the adoption of a critical realist view of employability provides a more robust basis to research is to look at one particular area. As was discussed earlier in the chapter, one strand of previous research into employability focused on the search for ‘what works’, particularly at the institutional level where the goal is to improve institutional DLHE statistics. This concern has led to a range of curriculum and extra-curriculum projects and initiatives across the sector, including the wide-spread desire to ensure students develop ‘employability skills’. Therefore we commonly see many courses which include employability related skills modules or career-development modules. Sometimes these modules are embedded within the context of the student’s course (e.g. ‘Professional Skills for Accountants’) but usually they are more generic and often ‘bolt-on’ modules. Outside of the formal course curriculum increasing numbers of institutions have developed additional badged employability related development and support schemes, almost invariably operated at University level.

Within the employability social structure of Fig. 5.1 these course-based and non-course based projects and initiatives would be classed as ‘employability enhancements’. With the exception of the impact of placements, research into the effectiveness of these approaches to improving an institutions DLHE is limited and largely inconclusive (Brennan and Shah 2003; Mason et al. 2009; BIS 2011; Cashian 2013). Adopting a critical realist perspective provides a different frame of reference, and suggests a more fruitful research approach to explore the ‘what works’ question.

As suggested the motivation for answering the ‘what works’ question relates to improving an institution’s DLHE statistics. This view of success implies quite a narrow definition of employability is being used, merely the ability to successfully get through the second entrance in Fig. 5.1. The focus of a critical realist approach to researching this question would centre on individual students and the impact the enhancements have on the students successfully negotiating the graduate workplace entrance. Thus, for example, in assessing the impact of the various institutionally badged employability award schemes then, obviously, we would be looking for evidence between the participation in the scheme and a successful graduate employment outcome. In critical realist terms the research would be looking for evidence that the employability enhancement was potentially acting as a ‘trigger mechanism’ to support the outcome of a graduate level job. However crucially, this would be from the student’s perspective.

The research would involve understanding how the students were engaging with the enhancements and, in particular, how the student interpreted and responded to the enhancement as part of their personal employability development. Finding a link between students who took part in the scheme and successful graduate employment would need to be supported by evidence of the positive impact of the scheme on the student's perception of their employability. Did the student think participating in the scheme helped them get their first graduate level job?

The other key factor in a critical realist approach would be the need to clearly distinguish between trigger mechanisms and pre-existing context. Potential trigger mechanisms will include the employability enhancements, such as central university badged schemes, which have been deliberately inserted into the social structure to enhance progress through the graduate labour market entrance. Context however is aspects of the social structure which already exist prior to the enhancements being introduced. Thus research into whether the institutional badged schemes act as potential trigger mechanisms for graduate employment would treat the student's degree programme and their social and demographic background as pre-existing context. The pre-existing contextual factors will impact on how an individual student interprets and responds to a trigger mechanism but not on the potential effectiveness of the enhancement, they need to be treated as two separate potential effects. Take as another example research into work placements. Work placements have already been discussed as a potential context-free generative mechanism, but this is an area within the social structure which needs more focused research to understand why this might be the case. One potential area for investigation is the relationship between a student having graduate parents and the opportunities for work placement. It might be, for example, that a student with graduate parents has higher levels of social capital which positively impact on gaining a work placement. This is a valid potential relationship within the employability social structure to investigate. However, how that potential relationship was treated in future research would depend on the purpose of the research. If the research aim was to explore the factors which make a student more likely to undertake a work placement then the graduate parent would be a potential trigger mechanism. If the purpose of the research was to look at work placement as a trigger mechanism for a graduate job then the graduate parent becomes part of the pre-existing social context.

Two final points need to be made in relation to the employability enhancements example. Research into a particular set of employability enhancements may uncover that some are indeed acting as trigger mechanisms; they seem to potentially have an impact on students successfully negotiating the graduate-workplace market entrance in Fig. 5.1. However given that causality is contingent it doesn't mean that the trigger mechanism will always lead to a graduate job either within the specific research context or in other research contexts. What is required is the development of a body of research across a range of contexts which begins to reveal consistencies in terms of the demi-regs which emerge and allow for the hypothesising of a potential organising framework. Finally the critical realist perspective emphasis on employability as being an active student-centric process impacts on how employability enhancements should be developed and incorporated in and/or around programmes of study. Employability enhancements need to be regarded as frameworks which provide students with opportunities to enhance their chances of making a successful transition into a graduate job, but the motivation for engagement needs to come from the student. Forcing students to take an 'employability skills' module is not in itself going to act as a trigger mechanism, but a framework which encourages students to take advantage of the opportunities offered may. This example however highlights another key aspect of adopting a critical realist perspective, the tendency to conflate several different aspects of employability into one catch-all term of 'student employability'.

THE CRITICAL REALIST CHALLENGE TO THE CURRENT EMPLOYABILITY DEBATE

The contention made in this chapter is that the adoption of a critical realist perspective on employability presents one possible approach to developing a more robust basis to research in the area. However the adoption of a critical realist approach also calls for a reframing of the discourse around employability, which can also have implications for institutional policies and approaches.

One fundamental difference is how employability is 'defined'. From a critical realist perspective 'employability' is not something to be captured in a single definition, such as the ESECT definition discussed earlier, but is viewed as a social phenomenon which needs to be, in the terms used by Lewis (2009), identified and illuminated. This is not to say that the issue of defining employability is avoided but rather that it becomes defined

within the context of the research being undertaken. In the employability enhancements example used in the previous section the starting point was to be clear about the desired outcome. In this particular case the assumption was that the research was exploring potential trigger mechanisms to enhance the chances of a student making a successful transition into a graduate job. In other words the definition of employability being used was the DLHE concept of a student being in a positive destination 6 months after graduation. However if we change the research context and purpose then we may be using a different definition of employability. If, for example, we were exploring the relationship between a graduate's university experience and their post-graduation career development then the definition of employability used to determine outcomes would not be the same as the DHLE metric-based view. In this case we would be looking for evidence of the trigger mechanisms in the university experience which have potentially supported the graduate's subsequent career trajectory. This is a more developmental view of employability than the DLHE metric-based view used to assess employability enhancements and, as discussed in more detail below, different aspects of a student's university experience may act as trigger mechanisms in different research contexts. Thus for critical realists, employability becomes a multifaceted phenomenon to be explored and understood rather than something to be tied down in a single all-encompassing definition.

With this in mind it is worth considering again the ESECT definition which is currently widely used by the HE sector and researchers.

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 (Yorke 2004).

Re-examining the ESECT definition through a critical-realist lens we can see that the multifaceted nature of employability is actually reflected in the above statement. The definition actually conflates exactly the same two different types of 'employability' discussed above. If the ESECT statement is accepted as **the** definition of employability then we are failing to recognise that 'likely to gain employment' and 'be successful in their chosen occupations' are actually different perspectives on employability. The 'likely to gain employment' is the DHLE metric-driven view that students on graduation make a successful transition into the graduate workplace.

However the ‘be successful in their chosen career’ represents the more open-ended view that employability is seen as an on-going developmental process. Equally the statement doesn’t distinguish between the ‘skills, understandings and personal attributes’ required for the DLHE metric-driven view of employability and those required for the developmental view. In critical realist terms the trigger mechanisms for the two views of employability are not the same. Specifically, to enhance a student’s chances of being ‘likely to gain employment’ trigger mechanisms will revolve around a student’s ability to negotiate the recruitment and selection processes associated with the graduate workplace market entrance in Fig. 5.1. Whereas for the ‘be successful in their chosen career’ developmental view of employability the trigger mechanisms may be more closely related to employability skills and the attributes strand of employability research.

As suggested previously the focus at institutional level tends to be on the DHLE metric and hence places emphasis on this measure as the definition of employability. There is however a problem implicit in the discussion above. Many institutional initiatives focus on employability skills within their curriculum as a means of trying to boost their DLHE figures. However this is addressing the potential trigger mechanisms associated with the developmental view of employability not the DLHE-metric view. There is nothing inherently wrong with enhancing a student’s chances to “be successful in their chosen career” but it needs to be recognised that increasing resources in developing employability skills in students is unlikely to impact on their chances of being ‘likely to gain employment’. There is some research evidence to support this view (Mason et al. 2009; Cashian 2013). To improve the DLHE statistics the implication for Institutions is that the focus needs to shift to the ‘skills, knowledge and attributes’ associated with the DLHE-metric view of employability – enhancing the student’s ability to play the graduate labour market entry game. In critical realist terms research is needed to understand the trigger mechanisms which potentially impact on a graduate gaining their first graduate job.

When considered from a critical realist perspective the other obvious problem with the ESECT definition is that it is essentially a passive statement, students acquire a ‘set of achievements’. As discussed in the last section for critical realists students are not passive acquirers of skills and attributes - students actively develop their employability through engaging with the employability social structure.

What the above discussion serves to illustrate is that the application of the critical realism approach required us to have a clear idea about what aspect of employability is being explored and to carefully distinguish between trigger mechanisms and pre-existing contextual factors. ‘What works’ research is to some extent misguided without a clear understanding of which aspect of employability is being researched – the answer will be different in different contexts and for different aspects of the social structure. Indeed Pawson and Tilley (1997) suggest that critical realist evaluative research of this type needs to extend the ‘what works’ question to ‘what works, for whom and what circumstances’.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The adoption of a critical realist perspective offers us the opportunity to build a more robust approach to employability research. Under the critical realist lens employability becomes a multifaceted phenomenon at the heart of which are individual students/ graduates consciously, and unconsciously, creating and developing their employability in response to the surrounding social structure. Recognition of this view would allow us to develop research which is more conceptually robust, the results of which would be contestable and hence more evolutionary in developing our understanding of employability. In addition, as illustrated in the previous section, critical realist research requires more precision in defining what aspect of the social structure you are interested in exploring. Not only will this force the researchers to consider the boundaries of the research but also to clarify what they actually mean by ‘employability’ in the context of the research.

However by adopting a critical realist perspective we are not dismissing the many years of previous research into employability. Rather the previous research needs to be regarded as the evidential basis to uncovering aspects of the underlying social structure. Systematic reviews allow for the development of Pawson and Tilley’s organising frameworks which will guide us to possible trigger mechanisms that might exist within the social structure in relation to the aspect of employability of interest to the researcher. The hypothesised social structure of Fig. 5.1 is a broad interpretation of previous research; aspects of the suggested social structure are open to development by similar systematic reviews of areas of the existing literature. Indeed the broad social structure of Fig. 5.1 is actually only one

interpretation of the previous literature, it is open to challenge by other interpretations or as new evidence is found.

Finally critical realist research should be theory driven. However critical realism is a philosophical view of the world, it leaves the researcher open to draw on theoretical constructs and research methods that best suit the purpose of the research. Thus to explore why a sandwich work experience may be a generative mechanism a researcher could draw on the emerging literature around graduate identity (Holmes 2001, 2013; Stevenson and Clegg 2011; Hinchcliffe and Jolly 2011). Similarly the tentative link between a student's social and demographic background could adopt a Bourdieusian conceptual approach based on ideas of social capital. However whatever the theoretical framework and research methodology adopted the main outcome will be moving employability research on in a more robust and evidence-driven way taking us out of the current stagnation that typifies the area.

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Boundaryless and Protean Career Orientation: A Multitude of Pathways to Graduate Employability

William Donald, Yehuda Baruch, and Melanie Ashleigh

INTRODUCTION

The neo-liberalisation of UK Higher Education (HE) seeks to establish an intellectual capital base (Giroux 2014). Discourse focuses heavily on the economic role of graduates and increased participation in HE (Tomlinson 2012). The political, economic and national ambitions and considerations as perceived from a macro-level Government mentality viewpoint are well documented (Holmes 2013; Baruch and Leeming 2001). In line with a paucity of existing literature in this area, it is less clear how the micro-level target population, the students; perceive their career orientation towards and following their graduation. We discuss these themes with the purpose of exploring the undergraduate student perception of graduate employability.

Our chapter starts with a brief commentary on the neo-liberalisation of UK Higher Education (HE); drawing on themes of increased participation

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and diversification (Tomlinson 2012), the graduate employability agenda (Holmes 2013, 2015) and work-integrated learning (Jackson 2013, 2015; Wilton 2012, 2014). Subsequently, our focus moves to the evolving nature of careers from a traditional to a contemporary construct. Specifically, Boundaryless Career (Briscoe and Hall 2006; Arthur and Rousseau 1996; DeFillippi and Arthur 1994) and Protean Career (Baruch 2014; Briscoe et al. 2006; Hall 1976, 2004) orientations are explored, alongside findings from studies that revealed the impact of MBA and Specialist Masters students (Cocchiara et al. 2010; Baruch et al. 2005; Baruch and Leeming 2001). Applications of these themes are then directed at undergraduate students. Our chapter concludes by setting out directions for future research and detailing implications to theory and practice to both HE institutions and national governments, based on the case of the UK.

Our theoretical underpinning relies on the intersection of Human Capital Theory (Becker 1964, 2009), including its strategic role in organisational performance (Wright et al. 2014), Planned Action Theory (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) and Career Theory (Baruch and Bozionelos 2011; Sullivan and Baruch 2009).

THE NEO-LIBERALISATION OF UK HIGHER EDUCATION

Go to university, get a good degree and be set for life. As a seventeen or eighteen year old, this mantra is often regurgitated from every angle of influence. Tutors and teachers, friends and family, the Government and media, industry and of course university establishments encourage this aim for prospective students considering HE. Thus, the key motivator for youth academic and career advancement is positioned as the transition from secondary to tertiary education, pursued at the best possible institution. Individual personality, background and the environment influence people's attitudes and actions (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) and culture 'programmes' human mind set (Hofstede 2001). Furthermore, the economic rhetoric of increased earnings as a direct result of undertaking a university degree is widely cited.

In the same way that Governments are seeking an economic return on investment for The Treasury and subsequently the country, students are seeking an economic return for the ever increasing accumulated debt associated with participation in HE (Stone et al. 2014). However, education itself is increasingly positioned as a means to securing a future employment that is of high status and well paid, with strong career progression

prospects; i.e. a graduate-level job. Subsequently, focus is placed on the economic expectation of increased salary and associated employment benefits realised from a degree qualification (Brooks and Youngson 2016). Alternatively, credential inflation may drive a defensive expenditure (Martin 2016; Thurow 1972), whereby individuals seek to minimise economic loss from not pursuing HE, as much as seeking a return on their economic investment for pursuing HE (Esson et al. 2013; Tomlinson 2013).

Thus graduates are positioned as educational consumers where skills, competence and knowledge are the commodity, with the focus on providing graduates with employability to operate in a knowledge-based economy (Jackson 2014; Tomlinson 2014; Wilton 2014). Jackson evidences this position in Australia and Wilton in the UK, both via quantitative-based studies; while Tomlinson adopts a UK based, qualitative approach.

INCREASED PARTICIPATION AND DIVERSIFICATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

We follow the case of the UK to manifest the global trend of increased participation and diversification in HE. The first and foremost element of diversity is gender. In 1963, at the time of The Robbin Report, there were 216,000 domestic and EU undergraduates in UK HE. Female representation was just 3,996; 1.85%. By comparison, in 2014 there were 1,127,000 domestic and EU undergraduates, with female representation of 597,310; 53.00% (Higher Education Funding Council 2014). These figures indicate the scale with which mass participation in UK HE has soared, with nearly half of all school leavers, 49.3%, now attending university; a trend which is expected to continue (Higher Education Funding Council 2014).

In addition to gender, the UK Government has also sought to diversify participation in UK HE by increasing ethnic representation and offering opportunities to students from lower-income families (Esson et al. 2013). This has been achieved through offering Government bursaries and promoting awareness of UK HE opportunities to a wider demographic. As a result, universities are better positioned to represent the wider society, promoting integration and understanding through inclusivity and respect. This is important for the student, employers and the UK Government since UK graduates will have a wider network of contacts and will compete for employment in an increasingly global and diverse graduate labour market (Holmes 2013; Tholen et al. 2013).

The UK Government, citing unfairness for the Tax Payer to underwrite an economic return to graduates of HE and having already increased tuition fees to £9,000 per annum, subsequently announced that parental income contingent student bursaries would be replaced with loans for all students commencing undergraduate study from the academic year 2016–2017 (Summer Budget 2015). Critics argue this move signals the end of social mobility in HE (Sutton Trust 2015), drawing on increased adversity to debt from potential students from lower income families (Tholen 2014). Furthermore, The Treasury could yet face a potential ticking-time-bomb (Sutton Trust 2015), given an estimated 73% of graduates are unlikely to repay their student loan in full (Garner 2014).

Maximising both employability and earnings of graduates is thus of significant importance to the UK Government. This leads to a number of questions – how will the system cope: students will be under pressure to pay, but also with a temptation not to wish to earn too much before the date of abolition of the debt. Governments will need to find the money. Some positive and negative incentives may be introduced to encourage former students to pay the debt (e.g. benefits to those who paid in full, obstacles for those who did not?). Moderators of gender, ethnic group and parental economic class are thus likely to influence student perceptions of the graduate labour market (Tomlinson 2013).

GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY AGENDA

Rothwell and Arnold (2007, p.25) define employability as: *The individual's ability to keep the job one has, or to get the job one desires*. One aspect of the neo-liberalisation of UK HE has been the drive for employability (Jackson 2015; Holmes 2013, 2015). Confusion exists surrounding the terminology of employable and employability. Universities are tasked by the UK Government and industry to produce employable graduates, equipped with the necessary competencies to thrive in a knowledge economy. However, the dominant measure of employable graduates is via employability, currently only including domestic students, six months post-graduation, via the 'Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey'. This is a highly contentious issue, since it is perfectly feasible for a graduate to be employable, that is to say they possess the necessary competencies and degree qualification to be capable of undertaking a job in the graduate labour market; whilst simultaneously not being employed and thus failing to satisfy the existing measurement of perceived employability (Jackson 2014;

Holmes 2013). Furthermore issues such as underemployment are not highlighted in the data set. A longitudinal study of graduate employability is now published every two years, evidencing a further snapshot in time, three and a half years after graduation. The most recent publication in August 2015 relates to graduates from 2011. Alternative measures of factors influencing employability, as proposed by Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) and Rothwell and Arnold (2007) are discussed later in this chapter.

WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

The Wilson Review (2012) called for stronger links between universities and employers, with the flagship recommendation that all undergraduate students should have the opportunity to undertake work-integrated learning. The dominant scholarly position states that a benefit of work-integrated learning is in producing more employable graduates (Evans et al. 2014). At face value, work-integrated learning offers augmented employability skill development and increases employability and starting salary of the individual (Brooks and Youngson 2016; Yorke 2011). Furthermore, work-integrated learning provides a positive impact on academic performance, through increased final year grades and degree classification (Brooks and Youngson 2016; Mansfield 2011). However, Crawford and Wang (2016) voice concern around the cause and effect correlation, questioning whether in fact better performing students are more likely to participate in work-related learning and therefore whether these students would have performed better anyway than their peers. Most recently, Jackson (2015) has positioned classroom learning as providing the scaffolding, whilst work-integrated learning helps in the development and refinement of skills. This is of particular importance given the existing mismatch between pedagogy incongruence and employability, as evidenced by Ojiako et al. (2014) and Ashleigh et al. (2012).

However, the benefit, if any, of work-integrated learning to students from outside business, healthcare and engineering degree programmes is not widely known (Edwards 2014; Wilton 2014). Additionally, much of the existing research exploring the impact of work-integrated learning on graduate employability has adopted a quantitative, self-reporting, snapshot in time approach (Taylor and Hooley 2014; Paisey and Paisey 2010). Thus, academics including Clark and Zukas (2016) and Wilton (2012) have called for longitudinal studies, looking at students before and after

undertaking work-integrated learning; alongside a control cohort without work-integrated learning experience.

THE EVOLVING NATURE OF CAREERS

The historic career practice of a stable ‘one-size-fits-all’, ‘job for life’, has been replaced with a dynamic and volatile labour market (Baruch 2004; Peiperl and Baruch 1997); an average USA employee changing employment every four years and seven months (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014). In the UK, this figure is six years; however younger employees move considerably more often, approximately every four years, with over a fifth of employees aged 18 to 34 staying in their first job for less than one year (Job Satisfaction Survey 2014). This seismic shift in recent decades, deeper entrenched by fall—out of the 2007–2008 Global Financial Crisis, places ever greater emphasis on the individual to take responsibility for their own career path (Farber 2010).

Improving employability (McArdle et al. 2007; Fugate et al. 2004) becomes of significant relevance to graduates, and their view of careers is different compared to earlier generations, although organisations may have different perceptions (Baruch 2001). At the national level governments will have wider policy guidance on national competitiveness. Additionally, the mobility of workers, both between organisations and physical or virtual locations is increasingly desirable by industry, driving the need for a flexible and adaptive workforce (Gubler 2011).

TRADITIONAL CAREER

Hughes (1937, cited in Baruch 2006, p.126) defined a career as:

The moving perspective in which persons orient themselves in reference to the social order, and of the typical sequences and concatenations of office.

The word career is based on the Latin word *carrus* meaning ‘wheeled vehicle’. It was derived in English in the Mid-16th Century from the French word *carrière* and the Italian word *carriera* and originally referred to a road or racecourse. The development of meaning overtime led a career to represent the road or course taken by an individual during their working life (Oxford Advanced Learners English Dictionary 2015).

Arthur et al. (1989, p.8) capture this in their definition of a career as: *The evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time*. Organisations historically adopted a predictable, stable and predefined structure, offering an authority based hierarchical career system (Rosenbaum 1979; Roberts 1968; Super 1957). This provided the employee with a stable career environment, as detailed in Miller and Form's (1951) Life Development Model. Accordingly, the employee would follow a linear pathway of upward mobility (Driver 1982), through hierarchical advancement and vertical career path progression (Whyte 1956), or until reaching a plateau. This progression would often occur at a single organisation until the employee reached a plateau or retirement (Wilensky 1964). In exchange for loyalty, the organisation offered job security, often through the provision of a job for life, as part of an unwritten and unspoken agreement (Gasteiger 2007). This notion was referred to by Levinson et al. (1962) as a psychological contract, and as detailed by Baruch (2001), the term was subsequently developed by Kotter (1973), Schein (1980) and Nicholson and Johns (1985). Furthermore, Rousseau (1995, p.9), described a psychological contract as:

Individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organizations.

Yet, this definition refers merely to the employee side, whereas 'contract' means there are two sides. Baruch and Hind (1999, p.299) thus define the psychological contract as:

The unspoken promise, not present in the small print of the employment contract, of what the employer gives, and what the employees give in return.

The general view since the end of 20th Century is that a major shift has taken place about the nature of the psychological contract (Conway and Briner 2005; Herriot and Pemberton 1995; Rousseau 1995). Stability, loyalty and mutual commitment were replaced with dynamism, breach of the old contract and competence based relationships (Baruch 2004, 2015).

Historically, lifetime employment and steady career advancement meant that organisations invested in developing a specific set of job-related skills in each of their employees (Gubler 2011). Developing these skills helped

an employee to cement their position at the organisation and achieve job security (Gasteiger 2007). The creation of and adherence to the notion of career anchors, facilitated the self-development of the employee (Schein 1975). However, the development of these tailored and specific skills meant that moving to a second career was considered a dream and even movement from one organisation to another was fairly rare (Arthur et al. 1989). Furthermore, people often sought employment in specific, localised areas, as close as possible to their homes and families (Andresen et al. 2012). However, the early 1990s saw globalisation, technological advancement and the evolution of societal perspectives (Gubler 2011; Sullivan and Arthur 2006). The traditional career was challenged by the contemporary career.

CONTEMPORARY CAREER

The rise of contemporary career-focused studies over the last twenty years is evident in career theory publications (Baruch et al. 2015; Lee et al. 2014). Furthermore, Gubler et al. (2014) claim that protean (Hall 1976, 2004) and boundaryless (Arthur and Rousseau 1996) are the most widely adopted contemporary career concepts. Significant differences are identified when compared to the traditional career. Most crucially, the transition to work has become increasingly unpredictable and individualised (Brooks 2009); driven by changes within society, education and the labour market (Tomlinson 2013). The advancement of technology has helped fuel globalisation of the workplace (Baruch et al. 2015). This has enabled organisations to re-locate, either nationally or internationally, to places with cheaper overhead costs or corporate tax incentives (Andresen et al. 2012). These factors are underpinned by economic changes, most recently the 2007–2008 Global Financial Crisis. As employers made record numbers of redundancies in an effort to become lean or avoid bankruptcy, many individuals found themselves without job and income (Baruch and Bozionelos 2011). Those still employed saw their wages stagnate or decline in subsequent years, compounded by less job security and the expectation of longer hours and increased job responsibility. With a contemporary career cited as offering greater work life balance, as individuals take accountability for their own careers, aligning work activities with their own interests (Direnzo et al. 2015), individuals increasingly looked to change career path or become self-employed.

Societal changes are likely to influence perceived career orientation, including: increased lifespan, a rise in dual-career couples, movement away

from the male-as-breadwinner family structure, increased labour supply and provision of care needs for elderly relatives and children (Sullivan and Baruch 2009). Another way in which individuals are taking temporary time away from the workplace is in the pursuit of education, skill development or voluntary work, with the purpose of enhancing their CV; subsequently re-entering the workplace (Van Heijden et al. 2016; Belkin 2008). This re-employability refers to either the same sector at a higher level of responsibility or more commonly, a completely different career sector. Although Belkin makes this point in reference to individuals already in the labour market, application can also be made to the increased participation in UK HE. Students are temporarily delaying their entry into the workplace with the purpose of pursuing education, skill development and work-integrated learning or voluntary work to enable subsequent entry into the labour market at an elevated position or alternative sector than would otherwise have been possible (Côté and Bynner 2008). In turn, this fuels increased participation in HE, and evidences a multi-faceted motivation for pursuing HE, expanding purely economic motivations (Tomlinson 2014).

Despite the focus on contemporary careers and the emergence of boundaryless and protean concepts, some scholars including Baruch (2006, 2014) are keen to point out that the traditional career is not dead. In fact, other scholars such as Inkson et al. (2012) go further, calling for a return to bounded, traditional careers, stating boundaryless and protean career terminology should be abandoned due to overreliance on metaphors and lack of empirical support. Rodrigues et al. (2016) take a different tack, calling on career theory researchers to look beyond the duality of traditional and contemporary careers.

BOUNDARYLESS CAREER

The conceptualisation of boundaryless career theory is attributed to DeFillippi and Arthur (1994). The construct was subsequently popularised by Arthur and Rousseau (1996) in their book *The Boundaryless Career*, with six meanings of a boundaryless career provided (p.6).

Boundaryless career theory was however not embraced by all career theory scholars. For example, Inkson (2002) cited the reliance on metaphors as a potential weakness and Pringle and Mallon (2003) called for greater clarity in the literature. Sullivan and Arthur (2006) develop the conceptualisation of boundaryless career theory by focusing on two kinds of mobility across boundaries; physical and psychological mobility.

Subsequently, a call is made for scholars to examine both types of mobility, rather than a predominant focus on physical mobility (Briscoe et al. 2006) due to its more accessible nature for empirical study.

Despite this, Inkson et al. (2012) continue to question the appropriateness of boundaryless career theory, citing neoliberal ideology as the driver for the pursuit of academic research. Baruch (2006) takes a more balanced position and is keen to point out that the traditional career is not dead. Furthermore, Baruch claims that reality often positions the individual somewhere towards the centre ground, rather than at one end or the other of the bounded versus boundaryless dichotomy. Most recently, Baruch (2015) has proposed a framework alongside Human Capital Theory, conceptualising labour markets as Ecosystems, specifically in relation to the understanding and managing of careers. Viewing careers and labour markets as ecosystems was offered as an overarching theoretical lens to reconcile the apparent disconnect between the co-existence of traditional and boundaryless careers (Baruch 2015).

PROTEAN CAREER

The protean career theory was offered by Hall (1976, 1996 and 2004) and draws on the motive of an individual to follow a particular career path; driven by values-driven and self-directed career moves. Scholars including Gubler et al. (2014) are keen to distinguish between theory, orientation and path when discussing a protean career. Gubler et al. (2014) cite the work of Hall (2004) and Drenzo and Greenhaus (2011) to propose that a protean career orientation is where an individual first defines their own concept of a successful career and subsequently looks to actively achieve this success through their actions. Furthermore, as the changing nature of careers evolves, a need arises for the individual to adapt to this changing environment (Hall 2004). Thus a protean career path defines the career direction of an individual which incorporates aspects of the protean career concept.

As part of an extensive literature review, Gubler et al. (2014) point out that the majority of studies have addressed protean career orientation. They go on to state that there has been some focus on protean career path, but little focus on protean career theory, beyond its use as an introduction to studies on protean career orientation. As a means of strengthening protean-career literature, Gubler et al. (2014) call for scholars to address the lack of existing empirical analysis. This call to advance career-theory understanding is further supported by Lee et al. (2014) and most recently Baruch et al. (2015).

Briscoe and Hall (2006) developed and validated a measure of boundaryless and protean career orientation. This drew on two scales of boundaryless career attitudes; boundaryless mind set and organisational mobility preference and two scales of protean career attitudes; self-directed career management and values-driven predispositions. These self-reporting scales enable the researcher to build a career profile of the respondent, but rather than positioning the respondent within a contemporary or traditional dichotomy, a multiplicity of options are available, seeking to reflect the complexity of career attitudes. In parallel, a unidimensional measure of boundaryless and protean career orientation was developed and validated (Herrmann et al. 2015; Baruch 2014). Consisting of seven items, this measure was validated via global samples. This sought to provide a *rigorous, practical and concise measure* for the use of *future academic scholars, HR managers, and consultants* (Baruch 2014, p.1702).

MBA AND SPECIALIST MASTERS INSIGHTS

Much of the empirical career-orientation literature has focused on MBA students, specifically in the USA (Briscoe and Finkelstein 2009; Briscoe et al. 2006; Cocchiara et al. 2010) and UK (Baruch and Leeming 2001). This focus seems logical given the MBA is the closest example of a qualification to manage and therefore employees with an MBA or MSc in Management qualification are expected to hold significant influence and power in the labour market (Baruch et al. 2005; Baruch and Peiperl 2000). Both MBA and specialist MSc participants indicate that their career orientation is contemporary, incorporating both boundaryless and protean orientations. They gain skills and qualifications sought by employers. These studies have primarily adopted a quantitative data-collection approach drawing on self-reporting survey responses. Because there are similarities in the type of knowledge and skills gained between undergraduates in business management studies and MBA/MSc in management studies, we expect graduates of first degree in business and management to benefit in a similar manner. Yet, it is unclear how HE helps those who study other subjects, from humanities through art and to science.

GRADUATE CAREER ORIENTATION

The western education system is driven and informed by society, reflective of middle class values (Tomlinson 2013). On the one hand, this can be viewed as a bounded system, whereby the student progresses in a

hierarchical manner, under the guidance of a tutor. On the other hand, a non-bounded system is increasingly evident. There is a diversification of offering by HE, seeking to cater for a larger coverage of student interest. Students have growing freedom to choose the subjects that they study, especially at university, in terms of the degree course and the individual modules. HE is furthermore informed by the collaborative focus of contemporary careers (Tams and Arthur 2011). For example, many university courses have compulsory collaborative working modules. A group of students is temporarily formed for the purpose of modular assessment whereby the individual combined efforts are reflected in the assessment mark achieved by all members of the group.

After graduation, graduates do not simply face a bounded versus boundaryless career choice. For example, a graduate may opt for a boundaryless career, driven by a change of interest during the HE studies. This can be voluntary work, internships, placements, temporary work to explore options, to name a few. Gap year and overseas work experience are also on the wish list (Brooks 2009). Alternatively, a student may wish to adopt a bounded career, but, on finding no job opportunities in their desired field, be forced to pursue a boundaryless career. Employers too are tailoring their graduate schemes to appeal to both bounded and boundaryless orientations. Whilst the graduate scheme is often bounded within an organisation, a rotational element, whereby a graduate may spend six months to a year in a role before moving to a different area of the same organisation, offers a boundaryless career across different business areas.

Boundaryless career orientation and protean career orientation are thus becoming increasingly prevalent in a globalised, technologically advanced, knowledge-based economy. The undergraduate student is likely to be technologically savvy, or at least more technologically aware than the previous generation, having grown up surrounded by technology in both a learning and recreational capacity (Kilber et al. 2014; Cekada 2012). Furthermore, globalisation has seen students temporarily re-locating to pursue their undergraduate studies, either from abroad or from within the UK. This willingness to mobilise in pursuit of improving one's-self is more common than in previous generations; as is the desire to integrate with people from a variety of ethnic groups and nationalities (Tomlinson 2013). In addition, the increasing levels of study-related-debt are driving graduates to seek a return on their educational investment (Esson et al. 2013). This has seen graduates re-locate to cities with an abundance of graduate employment opportunities, for example London, or to move abroad.

What is still relatively unknown is how boundaryless and protean career constructs are perceived by future graduates? We have evidenced movement in the labour market from traditional to more contemporary careers, but does this movement translate to those about to enter the labour market? How is the perception of the undergraduate student informed and what factors create a graduate identity? A study by Morrison (2014), based on a small qualitative sample of education undergraduate students in Wales, found evidence to support boundaryless and protean career orientation. However, a study adopting a mixed-methods approach is of crucial importance (Baruch et al. 2015). Additional opportunities to compare and contrast such studies across UK universities also exist. Further findings are provided by Futuretrack, a longitudinal study exploring the relationship between higher education, employment and career planning of students who applied through UCAS in 2005/2006. Futuretrack Stage Four (2012) indicates that graduates in 2009 entered a tough labour market compared to previous graduates, with high levels of graduate unemployment or employment in non-graduate roles. This may be indicative of enforced boundaryless careers, where a lack of jobs in a particular sector forces those graduates to take employment in alternative sectors. Furthermore, degree subject, ethnic background and parental education were all significantly linked to employment outcomes, evidencing the need to further explore these areas. However, the evolving nature of HE and the graduate labour market since 2009, when these students entered, highlights the need to look at current undergraduate students in 2016.

Our chapter now evidences directions for future research, including suggested methods for exploring employability.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As previously discussed, the UK Government measure of perceived employability is inadequate. Alternatively, career scholars may opt to use a four-item concise measure of employability, developed and validated by Rothwell and Arnold (2007) and subsequently used in studies by Cuyper et al. (2008) and Cuyper and Witte (2011). Furthermore, an alternative instrumental approach is offered by Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006), through their development and validation of a competence-based, multidimensional and operationalisation measurement of factors that lead to employability. Research into contemporary careers of graduates,

especially in the early stage when, as students they develop expectations of their future anticipated employment and career orientation, such as boundaryless and protean career orientations is lacking. Existing research has explored MBA and specialist MSc students, but has not yet addressed undergraduate students, specifically those outside the area of management degree courses (Lee et al. 2014; Baruch et al. 2005). In line with a paucity of existing literature in this area, it is less clear how the micro-level target population, the students; perceive their career orientation towards and following their graduation.

A possible avenue of research is to build upon the foundations of working identity (Ibarra 2003) and emergent identity (Holmes 2013, 2015) to gain an informed understanding of the construction of such identity and subsequently the perception of career orientation of undergraduate students. This in turn could satisfy a call by Tomlinson (2013) for scholars of career theory to explore the role of diversity issues. Furthermore, the impacts of work-integrated learning need to be better understood (Edwards 2014; Wilton 2014).

This is an area of significant importance given the Wilson Review (2012) and the government drive for all undergraduate students to have the opportunity to undertake work-integrated learning. Thus, academics including Clark and Zukas (2016) and Wilton (2012) have called for longitudinal studies, looking at students before and after undertaking work-integrated learning; alongside a control cohort without such experience.

Management, education and sociological research has heavily focused on students from management, healthcare and engineering disciplines, due to ease of access and the more traditional career progression from these subject areas (Gupta et al. 2014; Sheepway et al. 2014). Thus cross-faculty coverage of participants offers a further contribution, seeking to gain a greater depth of understanding, using subject area as a moderator, and challenging any blanket assumptions currently held. Our chapter also calls for a mixed-methods approach (Johnson et al. 2007; Creswell 2003): A quantitative approach, to gain understanding of the student career orientation and subsequently a qualitative approach to explore these findings and validate them through tailored engagement with the students. A longitudinal element to the quantitative aspect of the data collection is essential in adding value to the career theory literature, as previously called for by Edwards (2014) and Wilton (2014).

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has taken early steps along the pathway of exploring the student perception of graduate employability. The neo-liberalisation of HE has been explored, characterised by increased participation, diversity, employability and work-integrated learning. Subsequently, the evolving nature of careers was detailed, providing coverage of traditional and contemporary careers; with particular focus on boundaryless and protean career constructs. Insights from MBA and MSc in Management students were provided along with an overview of graduate career orientations. Most importantly, our chapter has set out clear directions for future research, specifically understanding the construction of graduate emergent identity and subsequent career perceptions of undergraduate students at universities, using the case of the UK HE as an example. Evidence is also provided, calling for studies adopting a mixed-methods approach, incorporating a longitudinal element, and providing cross-faculty coverage.

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Employability and Depth Psychology

Phil McCash

INTRODUCTION

It is sometimes argued that employability is difficult or even impossible to define. Tymon (2013: 842), for example, states that definitions of employability are problematic and suffer from ‘a lack of coherence’. Chertkovskaya et al. (2013: 707) go further and argue that employability is ‘empty of any substantive meaning’. Whilst there are some merits to these positions, I would like to suggest, in contrast, that employability is rather too full of meaning; indeed, it can hardly bear the weight of the emotional and rhetorical investments made in it. This position is informed by the use of selected key concepts from depth psychology. Through this, I develop critical and creative responses to questions such as: What are the grand narratives of employability? How might they be de-centred and de-potentiated? What action can be taken as a result? Linked to this, practical examples are provided and actions identified. Although the context identified is drawn from higher education, the implications extend to all educational, community and workplace contexts.

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DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY

Depth psychology is an umbrella term used to encompass a range of perspectives that allow for a dynamic approach to psychology and at least the possibility of its unconscious extent. Since, in strict usage, the term psychoanalysis refers purely to the Freudian tradition, the phrase depth psychology (or sometimes depth *psychologies*) is used inclusively to represent a wider range of views including Jungian, Adlerian, Lacanian, Kleinian and so on. A full treatment of depth psychology is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter. Jungian and post-Jungian perspectives on *projection* and *introjection* have therefore been selected in order to provide a manageable focus (Jung 1971: 452–458; von Franz 1978; Samuels 1993).

In Jungian terms, the overall *projective-introjective system* includes processes of projection and introjection in their passive and active forms. The passive form is almost entirely automatic and unconscious whereas the active form is largely voluntary and deliberate. Passive projection can be defined as the involuntary *expulsion* of unacceptable contents into another person or thing. Passive introjection can be defined as the involuntary *assimilation* of contents from another person or thing. The range of carriers and sources for the projective-introjective system is very wide indeed and includes all forms of phenomena including: family, individuals, types or groups of people, images, texts, organisations, ideas, causes, practices, buildings or landscapes. Both positive and negative values can be introjected and projected; for example, positive but unacceptable aspects of the self may be projected into others. A key indicator often lies in the presence of strong affective responses and exaggerating, idealising or demonising language that does not quite seem to fit or appears disproportionate to the topic under discussion.

A further key dimension is that the projective-introjective system refers to phenomena taking place *outside* the consulting room as well as within it. (The term transference is often used to refer to projection-introjection within therapy and will not directly be the focus of this chapter). Any conclusions drawn about the projective-introjective system must of necessity be highly tentative and this is particularly the case in relation to phenomena outside the therapeutic relationship. The main aspect in terms of understanding employability is that the projective-introjective system is a *social phenomenon* of relevance to all forms of social life including work, employment and career development. An assertive workplace manager, for example, may provide a *hook* for a worker's introjected critical parent. This

may result in the worker projecting the critical parent into the manager and in turn lead to *counter-projective* and *counter-introjective* behaviour from the latter. A vicious circle of projection and introjection can ensue with negative consequences for the individuals concerned and the wider organisation.

The passive forms of projection and introjection may be *withdrawn* via a critical and reflective process of *seeing through*. This entails differentiating, self-recollecting, evaluating and integrating the material. It is important to point out here that projection and introjection are largely normal phenomena i.e. it is neither possible nor desirable to see through all aspects of one's projective-introjective system. Nonetheless, seeing through, even partly, leads to more *active* and deliberate forms of projection and introjection. Active projection in relation to employability, for example, could entail differentiating competing voices, developing a distinctive point of view and taking action in relation to it. Here, the political and cultural possibilities of seeing through become apparent. It can be seen as the cutting edge of *social and organisational transformation* allowing for fuller and richer relationships between individuals and wider opportunities for organisational change.

LINKING WITH EMPLOYABILITY

I will now make some introductory remarks in relation to the employability literature before going on to engage in a more systematic analysis of employability claims. In an academic article, Taylor (2013: 852) argues 'there are two insidiously dangerous and under-acknowledged consequences of the employability mentality – managerialism and academic self-hatred'. He states that 'the choice between the employability agenda or the death of universities actually means the death of universities through the employability agenda' (ibid.: 859). He suggests that the death of the universities will be accomplished by 'vandalising hordes' within the 'Ivory Tower' consisting of "employability-fixated 'customers' waving their £9,000 cheques, apparatchiks eager to 'facilitate' satisfactory 'learning outcomes', and academics too pusillanimous to insist upon the distinction between the reality of education and the managerialist trappings of training" (ibid.: 859–860). Employability is given a highly negative, even demonic, quality in these quotations and this raises the suspicion that it is being asked to carry more than it can bear. Taylor also uses oppressive and marginalising language in relation

to certain student and staff groups. The unacceptable other is perhaps being projected into these groups.

A university website declares that ‘The University of Northampton is England’s No 1 University for Employability’ (University of Northampton 2012: 1). Another states that ‘For over 20 years Aston has consistently featured in the top 30 UK Universities for graduate employability’ (University of Aston 2016: 1). The heightened language used in these extracts suggests that employability is being somewhat idealised. Such bold declarations of employability success may have negative consequences for students within those institutions and beyond.

An academic trade union invites its members to oppose ‘greater marketization of higher education, where students will be treated simply as consumers and teaching will become nothing more than a hollow careers service’ (University and College Union 2016: 1). Note here the exaggerated language of ‘nothing more’ and simplistic disdain for the valuable work of career and employability professionals.

A lobby group (CBI 2011: 13) defines employability as consisting of ‘positive attitude, self-management, team working, business and customer awareness, problem solving, communication, numeracy and information technology’. It asserts brightly that ‘a positive attitude is the key foundation of employability....a readiness to take part, openness to new activities and ideas, and a desire to achieve results’ (ibid.). In stark relief, an editorial in a student magazine criticises the university’s “dubious corporate links and a constant ‘career’ focus” in favour of ‘education [that] serves its own purpose’ and ‘learning for the sake of learning’ (The Boar 2011: 6). In both cases, highly idealising language is used to define employability and the role of education respectively.

The CBI statement uses positive language to close off and, in effect, pre-cook the debate about what kinds of knowledge might be needed in working life. The student magazine editorial uncritically relies on an idealised vision of pure and uncontaminated education that may serve to perpetuate dubious and pernicious distinctions between, for example, the academy and ‘real’ life, theory and practice, the ivory tower and school of hard knocks etc. Both extracts might limit the reader’s ability to imagine new ways of designing work and education.

It is also useful to consider the wider topic of graduate employability in relation to the projective-introjective system. In a sense, the term itself carries a certain glamour or *mana* (Binder et al. 2016). One has only to

replace the qualifier 'graduate' with 'college leaver' or 'school leaver' to realise that considerable prestige accrues to the topic of graduate employability. It appears, for example, as a regular news item in the mainstream national press. As a critical first step, it may be necessary to acknowledge the gravitational pull of this topic. Many people, including myself, have investments and interests in this subject and the acknowledgement of personal experiences and investments can enable a more reflexive stance to be taken.

It is also worth identifying who is included and excluded in the graduate employability discourse. For example, postgraduates, people without a degree and undergraduates pursuing alternative identities are marginalised. To prioritise graduate employment at the expense of any other group in society is simply to pit one group of potentially vulnerable people against another. This may serve to constrain identity development and cement rather than reduce social divisions and inequality.

For researchers, a narrow concentration on graduate employability may mean that important contributions to the employability literature are neglected. Examples of the latter can be found in the seminal debates over liberal, conservative and radical visions of career education in schools that took place from the mid-1970s onwards in the UK, Canada and elsewhere (K. Roberts 1977; Daws 1977; Roberts 1980; Simon et al. 1991; Harris 1999: 58–62). In many respects, the current graduate employability literature has yet to catch up with this scholarship. For instance, in response to the Canadian government's emphasis on employability, Simon et al. (1991) developed an impressive critical pedagogical curriculum for work-related learning in schools that is rarely cited in the graduate employability literature.

It is also important to consider the projective-introjective system in relation to one's own experience and context. Reflecting on my own experience of change and self-discovery, for example, I can remember sometimes behaving in careerist fashion and also learning to reject this in favour of more holistic approaches. More widely, it is not unusual to hear staff espousing employability behaviours for others that they sometimes fail to live up to. Here, idealised recommendations for others provide a vehicle for projections and un-lived life. In relation to students, many come to university carrying powerful introjected beliefs from their immediate family and community background that may serve to limit employability development. In all these examples, employability beliefs and subsequent

behaviours may impact on the individual concerned and the *lives of others* in disadvantaging or oppressive ways.

SUMMARY

In a nutshell, I have argued that employability provides vehicles for projections and introjections of many kinds. These may be *withdrawn* through a critical and reflective process of *seeing through* (involving differentiation, self-recollection, evaluation and integration). Through this, what might be seen as ‘natural’, ‘obvious’ or ‘normal’ conceptions of employability can be *questioned* in order to *transform* the organisation of work and education. These ideas have particular value in relation to the development of an employability-related praxis.

Having identified the projective-introjective system and illustrated its application in relation to employability, I am now going to attempt to engage in a form of seeing through by provisionally *differentiating* selected employability ideas. Here, I have been influenced by approaches that attempt to locate employability claims within the transdisciplinary field of career studies (Holmes 2013: 548–549, 2015: 223–224; Tomlinson 2012: 422; McCash 2006, 2008, 2011). A selection of claims will be summarised in a series of tables and *some* of these fleshed out in more detail by way of illustration. Following this, some critical comments will be made and relevant examples of practice provided.

I propose that there are at least four *types* of claim relevant to employability:

1. **Accounts**
2. **Success formulas**
3. **Typologies**
4. **Metaphors**

It is important to stress that this is not a definitive treatment of each area. Several contributions have not been included for reasons of space and time and it is acknowledged there is a degree of overlap between them. In addition, it is recognised that there are many types of claim potentially relevant to employability and this process of surfacing concepts could be considerably extended to the multiple claims relevant to information technology, foreign languages, reflection, enterprise, team-working, communication, and leadership (see Atkins 1999: 269).

1/ Accounts

A distinctive feature of these employability claims is that they offer *accounts* of employability behaviour. They seek to account for the employability-related behaviour, roles and occupations of individuals within society. This is a multi-disciplinary area and Table 7.1 contains examples from three disciplines: Becker (1993) draws from labour market economics; K. Roberts (1977, 2009), Hodgkinson (2009) and Law (1981, 2009) from sociology; and Krumboltz (1979) and Dawis (1994) from psychology.

Becker (1993) argues that individuals make a series of investment decisions in relation to education, training and other employability-related activities and receive a return on those investments through the labour market in the form of earnings. Here, the individual is seen as a kind of self-investor, a one-person career capitalist with behaviour geared towards anticipated returns. Roberts (1977, 2009) offers an opportunity structure theory of career development with an explicit focus on socio-economic class. He argues that employability is primarily conditioned by socio-economic class rather than personality or individual initiative. This provides an interesting contrast to human capital theory as it places less emphasis on individual accomplishments or failings and more on the prevailing socio-economic conditions. Roberts sees a key role for the state in relation to employability through reducing socio-economic inequalities and supporting job creation. Although Roberts does not focus on higher education in detail, it is relevant that Burke (2016) has recently argued that social class continues to exert a powerful influence on graduate career trajectories.

Law (1981, 2009) argues for a community interaction approach to employability. He states that employment is linked to a range of recursive community influences.

Table 7.1 Accounts of employability behaviour

<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Accounts</i>
Becker (1993)	Human capital
K. Roberts (1977, 2009)	Opportunity structure
Law (1981, 2009)	Community interaction
Dawis (1994)	Theory of work adjustment
Hodgkinson and associates (1996, 1997, 2009)	Careership
Krumboltz and associates (1979, 1996)	Social learning

The way in which who-does-what in society is decided is the product of the plurality of interpersonal transactions conducted in local settings, and on the basis of interaction within and between groups of which the individual is a member (Law 1981: 145).

Law's work is distinctive in drawing attention to the mixed positive and negative nature of community influences and the *social* nature of identity. His work originally focused on the experience of young people and, in this respect, it is relevant that Holmes (2013) has sought to develop an explicitly interactionist account of graduate employability.

Krumboltz (1979) and Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996) argue for a social learning approach to career development. A distinctive feature of their approach is that employability is *learnt* through a succession of experiences leading to employment-related world-view and self-observation generalisations and related behavioural outcomes. This perspective emphasises that *employability learning* takes place before university, during university and in the workplace. In relation to higher education, it is pertinent that Binder et al. (2016) have recently explored how students at so-called elite universities *learn* to define and desire prestigious jobs.

Comment

Employability is such a rich area for projection and introjection that it can lead to a kind of possession by the grand narratives whereby employability becomes almost wholly synonymous with them. This can be seen in relation to the human capital grand narrative (Becker 1993) that explicitly or tacitly underpins most employability initiatives and policies. Fitzsimons (1999: 1), for example, identifies it as 'the most influential economic theory of Western education, setting the framework of government policies since the early 1960's'. This has led to the creation of closed systems within which alternative claims struggle to find a voice. In relation to organisations, the use of single employability theories to design programmes or other interventions provides a case in point. Initiatives such as these risk dictating employability to participants and impeding the development of alternative points of view. Here, I am reminded of Marie-Louise von Franz's (1978: 16) observation that projection can lead to a form of psychological violence arising from our concern to improve the other. One solution is to offer participants access to a *wider range* of perspectives. For example, the Association of Higher Education Career Services (2014) has developed an undergraduate

employability module for use in the Irish higher education context. It avoids a didactic approach by including a range of ideas in its curriculum including community interaction and work adjustment theories.

2/ Success Formulas

A key feature of these employability claims is that assertions are made about how to obtain *future* employment success. The CBI (2011) definition of employability discussed earlier provides an example as do the so-called self-help texts found in high street bookstores. Success formulas are also represented in a considerable academic literature that is the focus of Table 7.2. All the authors listed propose a contrasting set of success formulas for readers to engage in. This is another multi-disciplinary area: DeFillippi and Arthur (1996), Ibarra (2002) and King (2004) are based

Table 7.2 Success formulas for employability

<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Success formulas</i>				
Law and Watts (1977)	Self-awareness	Opportunity awareness	Decision learning	Transition learning	
DeFillippi and Arthur (1996)	Knowing why	Knowing how	Knowing whom		
Mitchell et al. (1999)	Curiosity	Persistence	Flexibility	Optimism	Risk taking
Ibarra (2002)	Crafting experiments	Shifting connections	Making sense		
King (2004)	Positioning	Influencing	Boundary managing		
Kuijpers and Scheerens (2006)	Career reflection	Work exploration	Career control	Self-presentation	
Haché et al. (2006)	Personal management	Life and work exploration	Life/work building		
Pool and Sewell (2007)	Career development learning	Experience	Subject knowledge	Generic skills	Emotional intelligence
Kumar (2007)	Self	Opportunity	Aspirations	Results	
Savickas (2013)	Concern	Control	Curiosity	Confidence	

in organisational studies; Law and Watts (1977) and Haché et al. (2006) in educational studies; and Mitchell et al. (1999) and Savickas (2013) in vocational psychology.

King (2004) argues that people should use three types of career self-managing behaviour: positioning, influencing and boundary managing. In her terms, positioning involves making a strategic choice of mobility opportunity through initiation of job moves or acceptance of changes made by another party and engaging in strategic investment in human capital by participating in training or education. It entails active network development through having relationships with influential people and making innovative changes in own job content. Influencing involves self-promoting through manipulating how job performance is perceived and ingratiating by making oneself more attractive to others. It entails upwardly influencing through increasing gatekeepers' understanding of one's desired outcomes. Boundary managing involves maintaining boundaries by negotiating with boundary-keepers such as line manager or spouse; and navigating the transition between work and non-work roles by, for example, reading the business press over breakfast or creating a physically distinct workspace at home where family members are not welcome.

Law and Watts (1977) suggest that individuals should develop learning in four areas: self-awareness; opportunity awareness, decision-making and transition learning. Self-awareness consists of knowledge relating to likes, dislikes, strengths and weaknesses. Opportunity awareness relates to knowledge of job, education and training options. Decision-making involves learning about how to make choices. Transition is connected with learning about job and course application process, self-presentation and networking.

Pool and Sewell (2007) argue that there are five components of employability identified as: career development learning; experience; degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills; a list of 15 generic skills and emotional intelligence. They suggest that reflection and evaluation in relation to these elements will result in increased self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem and consequently employability.

Comment

A possible advantage of differentiating the literature in this way lies in making the various dimensions of employability *more explicit*. For instance, there are 10 distinct success formulas in Table 7.2. Moreover, each author identifies between three and five dimensions of success so that in total 38 individual behaviours are named. In a sense, these contributions could

help readers become more explicit about their introjected or tacit success formulas. Suitably mediated, they could be used to make these topics discussable as a topic within organisational career education and management programmes. This could help individuals gain a critical purchase on employability.

Second, encountering the literature in this way may enable *reflexive* consideration of one's own thoughts and feelings in relation to employability claims and possible reasons for this. It was argued earlier that popular ideas can become a *hook* for our projections. Strong feelings of acceptance or rejection in relation to employability claims may provide an indication of something that is indigestible within one's psychic constitution. For example, when I first read King's (2004) ideas, I felt slightly queasy in relation to her emphasis on influencing behaviours such as ingratiation and self-promotion. This reaction was valuable because it helped me acknowledge that there is something in her approach that I was unwilling to recognise in myself that manifested itself in a physical reaction. I had perhaps a rarefied view of myself as a rather autonomous and independent individual and was reluctant to acknowledge the multiple ways in which I am reliant upon the good opinion of others. The implications of this for the design of organisational career education and management programmes are significant. It suggests that the role of the programme leader lies not in the advocacy of *favourite* or *pet* ideas but in enabling individuals to encounter a range of approaches, some of which may be *problematic* or *disagreeable* to participants. Standage and Ord (2016), for example, have developed a cross-faculty employability module at the University of Essex. It enables participants to understand contrasting success formulas such as planned happenstance and self-opportunity matching.

A third and related aspect is that the projective-introjective system can lead to *assigning* one's good qualities to others. Recognition of this can help in *seeing through* the employability claims that surround us. These can be heard in graduation ceremonies and workplace conversations and, as has been indicated, encountered in self-help books and academic publications (Table 7.2). Whilst it is possible that a particular author has divined the secret of career success, a depth psychological approach enables a sceptical stance to be adopted. Assigning successful employability management to others may serve a temporary purpose but the self-recollecting of one's own abilities can be more helpful in developing one's own distinctive approach. This suggests a need for the gathering in of employability success claims. For example, I have developed a career module that allows

individuals to compare selected success formulas and develop their own distinctive stance (McCash 2011).

3/ *Typologies*

A distinguishing feature of these claims lies in the *classification* of individuals into contrasting employability types (see Table 7.3). Like the other claims identified above, this is also a multi-disciplinary area: Sturges (1999), Baruch (2004: 85–6), Brown and Hesketh (2004), and Clarke (2009) in organisational studies; O'Regan (2010) and Tomlinson (2007) in education; Willis (1977) in cultural studies; and Bimrose et al. (2006) in career guidance studies. In methodological terms, these contributions are also highly diverse with some using classifications developed by participants (Willis 1977) and others using ideal-type systems (Tomlinson 2007). Similarly, the scope and depth of the typologies vary enormously ranging from brief sketches (Baruch 2004: 85–6) to extensive empirical studies (Bimrose et al. 2006; Elias and Purcell 2013).

Tomlinson (2007) proposes an ideal-type model of student orientations to work, careers and employability. The model consists of four types: careerists who have a strong work ethic and are highly flexible; ritualists who are more passive and less ambitious; retreatists who abandon

Table 7.3 Typological approaches to employability

<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Typologies</i>			
Willis (1977)	Lads	Ear'oles		
Sturges (1999)	Climbers	Experts	Influencers	Self-realizers
Baruch (2004: 85–6)	Ostriches	Lions	Bulls	Eagles
Brown and Hesketh (2004)	Players	Purists		
Bimrose et al. (2006)	Evaluators	Aspirers	Strategists	Opportunists
Tomlinson (2007)	Rebels	Retreatists	Ritualists	Careerists
Clarke (2009)	Plodders	Pragmatists	Visionaries	Opportunists
O'Regan (2010)	Instrumentalists	Hesitators	Introspectives	Learners
Brown et al. (2011: 80–81)	Developers	Demonstrators	Drones	
Elias and Purcell (2013)	Experts	Orchestrators	Communicators	Non-graduates

labour-market goals; and rebels who actively abandon labour-market goals. The rebels remained a hypothetical category in his study; however, evidence of students actively rejecting certain labour market goals may be seen in protests against the presence of certain employers on university campuses such as British Aerospace, the Army and Monsanto; or through graduates engaging in alternative ways of working such as cooperatives.

Brown and Hesketh (2004) suggest that students can be classified into two types: purists and players. It is argued that players see employability as the playing of a game, or the acting of a theatrical role. This involves the construction of story lines that send messages about one's suitability for employment. In contrast, purists are defined as meritocrats who believe that the job market operates in a fair and effective way. For them, employability is a technical puzzle involving finding the right fit or match between self and opportunity.

Comment

In relation to the typologies in Table 7.3, each author identifies between two and four subtypes. In total, there are 10 distinct typologies containing 35 subtypes and there are of course many more in the wider literature. As discussed earlier, these contributions could help readers become more *explicit* about their own introjected or tacit typologies. Within an educational or workplace CPD context, this could lead to the identification and evaluation of deeply-embedded cultural stereotypes. Individuals could be invited to consider these in relation to their own employability (and that of others) and, through this, discuss the inevitably *social* and *relational* nature of employability. Second, a significant problem with simplistic use of typologies is that application within organisations can lead to the idealisation and demonisation of certain types. For example, it can lead to organisations seeking to turn individuals into players and careerists or indeed reject being plodders or rebels (see Table 7.3). Here, it is the organisation that ends up taking over or colonising the individual's decision-making leading to a mild form of authoritarianism. In addition, it can result in stereotyping and/or interventions focused solely on one particular type. In this sense, I am seeing the typologies as potential *hooks* for an organisation's hunger to achieve certain goals. It can also lead to a kind of vicarious employability where, for example, an individual espouses strongly careerist views but does not practice them. One possible response may lie in enabling individuals to directly encounter and adjudicate contrasting typological claims. Frigerio (2014), for example, has developed

a career module for postgraduates at the University of Warwick. The syllabus includes identification and analysis of different employability types and workplace identities.

4/ *Metaphors*

A key feature of these claims is the use of a prominent *image* or *symbol* in relation to employability (see Table 7.4). For example, a machine metaphor is indicated by McKenna's (2008: 15) suggestion that 'your mind is like a computer...it's only as effective as the software it's running'.

D'Allesandro (2008) claims to have identified ten rules for engaging in what he terms career warfare and building success on the business battlefield. Here, employability is viewed as a *competition* and this is what is perhaps suggested by the terms rat race, fast track, high flyer, career ladder, war for talent and boardroom battle. Competition can be seen in media attacks on particular occupational groups such as doctors, bankers, journalists, politicians, teachers, social workers or estate agents. It is also manifest in the modern day workplace with its paraphernalia of talent wars, targets, teams, bonuses, skills, performance coaching, appraisals and images of getting ahead, getting on and flying high.

Holland (1997) argues that people search for work environments that provide a *match* for their personality type. He developed a six-fold classification of both work environments and personality types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional. He designed a coloured hexagon as a method of depicting these types with an accompanying questionnaire and database. Holland's theory grew out of his early interests in music and art and later experiences in military and educational settings. As an army private during the Second World War, he worked as a classification interviewer where he became interested in vocational

Table 7.4 Employability metaphors

<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Metaphors</i>
Super (1980, 1992)	Cycles
Cochran (1990)	Drama
Holland (1997)	Matching
McKenna (2008)	Machine
D'Allesandro (2008)	Competition
Inkson and Elkin (2008)	Landscape with travellers

typologies. Holland asserts ‘a personal preference for symmetry’ and a ‘need for pragmatism’ (1997: 5–7).

Comment

D’Allesandro’s (2008) competition metaphor is one of the most widespread conceptions of employability. Along with human capital, it is another of the grand employability narratives. For some, employability cannot possibly mean *anything other* than competing against others to get the best job, and this is reinforced by some university and recruiter marketing messages (Birchall 2015). Placing contrasting employability metaphors alongside each other may perhaps provide a first step in developing a critical awareness about this. Second, knowledge of the projective-introjective system might enable one to ask critical questions concerning the production of employability texts. What does it do for the author? What purpose might it serve? The approach developed by Holland (1997) referred to above, for example, is plausible, rational and elegant. It does, however, raise the question of who could possibly live in such an ordered way? Is this perhaps more of an espoused theory rather than a lived theory? Here, in terms of projection, one might speculate that theory-formation is providing a place for a highly idealised and ordered approach to employability management that would otherwise find difficulty in locating a home.

In terms of creative responses, it may be helpful to enable individuals to engage with *contrasting metaphors* in order to view employability from different angles. Mignot (2016), for example, has developed a core module on the sociology of work and career as part of a graduate employability pathway within an undergraduate degree in sociology at Nottingham Trent University. It entails the use of multiple career metaphors to help participants interpret their experiences of work and career.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In addition to the human capital and competition employability grand narratives identified above, one might include the widely available lists of so-called generic employability skills (e.g. Pool and Sewell 2007; CBI 2011). It can be quite difficult to wean people off the idea that employability *is only* about investment, labour market returns, skills audits and beating the competition. A step forward in *seeing through* would be for organisations to relinquish standing behind the grand employability narratives and stand slightly to the side of them. The intention behind taking

such an explicitly pedagogical stance would be to help other students and workers do likewise. It is because the grand narratives are the *least malleable* versions of employability that there is particular value in helping individuals see through as a bridge to increased participation in working life.

This method of reading employability indicates four key steps towards a critical employability approach. The first involves *evaluating contrasting employability claims* in relation to our own experiences, assessing the production of such texts and considering the experiences of others. Having made these critical moves, implications and applications may then be considered. The second step entails using a *meta-theoretical framework* (see Tables 6–6.4) in handling, classifying and depotentiating competing claims about employability. One benefit of this process is to lay bare or expose what are sometimes tacit assumptions and thereby create the pedagogical space for alternative content. Third, there is a need for tailored professional training, support and CPD opportunities for all students and workers. This should focus on developing the *wider knowledge* identified in the framework above and *supporting* individuals in discussing and exploring their beliefs and feelings, the behaviour of others and indeed the effect of their own behaviour on others. Fourth, a genuinely transformative approach demands that the *curriculum* in all forms of learning organisation cannot be a vehicle for the transmission of uncomplicated truths. It must be a place where participants can re-consider what appears to be ‘normal’, ‘natural’ or ‘obvious’ in relation to working life.

EPILOGUE

Behind the entrenched positions of the employability debate, opportunities for transformative personal and collective learning linger at the edge of consciousness like the scraps of a half-forgotten dream. They offer an integration of false splits between pure and applied, theory and practice, skills and knowledge, learning objectives and competences. They might enable us to re-imagine the curriculum in schools, colleges, universities and the workplace and, through this, re-make the world.

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Graduate's Learning Across Educational and Professional Settings: Outlining an Approach

Mariana Gaio Alves

INTRODUCTION

Given the significant interest that the employability of graduates has generated amongst policy-makers and within the media, a field of research focusing on these issues has been developing in different countries. Within this field, analysing the professional trajectories of graduates has been the leading aim of research, predominantly considering employability as getting (or not getting) a job and evaluating the match (or mismatch) between job and education. Meanwhile, other issues such as the learning involved in the transition from higher education into the world of work have been given much less attention.

Therefore, the aim of the chapter is to outline an approach that enables a deeper understanding of professional learning by drawing both on theoretical and empirical contributions. The intention is to reveal dynamics, dimensions and challenges involved in the graduates' professional

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learning, conceptualising it as a process that involves educational settings, work organisations, everyday learning and the interaction between them along (individual and collective) timelines. As such, this chapter intends to contribute to the debates around employability through an understanding of it as a professional learning process aimed at enabling graduates to cope with their professional activities.

The chapter is based on the assumption that becoming a professional is a process characterised by specific features in the so-called learning and knowledge societies in which we live today. Thus, researching professional learning in contemporary societies benefits (re)thinking about the organisation of educational practices within formal academic settings, as well as the ways in which those relate to the individuals' learning dynamics in working contexts and in everyday life.

INITIAL REMARKS: SETTING THE SCENE

In the last decades, the employability of graduates has generated a significant interest amongst policy-makers, as well as within the media and society in general. Employability has become an important criterion for the evaluation of the educational system (including higher education) both in the formal processes of evaluating institutions and courses conducted by national or international bodies and within the current social judgments about the quality of education (Boden and Nedeva 2010; Støren and Aamodt 2010).

The political and public awareness about employability coexists with the development of a field of research in different countries that focuses on various issues, problems and questions (Marques and Alves 2010). Within this field, analysing the professional trajectories of graduates has been the main aim of research on transitions into the world of work. This has further considered unemployment experiences, work conditions, the adequacy of individuals' educational credentials regarding their professional activities, and so on. This conveys the idea that research in this field has been centred mainly on employability, understood as getting (or not getting) a job, as well as on the match (or mismatch) between job and education. Meanwhile, other issues such as the learning involved in the transition from the educational system to the world of work have been given much less attention.

Recognising this context, this chapter's aim is to outline an approach that enables a deeper understanding of the process of professional learning

underpinning transitions between education and the world of work. In order to achieve that aim, it draws both on theoretical and empirical contributions, mobilising literature to stimulate the reflection about graduates' learning across professional and educational settings. Therefore, the intention is to reveal dynamics, dimensions and challenges involved in the graduates' professional learning, conceptualising it as a process that comprises educational settings, work organisations, everyday learning and the interaction between them along (individual and collective) timelines.

This chapter intends to contribute to the debate on employability through an understanding of it as a professional learning process aimed at enabling graduates to cope with their professional activities. Research exploring higher education's impact on professional performance reveals that the characteristics of study programmes in higher education seem to have minor effects on the chances of obtaining a job, yet these same characteristics have significant effects on actually doing a certain job. The type of characteristics mentioned are, for instance, lectures, group assignments, participation in research projects, internships/work placements, project and/or problem-based learning, written assignments, oral presentations by students, among others (Støren and Aamodt 2010; Vaatstra and Vries 2007). This being so, professional learning can be addressed as a phenomenon that takes place in the educational system, but it also takes place in professional settings, and probably most importantly it has to be understood within the interaction between these two main contexts for professional learning.

The proposed approach aims to contribute to the development of both educational practice and empirical research in the future. Moreover, the chapter is based on the assumption that researching professional learning in contemporary societies benefits (re)thinking about the organisation of educational practices not only within formal academic settings, but also focusing the connections between those and the individuals' learning dynamics in working contexts and in everyday life. This is of particular importance given the changing inter-relationship between higher education and work that frames employability nowadays (Boden and Nedeva 2010).

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING: PROCESSES AND CONNOTATIONS WITHIN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

The process of professional learning in itself and the different understandings about it are deeply enclosed within particular social and economic contexts that are inextricably related to specific individuals' options, values

and strategies. According to Usher and Edwards (2007: 2) “learning is neither invariant nor unchanging because learning is a socio-culturally embedded set of practices” as it is recognisable that the characteristics of contemporary societies frame a certain perspective on professional learning, since the importance of lifelong learning in today’s societies encompass the need to clearly identify where, when, how, what, why and for what do we learn, namely to learn a profession (Usher and Edwards 2007; Popkewitz et al. 2006).

In fact, the recognition that learning takes place everywhere (whether in schools, in professional settings or in other contexts of our lives) and occurs at different stages of the lifecycle is not a novelty in itself, since it is quite obvious that learning has always occurred in different contexts and at every age. However, there is something new in the way in which learning is valued and has become a central feature both for the life of each individual in contemporary societies and for the definition of educational policies (Alves 2010). This trend is connected to the statement that we are now living in knowledge and learning societies (Popkewitz et al. 2006) in which each individual has the right and the duty to engage in lifelong learning (Biesta 2010). This also means that, potentially at least, our whole lives have become pedagogised, i.e., all sort of everyday practices might be viewed as learning activities, while simultaneously to learn becomes a permanent requirement (Usher and Edwards 2007).

Within this context, if it is true that professional learning is far from being a novelty, it is also true that it is a much more valued and organised process in our contemporary societies than in other historical moments and settings. This is in part because educational systems have been growing enormously, so that more people are studying for more years within educational systems, as well as more people returning to it at various ages (Bélanger 2011; Popkewitz et al. 2006). However, it is also because learning that occurs outside the educational system is increasingly being formally recognised and certificated. This frequently leads to new systems and new social practices that try to assess to what extent the knowledge that an individual has learned in his or her life can be considered equivalent to a certain educational qualification.

In the past, learning and education were considered to take place primarily during the earlier years of people’s lives, but the emergence of information and knowledge-based societies has challenged this model. Individuals in contemporary societies are expected to engage frequently in various types of learning across their lifecycles, swapping between education and

work at different moments (Bélanger 2011). The trajectories of higher-education graduates within this context have become marked by a growing number of situations in which students work while studying, as well as by the increasing number of adults who engage in learning in its various forms while being employed or when unemployed.

Concerning the reasons that are currently presented to justify the engagement of individuals in learning after having graduated from higher education, it is frequently pointed out that this is a strategy to face either unemployment or the difficulties in finding a permanent job. Such situations are increasingly common within the uncertainties that surround professional trajectories in contemporary societies. However, in previous research (Alves et al. 2010, 2012) doubts were raised about these interpretations, since the reasons to return to higher education in the years following graduation could not linearly be associated with motivations related to unemployment or precarious employment, although they frequently characterize graduates' professional careers.

Moreover, the analysis of higher education graduates' trajectories in Portugal has shown that the demand for postgraduate training is significant for individuals who are unemployed or in situations of great professional insecurity and instability, but it is equally significant amongst those who hold more favourable professional situations (Alves 2013, 2016). Thus, the demand for postgraduate training appears to be a common practice and expectation across the graduates, in addition to being viewed as an employability strategy, since it is associated with diverse and even disparate situations of employability. In this sense, it can be understood as a frequent ingredient of their professional careers, and possibly a sign of wider dynamics of participation and involvement in various modalities of lifelong learning.

Therefore, the traditional model of life trajectories in which after graduation the individual would be involved exclusively in professional activities and tasks for the rest of his/her life (and would no longer participate in learning) must be abandoned, since it does not correspond to the majority of the trajectories lived by graduates in contemporary societies.

Additionally, transitions between education and work tend to be progressively less stable, as they assume various configurations and occur at different points in one's life trajectory (Jarvis 2009).

Empirical research (Alves 2014) suggests that there is a certain consensus amongst higher education graduates about the idea that learning is an unfinished dynamic that is prolonged across the different ages of an adult. The permanent and unfinished nature of lifelong learning is understood

by them not only as a demand arising from the current changing environment and ongoing challenges in the workplace, but also as the result of their personal will and motivation.

For graduates it is not only the return to higher education to attend post-graduation courses that is at stake, since it is fundamental to stress that understanding professional learning as a lifelong process encompasses the need to include informal and non-formal contexts of learning in the proposed approach. It should be remarked that informal learning results from daily life activities connected to work, family or leisure and it does not lead to certification; whereas non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution nor does it necessarily lead to certification, but it is structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) (Rogers 2014). Being so, professional learning does not occur only in school contexts; that is, it does not correspond strictly to a determined number of years or hours involved in planned learning designed to prepare professionals to perform in the world of work.

Recently, the growing interest for research centred on “experiential learning” (Jarvis 2009) and “workplace learning” (Fenwick 2010) gave visibility to non-school contexts of learning. Therefore, understandings inherited from the historical period of modern and industrial societies, when education was, above all, associated with dynamics and processes taking place inside schools, need to be complemented by making visible other contexts and processes of learning, namely those within work contexts and across professional trajectories (Canário 1999; Ileris 2011).

To summarise, contemporary societies are characterised by profound social and educational changes that imply (re)featuring professional learning-processes, namely considering the swap between education and work at different moments in the lifecycle. Therefore, the need to (re) think conceptual and analytical models to research professional learning is acknowledged and the proposed outlining of an approach is a possible answer to that need. The next section of the chapter elucidates the main theoretical and conceptual views underlying the outlined approach.

THE MAIN THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL VIEW VIEWS UNDERPINNING THE OUTLINED APPROACH

In this chapter, professional learning is understood as comprising the learning processes of graduates that enable the competent development of their professional activities. This starting point indicates that we understand

professional learning-processes as a phenomenon of “human learning” according to the views of Ileris (2011) and Jarvis (2009). To these authors, defining learning as “human” means rejecting the idea that this is a mere cognitive, psychological and individual process. Alternatively, learning is a process that involves interaction between the individual and his or her environment (Ileris 2011; Jarvis 2009), with which mind and body (Jarvis 2009) or rationality, competences, emotional and social dimensions (Ileris 2011) interact in complex ways. Such a view converges with the critical approach presented by Usher and Edwards (2007) that stresses that life-long learning is not an exclusively mental and individual process, since it is more adequately characterised as a sociocultural phenomenon that always implies some sort of relationship between individuals.

Within the theoretical views of adult education (Bélanger 2011), this argument does not support the understanding of learning as producing behavioural change in a desired direction (behaviourism) or as merely developing internal mental processes (cognitivism). However, it does endorse a view strongly grounded in humanism (stressing the development of each individual's potential), and socioconstructivism (highlighting the construction of meaning by the individual on the basis of lived experiences). Consequently, the individual's learning processes are the centre of the analysis, as these processes are not considered outside the contexts and situations in which they occur, given that learning is simultaneously personal and social and encompasses cognition and emotions.

The option to stress the individual's process, aims at enabling a deeper understanding of the interactions between learning inside and outside the education system. Accordingly, learning is understood as being much broader than education, in the sense that all education is learning but not all learning is education (Jarvis 2009; Rogers 2014), and to deepen research requires interlinking various contexts of learning. As Usher and Edwards (2007) point out, the major part of the research about learning has focused on institutional and organisational aspects of formal learning contexts, though these can only be fully explored when learning that takes place outside these contexts is taken into account.

Two other remarks are crucial to scaffold the outlining of the proposed approach. The first one reminds us that not all learning (whether in formal, non-formal or informal contexts) has an inherent positive value being always beneficial, as stated by Usher and Edwards (2007). Thus, the approach must include a reflection about the desirable aims of professional learning processes. The second remark highlights that even if it is possible

to learn in whatever context, this possibility does not always become a reality. Jarvis (2009) points out that the rejection of learning opportunities may happen for different reasons, ranging from those linked to the absence of a disposition to learn, to the anticipation of the disruptive effects of learning regarding the attitudes and identity of the individual. Therefore, the approach must incorporate a reflection about the factors influencing the involvement of individuals in various learning opportunities across their lifetimes.

Given that the proposed approach does not focus on all learning processes, but is centred particularly on professional learning processes, it is fundamental to clarify assumptions regarding the connections between education and work. Modern and industrial societies' have conceived the simultaneous linearity and the sequentiality of education and work, as well as emphasise the correspondence between jobs and educational credentials. Within this framework, the main concern is to adjust educational offers to the needs of professions in the labour market, identifying mismatches that should not exist.

To overcome this sort of conception, we argue that the proposed approach must alternatively be grounded in the assumption that its aim is to understand professional learning-processes enlightening connections between contexts, dynamics and circumstances affecting those processes. Thus, the first assumption clarifies that the choice is not to analyse the match (or mismatch) between what is learned and what needs to be learned in order to be a professional, but alternatively to focus on the learning occurring both in educational and work contexts and in the transitions from one to the other.

Within this framework, work shall not be understood as the field of application of education, but alternatively as a context that also contributes to education. Nevertheless, not all work experiences are transformed into learning: on the one hand, one might not always succeed in learning from one's experiences, and on the other hand learning is not a simple accumulation of experiences that might transform the knowledge, competences and attitudes of the individual (Jarvis 2009).

Besides this first assumption, a second one arises from the recognition that within contemporary societies it is particularly relevant to remember that professional learning takes place in a variety of institutional contexts and at different phases of the lifecycle. This has significant implications on the type and nature of the learning processes, as well as on the competences developed. Therefore, the second assumption consists in accepting

that both work and educational (inside and outside school) experiences frame professional learning, even if each contribution might be quite different.

As a consequence of the two interlinked previous assumptions, a third one concerns the understanding of professional learning as a matter of becoming, and not of having or being (Biesta 2010; Jarvis 2009). It is important to observe that we are not exploring concepts and dynamics such as the process of building professional identities, but we are examining ontological processes of becoming a professional. So, the objective is not to identify knowledge and competencies developed throughout the learning process, characterising which characteristics individuals have or how they are and act. Neither is the objective to sketch a pattern of knowledge and competencies suitable for being a professional after graduating from higher education. From a different perspective, a fundamental point within the proposed approach is to recognise that nowadays a professional is in a permanent process of becoming in endless challenging contexts and circumstances. Within that process of becoming, what seems to be crucial from an educationalist point of view is to ensure the possibilities of exposing learners to otherness and difference, allowing for their uniqueness to emerge (Biesta 2010; Fenwick 2010).

To sum up, it seems adequate to conceptualise professional learning processes as being permanent and always unfinished dynamics, not easily quantifiable in terms of products and results. Additionally, professional learning is featured as closely linked to a variety of learning contexts during adulthood, and as involving rationality but also emotions, beliefs, social and cultural engagements. Therefore, the proposed approach includes a set of five analytical dimensions that are described in the next section of the chapter.

THE FIVE ANALYTICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE OUTLINED APPROACH

The proposed approach to professional learning comprises five analytical dimensions, specifically: learning spaces, time and temporality, types of learning, knowledge and reasons to learn. These five dimensions hopefully contribute to the grasp of the nuances and complexities of employability, as they provide a deeper understanding of the professional learning process underpinning transitions between higher education and the world of work. In the following sections, the global aim is to sketch each dimension, accepting that all five are strongly interdependent.

Learning Spaces

The first dimension relates to learning spaces, and eventually also involves spaces free of learning. Within this dimension we intend to overcome the debates around the typology of formal, non-formal and informal learning, accepting not only that learning is situated (Lave 2009; Wenger 2009) but also that a certain space is part of the dynamics and outcomes of the learning that takes place therein.

The distinction between formal, non-formal and informal learning is typically founded on the criteria of organisation of the situation, as well as on the intention of both learners and learning providers (see for instance Rogers 2014). Non-formal and informal learning have been progressively gaining visibility within educational policies and practices, thus abandoning their marginal role as it is acknowledged that these learning dynamics are central in the life of individuals relating to their different contexts (work, training, family, community ...). One can find estimations indicating that the amount of informally-learned abilities and knowledge corresponds to between 70% and 90% of all learning (Rogers 2014).

Within the proposed approach, we do not intend to measure each type of learning or to analyse each and every context of professional learning and categorise it as formal, non-formal and informal. Recognising the diversity and interdependence of professional learning contexts, we found it more useful to mobilise a typology defined by Ileris (2009: 139) that argues for the existence of five main types of general learning spaces. These five learning spaces include: ‘everyday learning’ that occurs in daily life even when we are not participating in any specifically defined activities; ‘school and educational learning’ referring to intentional learning taking place inside the educational system; ‘workplace learning’ seen as both learning that is inevitably part of working life and also as more formalised learning in the workplace; ‘interest-based learning’ related to a personal interest and occurring in different activities (associations, communities, etc.); and, finally, ‘net-based learning’, which can be practised independently and is quite flexible compared to school and workplace learning.

Exploiting this proposal by Ileris (2009) as a starting point, and also considering some results from previous research on higher education graduates’ transitions to work, it is possible to endorse the adoption of a typology of four different learning spaces: ‘educational system’, ‘workplace’, ‘everyday life’ and ‘interest-based’. In our view, ‘net-based

learning' is currently transversal to all the other four learning spaces and should not be considered a specific space.

Previous research (Alves 2014) reveals that graduates tend to value the contribution of the educational system (namely through university), even when recognising that not everything can be learned within school contexts. Nevertheless, a variety of professional and personal experiences, before, during and after attendance of higher education are considered quite relevant to the process of professional learning.

In fact, research suggests that graduates tend to value participation in training courses and post-graduate courses, but they seem even more enthusiastic about the informal learning that occurs across their professional trajectories (Knight and Yorke 2004). Elements such as their personal effort in observing, inquiring and reflecting, as well as interaction with colleagues in work organisations, are considered quite important tools for informal learning.

The adoption of a typology consisting of four learning spaces does not mean that these must be considered completely autonomous. In fact, these spaces are often coexistent and interdependent across the learning processes. In previous research, it was found that professional experience during academic attendance could influence employability after graduation (Alves 2007). Furthermore, different models of proximity between higher education and the world of work (Støren and Aamodt 2010), and various options in terms of the curricular and pedagogical strategies of the courses (Vaastra and Vries 2007) have effects on the knowledge, skills and careers of graduates.

Additionally, there are surveys indicating that among higher education students there are some who deliberately seek to accumulate experiences of various kinds (internships, part-time work, volunteering, associations, etc.) in order to enrich their curriculum vitae to be presented to the employer after graduation (Knight and Yorke 2004; Tomlinson 2008). In other words, it appears that the various learning spaces are interdependent, enabling a variety of experiments, and the 'daily' learning area is concomitant with all the others.

However, because we live in knowledge-driven societies many authors have pointed out that the emphasis on learning as a phenomenon that fills all the spaces of our lives must be carefully considered. Gerwitz (2008) emphasises the importance of contemplating the existence of 'free learning spaces' arguing that while it is true that all spaces contain learning opportunities, the insistence that every situation of our life is thought of

according to the logic of effects and needs for learning can be counter-productive. Similarly, other authors (Fenwick 2010; Usher and Edwards 2007) sustain that when we expand the concept of learning to encompass all areas of our lives, we might risk some reductionism and somehow lose the base concept to characterise the specifics of a learning context. As stated by Jarvis (2009), it is the living and not the learning that takes precedence in every human being.

To sum up, a dimension containing four spaces of learning is proposed in order to analyse professional learning processes; having in mind the need to consider the overlapping among these spaces that frequently occurs. Graduates' employability is framed by the learning occurring across these various spaces. Moreover, even if learning opportunities exist in different spaces, it might be important to consider the need to maintain learning-free spaces avoiding the prominence of learning over life, study and work.

Learning, Time and Temporality

The second dimension concerns the moment in the lifecycle in which learning occurs, as well as the fact that learning always occurs within time even if we may not always be aware of its passing. Regarding this, the general assumption accepted previously is that it is possible to learn at all ages within the lifecycle. Lifelong learning is frequently assumed as adult learning or as work-life learning, but it is important to stress that it is more adequately described as a lifelong process from childhood to older age involving a diversity of aims. The graduates themselves stress that the university role is, in part, to prepare them for a learning process that will take place across their lifecycle (Alves 2014).

Therefore, professional learning is part of a lifelong learning process and is certainly affected by the age of the learner. Jarvis (2009) indicates that younger learners have a much more instrumental view and attitude towards learning than later in life when learning becomes more transformative of the learner. However, in contemporary societies these kinds of generalisations must be applied with caution, since many transitions happen along the lifecycle and professional mobility might imply instrumental learning at different stages in life in order to respond to the need to perform a new professional activity.

If the end of the professional learning process is probably difficult to identify, its beginning is associated with the initial attendance of higher education, regardless of the more or less vocational orientation of the courses.

Amongst individuals who have had professional experience before or during academic attendance, it can be observed that some of them attribute to it a merely instrumental benefit (to earn or occupy time during the holidays), while others consider these experiences as valuable contributions to their professional learning and to facilitate their access to the labour market after graduation (Alves 2014). For instance, professional experience is for some students a way to add value to their higher education credentials as they “perceive their academic qualifications as having a declining role in shaping their employment outcomes” (Tomlinson 2008: 49). Nevertheless, other studies (Knight and Yorke 2004) indicate that not all work situations experienced by students have an intrinsic value and involve learning potential, even if employers tend to value this kind of experience within the framework of graduate selection and recruitment processes.

Concerning time it must also be stressed that learning processes might be shorter or longer, depending on what, why and how we are learning, i.e., depending on the learning situation. Throughout these processes unlearning might also take place, in the sense that a part of learning requires forgetting what we knew and/or how we used to do things, in order to accommodate the contents of new learning.

To sum up, learning might happen at any age in life. Moreover, a learning process is not instantaneous but involves a certain period of time. Thus, graduates' employability is developed over time, assuming various configurations in different moments in one's trajectory. In this time, it could be that sometimes we have to unlearn what we had learned before and this is why it is important to deepen our understanding about types of learning.

Types of Learning

The third dimension within the outlined approach is centred on the types of learning. To address this dimension we mobilise once more Ileris's (2009, 2011) contribution, since the author proposes a typology of four types of learning: ‘cumulative’; ‘assimilative’; ‘accommodative’; and ‘transformative’. The distinction between these four types of learning involves different understandings of knowledge, as well as diverse effects of learning in the learner.

‘Cumulative’ learning seems to be more frequent in early childhood as it “is characterised by being an isolated formation, something new that is

not a part of anything else” (Ileris 2009: 141). Focusing on professional learning and graduates’ transitions to work, it is possible to argue that this type of learning is relevant to analyse newcomers into the world of work, because they need to develop ways of applying and mobilising knowledge and competencies in new conditions; that is, in professional settings.

‘Assimilative’ learning is defined as the most common form of learning and could also be called “learning by addition, meaning that the new element is linked as an addition to a scheme that is already established” (Ileris 2009: 141). Most assimilative learning happens spontaneously by integrating new contributions to an existing scheme, but sometimes is of a more focused nature when the contents are relevant to something we want or even have to learn. It can be envisaged that professional learning also comprises this type of learning, both for experienced professionals improving their knowledge and competencies and for newcomers in the world of work for whom professional learning started in the school and educational trajectory.

‘Accommodative’ learning arises when something that takes place is difficult to link immediately to an existing scheme and one cannot really understand it. In this sense, this type of learning “implies that one breaks down (parts of) an existing scheme and reconstructs it in a way that allows the new situation to be linked in” (Ileris 2009: 142). This is a more demanding type of learning for the individual than assimilative learning. Within professional learning it can be anticipated that this kind of learning is common in everyday routines, being more or less intense according to the nature of the situations and changes affecting the working contexts. Regarding new graduates, it is likely that what they usually describe as the shock with the world of work is a stage that requires precisely this type of learning.

Finally, ‘transformative’ learning is a very demanding and profound process that changes identity since it “implies what could be termed personal-ity changes or changes in the organisation of the self” (Ileris 2009: 142). Transitions might be phases characterised by this kind of learning because they generally imply assuming a different social role (from student to worker, from one professional position to another, from worker to retired). In this way it can be expected to be an important dynamic of professional learning, though it does not occur frequently but only in special situations.

Previous research (Alves 2014) allows foreseeing that professional learning can assume these four different types depending on the subject

itself, on the individual's academic and prior learning and on the characteristics of the organisational and professional contexts. However, the empirical data available are insufficient to identify the presence of these four types of learning, as sometimes the same graduate refers to learning in modes that combine features of more than one of the four types identified when asked to describe his/her transition to work (Alves 2014).

To sum up, the four types of learning proposed by Ileris (2009) can be useful to analyse professional learning-processes, enabling the identification of a diversity of implications regarding the learner and the knowledge involved in these processes. Graduates' employability simultaneously influences and is the result of those various possible types of learning. So, capturing the diversity of possible dynamics within professional learning is important, since each dynamic is characterised by specific features and impacts namely concerning the knowledge that it involves.

Learning and Knowledge

A central role is attributed to knowledge in contemporary society, even if some form of knowledge has always been fundamental in any historical period. Within this reflection, knowledge is not understood as simply formal educational credentials or as a set of data and information that can be strictly measured and acquired. In other words, understandings of knowledge as being exterior both to the life contexts and to the learners themselves are rejected (Canário 1999), as it is underlined that "knowledge is dependent upon the learners" (Jarvis 2009: 199).

The argument is that knowledge involved in professional learning-processes must be seen as inseparable from the subject himself/herself and from his/her experiences or the specificities of the context in which he/she lives (Jarvis 2009). Therefore, knowledge cannot be assumed to precede action, since it is permanently produced alongside professional action.

In this proposal, it is accepted that professional knowledge is created in all contexts of human life, and not only in professional ones. In fact, it is just in analytical terms that it is possible to isolate profession from the set of dimensions that constitute the uniqueness of each subject, given that professional learning is attached to the construction of the self (Canário 1999) as different graduates stress when questioned about this (Alves 2014).

Nevertheless, knowledge also includes other components. Guille (2008) suggests a holistic perspective comprising: a tacit dimension based

on the contribution of authors such as Polanyi, Nonaka and Takeuchi who showed that knowledge is crucial within organisations in the contemporary world of work; and a theoretical dimension referring to science and technology, and considered essential by Bell and Castells. Recognising this diversity it should also be observed that all forms of knowledge are learned (Jarvis 2009).

Within the field of transitions, research has indicated that it is probable that graduates show a lack of tacit knowledge in professional action—and this makes them culturally naive within work organisations—since higher education tends to emphasise formal and decontextualised knowledge (Knight and Yorke 2004). In fact, several authors highlight that the main difficulties faced by higher education graduates when entering working life are those related to the ways in which they lack the knowledge to act as professionals in the world of work and to perform in their professional trajectories (Bennett et al. 2000; Alves 2007). Namely, they refer to knowledge about inter-personal relationships and about practical procedures, more than specific knowledge about their domain of academic studies.

A similar trend is identified when considering the results gathered from the employers of graduates, and when assessing their evaluation of graduates' professional performance. Employers do not question the graduates' knowledge of their own academic and disciplinary field, but they recognise the need for the development of capacities, knowledge and attitudes that allow the graduates to be fully integrated and competent in the world of work and in the organisation in which they are employed (Alves 2007).

Research has shown the difficulties experienced by graduates when asked to clarify the knowledge that they consider important in the performance of their professional activities, even if they have no doubts in stating that professional knowledge benefits from professional experience (before, during and after academic attendance), as well as from training courses or volunteering experiences (Alves 2007, 2014).

The type of knowledge identified by graduates includes technical and operative skills learned in university, as well as self-knowledge and interaction skills (with clients, colleagues and bosses) within work contexts (Alves 2007, 2014). Therefore, graduates stress the importance of knowledge involved in professional action, defining it as a set of contents and competences (Young 2010). According to the same author, this concern is of particular importance in the current context in which the academic curricula are frequently considered inadequate, for drawing too much on contents (defined as data and information to be acquired) or for focusing

predominantly on competences' development unconnected from contents (Young 2010).

To sum up, professional learning is defined in the proposal as a non-quantifiable process. Its development and outcomes cannot be clearly foreseen in advance, as the knowledge involved is not entirely defined a priori or detached from concrete subjects and their educational and work experiences. Within knowledge, different elements are included, namely technical and theoretical knowledge, as well as skills underlying professional action, and they all are part of a graduates' employability.

Reasons for Learning

When examining the reasons that encourage individuals to engage in professional learning processes, it is necessary to consider two aspects. On the one hand, it has to be observed that an analysis of the reasons to be involved in learning cannot be dissociated from the characterisation of the various types of learning. In fact, a significant part of professional learning can be unintentional and unplanned (Ileris 2011), hence it makes no sense to reflect upon the reasons that led the individuals to be involved in it. On the other hand, in contemporary societies one can observe the high value attached to learning within the individuals' practices and attitudes, resulting in frequent and intense involvement in various kinds of learning dynamics. Adult participation in education and training is not a marginal phenomenon nowadays but a significant trend (Bélanger 2011), that can even be considered a criterion for social inclusion (Popkewitz et al. 2006).

Nevertheless, besides the societal and individual appreciation of learning observable in contemporary societies, different factors such as recognition of the value of learning by peers and bosses or the work organisations' characteristics might be more (or less) favourable to learning depending on the organisational culture. Graduates also suggest that the rules and demands of the work organisation might favour or constrain non-formal and informal professional learning (Alves 2014).

The professional learning that takes place through training courses or returning to higher education is as important as the work organisation in the motivation of individuals. Moreover, various factors such as work environment, employer characteristics, socio-economic status, living conditions, public policies and existing institutional learning-opportunities may also influence the participation of graduates in professional learning. In previous research, data indicated that work organisations tend

not to incentivise graduates to make use of educational opportunities, for instance post-graduate courses in higher education (Alves et al. 2010). More recent research also suggests a lack of incentives on the part of employers regarding learning opportunities organised by higher education or other academic entities.

Therefore, it seems that lifelong learning is an individual responsibility and not a collective one for many people in contemporary societies. According to Biesta (2010), this position entails significant societal risks by promoting the values of competitiveness instead of those of citizenship and democracy.

Overall, work organisations, public policies, and opportunities for learning available in educational institutions, as well as individual motivations, might constitute incentives to involvement in lifelong learning. However, it is important to stress that other elements might also have a significant influence, such as socioeconomic status and the initial level of schooling (Alves 2016). Within a holistic approach, adults' involvement in learning is the result of a complex set of factors related to institutional options and individual choices in contexts with particular characteristics and influenced by certain public policies.

Amongst higher education graduates, many individuals are likely to be involved in lifelong learning opportunities as willing participants. In fact, research shows that the probability of being involved in lifelong learning is higher for those who have completed higher degrees in the educational system, and for those in more qualified positions in the labour market who have more opportunities to access non-formal and informal learning (Bélanger 2011).

Additionally, previous research suggests that adults who have completed higher levels of schooling more easily and frequently recognise and value experiential learning (Alves et al. 2010). Correspondingly, statistical European data show that participation in lifelong learning (whether formal, non-formal or informal) is more common amongst younger adults and those professionally active and more qualified (Alves 2010).

Besides these general trends, it should be highlighted that involvement in learning might be initiated by critical events in one's biography (Bélanger 2011). Within professional learning, critical events may correspond to any anomalies in the functioning of organisations or abrupt and profound changes of professional situations of individuals. This means that situational factors (arising from one's situation at a given time) might promote involvement in learning and be complementary to institutional

(including types and procedures of educational provision) and dispositional (centred on people's attitudes and perceptions of themselves as learners) ones, as proposed by Bélanger (2011).

To sum up, participation in lifelong learning is common and valued in contemporary societies, both by individuals, organisations and political policies. Nevertheless, institutional, situational and dispositional factors might influence the involvement of individuals in learning. Simultaneously, certain characteristics of work organisations and educational institutions might help or constrain participation in lifelong learning. This set of factors influences professional learning, underpinning transitions between higher education and the world of work, framing nuances within graduates' employability.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE AIMS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY

The presentation of the outlined approach would not be complete without considering the intentionality present in every professional learning process and this consideration is inextricably linked to a certain conceptualisation of graduates' employability. Nevertheless, the intentions underlying professional learning-processes might be perceived from the learners' point of view, but also by adopting the views of the educational institutions or the employers.

In this proposal it is deemed necessary and important to promote the debate on intentions adopting an educationalist point of view, that is, defining objectives that are 'educationally desirable' (Biesta 2010). Besides considering the individuals or the educational institutions or the employers' perspectives on the aims of professional learning, one can choose to highlight the purposes that enable the educational development of individuals. In fact, discussing intentionality of professional learning goes beyond articulating personal preferences of individuals, educational institutions or employers. Therefore, the challenge is the identification of intentions that promote human development processes sustaining professional learning, in order to accordingly (re)think the organisation of educational practices.

To promote that discussion it is relevant to note that in the knowledge societies in which we live today different discourses about learning goals in general are put together; namely Gewirtz (2008) indicates four of these discourses corresponding to personal fulfilment, citizenship, social inclusion or social justice and work-related learning. In our opinion, the

underlying intentions for professional learning-processes can contain these four threads, in the sense that it is recommended that these processes cover the whole of the subject/individual and should not be thought of as a mere response to the needs identified in work contexts.

Aiming at grasping this set of mixed discourses, it is useful to adopt the proposal of three different (but) related functions (Biesta 2010) of learning, mentioned as qualification, socialisation and subjectification. For the author, this framework allows refocusing the debate that is dominated today by the existence of quantitative rankings and indicators within the framework of major international projects, which convey the idea that you can make decisions about education particularly drawing upon evidence and ignoring its normative dimension, i.e., the consideration of what can be considered ‘quality’ education or ‘good’ education (Biesta 2010).

The function of ‘qualification’ of the learners means: “providing them with the knowledge, skills and understandings and often also with the dispositions and forms of judgment that allow them to do something” (Biesta 2010: 19–20). In the specific case of professional learning, qualification can be understood as training for a particular profession. Based on the results of research on the employability of graduates, it is possible to conclude that qualification is important for this group, and is constructed not only through higher education and various learning experiences related to work, but also in personal life and in everyday life in general.

‘Socialisation’ is another function that “has to do with the many ways in which (...) we become part of particular social, cultural and political orders” (Biesta 2010: 20). Again considering the particular case of professional learning, this function can be rephrased as the insertion of individuals into social and cultural ways of doing and being in professional contexts. The results of research on employability reveal that lack of knowledge about the interrelationship rules and standards is often referenced by graduates when evaluating their initial entry into the labour market and justifies the feeling of shock associated with the transition into the world of work.

Lastly, ‘subjectification’ is about “ways of being in which the individual is not simply a specimen of a more encompassing order” (Biesta 2010: 21) or in other terms corresponds to the process of becoming a subject. This is no less important for professional learning since it is argued that, given the profound and never-ending changes that characterise the world of work nowadays, it is fundamental that each individual might not only perform, professionally speaking, but also think critically upon the implications and

alternatives to his or her professional action. In the results of the research on employability there are indications that this unique character of the individual is not only recognised and emphasised by graduates, but also, in some cases, promoted as a strategy to enrich the curriculum vitae presented to employers.

In summary, it should be underlined that the outlined approach to professional learning encompasses five interdependent analytical dimensions, but also requires a consideration of the purposes explicitly and implicitly underlying each professional learning process. Regarding intentionality, it is possible to acknowledge a diversity of possible functions for professional learning, given that the three functions identified (qualification, socialisation and subjectification) always overlap making it relevant to consider its diverse intersections.

Within this framework, it is not possible to accept a traditional definition of graduates' employability as simply gaining and retaining fulfilling work, nor understand it as an individual attribute (Boden and Nedeva 2010). Alternatively, the outlined approach emphasises the relevance of understanding the professional learning process underneath graduates' employability trajectories, and highlights the importance of considering that these processes and trajectories are not depending merely on personal characteristics as they are both resulting and influencing work activities and employment conditions.

Finally, the proposed approach is envisaged as a contribution to the development of both educational practice and empirical research in the future. Regarding empirical research, the outlined approach would benefit from the collection of qualitative and biographical data in the future, in order to enable a deeper understanding about space, time, knowledge, reasons and types of learning across the graduates' lifecycle. Such an understanding will be useful to enrich the continuous (re)thinking of the organisation about the formal contexts in which professional learning takes place, namely the models of proximity between higher education and the world of work, and various options in terms of curricular and pedagogical strategies. These elements might have a minor influence on the chance of obtaining a job, but seem to play a major role on the ways graduates do their jobs (Støren and Aamodt 2010). Nonetheless, decisions concerning educational practice should be framed by a view of what is educationally desirable for the learners, and this view should embrace qualification, socialisation and subjectification as aims of professional learning.

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International Students' Employability: What Can We Learn from It?

Zhen Li

INTRODUCTION

The rising number of internationally mobile students has changed the global higher education landscape, with many countries competing to attract such students, particular the 'best' students. We may have learnt a great deal about international students' academic/social experiences in host countries through volumes of research in this area, but there is a severe lack of attention to their experiences of transition to employment. Although as a diversely framed discourse, 'employability' – as a central connector in the transition between the university and labour market – is commonly discussed within a narrow national focus. Drawing upon some empirical evidence of international students' experiences of transition to the labour market, this chapter illustrates how studying international students' employability as the means by which they actively approach and engage with labour markets allows us to enhance our understanding of the concept of employability through the inclusion of wider contextual variables that have been brought into the discussion.

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As part of the discourse on a globally competitive ‘knowledge-based economy’, higher education is seen as a key national resource in producing advanced knowledge in fields considered to be strategically important for national economic survival and prosperity. One of the major functions of universities in this competition is to recruit and retain ‘the best and the brightest’ students from across the world. This active recruitment, coupled with increased demand from students themselves, has driven up the number of internationally mobile students from around 800,000 in the mid-1970s to over 4.3 million in 2013 (OECD 2013). Meanwhile, research literature suggests some form of global competition ‘to mobilize, attract and retain human creative talent’ (Florida 2005 quoted in Brown and Tannock 2009: 380) is currently underway at corporate and nation-state levels. Employers, particularly multinational companies, explicitly seek highly skilled professionals, regardless of their nationalities in order to be globally competitive (Brown and Hesketh 2004; Brown et al. 2011). Whether described as a ‘war for talent’ (Michaels et al. 2001), a less violent ‘competition’ (OECD 2008) or a seemingly more civilised ‘auction’ (Brown et al. 2011), labour markets for the highly skilled have become increasingly global in their scope and operation. The mobility of university students is widely believed to be closely linked to this mobility of highly skilled workers in various ways, but it is notable that the research on international students’ progress and achievements, and their subsequent careers is scant (Kim 2012). Consequently, it is not clear to what extent the mobility of international students is actually contributing to the global mobility of talent in diverse labour markets.

The concept of ‘employability’ has become a focal point of many attempts to explain and theorise HE student transitions to the labour market. *Employment* skills have been distinguished from *employability* skills, with the former referring to educational qualifications and credentials for specific jobs and professions whilst the latter refers to transferable skills that are not job-specific but support employment more generally, such as team-working, communication and leadership skills (Mellor-Bourn et al. 2015). It is argued that increasing globalisation and internationalisation has heightened the need for graduates with the ability to operate in culturally diverse contexts (Crossman and Clark 2010). Intercultural sensitivity and communication skills are gaining more credence as desirable components of employability constructions in this new globalised labour market. The British Council (2013) reports that employers value intercultural skills in their businesses but evidence of the benefits (or lack of them)

of overseas education and its role in cultivating employability skills is generally limited. Whilst some research has found established connections between study, working overseas or other international experience and employability (Crossman and Clark 2010), others question the incorporation of general employability skills into graduate outcomes in international education (Chan 2011). Indeed, there is evidence that international higher education graduates are highly skilled but not necessarily in ways that address local skill gaps (McNamara and Kight 2014; Jackling and Natoli 2015). In some circumstances, it has been found that studying overseas could even make one less employable at home (Roberston et al. 2011; Wiers-Jensen 2011). This raises important questions of whether generic employability skills are globally applicable and whether international graduates actually possess the requisite traits of a 'global human resource' (Breaden 2014).

Drawing on some empirical evidence of international students' experience of transition to the labour market, this chapter explores these questions as a means of instruction and to find out the extent to which employability is a useful concept to aid this understanding.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT TRANSITIONS TO LABOUR MARKETS

The valorisation of a knowledge-based economy as the route to the highest economic success places an economic premium on the possession and application of the 'advanced knowledge' that has traditionally been the concern of higher education. This is manifested in HE institutions in the generation of new knowledge through research activities and the preparation of graduates to possess such knowledge. On the one hand, this has led to greater significance being afforded to higher education at both family and government levels. Through various combinations of rising individual demand and the provision of more HE places, enrolment has risen across the world, doubling from 100 to 200 million between 2000 and 2013, the latest year for which complete statistics are available (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2016). (See Kipnis 2011: 86–8 for an insightful account on how this combination of enhanced demand and supply worked in China, where doubling of HE enrolment took place in less than six years.) On the other hand, this association between economic success and advanced knowledge has led to a redefinition of the role of higher education in society in primarily – or even solely – economic terms

(Brown and Tannock 2009; Shahjahan 2014). Several authors have identified this as an extension of the neoliberal ideology and practices that have shaped contemporary globalisation in general into the realm of higher education. Jones (2013: 273), for example, declares that the influence of neoliberalism on education “has established market fundamentalism as the dominant and often governing logic by which the value of knowledge is determined”.

Keeping pace with this expansion of tertiary enrolments has been the growth in numbers of those students who study outside their country of residence or citizenship – the so-called ‘international students’ in higher education. As indicated earlier, absolute numbers of such students have risen year-on-year although, interestingly, the proportion of internationally mobile students within total global enrolments has changed little, at about 2%, with minor fluctuations about that figure. Various rationales for this increased global flow of students have been proposed and investigated, from national, institutional and individual student perspectives. One rationale shared across all levels is that of economic benefit. At the individual level, the mobile student may hope that an overseas degree will lead to a more highly paid job at home or in the host country. Higher education institutions may regard international students as a valuable source of income as their government funding support is reduced. Governments may welcome the considerable money – in tuition fees and other expenditure – that international students contribute to the national economy, but they may also hope that suitably qualified international students will opt to stay on and enhance the pool of highly skilled human capital in the host country. This latter perspective has explicitly guided policy in Australia, which has traditionally suffered from a chronic shortage of highly-skilled labour and has offered at various times and in various forms a ‘two-step migration’ option – come as a student and stay as a skilled worker (Hawthorne 2010). Other countries, such as Canada, with a similar dependence on immigrant skilled labour have to varying degrees taken an interest in or adopted similar policies (Hawthorne 2014). The largest ‘staying on’ rate amongst international graduates, however, has consistently been in the USA (see Finn 2012, for example) where the approach to retaining them has tended at government level to be more *laissez-faire*.

If Michaels et al. (2001) are correct that a ‘war for talent’ that is global in nature is currently underway at corporate and national levels, and if the central purpose of higher education is now widely seen to be the development of high-value human capital, it would seem to make sense

for governments to treat international students as an important potential source for attracting the highest levels of talent in support of the national economy, as in the Australian example. Lowell (2008: 57) has suggested that flows of international students into Europe and North America, where they are attracted by the high global ranking of many universities, may be the 'leading edge' of migration by highly skilled workers into those regions. At a minimum, therefore, one might expect governments of countries hosting large numbers of international students at least to keep records of the number of such students who stay on to work and – to make the records more useful for policy-monitoring purposes – their qualifications and labour market destinations.

As Li and Lowe (2016) have suggested, however, it can be remarkably difficult to locate even basic data on the transition rates of international students into the host country (or indeed any) labour market. One problem is a lack of consensus over the definition of 'highly skilled' work and in some cases it may simply be assumed that an employee who has a university degree must be engaged in such work (Batalova 2006: 37–42; King et al. 2010: 86). Such a simplification may still be useful if we regard the employment of graduates as enhancing the overall human capital of a country, whatever their specific employment, and it could be argued that 'highly-skilled' will in any case be most usefully defined in local terms, based on local labour market needs and workings, rather than being universal. Even where there are data on numbers, however, such data are often imprecise as they are based on indirect, proxy measures (Cavanagh and Glennie 2012) or survey data that have generalisability limitations (e.g. BIS 2012). Some serious 'digging' is often required to obtain such detail as precise labour market destinations (see, for example the work of Finn (2012) in the USA and Salt (2013) in the UK). The limitations of this current dearth of data may actually have been recognised by the UK government, at least, as one element of a recent 'Green Paper' on teaching in higher education proposes the collection of graduate labour market outcomes (BIS 2015).

The value of having more sophisticated data can be argued from the perspectives of all three of the major stakeholders in the global high-skills labour market – governments, employers and students/labour market aspirants. Australian experience has shown, for example, that successful transitions by international students into the local labour market and the length of their retention locally depend in part on the local cultural and linguistic skills of the student/worker (Hawthorne 2014). These will, to

a large extent, be influenced by the length of time the student has studied in the host country, which will in turn depend on the study route a particular graduate has taken – not only at what level the graduate emerges from the local education system but also at what level she entered it and what path she followed through it. Such data rarely seems to be collected and is extremely difficult to locate, but would be invaluable to any government attempting to develop a rational policy to link international student recruitment to meeting national high-skilled labour recruitment needs (*ibid.*). For employers, the data could provide useful support to recruitment strategies, to supplement their own experience; and for students hoping to work in the host country; they could provide important indicators to support the development of their own employability before graduation. Ultimately, of course, since universities are now charged with raising the employability of their students, they will welcome anything that might help them do this.

Commonly linked to the idea of there being a global labour market (or perhaps ‘battleground’ would be a better term if we really are engaged in a global war for talent) is the existence of a set of personal attributes that are referred to as ‘global skills’. It is these global skills that are often described as being particularly attractive to employers competing on the global stage. If this were the case, we might expect international students to have an automatic advantage over home students in the employability stakes (Leggott and Stapleford 2007). There is little convincing data to support this position, except perhaps for those students who return home to seek employment (Brooks and Waters 2011). It has been proposed, for example, that UK students with overseas study experience enjoy an advantage with some employers in the UK labour market that would not be shared to the same extent by international students who have studied in the UK. This suggests that the construction of individual employability may be more complex than is sometimes suggested in the literature on global skills, and it is an examination of this that I turn to next.

EMPLOYABILITY, ‘GLOBAL’ SKILLS AND LOCAL LABOUR MARKETS

Despite its popularity in national and institutional policy documents, employability remains an imprecisely and ambiguously defined concept (James et al. 2013). The mainstream view, particularly in higher education policy, remains one of seeing graduate employability as a matter of

an individual's attributes – skills, abilities and experience which make one successful in the labour market (Moreau and Leathwood 2006). Closely linked to ideas developed from human capital theory, this view regards education, training and other means of skill acquisition as individual investments, and employability becomes “the measure of how well the individual had succeeded to match their human capital profile to labour-market demands” (Tholen 2015: 768).

For international students, education costs are often higher than they are for most domestic students; in this sense, international education can indeed be a substantial investment. The continued increase in the number of globally mobile students seems to suggest that their investment may well be ‘paying off’ in offering them employment advantages in various labour markets, either back in their home countries, in their host countries or elsewhere. However, there is insufficient empirical evidence to support this general assumption, partly due to the small volume of research on international student progression and career transition (Huang et al. 2014). The available evidence also presents a rather mixed picture – some report returnees enjoying access to more and better employment opportunities and larger salaries (Wieer-Jessen 2008), whilst others have found that study abroad does not enhance career prospects per se (Roberston et al. 2011).

There is a recognition of the declining value in some countries of an overseas qualification itself, or at the very least, as Robertson et al. (2011) argue, that the belief that the status of Western degrees grants international students from Eastern source countries higher social status and better employment opportunities needs to be further problematised. Taking China as an example, overseas HE credentials were historically perceived as offering a competitive advantage in the Chinese labour market, where they were seen as denoting an attractive and ‘rarer’ alternative to domestic experience (Xiang and Shen 2009). There has been a rapid and massive increase, however, in the number of both Chinese students studying overseas and those returning to China: China had sent over 3 million students abroad by the end of 2013, with over 364,800 returning in 2014 alone (CSSN 2014). The sharply rising number of students studying or having studied overseas has given rise to a degree of ‘credential inflation’ in overseas qualifications. Meanwhile, a massive expansion of HE enrolments in China – from 7.4 to 29.3 million between 2000 and 2009 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012) – has also contributed to fiercer labour-market competition and graduate unemployment there (Li et al. 2008; Waters

2009). In this sense, international students do not increase the ‘hard currencies’ (Brown and Hesketh 2004) in their employment profile simply by holding an ‘overseas’ degree. Credential inflation has, however, increased the competition to obtain qualifications from global elite universities, as the status of these universities can help graduates ‘stand out in the crowd’. This is reflected in international students’ own perceptions and experiences. In a study looking at Chinese postgraduate students’ experiences of construction of their employability in the UK (Li 2013), the students are more modest – or realistic – in their evaluation of how an overseas qualification can help to distinguish them from other graduates. As one student commented: “*Well, this is a good university, but it’s not Oxford or Cambridge, is it? We don’t have a guaranteed passport*”.

More often, students in this same study referred to the benefits of their overseas education in terms of increased ‘soft currencies’ (Brown and Hesketh 2004) in their employability profile, which include interpersonal skills and other qualities. Li (2013) found there was a general conviction that more important than the degree itself for enhancing their employability were the ‘soft currencies’ gained from the whole education experience overseas.

Many interviewees felt that, apart from subject knowledge, learning skills that they had developed from their course studies – such as searching for and analysing information, planning and conducting research, presentational skills and teamwork – were valuable in enhancing their employability. Moreover, they saw the overseas experience as expanding their horizons and increasing their self-confidence and problem-solving skills, which they believed would further enhance their career opportunities. Many spoke of the benefit they had gained from ‘engaging with difference’ by interacting with people from different parts of the world, which in turn helped them to ‘think differently’. This finding is supported by some other studies in this field (e.g. Roberston et al. 2011; Huang et al. 2014).

On the surface, therefore, international higher education seems to serve well the call for employability skills which are not job-specific but support employment generally, such as problem-solving and interpersonal skills and, in the context of global business, intercultural communication skills. The increased demand for graduates with such intercultural skills comforts supporters of the ‘technocratic’ explanation of the relationship between education and occupational structure in a global context. With the deepening scale and scope of globalisation and integration of the world

economy, there is a higher demand for skilled workers with certain 'global' skills and more such job opportunities. But in his critique of 'technocratic' assumptions as early as the 1990s, Brown (1995) questioned such a linear relationship between the supply of skills and requirements in the workforce. He argues that technocratic theory is flawed because the process of matching the expert knowledge with occupational recruitment and roles does not take place in a social vacuum "as they are dependent upon social differences in academic performance and employer's definition of 'acceptability'..." (Brown 1995: 737–8). Equally, the transferrable skills (whatever this means or however it maybe be defined) that employers want – particularly the 'soft' skills – come heavily raced, classed and gendered (Morrison 2014), and may be interpreted, understood and recognised differently in different contexts, and by different stakeholders (Tran 2015). Despite the difficulties of defining a set of such skills, transferring these 'general' skills could be more problematic for international students because of the 'contextual disjunction'.

Research from migration studies has found many highly educated or highly skilled professional immigrants encounter considerable cultural, social and institutional constraints when entering local labour markets. They struggle to integrate their knowledge or abilities in the post-immigration contexts, and find themselves either unemployed or involved in 'survival jobs' or 'transnational jobs' which are well below their expectations and skills levels (Fotovatian 2014; Guo 2013a, b; Liu-Farrer 2011). Lack of professional networks, language proficiency and familiarity with the cultural norms in working and social life are often reported as barriers to finding employment to match their education and experience. As Fotovatian (2014: 2) notes "for new-comer immigrants, regardless of their field or level of expertise, engagement in the workplace encounters entails building social capital in an additional language and culture". He reports that many new immigrants felt they lacked confidence in the informal and interpersonal communications with their colleagues that are important for this process.

Studies show international students face similar problems to those of immigrants when seeking employment in their host countries after graduation. Robertson et al. (2011) found student-migrants were limited in the Australian employment market due to a lack of cultural knowledge, local networks, language skills and familiarity with Australian job-seeking procedures. Underemployment or even unemployment is a common experience for many student-migrants and they often felt extremely frustrated

that their qualifications were not as valuable in a positional sense as they had expected. In his study looking at international students' engagement with the labour market in Japan, Breaden (2014) found the expectations of the advantage offered by their 'global' attributes are overshadowed by their lack of 'local socio-cultural literacy' in the Japanese conventional job-hunting system. Aure (2013) also shows that gendered expectations and norms affect immigrants' participation in labour markets, beyond issues of language proficiency. Similarly, Kim's (2016) research found gender inequality in Korean universities, which prefer hiring young male staff, over females with similar qualifications and experience.

It is recognised that focusing on the university supply of skills might be important but not sufficient as it gives us very little ground for judging whether the skills demanded by employers are actually being deployed in the workplace (James et al. 2013). This becomes clear when we examine the experiences of international students' attempts to engage with local labour markets, but its validity is wider than this, extending to all university graduates, international and local. The transition from university to work needs knowledge of the specific skills which can only be developed through practice and the workplace (Tran 2015).

ALTERNATIVE VIEWS ON EMPLOYABILITY AND BETTER UNDERSTANDING

The experiences of international students' transitions to the labour markets clearly call for a conceptualisation of employability that can take into account such diverse and complex processes as those discussed. Whilst the main-stream views accentuate individual skills and consensus with labour markets' demands, various other research theories and approaches have proposed an alternative view which regards employability as relational, contextual and, most importantly, conflictual (Tholen 2015). Employability and employment opportunities do not only depend on one's attributes, skills and experience but "the relative chances of getting and maintaining different kinds of employment" (Brown and Hesketh 2004: 25). In these alternative views, the labour market is seen as an arena where individuals and groups are struggling to obtain advantage over others, using means that do not necessarily relate to skill, ability or work-related capacity (Tholen 2015). Accordingly, labour markets themselves are culturally embedded rather than driven by economic supply and demand calculations (Jones 1996). Studies of international students' transitions to the labour market, some of which are

mentioned above, provide some empirical evidence to support such claims. One of the features of social transactions in Chinese society, for example, that has been widely observed and commented on is '*guanxi*', commonly interpreted as 'social capital', 'social networks', or personal or family connections with those with power or influence. Studies of Chinese returnees have found most of the students were aware of the possible effect of *guanxi* in seeking employment in Chinese labour market and some take advantage of family *guanxi* to give them competitive advantage over their rivals in the job market (Li 2013; Gill 2010)

The concept of 'personal capital' was developed by Brown and Hesketh (2004) to explore positional conflict within the middle classes and to understand the different strategies individuals adopt to manage their employability in order to win the competition for 'tough-entry' jobs. It refers to a narrative of employability as packaging personal qualities in a way that is attractive and valued by employers. Studies show international education experiences result in transformative outcomes that are not directly career related (Roberston et al. 2011; Gill 2010). In Li's (2013) study, it was found that students often regard knowledge, skills and experience gained through overseas education as significant in term of a whole personal development 'project', rather than being narrowly or directly career focused. The Chinese word, '*suzhi*' (human quality) is the term many students used to refer to these skills and competences. Arguably, the discourse of *suzhi* is much broader than that of 'personal capital'. It is used to judge the value of a human being according to his/her knowledge, skills, morality and manners and can be used in various contexts (Yan 2003; Anagnost 2004), without being restricted to the individual's transition to the labour market. The improvement of an individual's *suzhi* implies whole-person development, and has broader social applicability rather than being as directly and narrowly instrumental to employability as is the notion of personal capital developed by Brown and Hesketh. As such, it offers the potential for an analysis that places employability in much wider social and personal contexts.

Similarly, Roberston et al. (2011) find positional and transformative outcomes are often intertwined in surprising ways in stories of post-study transitions of international students. Transformative outcomes such as greater personal independence and an expanded worldview remain significant to many student migrants' personal lives, even when they did not perceive these new attributes immediately converting to positional outcomes in their careers. As Marginson (2014) puts it, international education can

be seen as self-formation, and accordingly international students are self-forming agents who have the capability to pursue the life course that they regard as being worth living. To understand international students' transitions to the labour market, we need a holistic approach to understanding not only how they engage with their learning experience, but how they engage with the whole experience of international education as a life experience, and as part of their journey through the world. Tran (2015) suggests seeing student mobility as a process of 'becoming' – international students imagine their spatial movement as producing new conditions and possibilities for the transformation of themselves and for identity re-construction in divergent manners (p. 2). In the same spirit, some studies embrace the notion of 'graduate identity' (Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011) or 'intercultural identity' in order to understanding students' transition experience (Gill 2010).

FINAL THOUGHTS

This discussion of the employability of international students has served to highlight concerns about the concept of employability and its application to transitions from higher education into labour markets more generally. The idea of successful transitions being largely determined by an individual's level of employability that is defined as a collection of various skills and aptitudes, and the idea that in contemporary 'globalised' labour markets (whatever that may mean in practice), employability is enhanced primarily by the possession of de-contextualised, generic global skills have both been shown to be inadequate for understanding what actually happens in transitions from higher education to work. Such problematising of the employability concept is valuable in itself but it also raises fundamental questions about the role and nature of contemporary higher education and the way it is responding to globalisation – or perhaps we should say, the way it has been manipulated in the name of globalisation. Enhancing student employability (judged primarily and simplistically in terms of whether graduates gain employment and in what fields they work) has become increasingly enshrined in government policy and in university mission statements as the sole purpose of higher education. Amongst others (amongst whom, in turn, Collini (2012) stands out for his persistence, erudition and wit), McCowan (2013) has reminded us of the importance of retaining a broader view of the purposes of higher education that, at its base, must rest on an answer to the normative question of what

'should' universities be for. The asking of this question has currently been short-circuited by the enforced predominance of neoliberal ideology and practices – particularly as forms of governance – that reduce all human activities and all social institutions to a matter of economic exchange via marketisation. Hence, any question of the purpose of any institution is answered before it is asked: its sole purpose is to serve the economy.

The Chinese term *suzhi* has appeared in this account, introduced in the accounts of Chinese students' appraisals of what they gained through their international experience. It can be translated as 'quality' but as in many translations, its replacement by a word in another language alters its original meaning – or perhaps it is the meaning of 'quality', in English, that has changed over time. A further Chinese term that includes *suzhi* is *suzhi jiaoyu*, which can be literally translated as 'quality education' and describes a campaign to reform education in post-Mao China that has been prosecuted with varying degrees of official enthusiasm. Once again, the literal translation misses the real meaning of *suzhi jiaoyu*, which is founded in a particular tradition of Chinese education. A better translation is 'education for quality', as it aims to enhance the quality of students not only in their academic or even practical skills, and even less so in terms of their 'employability', but also as a much broader enhancement of their 'humanity' (*ren*) that recognises the moral, cultural and aesthetic aspects of being human. As McCowan (*ibid.*) points out, these broader concerns once figured in popular understanding of the role of higher education in the 'West' too, but have largely been replaced by instrumental roles and a narrow conception of what it means to be a member of human society. Perhaps, in this era of globalisation and global exchange, we should be prepared to learn from the experiences of these Chinese students, who seem to have gained more from their time at a UK university than they 'should' have done, rather than arrogantly assuming that they are the only ones with something to learn.

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Cultivating the Art of Judgement in Students

Geoffrey Hinchliffe and Helen Walkington

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we wish to suggest that the capability of judgement is something that is valued by employers and this can be developed by students in their academic studies. Some initial research has already been conducted in this area (e.g. see Hennemann and Liefner 2010; Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011) but this has tended to focus on more generic capabilities that are valued by employers. Here, we wish to focus on one of these capabilities in particular – judgement. We would suggest that employers may well take as read a graduate’s ability to understand complex information and ideas; what they are also interested in (and the work by Hinchliffe and Jolly cited above suggests this in particular) is the ability to take ownership

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and responsibility in the form of giving recommendations and advice. If this is the case then this presents certain challenges for academic teachers in terms of both the organisation of subject matter and its assessment. In particular, disciplines need to be considered as more than bodies of knowledge that need to be learnt and understood. Rather, we need to see subject disciplines as inhabiting what has been termed the ‘space of reasons’ (McDowell 1994) in which students learn to contest and justify their knowledge.

Our chapter will situate the idea of the space of reasons by using the story of the cave, drawn from Plato’s *Republic*. It provides us with a metaphor of what it means to escape from a world of received opinion to a world of knowledge formation. An essential part of this formation is the cultivation of judgement in which students learn to own, defend and justify what they have learnt. They learn that few judgements are permanent – most of our judgements have to be revised both in the light of counter-argument and in the light of changing evidence. In order to exemplify this we use two case study examples where students are challenged to demonstrate this capability of judgement and in so doing, enhance their employability. The first example is a multi-disciplinary undergraduate research conference, where students disseminate and defend their own research findings (new knowledge) through dialogue. In this setting students begin to develop not only judgements about subject matter but also their ideas and disciplinary perspective in the light of an appreciation of their positionality. The authenticity and professionalism inherent in the examples is acknowledged by students as important for them in developing employability.

In the second example, we use a module-based assignment where students judge the management response to a real natural disaster. The case study demonstrates how the assignment brief and module structure scaffold the ability to make judgements. The outcome is a professional and authentic report. Student responses to the learning task will be included.

THE METAPHOR OF THE CAVE

The Cave in Plato’s *Republic* gives a powerful, even uncompromising metaphor of life without education, without knowledge. It portrays what we call ‘epistemic dependency’, in which mental horizons are limited, cramped and worthless. The broad features of Plato’s account are well known but one or two details are worth noticing as well. Plato supposes that the cave dwellers are so constrained that all they see are flickers on a

wall opposite, caused by the light of a fire behind them throwing shadows through a curtain. Behind the curtain is a road on which there are comings and goings of people which cannot be directly seen. All the cave dwellers can do is observe the flickers and infer from them the point and purpose of the people, animals and other implements. To help them in this task, the cave dwellers can hear noises from the road behind which they can associate with the shady figures in front of them. Plato speculates that they may get quite good at recognising these shadows and we can even suppose that they may award each other prizes for spotting the most interesting combinations of sound and image, not to mention prizes for being able to make correct predictions (Plato 1987: 258). He further speculates that if someone had managed to escape from the cave and spent time above ground (so that they experienced sunlight and could see things correctly) on their return they would be somewhat less interested in the prizes that the cave dwellers so eagerly valued. What is more, the returnee may not be very good at discriminating the flickers for he may have let all his old skills go rusty. He may well make a complete fool of himself and the cave dwellers “would say that his visit to the upper world had ruined his sight” (p. 259). With his new knowledge the returnee could certainly explain the causes of what the cave dwellers took to be reality but he would no longer be able to play an interpretative part in their world.

The Cave is a powerful metaphor because it is utterly uncompromising. What the returnee knows is now entirely incommensurate with what he used to know, to the extent that what he used to know is now quite valueless. The incommensurability between the cave dwellers and those who have escaped has nothing to do with social position or social recognition. The incommensurability is not positional but epistemic. The uncompromising nature of the metaphor is driven home when one sees that the cave dwellers cannot even use the flickers on the wall as a basis for knowing because such knowing is based on error, given that they can only see the flickers and not their source. The fact that they believe otherwise merely serves to emphasise the utterly hopeless position which they are in. The only way to shift their perspective is to give them entirely different experiences on which to build an interpretative and explanatory structure.

We do not, of course, know why these people are in the cave in the first place and the power of the metaphor could be lost once questions like that are pressed. All we need to note is that this dependency is structural and intended by no-one. It arises in a twofold way. First, they do not know and have no way of knowing anything about the source of the

sights and sounds they experience. All the inferences they might make could be wrong and if they are not that would only be by chance. Second, they are unaware of the sunlit world and are unable to conceive of such a world. (Perhaps they accuse those few who come back down to the cave of being ‘elitists’.) Interestingly, no-one benefits by this dependency. The only persons who might be said to ‘benefit’ are the cave dwellers themselves because, it may be supposed, their constraints are not particularly irksome especially when they have the distractions of the flickers on the wall to look at. Their life could be considered as one which is comfortable and undemanding. After all, if one knows nothing else, why would one ever complain? We might even speculate (although Plato does not go this far) that an escapee, whilst glad he has escaped and fully cognisant of the fact that there is no going back, might nevertheless occasionally feel pangs of regret at leaving behind a trouble-free existence even if he were to concede, if pressed, that he had no desire at all to go back to that kind of life.

We can see straightaway how the metaphor can work for education: the journey from the Cave to the sunlit world is a journey of enlightenment, from ignorance to knowledge. One of the key points is that in the process of that journey many things have to be *unlearned*. The metaphor has relevance for education not because children and students are in the exact position of the cave dwellers but because some contemporary experiences may mirror the Cave in a way that might be found uncomfortable if dwelt upon for too long (for example, Plato’s remarks about prizes they award each other and how the perceived prestige of such prizes no longer have any value for the returnee: the parallel with today would be celebrity culture). An important aim of education, then, is to liberate learners from the perils of epistemic dependency.

THE SPACE OF REASONS

The question arises as to how we are to conceptualise the knowledge and understanding that is needed to escape epistemic dependency. The seminal essay on the relation between knowledge and education by Paul Hirst, *Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge*, written in the 1960s, is still, in our view, very instructive. In this essay, Hirst investigates what he terms ‘forms of knowledge’ and suggests that the focus of knowledge is “experience, structured under some conceptual scheme” (1972: 97). The forms of knowledge (roughly speaking, the different disciplinary subjects) therefore could be seen as the structuring of experience of the natural and

human world. But for all of Hirst's achievement one could argue that he does seem to suggest that knowledge is essentially propositional, made up of inert theorems and informational sets. Whether Hirst actually believed this is perhaps doubtful but this criticism could be read into his account and often has been (see, e.g. Goodson 2005). So we need some way of developing his ideas so that the dynamic, shifting character of knowledge is recognised. If we can do this then there is the promise of a lively, dynamic curriculum as well. Somehow, we need to think of knowledge in terms of discovery and justification, of argument and counter-argument. How should we do this?

In his 1994 book, *Mind and World*, the philosopher John McDowell has contrasted what he terms the 'space of reasons' with the 'realm of natural law'. The realm of natural law is roughly the realm of propositional knowledge – for example, the laws of physics. The space of reasons relates to that human space in which we ask for and give reasons. We have to justify and give an account of our beliefs since, whereas the realm of law is essentially causal and explanatory, the space of reasons is justificatory. Of course, if propositions in the realm of law become open to doubt then they themselves have to be justified in the space of reasons.

For McDowell, it is important that the space of reasons has some grip on the world. Not just any justification or explanation can count as a reason and to think it can is to suppose our belief systems can operate independently of how the world is, 'spinning in a void' as he calls it. He thinks that we need to think of the world as constraining our beliefs – but it does not follow that they are outside what is *thinkable*. So 'experience' never comes as just raw sense data but as already conceptualised. Therefore an (conceptualised) experience does act as a constraint upon belief which *potentially* can answer to world's being 'thus and so', even if in practice we treat our beliefs as provisional and open to review. Indeed, that we do treat our beliefs as open to review is just what one would expect the moment those beliefs become part of the space of reasons.

McDowell thinks that we can become attuned to living in the space of reasons through the development of a second nature. This nature is exemplified by the way in which we conceptualise experience and justify our beliefs. It is a form of acculturation and in this connection he mentions the role of *Bildung* – the German concept of self-formation through learning. So education has a role to play which is not only cultural and moral but is also epistemological: through learning we conceptualise the world – and

therefore experience the world differently from what we would do if we did not have this ‘second nature’. But how does knowledge relate to the space of reasons?

What we suggest is that we can think of knowledge as existing in the space of reasons. From an educational point of view, what we want is for our students to learn to live in the space of reasons. It is in this space that experience is articulated in the form of beliefs that are tested, contested and justified. If knowledge is treated as if it were solely propositional, along the lines of the realm of natural law, then from the standpoint of those who are learning it can indeed come to seem as something dry and inert. But this rests on a misunderstanding of knowledge and its relation to experience whereby our knowledge is seen as separate from experience. When we take the ideas of Hirst and MacDowell together we can see that this separation is misconceived, a misconception that treats ‘knowledge’ as characteristic of the realm of law outside the space of reasons.

However, apart from the space of reasons/realm of law distinction there is another feature which plays an increasingly major role: this is the role played by judgement, namely the ability to constitute a state of affairs as having certain features and to evaluate their relative importance. Judgement is usually contextual so that the discrimination of a state of affairs is situated within a wider understanding. When we refer to the forms of knowledge as underpinning educational purposes then the ability to make judgements occupies a central place. Learning does not merely consist of the mastery of concepts and information: what we are looking for is the ability to make judgements. Understood in this way, learning becomes an active process that engages and challenges the learner through linking judgement and responsibility. It is described by McDowell in these terms:

...judging can be singled out as the paradigmatic mode of actualisation of conceptual capacities, the one in terms of which we should understand the very idea of conceptual capacities in the relevant sense. And judging, making up our minds what to think, is something for which we are in principle responsible – something we freely do, as opposed to something that merely happens in our lives...and this freedom, exemplified in responsible acts of judging, is essentially a matter of being answerable to criticism in the light of rationally relevant considerations. So the realm of freedom, at least the freedom of judging, can be identified with the space of reasons (McDowell 2009: 5–6; see also Backhurst 2011: 75).

Roughly speaking there will be at least some of our beliefs for which we are not responsible in the sense that they are formed through the world's being 'thus and so'. But supervening on such beliefs are a complex of beliefs—judgements—for which we are responsible. Engagement with forms of knowledge is therefore a risky endeavour since we are accountable for our judgements and being able to account for them is also what one has to do if one lives within a space of reasons. The kinds of judgements one makes, as far as learning is concerned, will range from the theoretical and the interpretative down to the severely practical.

Another feature of McDowell's account lies in the way in which subjective or agent-centred considerations must be laid aside. The idea here is that our judgements invoke publicly specified criteria; we can see that coming to be acquainted with such criteria helps us lay aside personal considerations in reaching a judgment. That one can be held personally accountable for making judgements in accordance with impersonal criteria takes time to digest and appreciate but this is another feature of judging that students need to learn.

THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR EMPLOYABILITY

It is not enough for graduates, on entering employment, to be able to absorb complex information and execute instructions accordingly. One of the key findings of the survey of Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) was that employers expect (or at least hope) that students are resourceful and can work independently; that they are able to arrive at and defend conclusions; and that they are able to give recommendations to others with confidence and able to back up those recommendations with reasons and evidence. The field of employment itself can be seen as operating in a 'space of reasons' in which shifting patterns of knowledge and information have to be interpreted, configured and presented in different ways. The requirement that graduates can cope with change and where necessary become 'change agents' themselves is just another facet of working and living in the space of reasons.

Thus the implication is that students need to be capable of justifying their beliefs and making judgements, because what we really want our students to do is to get used to defending and criticising judgements. In that way they learn that knowledge doesn't come in neatly packaged bundles but is something difficult, not clear cut. Making and defending judgements helps students to learn how to become *responsible for those*

judgements. For teachers in universities who have within their horizon the importance of student employability, these considerations have important implications for the curriculum in terms of both its content and modes of assessment. It means that students are not only expected to demonstrate skills and understanding appropriate to subject matter but that they also develop the capability of making and defending judgements if they are also to successfully make the transition into employment. We maintain that bridging this transition is not something that can be left to students as if academics have no part to play. To the contrary, academics do have a responsibility for ensuring that the curriculum develops employability, consistent with academic excellence: hence the need for detailed examination of the curriculum in order to ease this transition.

In the UK the skills gap between higher education and employment is well documented (Archer and Davison 2008; UKCES 2014a, b). Strategies to support the development of professional capabilities, including in non-vocational subjects, suggest that assessment tasks contains many implicit capabilities for employment, but that translation from a higher education environment to employers is required (Tyrer et al. 2013). This suggests that a reflective approach associated with assessed tasks can support students in this translation process. Provoking students to reflect on their learning at the end of a module or degree programme could enhance the employability of students.

It is vital that students recognise what they have been learning. There is quite a lot of evidence that they are often not prepared to translate their experience of 'doing a degree' into the language of achievements valued by employers. When employability-enhancing elements are only tacitly present, students' claims to employability are seriously compromised. If your project fosters achievements valued by employers, does it also ensure that learners know this? (Knight 2003: 5).

Some institutions focus on placements or work-related learning outside the curriculum but these opportunities are not always open to all students. Curriculum embedding of employer related capabilities becomes particularly important if we are to encourage *all* students to engage with the employability agenda personally. Institutions will adopt an employability focus that meets the individualised requirements of their particular students and modes of curriculum delivery (Pegg et al. 2012). It is therefore essential that students are helped to reflect on their learning with an employability lens (CBI and UUK 2009).

This chapter now provides two case studies of interventions to promote reflection on learning experiences. The first case study is a student research conference where students were interviewed at the end of the event and asked to reflect upon what they had learnt. The quotes that are included here highlight the employability benefits that students can perceive, linked specifically to making judgements.

CASE STUDY I: A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY STUDENT RESEARCH CONFERENCE FOR UNDERGRADUATES

Student research conferences are just one way of disseminating research findings (Spronken-Smith et al. 2013; Walkington 2015) and in so doing, completing the research cycle (Walkington 2014). Using the Graduate attributes model of Barrie (2006), Hill and Walkington (2016) provide evidence of the attributes developed for the Geography, Earth and Environmental Science (GEES) disciplines through multidisciplinary student research conferences and identify self-authorship (Baxter Magolda 2004) as the overarching pedagogic concept. Self-authorship (Baxter Magolda 2004, 2009), describes a student when they are able to consider what they know and how they came to know it, to judge the suitability of their knowledge as applied in particular contexts and to be able to reframe their knowledge purposefully for different contexts. This implies a responsibility for judgement. Hill and Walkington (2016) reveal that GEES students develop their own understanding of their work further through dialogue with peers, and gain multiple-graduate attributes simultaneously in a 'peak experience' due to the prestige of the conference event. The students move towards self-authorship in this setting through a careful balance of communicating their disciplinary understanding to someone from another subject area with an evolving set of intra-personally grounded values, negotiated through dialogue. Such conferences, therefore, provide opportunities to begin to construct graduate identities during a degree programme, potentially helping students develop their employability and start a process of transition into the next phase of their lives.

Although communicating the results of research has many generic benefits in terms of employability, research literacy (and other graduate attributes) and in terms of developing a professional identity, more specific capabilities such as making judgements and defending beliefs have not previously been studied. One aspect which we explore here is the need to make and defend judgements. This section outlines the way that students

respond to the conference experience in their own words and is based on student responses to multidisciplinary research conferences within a single UK institution, Oxford Brookes University (ranging from multidisciplinary conferences within a department composed of several social science disciplines, through to faculty-wide and university-wide conferences).

Student responses were filtered to look for evidence of students making judgements of any kind. The statements below reveal that students carefully judge the material that they are going to convey and the type of audience they might anticipate, such that their material can be conveyed to an audience from different disciplines; they also make judgements about themselves in the light of the material presented by others during the conference event itself; a further judgement about the research itself and its worth is made, particularly with respect to research that has been carried out in groups, when a single person is presenting not only their own work but that of a team.

Selecting material is an important first step in preparing for a conference. Justifying the knowledge to convey is important and students have to be selective. However, they also begin to see the conference space as a space to contest knowledge actively:

a conference has two outcomes, I mean it could be seen as informing the people that come to the conference, but it also informs the person presenting at the conference, it is sort of a dual feedback system in other words, it is not just the person coming to the conference who gets information, because by asking questions they're testing the knowledge of the person doing the presentation. That enables me to look more critically at the work I've produced. I had an anthropologist come up to me and ask me about all these other things, about educating people to work with nature, and I was saying 'well people shouldn't be in nature' and then we got into a discussion about people only protecting things they are interested in, which is something I hadn't really thought about before. She had a different perspective, which allowed me to develop my thoughts about an issue.
[Male, physical geography undergraduate]

Actively discussing ideas and judgements on material led to student researchers changing their minds on the way that they presented their judgements, in this case of historical data:

the engagement in producing my poster, and then discussing it with a number of attendees, helped to further refine and develop my thinking on the subject of Empire sentimentality in the 1800's. The impact on my eventual dissertation

was really profound and, when the time came to present my work in the faculty conference last week, I needed to produce an entirely new poster to reflect the changes in my thinking since the last one. [Male, History undergraduate]

In order to justify the knowledge they were highlighting, students also had to make decisions about the choice of material to convey:

*It wasn't like doing a project where I could put all my information into an appendix, I couldn't waffle, I had to be to the point and make sure that everything related back to what I was researching and **that I fully substantiated everything**, so in that respect that was quite difficult. It was good fun at the same time, it was quite difficult to sort of select what I was going to show, like, I had loads of photos, loads of data and **it was a case of selecting exactly what was appropriate for this**, that was going to get my point across the best because I had that limited space and also, I was governed by the sensitivity of the subject that I was doing in terms of the sort of photographs I could show and had permission to use. [Female, International Relations undergraduate]*

Students often talked about extending their knowledge through explaining their material in different ways, highlighting how this approach differed from normal presentations for assessment:

*I don't think I would have realised how much I've learnt in a formal presentation because I would have just memorised what I wanted to say, said it, and prepared for the questions, whereas here every time I spoke to somebody I gave a slightly different approach to it, like **I explained it a different way depending on the knowledge they already had**, there was one person who already knew a lot about [my topic], he really grilled me, but it was good because it made me think even further than the limit I'd already reached. [Female, Human geography undergraduate]*

Students made extensive comments about the links between the conference presentation and their awareness of developing employability skills:

*I saw it as something that would be good for my CV, the job I'm going into, I'm going to be doing a lot of presentations and meeting a lot of unfamiliar people and to a certain extent **selling my ideas and my research** so it was good experience for me. [Female, Politics undergraduate]*

Only a minority of students presented work that had been done collaboratively; however for those that did an interesting theme was the negotiation

involved in the research process, leading to judgements about the value of other people's ideas and contributions. This was particularly the case where students were working with subjective knowledge:

Sometimes it's quite nice just to get things done and to go off and do it on your own, so there is no one else interfering and just getting it done, but then when you put it together as a group you've got to have better communication skills and you've got to take other people's ideas on board, even if you don't agree with them. [Female, Anthropology undergraduate]

This data has come from local conferences in a single institution but the themes are mirrored in a larger-scale study by Walkington et al. (2016) who address the gap in knowledge of the learning gains from national-level student research conferences, and reveal a student-driven learning process, a multidisciplinary pedagogy of 'Reciprocal Elucidation'—a form of bi-directional knowledge building.

This case study has revealed that by exploring evaluation data from conference participation, students are developing the art of judgement in a variety of ways, regardless of the discipline or context in which they are working.

CASE STUDY 2: A DISASTER MANAGEMENT MODULE

This case study uses an Environmental Hazard Management module within an undergraduate geography programme to demonstrate how beliefs and judgements are negotiated by groups of students and by individuals through the creation of a space of reasons within the module. The module aimed to examine the management of environmental disasters. Through a series of real case studies it dealt critically with the performance of different kinds of management interventions, including risk-reduction strategies. Learning outcomes included: the evaluation of contemporary approaches to environmental disaster management; theoretical approaches to explain the underlying causes of disasters, particularly human vulnerability; the nature of the interrelationships between physical, social, economic and political factors which influence disaster response; and the ability to use real case studies to reflect on the efficacy of disaster management and to use these judgements to propose recommendations for the future management of similar disasters. The module was assessed through two assignments:

1. Student led mini lectures—to develop the students' ability to present a critical argument that facilitated discussion and debate amongst the cohort, and to provide a framework within which students could explore their own views (**beliefs**) and those of others on course issues. (The mini-lecture topics included: the role and impact of the media in disasters; the role of Aid; responses to the refugee problem; the gender dimensions of an emergency; the role of the military in disaster relief; and the efficacy of forecasting in saving lives).
2. An individual recent environmental disaster report—to develop students' ability to make a judgement about the effectiveness of the emergency response to a real disaster case study, and to make a series of recommendations (**judgements**) for long-term action in the disaster context. The report format was provided for the students in order to ensure a comparable structure.

Students were asked to complete an optional short anonymous questionnaire at the end of the module in relation to their beliefs and judgements. The relationship between beliefs and judgement making has been outlined earlier in this chapter when considering the space of reasons. Therefore these two facets were used to frame reflective questions.

Beliefs

Question: This module has explored our beliefs in relation to environmental hazard management, especially through presentations and debates. Please comment on how you felt the module has allowed you to test, contest and justify your beliefs.

Responses:

It has allowed me to test my beliefs by broadening my knowledge of issues surrounding environmental hazards and the effectiveness of their management, as well as viewing different opinions via the presentations. (Respondent 1)

Debates allowed me to take sides and ask questions to opposing teams. I was allowed to ask questions as well as actually debating myself. I was given the opportunity to justify my beliefs after questions were asked. (Respondent 2)

I feel the presentations were helpful in testing certain beliefs and giving me more insight into them e.g. use of international aid in disaster relief and watching two sides of an argument and possibly reshaping my belief, to an extent, as a result. (Respondent 5)

It has challenged previous assumptions I have had. For example, the difference gender makes to disaster impacts. This was evident in the research process for our presentation. Through the questioning after our presentation we were able to contest other people's beliefs. Through questioning after the presentations I was able to justify my beliefs. (Respondent 14)

Making Judgements

Question: This module has involved you in making judgements. You have been asked to judge the effectiveness of the emergency response to phases of a disaster, you have been asked to judge what could work as a set of recommendations. Please comment on how the module developed your ability to make these judgements and your experience of learning to make them.

Responses:

In response to this question students' reflections were grouped thematically by the authors. We identified approaches to judgement making that were theoretical, in contrast to those that were based upon real case studies (and therefore more practical), a further category was that of judgements that focused on balancing the views of multiple people (normative). These three themes are returned to later in the chapter.

Theoretical Approaches to Judgement Making

It helped me become informed as to what are the key issues that need to be addressed and in what way to therefore judge their effectiveness and develop my own recommendations. (Respondent 1)

It taught me to be more critical when making judgements, listening to others' ideas on why they made their judgements in the presentations and debates can contest [your] beliefs but help you make better judgements. I developed the ability to use [theoretical] models to split up the phases of a disaster, to open up to making new judgements for each phase. The module taught us to dispel myths e.g. from the media or what is thought to be common knowledge which could have an effect on how judgements are made. Don't believe everything you see / hear! It helped show judgements aren't always black and white. Definitions can impact on judgements. (Respondent 3)

It gave me the tools and techniques to make more informed and more critically-based judgements: allowed me to develop my skills in research therefore allowing more detail and knowledge to be present in my judgements. (Respondent 4)

It taught me how to prioritise the key issues that arise from a disaster, the more we judged the easier it became. Questioning whether the emergency responses have done enough in the past, for us to be able to cope now, was a useful framework. (Respondent 6)

Case Studies

The experience was difficult at first as the ‘myths’ [of disaster management] highlighted how complex it was to make those judgements, but multiple case studies began to make the judgements easier to make, and studying further literature for the disaster report completed the process. (Respondent 10)

By learning what has and hasn’t been effective in previous natural disasters I was able to develop my ability to make judgements. (Respondent 14)

Multiple Perspectives:

Hearing various people’s view points on issues, and their explanations (reasoning). (Respondent 7)

It is good to have disagreements in class! (Respondent 9)

I further developed my ability to acknowledge that sometimes someone else will have a better point / idea. The lectures and sessions exposed us to ideas / theories that we may not have considered before. Also, listening to other people’s personal experiences made me consider other ideas. The reading required for the module also allowed me to see more than one side to an argument. (Respondent 11)

The use of a case-study approach and repeated modelling of the judgement process in class has clearly scaffolded the making of judgements for students. The idea that beliefs are long held whereas judgements are made more quickly and are subject to the challenge of new information has been borne out here. Although students had their beliefs challenged, none admitted to completely changing their belief, instead they did say that their judgements would change in the light of hearing alternative viewpoints and gaining further information. Learning the theoretical approaches to understand a subject allowed students to frame their judgement making. They were able to structure the information they had about a disaster in a way that made evaluating it critically more manageable, such as by judging each phase separately (breaking the task down), before looking synoptically across their judgements and defending a grounded analysis. Actively debating in class proved to be a very powerful pedagogic approach for developing judgement making. Hearing alternative perspectives and the

reasoning behind points of view as well as having ones ideas tested by others was all valued in the process of learning to make judgements.

In the second assignment students critically evaluated the management of a disaster and in the process made a series of judgements at each stage in the disaster management cycle (initial preparation for the disaster, the immediate response, the response in the days and weeks following the disaster). This was followed by a set of recommendations to ensure that similar disasters could be better managed in the future. The student's own evaluation of the response therefore contextualised these recommendations. The judgements that students made were defended and judgements of suitable alternative approaches were provided. The assessed work fell into several categories based on how well the students were able to judge, defend their judgement and advocate for future action.

At the most basic level students described the disaster response, following on from this there was an attempt to judge the effectiveness of that response and most students were able to apply some theoretical criteria against which to do this critically. When it came to recommendations, students had to consider the appropriateness of their recommendations in the light of the specific context of the disaster. Values-based judgements were therefore made in determining this appropriateness. For example, one student talked about early warning systems being available for disasters in some countries, but the same level of forecasting and communication of warnings not being available in other places due to the lack of infrastructure. Therefore judgements about practical ways in which communities could prepare were justified over investment in expensive forecasting technology as the country in question did not have sufficient resources for this.

In the case of the Tōhoku earthquake and associated tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan in 2011 one student identified that people were most affected on the basis of their age category, with young people, for whom disaster education and drills are part of schooling being little affected, in contrast to older generations with reduced mobility. The recommendation to map human vulnerability and use this as a basis for planning was therefore well justified with the use of the data. This kind of judgement is therefore quite easy to assess, in contrast to a values-based judgement about political decision-making.

At the top level students were able to make a judgement about the root causes of the disaster and use evidence from other places to develop synoptic thinking in making a judgement about what might be feasible to reduce disasters in the future. For example, one student looking at the management of tornados in America had explored why they do not occur

at similar latitudes elsewhere and as a result suggested a wall or superstructure made from the alignment of sky scrapers in Midwestern towns to directly address the causes of the disaster. This judgement was then critically analysed in terms of the economic return that could be gained in savings from tornado destruction and judged to be cost effective. However, it was also judged to be impossible to raise the funding in the first place.

The students therefore made a range of theoretical, practical and normative judgements. In assessing the work it was much easier to assess the efficacy of the theoretical and practice judgements in comparison to the normative values-based ones.

The ability to make and defend judgements, although free of restraint to a particular discipline, remains specific to a context. Yet, the art of judgement could be considered a generic graduate attribute (Barrie 2006, 2007). Graduate attributes have been used by institutions to define their educational offer. For example, communication skills, information literacy and critical thinking often feature in the generic graduate attributes that institutions provide as an entitlement for all their learners, regardless of the discipline / programme being studied. However, as this case study has shown, the art of judgement does contribute to the development of graduate attributes. As Hughes and Barrie (2010) noted, measuring the attainment of these attributes is not straightforward. They suggested a mix of data was required including curriculum documentation, student evaluations and employer responses with the clearest evidence coming from 'explicit embedding in assessment' (Hughes and Barrie 2010: 325). This case study has been an attempt to start this process with a focus upon curriculum embedding within a module, and the efficacy of the assessment process in marking (judging) the judgements of the students. It has confirmed that assessing effective attitudes and values is challenging (Haigh and Clifford 2011) where these are part and parcel of the judgement process, as they are tied to value systems which are not objectively measurable. It is important to check with employers whether generic graduate attributes are something that they consider important for employability. Employers will differ greatly in their specific requirements, but many look for leadership capabilities and for this effective decision-making and the use of judgement is essential. Generic graduate attributes are unlikely to stress leadership because not all students can be guaranteed to develop this. As a result generic attributes may be more of a basic entitlement rather than something to distinguish and differentiate students in terms of their employability.

It has been important to reflect on judgements as theoretical, practical and normative to contemplate the work of the students and also the

assessment process. These reflections allow the assessor to be more explicit future about the way in which judgements may fall into different categories and to be more explicit in the assessment brief about the types of judgements that might be expected, as well as in the module-learning outcomes and therefore also the marking criteria. Reflecting on the art of judgement has provoked consideration of how to represent the students to employers in references, being able to evidence their ability to make effective judgements. In addition, it may help support students in refining what it is they have learnt and how this has real-world application, so that they can present this to potential employers.

THE ASSESSMENT OF JUDGEMENTS

If we think of learning and ask what we want students to learn, in some ways the answer could be said to be fairly straightforward:

1. Basic theorems and information plus skills
2. Understanding of associated context
3. Judgements

Context is always important because understanding context tells us the extent to which students understand basic content. Judgements are related to context and content. There are no 'skills in judging' that can be learnt apart from context. This implies that judgements are not easily transferable from one knowledge domain to another. But we can learn what it means to be responsible for our judgements and how they might be justified: we want our students to learn to become mature in their judgements.

When we come to assessment we need to be clear in our minds what we are assessing. Are we assessing knowledge of content and context? Or, are we assessing judgements and how well-founded they are? The former implies that assessment is orientated towards an understanding of concepts, information, interpretations and explanations: if these can be situated by the student within a wider context then so much the better as it demonstrates greater breadth. But if we assess judgements as well we are asking students to demonstrate not only a sophisticated understanding of context but also the ability to orientate this understanding towards purposive goals as well. This gives the more traditional curriculum aims a greater urgency and relevance. Getting the students to learn how to judge, places that curriculum squarely in the space of reasons.

But when we listen to colleagues in Higher Education in the UK we worry sometimes that their assessment strategies are dominated by content, context and traditional learning. We worry that we don't really know how to assess judgements – or to judge judgements. It is as if we are reluctant ourselves to let students enter the space of reasons in a full-blown way, by our having assessment methods that play safe, that are risk-free. The first thing we have to do is to educate students into the art of making judgements, no matter what subject they are taking. We need students to understand that we don't just want to assess their knowledge of content and context: we have to educate them to take risks, even if sometimes that doesn't pay off. Because students have to learn what a poor judgement is. In addition we must reflect on this process as academics and start to embed judgement making more clearly into our assessment briefs, marking criteria and be explicit with students in terms of how learning outcomes based on judgement making may link to their employability.

As we understand it, an academic judgement falls short of being a statement (or assertion) of 'how things are'. Rather, it is an *estimate* of how things are, typically prefaced by an utterance of the kind: 'I believe that x, y, z.....' where the belief contains a degree of uncertainty. Although there are many kinds of judgement we suggest three types relevant to this discussion:

- Practical
- Epistemic
- Value judgements (normative)

Whereas a practical judgement issues in a decision or recommendation, an epistemic judgement aims at a certain understanding – a phenomenon or event should be understood or interpreted in this way rather than that way. In traditional academic disciplines most judgements tend to be epistemic. It provides an estimate of 'how things are' which falls short of a *statement* (or assertion) as to how things actually are. In addition, value judgements are often implied in practical judgements although the values (norms) are not always made explicit. But value judgements cannot be ignored because they may give a particular recommendation its point or purpose. Thus practical judgements which are made without appropriate epistemic investigation or without sufficient reflection on the values being employed may well emerge as not only inadequate but positively harmful.

Given this brief consideration of the nature of a judgement, we may come to understand the features of what constitutes a poor judgement in

our students. First, there would be a lack of secure understanding of basic content and where understanding of associated context is thin or non-existent. In addition, we would expect to see a failure to make use of, or to understand, key threshold concepts – this is particularly manifest in weak *epistemic* judgements. Further considerations relating to poor judgements include:

- Failure to make explicit the basis of normative grounds of a judgement
- Practical judgements and recommendations that are not attended by sufficient reasoning/evidence
- Epistemic judgements are likely to be weak if there is only a perfunctory engagement with appropriate content
- Given that judgements are usually shaped by readings of context an inadequate contextual understanding is bound to result in poor judgement—thus contextual understanding is an important dimension of epistemic judgements
- Poor judgements usually wilt under a series of counterfactuals. By contrast, good judgements can withstand counterfactuals whether in the form of argumentation or evidence.

WHAT IS A GOOD JUDGEMENT?

First, we would expect the student herself to understand that a judgement falls short of being propositional; it is a best estimate of ‘how things are’. But it is worth remarking that we would expect this understanding to be conveyed in the substance of a particular judgement and that an extensive connotation of *phrases* of estimation (‘to some extent’, ‘may possibly be’, ‘could be seen as’, much use of the word ‘might’, etc., etc.) does not, in itself, amount to good judgement but merely conveys the appearance of judging. In addition, we could say:

- There is a rigour and internal robustness to good judgements so that they are not easy to knock down. They have some resilience
- We should encourage our students to use scholarly apparatus and (or) evidence to support their judgements and warn them against the danger of using academic apparatus to disguise poor judgement or the lack of any judgement
- A good judgement says something interesting. So the test is not just ‘is it true?’ but also ‘Is it true but trivial?’ Judgements that just repeat

at great length what we already know are of little use, no matter how sound

- Consequently, good judgements take *risks*. The judgement has something about it that makes it stand out, whether in terms of the judgement itself or the reasons or evidence used to back it up.

Finally, we suggest that the assessment of judgements can shed light on the assessment criterion of critical evaluation. Often this is unclear to students, and their teachers may lament their students' lack of ability to engage in evaluation. However, once it is seen that evaluation needs to issue in a *judgment* and that is judgement which may be structured in terms of its practical/epistemic and value-driven dimensions then 'critical evaluation' has a purpose and an outcome. In the two case studies there are examples of how students were evaluating critically their beliefs in respect to subject matter (e.g. responses to environmental disasters) to the extent that they felt confident in making tentative judgements regarding those responses. These judgements included giving due weight to evidence in so far as they were aware of how evidence and judgements were related.

It is our contention that the development of judgement making in students enhances employability since it demonstrates not merely a capacity to understand complex subject matter but also an ability and confidence to express beliefs and make recommendations.

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Who Is to Be Positioned as Employable? Adult Graduates' Educational and Working Life Pathways

Päivi Siivonen

INTRODUCTION

Finnish higher education is closely related to the goals of the Finnish welfare state (e.g. Välimaa 2012). Everyone has a chance to educate themselves and to get ahead in life through education. Education, in general, particularly higher education, has also traditionally had a very high status in Finland. The aim of the free-educational system, including higher education, has been to cultivate knowledge and skills that creates good citizens and provides equal educational opportunities to all regardless of gender, social class or other social distinctions (e.g. Kivinen and Kaipainen 2012).

However, over the last few decades differences between social groups and their chances to participate in university education have narrowed but not disappeared. In the era of mass higher education in the 2000s, those coming from academically educated families, are eight times more likely

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to study in universities compared to those coming from non-academic backgrounds (Kivinen et al. 2007). Moreover, and despite the emphasis on lifelong learning for all, the most common route to an academic occupational pathway is still to continue in higher education and graduate with a degree from a polytechnic (also called university of applied sciences) or a university in one's youth. At a time when rapid graduation and labour-market entrance are being strongly encouraged, graduation in adulthood may be interpreted as a weakness as adult graduates are expected to prove their worth in an increasingly competitive labour market sometimes, without former experience from the field (Irni 2008, 2010; Kelan 2008; Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016). Credential inflation together with work-related age discrimination may influence their relative positioning in the labour market (Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016).

In addition to social differences of educability, that is who is to be educated and how (Häyrynen and Hautamäki 1973), social differences of employability are further construed in the neo-liberal market economy. In order to convince her/his worth for potential employers an ideal individual of the neo-liberal order is to engage in continuous self-development and entrepreneurial work on the self. S/he is to become an accountable, active, autonomous, self-directed, responsible and flexible-lifelong learner and enterprising individual (Tuschling and Engemann 2006; Komulainen et al. 2009; Foster and Wass 2013; Siivonen and Brunila 2014; Siivonen et al. 2016; Siivonen 2016). As I would like to argue, this kind of self is a middle-class construction and, thus available in different ways for individuals with differing social dispositions (see also Skeggs 2004, 2005; Siivonen et al. 2016). Moreover, age is also an important issue in maintaining one's employability and the entrepreneurial work on the self (Kelan 2008; Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016).

In this chapter, in order to examine Finnish higher education graduates' social positioning in education and working life, I have chosen to analyse three adult graduates' narrative life histories based on a larger eight-year-long qualitative study that took place in 2004–2012.¹ The three participants had graduated from Finnish general upper secondary school for adults (GUSSA²) in 2004–2005. By the time of the follow-up interviews carried out in autumn 2012, they had also graduated from Finnish higher education institutes: one from a university with a Master's degree (Lisa³) and two from a polytechnic with a Bachelor's degree⁴ (Kaarina and Henri). At the time of the second interviews they were aged 33–56 and all of them were also employed in jobs that corresponded to their new

upgraded degrees. Two of the graduates were females who self-identified themselves as having working-class backgrounds and one of them was a male with a middle-class background. In this study I am interested in how different social dispositions in relation to age, social class and gender intertwine in the construction of employability in the three graduates' narrative life histories. So far qualitative follow-up studies that focus on graduate employability and transitions into working life have been scarce in the field of Finnish higher education research. This is despite prolonging careers 'at both ends and in the middle' being currently an especially relevant and highly-debated issue in Finland (see also Viitasalo 2015).

In the analysis of the follow-up interview data of the three higher education adult graduates I will show how social differences related to age, gender and class provide differential dispositions in relation to how they construct their competence and abilities as well as their employability and future educational and working-life prospects as highly-educated academics. This chapter is based, in part, on previous studies (Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016; Siivonen et al. 2016; Siivonen 2016) on adult graduates' social positioning in relation to the changing working life and the new discursive framing of employability. In this chapter, however, I will focus on how the three higher education adult graduates I have followed, position themselves and are positioned in relation to the employability discourse and how they interpret and negotiate age, social class and gender in relation to that discourse. In what follows, I will discuss the current changes in the discourses of employability, in the Finnish higher education context in particular, and the relative positioning of the workforce in the labour market.

SOCIAL POSITIONING AND EMPLOYABILITY

As an answer to the demands of both students and the labour market, employability has been raised among the universities' core priorities in the European Union (Puhakka et al. 2012). This is not surprising as one of the key issues students want from university education is that it will have a positive impact on their transitions into working life. The labour market, in turn, wants graduates who are 'employable' (Ibid.). Consequently, the contribution of academic education to produce knowledge and skills has been re-labelled as employability (Boden and Nedeva 2010) reflecting the short-term benefits of university education. Education is viewed primarily in economic terms and the major role of higher education has become

training an appropriate workforce (see also Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016). As a result such traditional missions as mediating cultural heritage, introducing a new perspective, and providing critical observations of society have been pushed to the background (Puhakka et al. 2010).

This also means that besides further education qualifications so-called enterprise abilities; that is personal qualities and skills have become crucial in order to be positioned as employable (Brown et al. 2003; Tomlinson 2008; Siivonen et al. 2016). According to Beverly Skeggs (2004), social skills based on cultural and social capital are becoming increasingly necessary as people with similar levels of qualifications enter the labour market. It is the social and cultural dispositions of the potential employees that determine their worth as employers need to differentiate between them.

Philip Brown and his colleagues (Brown et al. 2003) introduce a positional conflict theory to conceptualise the changing relationship between education, employment and the labour market and the two simultaneous processes that are not mutually exclusive: the rigging of the market for credentials and ranking the individuals in the market at both institutional and individual level on the basis of social and cultural capital. They define employability in terms of the relative chances of acquiring and maintaining different kinds of employment, depending on both the relative (the laws of supply and demand) and the absolute (the skills and personal qualities) dimensions of employability. They call this the *duality* of employment.

However, becoming ‘employable’ does not necessarily imply the position of actually becoming employed (Brown et al. 2003; Brine 2006). In competition for employment, an individual needs to possess the right kinds of personal qualities and skills in order to be positioned higher relative to other potential candidates for a job (Brown et al. 2003). Moreover, different social groups are also engaged in positional power struggles. Social differences related to age, gender, social class as well as other social distinctions influence individual positioning in the labour market (see also Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016).

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The concept of narrative life history emphasises both the storied nature and the social and historical context of telling our lives (Goodson 1992). In conducting the interviews of the three adult graduates in this study, I gave the interviewees as much space as possible to construct narratives

about their lives with a special focus on learning, education and working life. The narrative life-history data generated this way produced rich and detailed accounts about the adult graduates' lives and educational and working life pathways. On accounting their experiences, the interviewees elaborated different subject positions in relation to employability and applied different social and cultural narratives available to them (see Davies and Harré 1990).

The interview follow-up data was analysed from a discursive-narrative point of view (Davies and Harré 1990). An examination of how the interviewees position themselves and are positioned, in relation to the discourses of employability in different narrative environments was undertaken (Gubrium and Holstein 2008). When reading the data I focused on both continuities and discontinuities within the narratives (cf. Linde 1993) as well as similarities and differences between individual narrative accounts. Moreover, I was interested in how age, gender and social class are interpreted and negotiated. As Floya Anthias (2005, 42) posits, in telling our stories we simultaneously tell a story about “how we place ourselves in terms of social categories, such as those of gender, ethnicity and class at a specific point in time and space”. Age, gender and class are not here seen as static positions, but are understood as discursively-constructed processes that are lived on a daily basis (see Reay 2005, 2006). Social differences, then, materialise as different types of socially-valued resources, which in turn position individuals differently in terms of social categories (see Anthias 2005; Skeggs 1997). In the following section Kaarina's, Lisa's and Henri's cases are analysed separately in order to show how differing narratives are constructed in different narrative environments (Gubrium and Holstein 2008), thus, providing distinct social positions in relation to employability. In the construction of these narratives it will be analysed how social differences in relation to age, gender and social class intertwine forming differing positions in relation to employability.

WINNERS AND LOSERS OF THE MARKET ECONOMY?

In our previous studies (Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016; Siivonen et al. 2016) we have argued that in the discursive framing of employability positioning in relation to age and ageing is anything but straightforward. Rather, age and ageing intertwine with social and material resources such as formal qualifications, personal qualities and skills as well as gender and

social class. Moreover, the supply and demand of the labour market has an impact on the construction of employability and employee's relative chances of becoming employable and ideally also employed (Brown et al. 2003; Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016; Siivonen et al. 2016). This in turn is likely to influence the way subjects position themselves in relation to employability and how they perceive their chances of becoming employed.

In this section I will examine social positioning in relation to age, gender and class and employability in Kaarina's, Lisa's and Henri's case studies. Kaarina (56) and Lisa (33), two women with a working-class background, represent extreme ends of the age continuum in the data. Interestingly, however, Kaarina's working-life history can be described as a 'success story' whereas Lisa experienced disappointments both in higher education and working life (Siivonen et al. 2016; Siivonen 2016). Moreover, Henri (43), a male with a middle-class background, made a successful new career after his graduation first from GUSSA and then from a polytechnic (Siivonen et al. 2016). A summary of the interviewees' educational and working-life pathways is presented in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1 A summary of the educational and working-life pathways of the interviewees

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Gender/Age</i>	<i>Educational path</i>	<i>Working life history</i>
Kaarina	F/56	Home economics school (4, 5 months), vocational school (1 year), courses at work, GUSSA, specialist qualification in management, Bachelor's degree in hospitality management from a polytechnic	Advancement in a managerial and later in an expert position within the same organisation in cleaning services. Has worked in the same organisation since youth
Lisa	F/33	GUSSA, Master's degree from university in natural sciences	Odd jobs in youth, working as a contract researcher after graduation from university
Henri	M/43	Courses at work, GUSSA, Bachelor's degree in social sciences from a polytechnic	16-year-long career before GUSSA within one organisation. Permanent job after graduation from a polytechnic in social services

Kaarina's Case

Kaarina, aged 56 at the time of the second interview in 2012, had completed a specialist qualification in management as well as a Bachelor's degree in hospitality management from a polytechnic after her graduation from GUSSA. Before that, she had made her long working career in cleaning services within the same organisation and had also worked in a managerial position with vocational qualifications (see also Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016; Siivonen 2016). Studying in adulthood had been a very positive and personally meaningful experience for Kaarina with her working-class background. She had been labelled as a 'poor' student and a 'minus girl' in comprehensive school (nine-year basic education for the whole age group) and encouraged on a vocational rather than an academic pathway in her youth (Siivonen 2010a, 2016). Being able to complete the GUSSA study successfully as well as to pass the matriculation examination, the Finnish school-leaving examination, had given her confidence in her own ability as a student and learner and improved her self-image (Siivonen 2016). This had also encouraged her to continue her studies in higher education as well as to apply for an expert position in the organisation where she was working. She explained that she had got the feeling that she should update her formal qualifications to correspond to the present-day demands of the labour market (Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016). She recounts:

Then there was this vacancy and the question of these qualifications came up (...) In our organisation they are very strict about them (...) if a polytechnic degree is the requirement for the job then (...) that's that and then that (...) degree was good (...) It was the requirement (...). With the old degree I could not have (...) with the old degree they would not have (...) Also in our field in every field these degrees develop. And I had a degree in cleaning services, but it was quite an old degree already and then I felt like I had to update this, my professional competence and to get formal qualifications (...). If you apply for something else, then it is better that you have upgraded knowledge. Old knowledge and qualifications are no good; of course in working life you learn (...) all time (...) and and at work you learn all the time (...). Well it was a bit, you know, let's say that those younger people with updated qualifications won't come to me and say that you have old knowledge (laughter).⁵

Kaarina needed to upgrade her formal education in order to stand at the same level with 'younger degree holders' with up-to-date knowledge.

According to Kaarina, skills gained through work experience were valued in the organisation where she was working but formal qualifications were, nevertheless, perhaps even more appreciated (Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016). The new upgraded Bachelor's degree made her formally qualified to apply for an expert vacancy within the organisation where she had been working since her youth. Consequently, the degree together with a strong expertise in cleaning services gained through work experience made her the strongest candidate for the expert position. According to Kaarina, formal education had provided her a wider perspective on work rather than just 'sitting at the same desk':

That [polytechnic degree] has given me a wider perspective on things, because I have needed to look into things (...) from different perspectives. If I had just sat at the same desk for thirty years and worked on that (...) same thing, my perspective would have been narrower.

'Thirty years' of work experience alone without an upgraded higher education degree would not have provided her the strong expertise needed to advance in the expert position. Moreover, she had such highly-valued personal qualities as flexibility, adaptability, social skills as well as honesty, 'they can trust me a hundred per cent, I do my work (...) as well as I can,' to recommend her. However, it was not self-evident for Kaarina that she would actually get the promotion: 'And then I told my boss that I was really amazed and he told me how could you be amazed; this is absolutely clear (...) who could have better knowledge in these issues.' Kaarina does not give explicit reasons for her amazement, but it might be due to her chronological age and fear of age discrimination, which is relatively common in Finnish working life. Niina Viitasalo (2011) showed in her recent study that work-related age discrimination was most commonly experienced by over 55-year-old women: as many as 7.5% of them had experienced age discrimination and this was most likely to happen in recruitment (Viitasalo 2013). However, in another instance Kaarina states that 'older workers are more valued (...) and they are more committed to their work than younger ones.' This statement might reflect Kaarina's positive experiences of getting ahead in her career in the organisation where she was working – despite her age.

The completion of up-to-date qualifications and the continuous development of the self, increased the value of the long-lasting work experience and skills gained through practice for Kaarina and positioned her as employable and a strong candidate in the employment market (see also

Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016). Moreover, her long-lasting commitment to the same organisation made her a trustworthy employee. I argue that strong experience together with an upgraded degree and long-lasting commitment provided her with impeccable expertise that also protected her from age discrimination and contributed to her advancement in her career in her 50s. Moreover, in our previous studies we have shown that becoming an entrepreneur of one's own life, who is self-responsible, active, flexible and adaptable, and willing to invest in continuous learning and self-development is especially important for older workers, who want to enhance their employability and stay actively involved in working life (Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016).

Lisa's Case

By the time of the second interview in 2012 Lisa was aged 33. She had completed a Master's degree in chemistry at university. Hard work and excellent grades in such subjects as mathematics and chemistry in GUSSA and matriculation examination had opened up the possibility of studying chemistry at university. She was thrilled about this opportunity that had earlier appeared as far-fetched for this young woman with an unstable working-class background. According to her she did not belong to 'that caste' who went to university and pursued an academic career (see also Siivonen 2010a; Siivonen et al. 2016).

In 2012 she was working as a contract researcher at a university, but her future employment was uncertain and negotiations about a new and possibly less attractive work contract were under way. Even though she appreciated the chance of gaining work experience in her present job, striving to do her best with the present time available (see Ylijoki and Mäntylä 2003), she also considered working at university as her last choice. Her dream was 'to get into a nice company in a good research group, to work in research and development or something, to work as a chemist.' She continues, however, that 'I don't believe in it anymore, you know, that I'm able to reach that with hard work; I should have those good contacts.' While writing a pile of job applications after her graduation she had realised that she should take whatever job she happened to get. She was not invited for job interviews and she got her present job through a friend. She states ironically that competition for her dream jobs was extremely fierce and there would be '200 applicants who are all those 25-year-old super humans with three doctoral degrees.'

As a diligent, active and responsible female-contract researcher with a lot of initiative and capability and willingness to learn Lisa was, nevertheless, positioned as lacking at university and in the competitive labour market (see also Siivonen et al. 2016). She was missing out on the right kinds of contacts in order to gain employment: ‘At University (...) who you know and (...) who you perform you are is more (...) important than how hard you work.’ According to Stephen Ball (2003) performances of individual subjects serve as measures of productivity or output that encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual. In the performative-enterprise university amidst growing demands and accountability, Lisa had become insecure and anxious. She was constantly in doubt about whether she was doing enough and the right thing, whether she was as good as others (see also Ball 2003): ‘I have somehow lost the belief in myself; I’m nothing really.’

Moreover, Lisa was also missing out on the self-assured determination and ‘everything is possible attitude’ of getting ahead in life that some of her middle-class male colleagues displayed (see also Siivonen et al. 2016; Archer 2008). As an academic with a Master’s degree, Lisa continued to think of herself as belonging to the working-class: ‘I keep thinking of myself as belonging into working-class (...) I have the same salary as before getting my degree and I’m still not able to get a mortgage and basically I’m in the same situation.’ In our previous studies we have interpreted Lisa’s disappointment in academic education and the labour market as the working-class feeling that the new enterprise abilities, such as social networking emphasised at the new enterprise university, are not as ‘real’ and valuable as theoretical academic abilities (Siivonen et al. 2016; see also Reay 2004). Lisa’s social positioning as an academic with a working-class disposition constructs strangeness and unfamiliarity in relation to the competition and emphasis on enterprise abilities in academia. Similarly, Louise Archer’s (2008) research with early-career academics has shown that those academics who self-identified as coming from working-class backgrounds talked about the difficulties of passing into the classed spaces of academia. As for Lisa, the dream space of university positioned as ideal at first had turned out as not so idealistic in practice.

In Lisa’s narrative social class and gender intertwine with age producing a vulnerable position in relation to employability. Despite her university education and seemingly young age she also considered her age

as problematic in getting ahead in working life (see also Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016; Siivonen et al. 2016):

I have lost my motivation completely. This is because I feel that it is more and more difficult to get work. The more you educate yourself, and this is quite the opposite of what I imagined (...) you go to upper secondary school and get a good education and get a good job and (...) and so on. I feel that the competition is getting harder all the time and (...) I don't have the strength for all that. (...) I feel that the demands are just unbelievable. (...) And then I have a family and kids and everything else. (...) If I had only done things in the normal order or what is generally seen as the normal order: straight from comprehensive school to upper secondary school and living with dad and. (...) If I had taken care of things then.

Contrary to the principle of lifelong learning throughout life, Lisa evaluated that the normal societal order of doing things would have been a lot easier than studying in adulthood (Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016; Siivonen et al. 2016). Completing secondary education later than the norm, left her in a vulnerable position in working life: 'You can't have those ten years of work experience if you are old when you graduate.' She evaluated herself being five years behind the majority of the students studying at university in Finland. Having a family with two children also prevented her from establishing social contacts as well as travelling abroad and developing her language skills. As a result, this had led her into a disadvantaged labour market position. Odd jobs in youth had not provided her enough work experience and social networks for getting a secure job and an improved socio-economic status that she had dreamt of when she started studying first at GUSSA and then at university (cf. Moreau and Leathwood 2006).

As Lisa's example shows getting formal qualifications later than the overall norm may result in a disadvantaged labour market position (see also Purcell et al. 2007). She had not had the chance of gaining a positional advantage in relation to other university graduates by enhancing social relations and applying theoretical knowledge gained at university into practice – the ability that, according to her, is greatly valued by employers in the private sector. This is all the more important as unemployment rates in natural sciences have been increasing in Finland since the 2007 recession (see Akava 2014). As a result, a Master's degree in chemistry had left the employment options limited for Lisa, who was just starting her academic-work career with no former experience from the field.

Henri's Case

In the same vein as Kaarina, Henri, aged 43 at the time of the second interview in 2012, had experienced successful transitions in working life (Siivonen 2016; Siivonen et al. 2016). He stated that when he graduated from GUSSA in 2004 he had 'a very realistic view that yes I'll be able to achieve a degree that is one step higher (...) either from university or polytechnic.' Henri was an ambitious man who wanted challenges in life: 'when you reach one peak, there is always another one to climb.' He had a strong faith in education and was determined and systematic in reaching his goals. While studying for a Bachelor's degree in social sciences in a polytechnic he had gained work experience and established social contacts. After completing the degree he was offered a permanent position as a social worker through the networks he had established while studying. The higher education degree had been beneficial for Henri also because his socioeconomic status had risen. Social class and gender intertwine as Henri confirms his status as a middle-class male citizen legitimatised by means of a higher education degree (Siivonen et al. 2016).

At the age of 43 Henri had 'learned to calculate a bit' and planned to continue his studies preferably at university or alternatively in a polytechnic and to change jobs to have better opportunities for promotion in his career. His dream was to 'retire from a managerial position with a Master's degree' (Siivonen et al. 2016). According to Henri 'based on my qualifications alone I'm more competent than some of my bosses (...) I have more competence than I'm able to use.'

In our previous study we have interpreted that Henri's emphasis on individual effort and lifelong learning as well as continuous self-development in order to succeed in life has the qualities of the self-reliant, self-responsible and enterprising ideal self of the neoliberal order (Siivonen et al. 2016; see also Komulainen et al. 2009; Siivonen and Brunila 2014). Contrary to Lisa, Henri with a middle-class disposition was not in the position to have to need to negotiate his professional competence or personal qualities in relation to employability. He had a strong faith in himself and did not doubt his abilities to advance in his studies and his career. Moreover, Henri did not perceive his age as any kind of a problem for getting forward in working life. For him, mature adulthood, in contrast to being an immature teenager, when studying was not a priority for him, represented an ideal stage for studying and advancing his career (Siivonen 2010a). According to him 'a 25-year old Bachelor of social sciences is as

valuable as a 37-year-old.’ His future success would depend on himself and his personal characteristics alone (see also Siivonen et al. 2016):

It’s all very clear. All the keys are in my hands. (...) It is up to me to decide if I continue, if I try to get forward. I have got the ability and competence. And I’ll be able to find the right educational route, the education that I need (...) to continue forward. I know where to find it. (...) Everything is possible.

Contrary to Lisa Henri had a strong belief in himself and his competence and an ‘everything is possible attitude’ firmly in place. It has to be acknowledged, however, that Henri’s situation was different from Lisa’s in the sense that he had managed to get a permanent job in the public sector, still deeply rooted in the ideology of the welfare society, while Lisa’s future employment was uncertain and under negotiation in the increasingly enterprising university sector. Consequently, Henri may not have faced as fierce competition in the markets of the public sector as Lisa in the competitive university environment. (See also Siivonen et al. 2016.)

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have analysed how three Finnish higher education adult graduates – Kaarina, Lisa, and Henri – I have followed between 2004 and 2012 position themselves and are positioned in relation to the employability discourse and how they interpret and negotiate age, social class and gender in relation to that discourse. All the three adult graduates had engaged in continuous self-development and the entrepreneurial work on the self in order to stay up-to-date and at the top of their game (Kelan 2008). They had achieved up-to-date degrees from university or polytechnic by the time of the second interviews in 2012. They had also gained employment that corresponded to their new upgraded degrees. Interestingly, however, age, social class and gender intertwine in their narratives constructing differing positions in relation to employability in different narrative environments (Gubrium and Holstein 2008).

For Kaarina aged 56 who identified herself as having a working-class background studying in adulthood had been a positive experience that had boosted her confidence and improved her self-image. This was personally significant for Kaarina who had been labelled as a ‘poor’ student in youth and encouraged on a non-academic occupational pathway. Kaarina’s upgraded qualifications together with ‘thirty years’ of work experience

had guaranteed her an expert position in the organisation where she had been working since her youth. The study suggests that her work experience and up-to-date degree had protected her from age discrimination that especially women who are 55 or over frequently experience in Finland (Viitasalo 2013).

For Lisa, aged 33, on the other hand, who also self-identified herself as coming from a working-class family, transitions into working life had turned out as a disappointment. She had not achieved the good job in a good company with a decent salary she had dreamt of when starting her studies at university. Age, social class and gender intertwine in her narrative as she accounts for her transition into working life as a woman with a working-class background who was ‘too old’ already when she started her university study. Consequently, she was placed in a vulnerable position in relation to employability as she neither had previous work experience from her field nor those crucial social contacts to recommend her. Moreover, she felt estranged from the neoliberal enterprising university culture she faced both studying and working in academia as a contract researcher (see also Reay 2004; Archer 2008).

For Henri, 43, with a middle-class background studying in adulthood was ideal. He had been successful in his study in both GUSSA and the polytechnic; he had also managed to get a permanent position as a social worker right after completing the Bachelor’s degree in social sciences with the help of the social contacts he had established during his study at polytechnic. He was thinking of continuing his studies either at university or a polytechnic in order to ‘retire from a managerial position with a Master’s degree.’ ‘Everything is possible’; it all depended on himself alone. For him being middle-class and male provided a positional advantage: he displayed qualities of a self-reliant, self-responsible, and enterprising ideal self of the neoliberal order (Siivonen et al. 2016) and did not have any doubt about his employability.

In research literature gender and social class are acknowledged forms of social and cultural capital that position individuals differently in relation to employability (e.g. Brown et al. 2003). However, age and ageing and adult graduates’ employability are an understudied area of research. In this chapter I also argue that age influences individual positioning in the labour market in multiple ways (see also Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016) and consequently, age and ageing may be interpreted as a weakness or a strength depending on the organisation’s culture (Irni 2008, 2010; Kelan 2008).

As the analysis shows age, social class and gender intertwine in interesting and somewhat unexpected ways providing differing social and cultural resources as well as social positioning in relation to employability. Different social groups engage in power struggles to be positioned as employable in the increasingly competitive graduate labour market (see also Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016). Power struggles in the neoliberal market economy, and in the new enterprising university especially, produce both winners and losers (see Ylijoki and Mäntylä 2003). Engagement in continuous learning and entrepreneurial work on the self is expected from everyone, the consequences, however, are for each individual to bear: disappointment and failure as Stephen Ball (2003, 220) writes ‘become matters of self-doubt and personal anxiety rather than public debate’.

NOTES

1. The data were generated as part of the project ‘General upper secondary school adult graduates’ ability conceptions in the context of changing discourses of employability’ in which ten general upper secondary school adult graduates were followed in 2004–2012.
2. The general upper-secondary school for adults – GUSSA for short in this text – is an institute that provides formal general education for adults aged 18 and over. Today, there are approximately 50 institutes specialising in general upper-secondary education for adults in over 40 municipalities in Finland. In 2008, over 10,000 GUSSA students were pursuing general upper-secondary qualifications and about 6% of the matriculation examinations were taken and passed by GUSSA students (Siivonen 2010b). Besides this, there is an increasing number of students taking individual courses in some subjects. For more information see Finnish National Board of Education (2008).
3. The names of the participants have been changed into pseudonyms.
4. A Bachelor’s degree from a polytechnic includes at least 180 credits and takes at least three years of full-time study to complete. In comparison, a Master’s degree from university includes 300 credits and the recommended time for study is five years (for more information, see http://www.oph.fi/english/education_system/higher_education).
5. To improve the readability of the interview extracts, repetitions, odd words, and other data that have been interpreted as analytically irrelevant have been omitted and marked with ellipses. Relevant non-verbal information is marked in square brackets. Researchers’ additions of missing words, as well as researchers’ comments, are also provided in square brackets.

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Graduate Employability as Social Suitability: Professional Competence from a Practice Theory Perspective

Ola Lindberg and Oscar Rantatalo

INTRODUCTION

What makes an employer decide in a graduate's favour when applying for a new job? This question is urgent and important for many graduates who are hoping to get the upper hand in competing for their first job, yet research can tell us little about how to answer it. In an effort to inquire into this question, the following chapter outlines an understanding of graduate employability based in workplace practices. Practice theory is an umbrella term for a number of theories and concepts focusing on the importance of activity for understanding the social world. 'The practice turn' in social science seeks to bridge some problematic dualisms (such as actor-structure) in other theories. In the version of practice theory that will be presented below, we draw upon the theorisation presented by Theodore Schatzki

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(2001, 2005) and our previous work within this framework (Lindberg and Rantatalo 2015), in an effort to translate practice-theory concepts into research tools for examining graduate employability.

By providing two empirical examples based on previous research (Lindberg and Rantatalo 2015), we show how notions of ‘the accomplished professional’, on the one hand, are rooted symbolically in situated practice and, on the other hand, are contextual. While acknowledging how workplace practices position graduates and potential future colleagues into a continuum of more or less hireable, we also discuss how these contextual constituents of employability and skills are governed by more general organising principles and overarching logics that are shared between different work practices.

With this claim, our chapter aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion within research on skills and employability in two main ways. First, we contribute to the debate on whether competencies and skills can be viewed as transferrable and generic. In this discussion, our approach entails an intermediate position, acknowledging that notions of skills and employability are highly situated on a symbolic level, while at the same time, the process by which symbolic signification comes about seems to span over practices. This position allows for a critique of the generic-skills paradigm, while not collapsing the argument into overly myopic definitions of employability as being fully contextual. Rather, our theoretical perspective is recognisant of how social differentiation, on the one hand, is dependent on situated symbolic inferences, but on the other hand is also governed by overarching logics that position individuals into more or less wanted applicants in that given practice and, ultimately, more or less employable graduates.

Second, by employing a practice-theoretical view of employability, the approach presented in the chapter also entails an example framework for research that focuses upon the ‘demand-side’ of employability discussions (Tomlinson 2010). That is, we focus on how the selection and social differentiation of graduates actually play out through sense making and enactment in practice (Bolander and Sandberg 2013). This view emphasises the demands that are put on graduates in the labour market by employers and what resources and forms of capital are given due weight in selections between individuals. We believe that research that approaches employability discussions from this perspective has the potential to account for how power relations in recruitment settings and in the situated practices of workplaces impact how candidates are selected.

In summary, the following chapter draws on practice theory to address the issues encircled above, with a special focus on how social differentiation is enacted in diverse work contexts. In the following, the chapter is organised around four main sections. First, we provide an overview of previous research on skills and graduate selection to further locate the chapter in frameworks of employability. The review identifies a need for theorisation about how social differentiation and selections of graduates are anchored in practice. Second, we provide a theoretical understanding of employability based in Schatzki's practice theory, specifically in the concept of teleoaffectivity. Third, we exemplify the application of such a framework in two separate professional practices to demonstrate how symbolic inferences of competence and skills are both locally produced and connected to overarching logics. Fourth and finally, we discuss the potential merits of a practice theory approach to research on social differentiation and selection in professional contexts as well as what implications this approach may have to the wider discussion on employability.

EMPLOYABILITY AND SKILLS

There is a wide agreement that there is a disagreement on what employability means. In much of the literature on the subject, employability has been viewed as 'skills' or 'attributes' –which is incumbent on the individual, higher education (HE) institutions, the employer or society in general to bestow upon a graduate (Lindberg 2012; Tymon 2013). More often than not, these employability skills are given the prefix of 'transferable-', 'generic-', 'key-' or similar pointing them out as *different* to 'other stuff', such as technical skills or subject knowledge (De La Harpe et al. 2000). Measuring and defining employability, however, is an issue of constant debate, and calls have been made for more congruent conceptualisations of these skills and attributes (e.g. Barrie 2006). Tymon (2013) present an overview of employability frameworks that demonstrates skills, attributes and competencies from five different sources. In this overview, Tymon highlights the differences between these frameworks but also important similarities. It seems that communicative skills and teamwork skills occur across all frameworks and is considered important for stakeholders. In addition, several items in these frameworks are identified as being linked to personality traits, such as being 'reliable', 'confident' and 'flexible' (Tymon 2013, p. 844).

Hence, while much research has pointed out the deficiencies of graduates concerning skills (e.g. De La Harpe et al. 2000; Hennemann and Liefner 2010; Nair et al. 2009; Sheldon and Thornthwaite 2005), there is at present no clear consensus about what these skills are or how they are enacted in workplace practices. There has been widespread criticism against the generic skills view of employability, with one strand of criticism attacking the alleged transferability or generic nature of skills. The argument here is that a skill is dependent on context and is therefore not transferable between contexts (Antonacopoulou and FitzGerald 1996; Stevenson 2005). ‘Problem-solving skills’, for instance, is hence just a label and should be quite different for a lawyer versus a stonemason (Beckett 2004). The other strand of criticism concerns dissatisfaction with the concept of skills *per se*, arguing that the term ‘skills’ is insufficient in describing the complexity and multiple meanings of being employable. This criticism has spawned the graduate-identity approach to employability, in which identity is context dependent and complex (Holmes 2001; Tomlinson 2012). In this tradition, Hinchliffe and Jolly’s (2011) analysis of employer accounts of graduates resulted in a four-stranded concept of identity that included value, intellect, social engagement and performance.

As Tomlinson (2010) argues, the graduate skills view of employability also entails a view through which problems of graduate employability are seen as a ‘supply-side’ problem. It seems, by this line of reasoning, that no mismatch between education and work would exist if only HE institutions would supply a better product (graduates). In focusing on workplace practices in this chapter, we conversely view employability from the *demand-side*, in that we describe what workplaces envision as a person they would gladly employ. Another important aspect of employability underpinning the current investigation is the recognition that graduates are competitors in an *economy* (Brown and Hesketh 2004). Competition in such an economy increases in systems of mass HE, where there is a surplus of formally qualified graduates. Hence, throughout modern societies with a knowledge-driven economy, there is “a positional competition for jobs that are in scarce supply” (Tomlinson 2012, p. 420). In Sweden, particularly, with free HE and simultaneously high youth unemployment, the competition for jobs is substantial (Stiwne and Alves 2010).

The literature on graduate employability rarely includes research on the actual selection of candidates. This is perhaps unsurprising, as the research on candidate selection is almost exclusively prescriptive and as

such is concerned with testing and developing methods on how to get the best candidate for the job. However, there is wide recognition of the fact that the labour market and selection of employees is biased towards, for instance, class, gender and race (Horverak et al. 2013; Moss-Racusin et al. 2012). Even graduates seem to be aware of such biases (Morrison 2014). Theoretically, this has been explained in terms of similarity-attraction of the recruiter and employer (e.g. Graves and Powell 1995) or the ‘organisation fit’ of the applicant, meaning a social fit between the individual and the organisation (e.g. Dafou 2009). However, little research exists on how selection is actually done in practice (Bolander and Sandberg 2013) and even less from critical perspectives on the how these power relations work in the practical recruitment settings of the workplace.

There is thus a need for perspectives about how recruiters think and how they select candidates to understand the concept of graduate employability from the demand side. A theoretical view of what employability entails is a necessary first step in understanding employers’ preferences.

A PRACTICE THEORY VIEW ON GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

In Schatzki’s practice theory (2001, 2005), practices are organised by understandings, rules and a teleoaffective structure. Understandings are comprised of past experiences of how things are done. Rules may be explicit or implicit but describe the limits of how things should be done. Teleoaffectivity is a two-part term recognising that human action is both goal oriented (teleological) and a result of one’s current emotional state (affect). The teleological component signifies that actions are always undertaken to accomplish a certain goal. Expectations, hopes and beliefs thus play important roles in determining human activity. The affective component signifies that humans do what matters to them and that they are emotionally invested in situations. The teleoaffectivity of human actions gives rise to a structure in Schatzki’s theory:

...a range of acceptable or correct ends, acceptable or correct tasks to carry out for these ends, acceptable or correct beliefs (etc.) given which specific tasks are carried out for the sake of these ends, and even acceptable or correct emotion out of which to do so. [...] So practices establish social order, first, because they help mould the practical intelligibility that governs their practitioners’ actions and thereby help determine which arrangements people bring about. (Schatzki 2001, pp. 53–54)

The teleoaffective structure is working normatively and pointing out acceptable and unacceptable activities. As such, Schatzki suggests that teleoaffectivity establishes the social order. For this inquiry, in choosing between more or less desirable candidates in an economy with competition for employment, teleoaffectivity influences how these choices are made. From this perspective, employability should hence be understood as an employ-*ability*, with particular focus on the potentiality of actors to perform (well) in a given practice. From a practice theory framework, an ability such as ‘communication skills’ can only be understood in relation to a certain practice. If the particular way of communicating (activity) demonstrated by an actor is received, understood and appreciated by other participants in a given practice, that activity will be favourable for the actor. We therefore suggest that the conception around ‘skills’ in the employability literature should be divided into two distinct levels: what we term a *quality level* and a *symbolic level*.

The quality level consists of qualities a graduate possesses that can either be viewed as positive or negative (such as ‘ambitious’, ‘callous’, etc.). The symbolic level, on the other hand, is the concrete manifestation of that quality in practice (such as staying late at the office, making people laugh or not reacting to violence). Thus, on the symbolic level, behaviours encoded with specific meaning (as understood by actors) surface. Symbols are, as such, necessary to understand the distinct expression (or performance) of a quality in a given practice. With this division as a basis, some pertinent problems associated with the ‘generic skills’ approach to employability can be avoided. In other words, a quality is not inherently transferable, as a quality can have vastly different symbolic manifestations. Also, the quality is context bound and enacted in a particular practice, as a practice “provides the site within which identity is constructed”, as argued by proponents to the identity approach to employability (Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011, p. 564).

Thus, we view employer accounts on what they value in graduates as accounts of (potentially) competent practitioners. In a practice theory view of competence, competence is a relationship between actor and practice, rather than inherent traits (Velde 1999). We define competence as *the inferred potential for desirable activity within a given practice*. The addition of inference to this definition is important – someone is always competent in the eyes of actors (oneself or others) anchored in practice (“carriers of a practice” in Schatzki’s 2001, terminology). This view positions competence as a form of social suitability that is not limited to social skills or social competence. Technical or practical skills, knowledge, and any

quality are *perceived* through their symbolic manifestation. The recruiter or employer thus views a candidate or co-worker's actions and assets (symbolic level), and from this infers a view of the individual's qualities, thus viewing the candidate as more or less (potentially) competent to perform in the workplace. From these theoretical concepts, we designed a study asking the question, "What is viewed as a (future) competent co-worker?" Inherent in this question is also an investigation of the opposite, that is, the qualities and symbols that make employers question one's competence and fitness for the job.

THE COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL: TWO VERY DIFFERENT CASES

The following empirical application of the practice theory framework is a comparative case study that was reported in more detail by Lindberg and Rantatalo (2015). The purpose of that study was to further the debate and theory around the concept of professional competence, but it did not address the question of employability directly. In the present chapter, we frame the results of this study in the concepts and theories surrounding graduate employability.

The two occupations we compared in our previous project were police officers and medical doctors. These cases were, in light of their apparent differences, thought to provide opportunities for rich cross-case comparisons. There are also important similarities between the selected cases. First, both cases are *exclusive* professional practices, in that they are highly specialised and practitioners are selected through rigorous procedures. Second, both cases are also *popular* workplaces in a Swedish societal context, meaning that there are many applicants per offered position. Thus, there is a need for fine-grained differentiation practices in recruitment. Third, all of the members in these cases, respectively, *shared formal qualifications*. Differentiation within each case must hence be based on criteria other than formal qualifications. Taken together, these similarities actualise a number of questions regarding employability, as we expect to find rationales for liking or disliking potential candidates to be both explicitly formulated and based on judgements of being fit for the job, without the disqualification of candidates on formalities.

In the police case, we conducted 18 interviews with members of an elite, high-status unit in the Swedish Police: the Swedish National Police Counter-Terrorist Unit (NI). The unit operates nationwide in Sweden

and functions as an enforcement resource in extreme and high-risk situations. Regarded as an expert unit, the NI is a high-status workplace that attracts numerous applicants in its recruitment. The entrance requirements are high, and the trials and recruitment procedures are rigorous, involving both psychological and physical testing. Within the unit, we interviewed both commanders and police officers with different specialisations. This choice was motivated by the fact that the unit members themselves are highly involved in the recruitment procedures for new members, for instance in physical testing and in the initial screening of applicants. In the medical doctor (MD) case, we interviewed 21 recruiters of medical interns in Sweden's most prestigious hospitals. The respondents were all responsible for recruiting medical interns. In almost all of the cases, they were senior doctors and the headmasters of that hospital's internship programme. However, exceptions existed depending on the local recruitment organisation. In one hospital, the respondent was an HR specialist; in another hospital, a senior doctor working together with the headmaster managed the recruitment. We chose the hospitals by examining the number of applicants for each offered position and including the hospitals with the highest number of applicants. Both the NI members and the senior doctors responsible for recruiting medical interns were, as initiated carriers of their respective professional practices, competent enough to explicate the normative dimension of their respective practices concerning the qualities they looked for in a candidate. Desirable and undesirable symbols and qualities regarding newcomers within these practices were expected to be articulated in the conducted interviews.

The interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes and were aimed at examining which symbols and qualities the practitioners articulated to define and differentiate among the levels of suitability and approvable activities within each professional practice. In the interviews, we prompted the respondents to give concrete examples of concrete situations, behaviours and contexts in which they perceived differences between competent and incompetent colleagues, as well as important facets of their selection procedures (i.e. what was of importance concerning being eligible as an employee or suitable as a police officer or doctor).

The analysis was carried out through coding and categorisation using qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 8). Qualities, both negative and positive, were categorised in a node structure from respondents' narratives of 'good' or 'wanted' (desirable) as well as 'bad' and 'unwanted' (undesirable) traits, abilities and character dispositions in applicants and

colleagues. Doing this analysis separately for each case, we then turned to comparison. We referred to the qualities found in both cases as ‘shared qualities’, while the qualities that manifested in just one of the cases were called ‘case-specific qualities’. In the final stage of analysis, we grouped the qualities into meta-categories to show the general directions of the normativity in these practices. The term we employ for these meta-categories is *general constituents of the teleoaffective structure*.

PERFORMANCE AND SOCIAL ORIENTATION

In total, we constructed 36 qualities from the data. 12 of these were shared qualities, meaning that they occurred in both cases. Nine qualities were specific to the police case, and 15 qualities were specific to the doctor case.

In Table 12.1, the shared qualities are presented in bold and italics. The case-specific qualities are denoted with a (P) for police and (D) for doctors.

Table 12.1 Qualities identified in the material

	<i>Performance orientation</i>	<i>Balanced</i>	<i>Social orientation</i>
Positive Qualities	<i>Ambitious</i> <i>Confident in leading</i> <i>Independent/Autonomous</i> Show initiative (P) Not afraid to be on call (D)	<i>Self-knowing</i> <i>Responsible</i> Pathos/pride (P) Calm (D) Mature (D)	<i>Flexible</i> <i>Cooperative</i> <i>Socially competent</i> <i>Humble</i> Trustworthy (P) Dares to ask (D) Endearing (D) Happy/positive (D) Warm/empathic (D) Loyal (D)
Negative Qualities	<i>Absence of performance orientation:</i> <i>Lacks initiative</i> Lacks physique (P) Sloppy (D) Hesitant (D) <i>Absence of social orientation:</i> <i>Overconfident/cocky</i> <i>Careerist/uncooperative</i> Strong opinions (P) Over-ambitious (P)		<i>Absence of social orientation:</i> Does not handle critiques (P) Macho (P) Lacks perspective (P) Strange/unsocial (D) Negative (D) Prejudiced (D) <i>Absence of performance orientation:</i> Too personal (D) Self-effacement (D)

One striking similarity, which was also prominent in the respondents' accounts, is that the most accomplished candidates have the ability to balance between being focused on the professional task (performance) and focusing on the social environment of the workplace. These individuals were described as the most desirable candidates and were attributed qualities such as 'self-knowing', 'responsible' and 'mature'. Also, almost all of the respondents touched upon the ability to balance traits that seem to point in two different directions. Examples of this balance include a respect for the seriousness of the work without being too afraid, an ability to demonstrate autonomy without being selfish, a disposition to be hard working without burning out, being social without being obtrusive and being dominant and strong-willed without disregarding other people's wills and wishes. Below are a few examples from the study of informants discussing balance:

You need to be able to work on your own, show initiative, be dominant and showcase a spirit of go-ahead without anyone pushing you in the back; at the same time, you need to be able to discuss things and subordinate yourself to a chain of command; you need to be able to take orders and do stuff, really without hesitation. Of course, this is a hard combination, and most people have preferences in either direction. But here you need to have both (Interview 12, Police).

You want something in between. I want to see that person having respect for being at a small hospital and working quite independently but at the same time not being completely unafraid of it (Interview 12, Internship recruiter).

It's the tone, I think, in this letter. And I know it sounds strange, but you don't want it to sound too flashy but you don't want it to sound too cautious either (Interview 15, Internship recruiter).

In the study, it was also evident that negative qualities were dependent on both dimensions. There are, so to speak, two sets of undesirable traits, depending on a lack of either performance orientation or social orientation. Hence, a person can be judged as over-ambitious or careerist, meaning that the performance orientation is too prominent, without balancing this performance orientation with social qualities such as being humble or cooperative. Similarly, a person can be judged as lacking confidence and autonomy (performance) while having a prominent social orientation. Such persons are viewed as too personal or self-effacing.

Thus, *performance orientation* and *social orientation* became a sound way to structure the material into general constituents of the teleoaffective

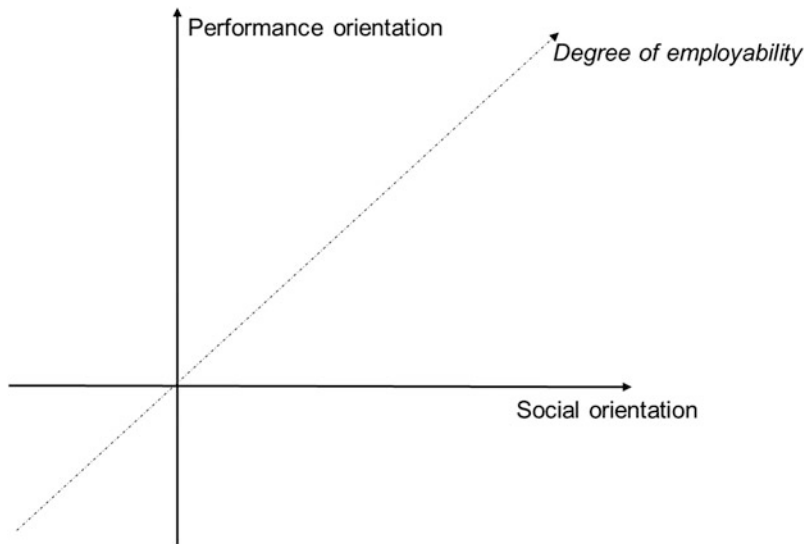


Fig. 12.1 Employability as a function between performance and social orientation

structure shared between our two cases. Based on our results regarding competence, we argue that employability should be understood as a *function* between performance and social orientation, based on the emphasis that the respondents put on the balance of these orientations (Fig. 12.1).

These general constituents of teleoaffectivity are also evident, as they discuss competent co-workers *in the making*. Extending the concept of employability into career progression and opportunities, the most desirable future employees are mostly described as people who can learn and progress, rather than as ‘finished products’. Based on how the informants spoke about this matter, they seemed more interested in potential than achievements.

These two general constituents of teleoaffective structure are a way to view the transferability or the generic nature of skills. While the symbolic manifestations of skills can be quite diverse, these constituents can point to a more general and overarching logic on how employability is viewed in workplaces. Thus, employability should be understood as a continuum (degree of employability) that positions different actors and their resources on a scale, depending on their ability to demonstrate their possession of

both social abilities and task-related abilities in the specific case settings. This could, in turn, be viewed as a logic behind differentiation and the creation of a hierarchy that ranges from 'incapable' (lacking both constituents), via 'proficient' (demonstrating some degree of competence, without being viewed as either 'good' or 'bad') to 'excellent' (demonstrating a high degree of both constituents, coupled with an ability to balance them).

On the other hand, we also note how different qualities are manifested symbolically. Using a certain label, such as 'socially competent', does not necessarily mean that the term refers to the same set of actions or resources held and enacted by the practitioners. For instance, we inferred a negative quality such as 'careerist' from quite different symbolic manifestations in our cases. Examples from police practice include a tendency to 'suck up' to the chief, putting self-interest before the collective's interests and trying to be seen and heard just for the sake of it. From the medical practice, on the other hand, the focus of symbolic manifestation lies in career paths and includes applicants who seem too eager to ask for career opportunities and make salary demands. Thus, as our informants discussed these matters, it seemed as if the same logic also applies to career progression.

A further example of the interplay of general qualities and specific symbols is the apparent difference in our material concerning the function of the profession related to societal *role*. This difference at the symbolic level could be conceptualised as issues regarding profession-specific functional traits. The NI functions as the last resort in situations of extreme confrontation, and medical doctors have a professional role as caretakers. These traits could be related to a monopoly on certain types of activities (e.g. prescribing drugs, using lethal force), as well as the ethical standards and codes of behaviour present in both professions. These functions can also be shown to have importance in how competence is conceived in the respective cases. The situations these professionals face in their respective practices are inherently different, and thus what it means to be responsible, restrained, calm or simply 'professional' also differs symbolically. On a more general level, however, we can derive general logics of what it means to be professional, in that professionalism in both cases entails being 'personally detached' from the task at hand. This would mean, in the case of the NI, that violence and lethal force should be administered rationally and instrumentally, with restraint and precision, and without involving personal emotions or preferences. Similarly, doctors should also administer care without 'perishing' personally,

in the same manner, deliberately, rationally and instrumentally. Based on the number of respondents addressing these issues, the ‘crazy policeman’ and ‘the sentimental doctor’ are the most prominent antitheses of professionalism in each respective case.

A CASE FOR GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY AS SOCIAL SUITABILITY

This chapter has outlined a practice theory approach to graduate employability based on Schatzkian theorisation. To recapitulate our approach, we make the case that graduate employability can be understood as based on the teleoaffective structure of workplace practices and that an analysis of teleoaffectivity holds the potential to further the discussion of how selection in professional practices are enacted and structured. The exemplified work practices demonstrated, on the one hand, extreme differences on a symbolic level, but on the other hand, remarkable similarities on an analytical level, where we used the concept of qualities to pinpoint an overarching logic of how the respondents normatively reasoned about future and current co-workers. Through the extreme differences between our studied practices, we viewed cross-case similarities as evidence of an overarching logic of how respondents normatively reason about the employability of colleagues. Through a comparative approach, this logic become more apparent than it would have in a single case study.

Turning now to the question of what this approach adds to a discussion about employability, we conclude that the graduate-identity approach to employability has made important contributions in nuancing and criticising a simplistic view of employability as skills or attributes. By focusing on the teleoaffective structure of the workplace, we expand the concept of identity to mean a constituting relationship between actor and practice. As research into workplace practices, particularly on the practice of recruitment, is more uncommon than studies about graduates themselves, we believe that the current perspective is an important consideration for developing the field. Future research can develop the general constituents suggested in the present study, informed by more detailed studies of activities and how they are received by practitioners in specific workplace practices. In particular, as noted by Bolander and Sandberg (2013), there is much work to be done in researching how employer decisions are made in practice, rather than in the espoused accounts in interviews and surveys.

There is also evidence that previous employability frameworks from the demand-side – that is, the labour market and employers – have similar findings concerning the general or generic qualities. The frameworks presented by Tymon (2013), for instance, have many similarities with that of the present study in the level of qualities considered vital for successful education-work transitions. Graduate-identity research, such as that of Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011), also shows similar tendencies in which employers have judged the qualities they look for in graduates. Other researchers also discuss the general principle of balancing traits that might point in different directions and that have been noted to be of importance in many different settings. Balancing different concerns and norms such as task vs. maintenance (Ancona and Caldwell 1988) and concern for employees vs. production (Blake and Mouton 1964) has been widely used in describing leadership and organisational cultures (Hofstede et al. 1990).

In the respondents' accounts of desirable activities of candidates and co-workers, even performance on the job and what might be judged as technical skills are framed in quite social terms. In fact, their descriptions downplayed technical expertise. An inquiry into possible counter-images (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003), or asking what was missing from the respondents' storylines, led us to conclude that technical skills were largely absent from the talks about competent professionals and highly desirable candidates. *Getting results* is hence a counter-image that might be rather surprising, given the highly qualified work carried out in these practices. However, police officers who get results, succeed in capturing or neutralising their targets or demonstrate a high level of technical skill are absent in the respondents' stories.

Likewise, talk of getting results through successfully treating a patient was not a part of the ideal concerning highly-competent doctors. Instead, a base level of technical skills and knowledge was only mentioned in relation to 'bad' or 'unwanted' candidates and co-workers, in that they are disqualified from competition and professional entry in these exclusive practices. When discussing the differentiation of possible candidates and co-workers, there was almost an exclusive focus on the general and personality-oriented qualities. In a sense, these results point to a reopening of the case of generic skills as a determinant of graduate employability, with knowledge and technical skills being viewed as an entry ticket to a game decided by other achievements (Knight and Yorke 2003). However, important contextual and practice-based differences at the symbolic level have to be considered.

In summary, we suggest that the qualities described as being important for the employability of graduates, in our findings and elsewhere, must be understood as *both* general, in the sense that they make up structuring principles by which graduates are differentiated, *and* practice specific, in that the qualities have different symbolic manifestations. In this respect, a conceptualisation of employability through a practice theory lens allows for analysis of how competence is constructed in the ‘here-and-now’ of situated practice (Nicolini 2009), without losing sight of the overarching logics that underpin the ways in which practices are socially differentiated.

Turning to the possible implications of this theoretical view on graduate employability, we can also see clear evidence of the *economy* of symbolic manifestations of qualities in our material (Brown and Hesketh 2004; Tomlinson 2012). As the candidates in our studied cases largely shared formal qualifications and experiences, selection and differentiation became more fine-grained and more dependent on perceived personality:

When I started this work, I thought it was a merit to have worked or studied abroad, but at present, these applicants are a dime a dozen. It's like it's almost a part of the medical programme. I've come to realise it is more of a fun thing and that it doesn't really give any experience. Wait, that came out wrong. Of course it's a good experience, but it's just that almost all have it. (Interview 4, Internship recruiter)

Furthermore, Schatzki (2001) makes the point that teleoaffectivity in practices establishes a social order. In our version of Schatzki's theory and informed by the findings, we present – through the general constituents of the teleoaffective structure – a logic that differentiates and demarcates professionals into more or less competent practitioners and candidates applying for work as more or less employable. The theoretical exploration of these questions opens up to a perspective recognising power as a productive dynamism that permeates everyday interactions, in which social relations are relationally organised. This purpose could be formulated as the ambition to critically examine the principles by which processes of social differentiation and social hierarchies are established (Bourdieu 1998). In this undertaking, the concept of power might serve as a fruitful future ‘critical lens’ (to borrow a metaphor from Alvesson and Deetz 2000) that enables the analysis to reach beyond a descriptive dimension of graduate employability and, by extent, incorporate the logic by which the present is a function.

For instance, Bourdieu's (1998, p. 10) model defines "distances that are predictive of encounters, affinities, sympathies or even desires". A possible way of understanding the preferences of recruiters and what guides employment decisions would hence be to view their preferences as a result of proximity in social space. Preference for one candidate over another could, in other words, be explained by similarity attraction (Graves and Powell 1995). Likewise, discrimination against and disadvantages for minority groups and women reported in research on employment decisions (Horverak et al. 2013; Moss-Racusin et al. 2012), for example, could be explained by differences between the graduates and recruiters in the *habitus* from which they arrived at their positions. Applying the critical lens, knowledge of the underlying logic of differentiation that sorts graduates into more or less employable holds emancipatory potential for groups that are, through their background, disadvantaged in the competition for jobs. While locally-anchored symbols are important, and although social differentiation will occur based on criteria that are rooted in practice, there is still potential in recognising that this differentiation will follow a certain logic that we can recognise between and across practices.

This recognition of power and social order also holds implications for the supply-side (Tomlinson 2012) of graduate employability, that is, the HE institutions that have struggled with the employability agenda for the past decades. In this case, HE practices might have a compensatory role to fill for disadvantaged groups, as suggested by, for instance, Atkins (1999). Knowledge of the over-arching logic of differentiation might inform teaching and learning in making students aware of the rules of the game, particularly in professional practices with high competition for jobs. Furthermore, HE practices must also recognise the fact that students are not *tabula rasae* when entering HE and that what teachers and educators recognise as aptitude and talent might be influenced by their own social position. Finally, the teaching of generic skills needs to be reconstructed based on the recognition of the contextuality of marketable skills. If the argument for an intermediate position on skills and employability holds, then HE institutions will have to reconsider the teaching practices surrounding generic skills. At least in the Swedish case, generic skills are seldom integrated into subject matter or taught in a decontextualised manner, such as through rhetoric classes or method courses. Viewing marketable skills as rooted in practice, on the other hand, would point to an increase of work-based and practice-based learning in HE.

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Encouraging Students to Develop Their Employability: ‘Locally Rational’, but Morally Questionable?

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INTRODUCTION

I have for many years been carrying out research into career decision-making and employability. This included an action research project which ran for several years – mainly in the Business School of Edge Hill University, but also in other academic departments across the university (e.g. Law, Media, Sport, Geography, Computing and History).

Edge Hill is located in the north-west of England. It is described as a ‘new’ university in the UK as it gained university status after 1992. In contrast, what are referred to as ‘old’ universities, obtained university status before 1992. In common with many ‘new’ universities Edge Hill has a relatively high proportion (compared to ‘old’ universities) of students from working-class backgrounds. This is reflected in the type of students who participated in the research discussed in this chapter. About 40 per cent of students in this research are from working-class backgrounds.

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This is something that should be borne in mind when reading this chapter. Account should also be taken of the fact that the vast majority of students participating in the research were below the age of 25 when they commenced their degrees, with most starting at university in their teenage years. There was a fairly even split in terms of gender, but a very small proportion of students from ethnic minority groups (a reflection of the student body at Edge Hill when this research was carried out).

This action research project aimed to encourage undergraduates to critically reflect on how they should make career decisions and prepare for the transition from education to employment by developing what Brown and Hesketh (2004) have referred to as ‘personal capital’ – that is the skills and attributes graduate employers are looking for, and the evidence (through curricular and extra-curricular activities), to prove they have these skills and attributes. In doing this a series of ‘transformative’ pedagogic interventions designed to encourage undergraduates to critically evaluate the values underpinning their attitude towards employability were introduced. This chapter will summarise this research and then consider the efficacy and ethics of attempting to influence student values. In particular, the chapter will analyse the case for encouraging students to develop their employability from an individual, institutional and national perspective. Indeed, it may be rational, at the ‘local’ level (i.e. for an individual student and institution) to develop student employability, but not at the ‘macro’ level. This will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

RESEARCH: FROM SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS TO ‘ACTION’

Survey and Interviews

The starting point was a survey of final-year undergraduates from a cross-section of departments in the Faculty of Arts and Science at Edge Hill University. This survey was followed by in-depth interviews with a sub-sample of these students (for details of this research see Greenbank and Hepworth 2008). A later, longitudinal study, involved interviewing undergraduates from the Business School in their first year, and then in their final year of study – just before they graduated (see Greenbank 2014a, 2014b).

Virtually all the students in these two studies indicated that their prime motivation for coming to university was to obtain a ‘good’ job. Yet the research found that, once at university, the vast majority of these

undergraduates were not behaving in a way that would maximise their chances of obtaining a good job. For example, many of the students made little attempt to enhance their employment prospects by engaging in the type of extra-curricular activities (ECAs) that graduate employers favoured. The research found that students believed that gaining a 'good degree' – what Pitcher and Purcell (1998) refer to as 'the essential 2:1' – was the key to obtaining a graduate job. The students were often unaware of the value graduate employers placed on ECAs, particularly unpaid ECAs such as volunteering and sporting and cultural activities.

It became apparent from the interviews with final year students that many of them only thought about life after university intermittently and then in little depth. For example, one student said:

I really haven't thought about it [the future] too much. I've considered it, thought about it, but I've not really considered it a lot (pause) not really a lot, not in much detail really.

It was also evident that many students did not consider careers issues until they became aware of impending deadlines for job applications – what Marsick and Watkins (2001) refer to as 'triggers' for action. The problem is that when these 'triggers' occurred the students found, because they were often half-way through their final year of study, that they were in no position to engage in ECAs and did not have the time to research different career options. This meant that, just weeks before they graduated, many students were ill-prepared for the transition from education to work and still had little idea what they wanted to do. This is exemplified by these comments from two final-year students who were interviewed just a few weeks before they graduated:

I just saw the deadlines, panicked and put a couple of applications in. It was just a case of trying to get SOMEWHERE (capital letters indicates that the student was emphasising a word).

I just sent some jobs off to meet the January deadline. You just send them off; it makes you feel better even though they may not be the best.

One of the consequences of such behaviour is that, even if students are successful in gaining a job (and because they were ill-prepared this was often not the case), they may not obtain one that is appropriate. In fact a follow-up survey found that many of these students were not in graduate jobs six months after graduation (see Greenbank 2014b).

INFLUENCE OF STUDENT VALUES

The research was able to identify the values that underpinned the students' attitudes to career decision-making and preparing for the transition from education to employment. A brief summary of the values influencing student behaviour is outlined below:

- Students demonstrated a preference for making intuitive decisions based on informally-absorbed information (rather than research) and a 'feel' for the right decision. For example, one student made the decision to enter the accounting profession after talking to a friend who had a job with a local accounting firm. He justified this decision by saying he had a 'good gut instinct about accounting as a career'. This type of decision-making is referred to as 'System 1 thinking' by Khaneman (2011). In contrast, 'System 2 thinking' – which involves a 'rational' and comprehensive approach entailing: the setting of personal and career objectives; the collection of information on different types of job; the generation of different career options; and the evaluation of these options to make a decision (see Khaneman 2011) – was virtually non-existent amongst the students in this study.
- Students often adopted what O'Donoghue and Rabin (1999, p. 103) refer to as 'present-biased tendencies' rather than a future-time orientation. This meant that they invariably 'lived for today' and did not pay too much attention to the longer-term. This arose, not just because of a focus on immediate gratification (although this was a key factor), but because the students felt overwhelmed by their current activities (e.g. classes, assignments, etc.) and therefore found it difficult to think about the future. This present orientation meant that activities which resulted in longer-term benefits, such as researching different career options and engaging in non-paid ECAs, were often neglected.
- Students exhibited a tendency to be dependent on others supplying them with information about careers. For example, some of the students said they were waiting for the university's careers service to come in and provide them with ideas on the type of careers they might pursue.
- The students felt the need to try and remain within the parameters of what was regarded as 'normative' behaviour. For instance, they often

justified their failure to engage in ECAs by stating that their peers were not participating in such activities.

- The students often exhibited an 'external', rather than an 'internal', locus of control (see Rotter 1990). As such, they believed they had little control (i.e. agency) over what happened to them: the perception being that their futures were largely determined by fate and happenstance. This often resulted in reactive rather than proactive behaviour.
- The students demonstrated a tendency to be risk averse when making decisions. This often arose because they focused on the potential for regret. For example, some students did not want to go on a year-long work placement, because it meant giving up their part-time jobs; and they feared being unable to obtain another part-time job when they returned from their placement.
- Students tended to exhibit a 'purist' rather than a 'player' orientation (see Brown and Hesketh 2004; Brown et al. 2011). Players are students who engage in activities with the objective of developing their employability. Therefore, players would participate in ECAs, not because they were interested in them, but because they thought it would enhance their job prospects. In contrast, 'purists' would only engage in ECAs they were interested in and had an affinity with. Purists would not, therefore, participate in ECAs with the sole aim of enhancing their employability.

ACTION RESEARCH

The action research project was initially carried out with first-year students in the Business School, but the ideas developed were then introduced into other departments at Edge Hill University. The aim was to persuade students to critically reflect on their decision-making and how they intended to prepare for the transition from education to employment. The students were encouraged to consider adopting a rational approach to career decision-making (a System 2 approach) and to be more future orientated, independent and autonomous. The students were also encouraged to adopt an internal locus of control, be willing to take (calculated) risks and be more 'player' orientated. A summary is provided in Fig. 13.1 (below) with the values listed on the left deemed to be barriers to students developing their employability and the values to the right seen as facilitating the development of the students' employability. The arrows indicate the shift that students were being asked to consider.

Barriers	Facilitators
System 1 thinking	System 2 thinking
Present orientation	Future orientation
Dependency	Independence
Conformity to 'norms'	Autonomy
External locus of control	Internal locus of control
Risk aversity	(Calculated) risk taking
'Purist' orientation	'Player' orientation

Fig. 13.1 Values influencing student approaches to employability

A series of interventions were developed over several years/cycles of the action research project. A key aspect of this was to try and 'unfreeze' (Lewin 1999) the students' current values so that they were at least willing to consider alternative approaches. This was attempted by requiring the students to work in small groups to critique the way they had made decisions in the past. They were also asked (again working in groups) to critique a range of case studies which provide details of how different students had approached career decision-making and the transition from education to employment. As Schein (1987) argues the unfreezing process is designed to create 'disequilibria' by making individuals aware that the approaches they have adopted in the past, and plan to utilise in the future, may be flawed – thereby encouraging behaviour change.

The students were also asked to consider their strengths and weaknesses (in terms of skills, personality traits, values and other attributes) as a basis for identifying the type of jobs/careers that they would be most suited to. In conjunction with this, they were required to write about their 'future possible-selves' (see Leondari 2007; Plimmer and Schmidt 2007). This involved writing about where they would like to be (in terms of career, life-style, etc.) five-ten years after graduation. As Grosz (2013) argues, reflecting on where we would like to be in the future helps determine our current behaviour:

The future is not some place we're going to, but an idea in our mind now. It is something we're creating, that in turn creates us. The future is a fantasy that shapes our present. (p. 157)

It is also important for students to have well-developed future possible-selves because according to Rossiter (2007) “if an individual really cannot envision herself or himself doing something, it is unlikely that behaviour will be directed towards that end” (p. 90).

As well as articulating their aspirations (which should include a number of different scenarios in order to encourage students to make contingency plans and help them to be adaptable in the face of changed circumstances), the students were asked to identify the future possible-selves they feared. For instance, many students worked in supermarkets and they feared having to continue doing this (as many of their peers had) after graduation. This exercise was designed to provide further motivation to be proactive.

In order to motivate students to engage in relevant ECAs they were required to draw up action plans detailing the type of activities they were planning to engage in. The students were also encouraged to reflect on the skills they needed to develop for the recruitment and selection process – and how, and where, they could acquire these (for example through the University’s Careers Service or on-line). The extent to which they carried out these plans was monitored by their personal tutors. Before their final year the students were also expected to have: clear career objectives; to have collected evidence of their curricular and extra-curricular activities relevant to their career choice(s); and to have developed a strategy for applying for jobs during their final year of study. A summary of the type of interventions that would ideally take place over a three-year undergraduate degree are summarised in Table 13.1 (below).

ATTEMPTING TO INFLUENCE STUDENT VALUES: SHOULD WE BE DOING THIS?

The action research project was predicated on the idea of encouraging students to critically reflect on the values underpinning their attitude to career decision-making and developing their employability. However, as the direction of the arrows in Fig. 13.1 illustrates, we were in practice, advocating the adoption of certain values. We were, for example, promoting the view that System 2 thinking, a future-orientation, autonomy and agency were models of behaviour that should be adopted because we believed they would lead to better outcomes in the graduate labour market.

It could of course be contended that when we are teaching and interacting with students, we will inevitably (either consciously or unconsciously)

Table 13.1 Interventions over the three years of an undergraduate degree programme

<i>Year 1 & summer</i>	<i>Year 2 & summer</i>	<i>By the end of summer, just before Year 3</i>	<i>Year 3</i>
Unfreezing Awareness of the nature of the graduate labour market Critical reflection on decision-making Case studies Identifying future possible-selves	Reflecting on progress Continuing to develop and evidence personal capital Revisiting future possible-selves Refining career objectives	Formulate clear career objectives Evidence of personal capital fully articulated Develop strategy for applying for jobs	Apply for jobs Reflect on progress and if necessary take action to overcome setbacks
Developing personal and career objectives Developing and evidencing personal capital through curricular and extra-curricular activity	Developing skills for the recruitment and selection process		

promote certain values. Kogan (2000) argues that this is justified, because our knowledge and understanding (derived from our education, research and life experience) is superior to our students. It is, indeed, suggested that teachers are morally obliged to try and influence their students, because to do otherwise, would be an abdication of their responsibility (Nixon 2008; Cain 2011). On the other hand, some lecturers would contend that they do not have sufficient knowledge of the graduate labour market to enable them to play a role in helping students to develop their employability (Speight et al. 2013). Yet many of the skills and attributes identified in Fig. 13.1 are generic and do not require a specific knowledge and understanding of the graduate labour market. For example, System 2 thinking is closely aligned to critical thinking – at least in terms of the systematic/rational processes involved in collecting and analysing information before making decisions or drawing conclusions (Moon 2008) – and the development of critical thinking/rationality is something that is actively encouraged in higher education (Kember 2001; Brennan et al. 2010; Knowles et al. 2015). Similarly, independence, autonomy and a future-orientation are values that we often aim to develop in students (Fry et al. 2015).

Also, teachers may have more knowledge about the graduate labour market and its workings than they realise because they have been through

recruitment and selection procedures themselves and they may have experience of supporting family and friends, as well as students, to obtain employment. Indeed, lecturers often have more knowledge and understanding of the graduate labour market than the individuals in a student’s network, such as family and friends – who students may approach for advice. This may be particularly relevant to students from working-class backgrounds, because the people in their networks, are likely to have less direct experience of the graduate labour market than students from middle class backgrounds (Thomas and Jones 2007).

Bok (2006) argues that, “Institutional efforts to build character or change behaviour should include only goals which no reasonable person is likely to disagree” (p. 64). On the face of it, promoting values and behaviour that will enhance the employability of students might be regarded as uncontentious. There are, however, lecturers who are ideologically opposed to the idea that universities should be actively preparing students for what Leach (2015) refers to as a “neo-liberal inspired labour market” (p. 60). There is, for example, a view that higher education institutions (HEIs) should focus on the ‘traditional liberal ideal’ of developing the students’ minds (Maher and Graves 2008) and they should not be seeking to serve the needs of graduate employers (Sarson 2013; Shay 2015). There are complaints, for instance, that HEIs are being turned into ‘training camps’ for industry (Bok 2006). Nevertheless, interviews with teaching staff at Edge Hill University, carried out by Hepworth et al. (2015), suggest there is little evidence of widespread opposition to incorporating employability in the curriculum, only ‘small pockets of resistance’ (ibid, p. 38). In fact, rather than being resistant, most lecturers indicate a desire to further develop their understanding of issues relating to employability so that they can improve the support they provide to their students (Hunter-Barnett et al. 2015).

However, interviews conducted with academic staff during the action research project indicated that a number of lecturers had reservations about some of the values being promoted. There were, for example, concerns about promoting a ‘player’ orientation as this was seen as promoting inauthenticity. There were particular anxieties about students being encouraged to engage in ECAs, such as charitable work, which students were only committed to because it enhanced their employability. The counter argument is that provided the charity benefits from the students’ participation their motivation for working in it is not important. Moreover, it can be argued that whilst a student may engage in an ECA – such as

charitable work – out of self-interest, the experience can be transformative, with students acquiring values and personality traits that are seen as beneficial. They may, as a result, also develop a genuine commitment to the aims of the charity they are working with.

Another concern relates to the idea that students should develop an internal locus of control and agency. This of course is part of the neo-liberal discourse: you can achieve anything; it is down to your own efforts; as such, *you* are in control of your own destiny. According to Salecl (2010) the problem is that if everything is the responsibility of the individual, then a failure to succeed also rests with that individual. Yet a failure to succeed may result from factors outside an individual's control, especially in a highly-competitive graduate labour market, where others may have (often class-related) advantages emanating from the contacts they have, their ability to engage in the type of ECAs valued by graduate employers, and the fact that they may have attended prestigious schools and universities (see Skeggs 1997; Chevalier and Conlon 2003; Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Greenbank 2007). As Moreau and Leathwood (2006) point out issues such as social class (and gender and race) are often not acknowledged as factors influencing employment outcomes in the neo-liberal discourse on employability. Moreau and Leathwood (2006, p. 319) go on to argue that:

The lack of recognition of wider social and economic inequalities and the differential opportunities in the labour market for different groups of graduates reinforces a notion of individual responsibility.

It is, therefore, important for universities to address such factors so that students are aware of structural factors and how they can influence success in the labour market.

The influence of structural factors is something that was addressed in this action research project. As a result, students often become conscious of the fact that they may be advantaged or disadvantaged compared to their peers. This sometimes resulted in the manifestation of emotions such as distress, anxiety or embarrassment. There was, therefore, a need to address such issues sensitively. It also became clear that the use of intuition (dominant in the way students in this study make decisions) may, in the case of students from working-class backgrounds; cause them to (often unconsciously) restrict their aspirations to what they see as achievable. This is supported by Tomlinson (2010), who drawing on the work

of Pierre Bourdieu, discusses how student's dispositions are intuitively grounded in their respective cultures.

For us at Edge Hill University it was important for students to be cognisant of the fact that they were not only competing with students from their own university, but those from other, often more prestigious HEIs. As Tomlinson (2008) points out students need to be aware of the need to develop their personal capital not in absolute terms, but *relative* to those they will be competing against for jobs. For the lecturers these discussions necessitated a careful balancing act which involved helping students to understand the barriers they face, not stifling aspiration, but helping them to develop realistic career objectives. To this end we drew upon the work of Margaret Archer who argues that people reflect and respond in different ways to their circumstances, with social class and other structural factors, not necessarily determining a person's career trajectory (Archer 2003, 2007, 2012). She argues for a reflexive approach that enables individuals "to design and determine their responses to the structural circumstances in which they find themselves" (Archer 2007, p. 11).

There are of course multiple influences on the students' values and behaviour. Some of the factors influencing student values have been discussed above, but at this stage of the research, it is not entirely clear why students often exhibit values such as System 1 thinking, a present orientation and risk aversity – values that act as barriers to developing their employability. It can be argued that many of these psychological traits and approaches to decision-making are common to the general population (see Bazerman and Moore 2013). However, it would be useful if additional research could seek to obtain further insights into the factors influencing the values underpinning student attitudes to developing their employability. In particular, it would be useful to see if there are differences by factors such as age, social class, gender and ethnicity. Also, are there differences across different types of institution (e.g. 'new' versus 'old' universities) and in different countries?

Given the range of influences on student values and behaviour, the interventions introduced in this action research project are one of many. This is reflected in the fact that, despite the interventions, students often did not take on board the values being promoted. From our perspective such a response could be regarded as a failure, especially as a positive response to the interventions is seen as enhancing the students' employability. But it might also demonstrate that the students were not unthinkingly accepting the values being promoted by their lecturers. This of course assumes that

the students critically evaluate the perspectives being promoted and make a conscious decision not to adopt them. However, this research suggests that during the three years of their degree many students did not reflect in very much depth on the issues raised in the sessions on employability. In fact, it appears that a large proportion of students did not give employability much thought until they became aware of impending deadlines for graduate jobs (see Greenbank 2014b).

Nevertheless, the research did find that some students had critically evaluated the advantages and disadvantages associated with different approaches to decision-making (System 1 versus System 2 thinking). For example, students were able to point to the effectiveness of intuitive decisions they (and others) had made in the past. They also referred to the fact that rational approaches did not represent a panacea, especially in relation to career decision-making, because the diversity and dynamic nature of the graduate labour market – due to the development and continued emergence of new types of jobs that graduates are entering (see Elias and Purcell 2003; Nabi 2003; Rae 2007; Brynin 2012) – meant they were ‘bounded’ (see Bazerman and Moore 2013) in their ability to make rational decisions.

In addition, some students also provided a rationale for why they had not engaged in ECAs and researched different career options. For example, a number of students said they wanted to enjoy what they perceived to be their only opportunity to be a full-time student, which for them meant having an active social life and being able to take advantage of the long holidays. As one student commented: ‘I will never get the chance ever again to be a student and I just want to, you know, like enjoy myself ... I won’t get the chance again’. Other students found the idea of operating as a ‘player’ conflicted with their sense of how they should behave. One student, for instance, made the following comment: ‘I wouldn’t do something just to make my CV look good’, whilst another said, ‘I’d feel uncomfortable making myself look good for others. It’s like I would be putting someone else out of a job who really wants it and me TAKING it off them’.

The fact that some students are making a conscious decision to resist the values being promoted does not of course mean that the students will always make the ‘right’ decisions. As Archer (2012) states:

[A]ll have to draw upon their socially dependent but nonetheless personal powers of reflexivity in order to define their course(s) of action in relation to the novelty

of their circumstances ... The positive face of the reflexive imperative is the opportunity for subjects to pursue what they care about most ... Its negative face is that subjects can design and follow courses of action that are inappropriate. (p. 1)

There are factors that seem to influence the extent to which students adopt what Archer (2012) refers to as 'inappropriate' courses of action. It appears that students may be overly influenced by certain people (usually family and fellow students) who may not provide suitable role models or be in position to provide useful careers advice (Greenbank 2011). Also, the students' ability to reflect on, and critically analyse, situations in order to make informed decisions may be poorly developed. It has, for example, been argued by a number of writers (see for example Kember et al. 1997; Kember 2001; Brennan et al. 2010; Ransome 2011; Arum and Roksa 2011) that many students fail to develop the ability to critically analyse whilst at university. It has also been suggested by Moon (2008) that even students who do develop these skills for their academic work sometimes find it difficult to transfer this skill to other situations such as career planning.

Another factor influencing the extent to which students adopt the type of values being promoted by this action research project was the fact that it was not until the end of the project that all the interventions were fully introduced. This is important because it is the integrated nature of the interventions that is likely to have the greatest influence. For example, in the early stages of the research there was, until the unfreezing techniques were introduced, considerable resistance by the students to the suggestion that they should be more future-orientated and adopt rational (System 2) approaches to decision-making. It was also discovered later on, when students were re-interviewed in their final year of study, that although they had indicated that they would research different career options and be more future orientated (by engaging in ECAs) their intentions had often not been turned into actions. This led to a recognition that there was a need to reinforce the ideas introduced in their first year of study throughout the students' degree programme. This is represented in Table 13.1, where students are asked to reflect on progress and revisit their personal and career objectives and their thoughts on their 'future possible-selves'. Indeed, studies suggest that if students have well developed possible-selves, which they often revisit, this will reinforce their proclivity to convert intentions into actions (see Markus and Nurius 1986; Rossiter 2007; Froehlich et al. 2015). It also encourages students to reflect on their future possible-selves and change these as part of a process of developing their 'emerging

identity' (see Holmes 2015). Moreover, Plimmer and Schmidt (2007) make the point that students need to develop a repertoire of future-selves as a way of preparing for the uncertainty of the graduate labour market: by doing this, students develop their ability to be adaptable.

The problem with these interventions is that they require significant amounts of time in the classroom. This can be difficult to obtain, especially when the place of employability in the curriculum has to compete with the disciplinary topics that lecturers are teaching and researching. This is exacerbated by the fact that it is rare for lecturers (even in a Business School) to specialise in employability. At Edge Hill University there have been some attempts to overcome this by appointing 'employability champions' within departments. Moreover, some staff are now actively researching graduate employability. There may, therefore, be more support in the future for creating space within degree programmes for students to study issues relating to employability. A further justification for including the sort of topics proposed in this paper is that they often involve developing generic skills and attributes such as decision-making, critical thinking, planning, autonomy and independence, which are also useful to the students' academic and personal development as reflective students/citizens.

There can of course be a downside to the promotion of such skills. There may be an over-emphasis on rationality at the expense of intuition. However, nobody would suggest that intuition plays no role in career decision-making; only that for inexperienced decision-makers to rely on it is problematic. Intuition is particularly effective when experienced decision-makers draw on their experience to make quick decisions (Henry 2001; Phillips et al. 2004). Undergraduates generally do not have experience of the graduate labour market; neither do they have to make quick decisions. Despite this many of the students in this study were overconfident of their ability to effectively utilise intuition in their decision-making.

The idea of changing the students' values was seen by some lecturers as too difficult and unrealistically idealistic. Whilst it is accepted that changing the values of individuals is difficult (Rokeach 1973), this research – and other research: see Lewin (1999); Loewenstein et al. (2003); Bazerman and Moore (2013) – has shown that individuals can change their values (and their behaviour). It would, nevertheless, be fair to say that the action research project has not resulted in the magnitude of changes in student values and behaviour initially envisaged. It is, as discussed above, the case, however, that it is only recently that the full range of interventions has been developed. The difficulty is that departments are reluctant

to implement all the interventions because of the time involved. It also seems that departments prefer to offer events such as employer visits, sessions on how to complete CVs and mock interviews. The problem is that it is the students who are the most highly motivated that attend these. As Hepworth et al. (2015) state, “The ones that need it most engage the least” (p. 40). Also, there is little value in students knowing how to put together a job application or how to behave in a job interview if they have no idea what type of job they want and have not engaged in developing the type of personal capital employers are looking for.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated that the interventions implemented at Edge Hill University, which were designed to influence the students’ values and improve their employability, have had varying degrees of success. It, however, depends upon how ‘success’ is defined: if students critically evaluate the ideas presented to them and then decide they do not accord with their own values and objectives and they do not want to change, then their ‘failure’ to adopt them should not be judged negatively. It is crucial, however, that we help students to develop the skills and attributes that enable them to critically evaluate the ideas they are exposed to so that they can arrive at well thought-out decisions about how they want to spend their time at university – and whether this includes spending time researching the sort of career they want to pursue and developing their employability. As Jon Nixon (2008) argues higher education plays a key role in helping students to consider different perspectives so that they can make decisions about how they want to live their lives:

Thinking may not in itself be an action; but, to be purposeful, action requires sustained thoughtfulness. That is the premise upon which the university is based: thinking this or that through from a variety of perspectives, and drawing on the knowledge and insights available, one’s capability for right action is likely to be enhanced. (p. 32)

Nixon (citing Walker 2003) goes on to contend that through higher education students develop their skills and attributes, but “what they choose to do with these capacities, in other words how they act or function, cannot be predetermined” (Nixon 2008, p. 125 quoting Walker 2003, p. 177).

This chapter has also discussed how the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of the interventions we introduced depended on the commitment of departments, courses and individual lecturers. As demonstrated in Table 13.1 the different interventions are linked and it is better to utilise them in a sequential and integrated way in order to maximise their influence. In practice, this often did not happen. A key factor was the reluctance of departments and courses to make class time available for sessions on career decision-making and employability in what was already regarded as a crowded curriculum. Yet it could be argued that the main reason students enter higher education is to improve their employability (Purcell et al. 2008) and if HEIs do not help students to develop their employability they will be disadvantaged in what is a very competitive – and an increasingly vertically segmented (Brynin 2012) – graduate labour market. It could, therefore, be argued that HEIs have a moral duty to prepare students for the transition from education to the realities of the graduate labour market.

In England, the employability of students has become increasingly important because of the rise in tuition fees (from 2012 colleges and universities have been able to charge up to £9,000 per annum). Also, prospective students (and their parents) are now able to access information on graduate destinations by institution and course through Key Information Sets (see <https://unistats.direct.gov.uk/find-out-more/key-information-set>). In an higher education environment characterised by increased information and rankings through the publication of university league tables it is not surprising to find that the vast majority, if not all, English HEIs are engaged in activities to improve the employability of their students. This, however, provides its own challenges because as Brown and Hesketh (2004, p. 30) quoting Fred Hirsch state: “If everyone stands on tiptoe, no one sees better”. If HEIs are helping their students to develop their employability, it means that any institution choosing not to engage with the employability agenda will disadvantage their students. As such, it is ‘locally rational’ for HEIs to engage with the employability agenda. Moreover, it could be argued that it is also rational at the macro (i.e. national) level for HEIs to develop their students’ employability if it results in the graduate labour market operating more efficiently. For example, if students are able to make better career decisions it may result in fewer instances where there is a mismatch between graduate and employer expectations of a job – leading to improved market efficiency and reduced labour turnover. In addition, if graduates are better prepared for their chosen careers (through

the development of their personal capital) it may result in higher levels of productivity.

There, nevertheless, continues to be concerns about the type of values that this research has been promoting. For example, Edwards and Usher (2000, p. 55) argue that the employability agenda is replacing the dominant identity of the 'enlightened student' with that of 'autonomous/self-directed/flexible lifelong learners' (quoted by Clegg and Bradley 2006, p. 58). However, I would argue that the types of values being promoted are not in conflict with the 'enlightened student' (to use Edward and Usher's phrase) or the 'thoughtful' student (to use Nixon's (2008) word as quoted above). I would argue that as well as being beneficial to making the transition from education to the world of work, these values are useful to graduates as consumers, parents, voters, etc. The challenge is to persuade colleagues that space should be provided in the curriculum to help students develop these values. In order to achieve this it would probably be better if the type of skills and attributes being promoted in this research were not narrowly defined under the nomenclature of 'employability'. The fact that the values, skills and other attributes being promoted and developed could be useful to students as they "make their way through the world" as reflexive individuals (Archer 2007) should be given greater emphasis.

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Graduates' Psycho-Social Career Preoccupations and Employability Capacities in the Work Context

Melinde Coetzee

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The capacity to uphold one's employability in today's more volatile and uncertain employment climate has become a fundamental requirement for surviving in the contemporary workplace. This chapter explores the notion of employability capacities as important psycho-social resources supporting graduates' career management and development in the contemporary work context. The employability of graduates has significant consequences for their future work selves, including their economic and social status, lifestyle and career well-being, all of which are seen as important psycho-social career preoccupations. This chapter explores an under-researched theme, namely how graduates' self-evaluation of their employability capacities relate to their psycho-social career preoccupations. A sample of graduates employed in the human resource and financial fields ($N = 160$; 67% black people; 59% females; age 25–45 years; 80%) participated

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in the study. The results showed that career-adaptation preoccupations (expectations about one's career outcomes) could largely be attributed to self-efficacious beliefs about one's social capital and goal-directedness. The chapter further outlines the implications of the research findings for graduate employability in the work context.

INTRODUCTION

Graduates in today's work context have increasing concerns about their employability due to conditions of constant change, accelerated technological advances in a knowledge- and information-driven society, employer demands for innovation and optimal performance in competitive global markets and the instability of employment in an unsettled global economy (Fiori et al. 2015; Schreuder and Coetzee 2016). The capacity to uphold one's employability in this climate has become a fundamental requirement for surviving in today's unpredictable employment market (Hall 2013; Savickas 2013). Scholars have emphasised the psycho-social resources individuals need to proactively adapt to and cope with increasing career and employment uncertainty while constructing a meaningful career-life (Coetzee et al. 2016; Fiori et al. 2015; Savickas and Porfeli 2012). This chapter explores the notion of employability capacities as important psycho-social resources supporting graduates career management and development in the contemporary work context. Employability capacities relate to non-job-specific skills (referred to as industry-relevant generic graduate attributes) that are regarded important for successful business or professional practice (Barrie 2006; Coetzee 2014b; Griesel and Parker 2009; Jackson and Chapman 2011). Generally, employability capacities equip graduates as scholars, global and moral citizens, life-long learners and effective members of modern society who can act as agents of social good, change and innovation (Barrie 2004; Coetzee 2014c; Steur et al. 2012). Well-developed employability capacities therefore increase the likelihood of getting and retaining a job (De Cuyper et al. 2012).

This chapter explores whether graduates' perceptions of their employability capacities relate to their psycho-social career preoccupations. The employability of individuals has significant consequences for their future work selves, including their economic and social status, lifestyle and career well-being, all of which are seen as important career preoccupations (Schreuder and Coetzee 2016). Although employability has been widely researched, little is known about the association between individuals'

perceptions of their employability capacities and their psycho-social career preoccupations. The construct of psycho-social career preoccupations relates to proactive career attitudes and behaviours that are seen to support the development of the career identity (Coetzee et al. 2015). The career identity represents individuals' conception of themselves in the context of a career (Coetzee et al. 2015) and generally promotes self-direction in career-related behaviour (Simosi et al. 2015). As a higher-order mental construct the career identity increases the likelihood that even in turbulent economic situations and uncertain and constantly changing employment contexts individuals will sustain the pursuit of career goals and career interests (Simosi et al. 2015). Scholars have noted that individuals' concerns about their employability as an overarching psycho-social career preoccupation may give rise to non-career-stage and non-age related career preoccupations relating to continuous learning and development and upskilling opportunities, adaptability for more frequent transitions, work-life integration and flexibility, career mobility, renewal and change, proactive career agency and self-awareness (Coetzee 2015; Hall 2013; Savickas 2013; Sullivan 2013). Forming an integral part of career identity development, these psycho-social career preoccupations may drive graduates' career behaviour and decisions.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL CAREER PREOCCUPATIONS

Individuals' psycho-social career preoccupations denote their psychological (career self-concept or identity) and social (career-social circumstance/roles interface) concerns at a specific point in time (Coetzee 2015). According to career construction theory (Savickas 2002, 2011, 2013), these career-related concerns are predominant in the career-life story and emerge as themes relating to certain psycho-social developmental tasks of adaptability individuals have to face in the process of career-identity development throughout the career-life cycle (Coetzee 2015; Savickas 2005; Sharf 2010). The capacity or predisposition to adapt to change has become essential in helping individuals as growth-oriented organisms (Deci and Ryan 2000) balance the dynamic interplay between their evolving career needs and self-concepts and a constantly changing environment (Hamtaux et al. 2013; Morrison and Hall 2002). In this regard, career preoccupations are seen to facilitate proactive career attitudes and behaviour in the endeavor to improve the match between the evolving individual self and situation in which the career is constructed

(Coetzee et al. 2015; Hamtiaux et al. 2013; Savickas and Porfeli 2012). Research has also shown that employees' career preoccupations influence their job- and work-related attitudes, such as their commitment and engagement (Coetzee 2015).

Coetzee (2015) identified three core dimensions of non-age and non-career stage related psycho-social career preoccupations that may emerge as predominant themes in the career-life narrative within a particular socio-cultural work context: (1) career establishment preoccupations, (2) career adaptation preoccupations and (3) work/life adjustment preoccupations. The *career establishment preoccupations* involve concerns about fitting-in in a group, career and economic stability and security, establishing opportunities for self-expression and personal growth and development and advancing in one's career in the present organisation (Coetzee 2015). These preoccupations represent the developmental tasks of adaptability relating to Super's (1990) and Savickas's (2005) description of the exploration career stage (coping with entering a new workplace or job) and the establishment career stage (fitting-in and advancing within the job/organisation and feeling a sense of stability on the job). The *career adaptation preoccupations* involve employability-related concerns about adapting to changing contexts which might involve career changes and adjusting one's interests, talents and capabilities to fit with opportunities in the employment market (Coetzee 2015). The developmental tasks of adaptability represented by these preoccupations relate to the career maintenance stage (maintaining the self-concept in the process of noting changes in the work environment, learning more about new requirements, improving one's performance and dealing with new technological advances) described by Super (1990) and Savickas (2005).

The *work/life adjustment preoccupations* involve concerns about settling down, reducing one's workload and achieving greater harmony between one's work and personal life, which might also involve withdrawing from paid employment altogether (Coetzee 2015). The themes represented by these preoccupations share the developmental tasks of adaptability relating to the maintenance career stage (reassessing the self and family issues) and disengagement career stage (forging a new life structure outside the work organisation, slowing down one's work or retiring) as described by Super (1990) and Savickas (2005).

Presently, limited research is available on the framework of psycho-social career preoccupations postulated by Coetzee (2015). Research provided evidence of positive links between career establishment preoccupations

and work-related commitment while preoccupations with career adaptation, career renewal and employability are positively associated with lowered commitment to the job/career in the present organisation and heightened interest in external opportunities in the job market (Coetzee 2015). Social learning theory of career development (Krumboltz 1979; Mitchell and Krumboltz 1996) assumes that people are aware of their environment and try to deal with changes through adaptive behaviour and life-long learning endeavours. In line with this reasoning, the psycho-social career preoccupations that emerge at a specific point in time potentially signal this awareness and suggest behavioural intentions that may potentially manifest as proactive career attitudes and behaviours. Social cognitive career theory (Lent et al. 1994) further suggests that individuals' career interests, goals and decisions are influenced by their self-efficacy beliefs (the subjective belief that one is able to perform particular tasks), outcome expectations (the belief that these behaviours will result in specific outcomes such as for example financial gain, lifestyle, social approval and self-satisfaction) and goal mechanisms (aspirations and choices). In line with these premises, one could assume that individuals' positive self-evaluations (self-efficacious beliefs) about their employability capacities may potentially influence their psycho-social career preoccupations (concerns about certain outcome expectations).

EMPLOYABILITY CAPACITIES AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL CAREER PREOCCUPATIONS

Perceived employability refers to graduates' personal assessment of their capacity to deal with the world of work in the future (Nazar and Van der Heijden 2012; Rothwell and Arnold 2007). Employability denotes a form of work-specific active adaptability that enables individuals to identify and realise career opportunities (Fugate et al. 2004) through the use of a range of competences or capacities (Nazar and Van der Heijden 2012). Employability capacities refer to sets of portable generic non-job specific skills and attributes that are seen to promote the graduateness of individuals who pursue educational qualifications as part of their lifelong learning (Coetzee et al. 2015; Rocha 2012). Graduates' educational qualifications and graduateness (as reflected in their employability capacities) are linked to higher productivity and therefore a requirement by employers (Chesters 2014). Graduateness denotes the quality of personal growth and intellectual development of the graduates produced by a higher education

institution and the relevance and quality of the employability capacities they bring to the workplace (Coetzee 2012; Griesel and Parker 2009).

Coetzee (2012, 2014b) identified three core graduateness attributes, each of which is underpinned by certain employability capacities that are regarded as essential aspects of individuals' graduateness by employers: (1) scholarship - the attitude or stance towards knowledge and understanding, (2) global/moral citizenship - attitude or stance towards the world and communities and (3) life-long learning - attitude or stance towards oneself (Barrie 2004; Coetzee 2014c). *Scholarship* relates to aspects of critical or "higher order" critical thinking and meta-cognition reflected in graduates' problem-solving and decision-making skills, analytical thinking skills and enterprising skills. These employability capacities reflect self-efficacious beliefs about being venturesome, creative and proactive in the process of producing a solution to a recognised, yet often ill-defined problem or problematic complex situation (Coetzee 2012). *Global and moral citizenship* represents the capacity to contribute to society in a full, responsible, ethical and meaningful way through one's role as member of local, national and global communities (Barrie 2004). Employability capacities such as interactive skills, presenting and applying information skills and ethical and responsible behaviour are seen as important aspects of one's global/moral citizenship (Coetzee 2012). These capacities denote graduates' social capital which reflects how well they are connected to others in ways that create value for them and advances their goals (Creed and Gagliardi 2015). The ability to function effectively, efficiently and responsibly as a person in communicating and interacting with people from diverse cultures, backgrounds and authority levels, both globally and locally are core employability capacities underpinning graduates' social capital (Coetzee 2012). *Life-long learning capacities* consist of higher-level cognitive activities, such as connecting new knowledge to what was learned previously and reflecting upon its value and consequences (Steuer et al. 2012). Goal-directedness, a cognitive openness toward continuous learning and the willingness to proactively engage in the process of acquiring new knowledge, skills and abilities throughout one's life and career in reaction to, and in anticipation of, changing technology and performance criteria are seen as important life-long learning capacities (Coetzee 2012). Social cognitive career theory (Lent et al. 1994) suggests that people formulate goals, monitor their progress toward these goals, and adjust their behaviour in response to any discrepancies between the set goals and progress toward the goals by revising, adjusting or abandoning goals,

or increasing their effort toward goal achievement. These behaviours are positively associated with employability and career satisfaction (Creed and Gagliardi 2015) and career adaptability (Savickas and Porfeli 2012).

Generally, employability has been shown to be significantly related to objective career success outcomes such as for example career advancement (Van der Heijden et al. 2009). Research provides evidence that employability capacities support proactive behaviour in the workplace (Schreuder and Coetzee 2016). Self-efficacious beliefs about one's scholarship capacities were shown to increase self-directed behaviour. Positive beliefs about one's global/moral citizenship capacities were indicated to enhance a sense of agency and motivation (Coetzee 2014c). Individuals' self-evaluations about their social capital are positively associated with their career identity development and career adjustment (Creed and Gagliardi 2015). Social development and interaction were also seen as essential aspects of graduates' employability and career advancement prospects by employers (Selvadurai et al. 2012). Positive self-evaluations or beliefs about one's lifelong learning capacities (goal-directed behaviour and continuous learning orientation) significantly predicted adaptive behaviours such as confidence (efficacy), curiosity (motivation and willingness) and sense of control (taking charge) (Coetzee et al. 2015).

Employability in the work context is seen as a precursor for employee outcome expectations (e.g. positive career outcomes, advancement and performance) and employer outcome expectations (e.g. organisational performance and innovation). For employees, employability is associated with the capacity to get and hold on to employment, which in the career development context, subsumes the capacity for career self-management and career agency and self-directed attitudes and behaviours (Van der Heijde 2014). Individuals' self-perceived employability is generally based on self-efficacious beliefs or positive self-evaluations about their ability to attain sustainable employment appropriate to their qualification level (Praskova et al. 2015). These beliefs are anchored in their confidence in their employability capacities which function as self-regulatory personal resources in adapting to and controlling the work environment (Coetzee 2015; De Cuyper et al. 2012; Van der Heijde 2014). Conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll 2001) posits that people who possess such personal resources are more capable of resource gain, less vulnerable to resource loss and they are able to protect established resources (De Cuyper et al. 2012), all of which potentially explain the strength of their self-efficacy beliefs or self-evaluations. Employability further entails the

continuous monitoring of one’s capacities compared to changing organisational environment requirements and engaging in proactive adaptive behaviours to ensure sustainable employability (Van der Heijde 2014). As shown in Fig. 14.1, this self-regulatory aspect of employability may potentially give rise to certain career preoccupations which may emerge as predominant themes in the career narrative. However, the empirical association between graduates’ employability capacities and psycho-social career preoccupations are to date unexplored. Understanding the link between these constructs may potentially contribute to the graduate employability

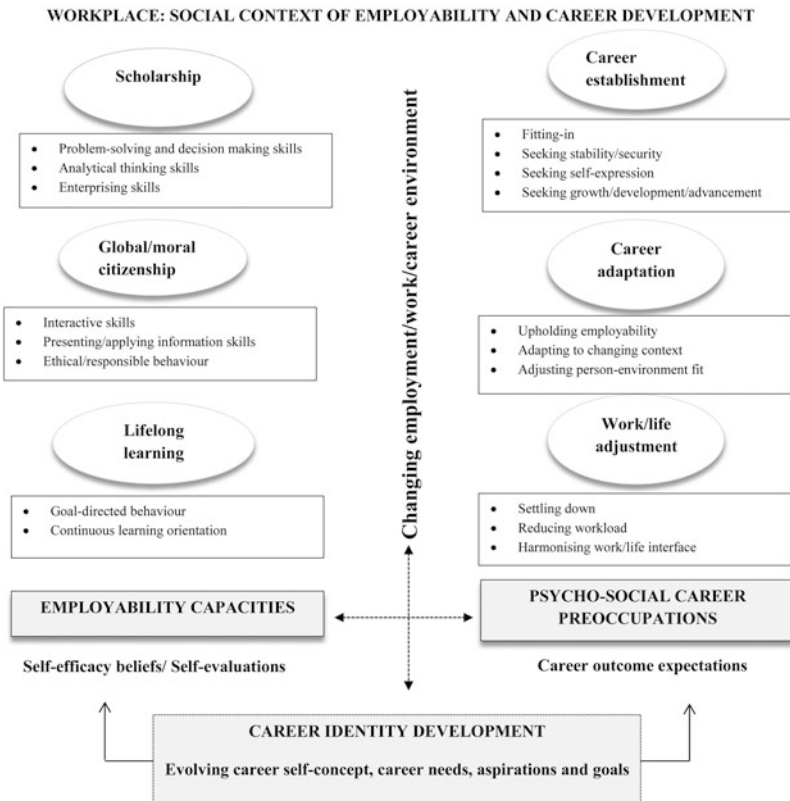


Fig. 14.1 Conceptual framework for exploring the association between employability capacities and psycho-social career preoccupations

literature. The next section outlines the research method employed to explore this association, followed by the research results, the findings and implications for graduate employability in the workplace context.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

A random sample of graduates ($N = 160$; 67% black and 33% white people; 59% females and 41% males) employed in the South African human resources and financial fields participated in the study. The participants were enrolled for further studies at a large South African higher education open distance learning institution. Ethical clearance and permission to conduct the research were obtained from the management of the university. The participants had an age range from 25 to 50 years with 80 percent in the early career stage (exploration and establishment phase) of their lives (25–40 years).

MEASURING INSTRUMENTS

Two measuring instruments were used to assess the association between the participants' employability capacities and their psycho-social career preoccupations.

Employability Capacities

The *graduateness skills and attributes scale* (GSAS) developed by Coetzee (2014b) was used to measure the participants' employability capacities. The GSAS contains 64 items and eight sub-scales with a 6-point Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (always): (1) problem-solving and decision-making skills (8 items; e.g. *I can initiate changes to make my work or life more satisfying and developmental*); (2) enterprising skills (9 items; e.g. *I keep up to date with competitor information and market trends*); (3) analytical thinking skills (4 items; e.g. *I can give accurate explanations of information and data presented to me*); (4) interactive skills (16 items; e.g. *I find it easy to persuade, convince or influence others*); (5) skills in presenting and applying information (5 items; e.g. *I can write my ideas and opinions clearly to convince my audience*); (6) ethical and responsible behaviour (5 items; e.g. *I uphold the ethics and values of my*

profession, community or workplace in all I do); (7) goal-directed behaviour (10 items; e.g. *I take action to achieve my goals*); and (8) continuous learning orientation (7 items; e.g. *I make sure that I keep myself up to date on technical knowledge and new developments in my field*). Evidence of the construct and internal consistency reliability of the GSAS has been reported by Coetzee (2014b). In terms of the present study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients (internal consistency reliability) for each of the eight subscales ranged between .77 and .97 (high). The GSAS also had acceptable construct validity with the fit indices of the eight-factor measurement model showing adequate model fit for the present study: (Chi-square/df ratio = 2.23; $p < .0001$; RMSEA = .08; SRMR = .07). The Harmann's one-factor solution showed that the single factor that emerged for the GSAS accounted for only 28% of the covariance among the GSAS variables, indicating in line with the guidelines of Podsakoff et al. (2003) that common method variance did not pose a threat to the interpretation of the GSAS findings.

Psycho-Social Career Preoccupations

The construct was measured through the *psycho-social career preoccupations scale* (PCPS) developed by Coetzee (2014a, 2015). The PCPS uses a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = not concerned; 5 = extremely concerned) with 24 items that directly measure working adults' general degree of concern with specific vocational developmental tasks across three dimensions regarded as being relevant to contemporary career theory: career establishment preoccupations (13 items; e.g. "*To what extent are you concerned about increasing your employability?/ To what extent are you concerned about learning more about your career interests, talents and capabilities?*"); career adaptation preoccupations (5 items; e.g. "*To what extent are you concerned about making a career change/To what extent are you concerned about how your concept of your interests, talents and capabilities fit with the changes in the employment market?*"); and work/life adjustment preoccupations (6 items; e.g. "*To what extent are you concerned about balancing work with family responsibilities?/To what extent are you concerned about reducing your current workload?*"). Evidence of the construct validity and internal consistency reliability of the PCPS has been reported by Coetzee (2015). For the present study, the overall subscale Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranged between .70 and .94 (high internal consistency reliability). The PCPS also had acceptable construct validity

with the fit indices of the eight-factor measurement model showing adequate model fit for the present study: (Chi-square/df ratio = 2.57; $p < .0001$; RMSEA = .08; SRMR = .07). The Harmann's one-factor solution showed that the single factor that emerged for the PCPS accounted for only 11% of the covariance among the PCPS variables, indicating that common method variance did not pose a threat to the interpretation of the PCPS findings.

Demographic data were used as control variables and included: age (coded 0 = ≤ 45 years; 1 = ≥ 46 years), gender (coded 0 = male; 1 = female), and race (coded 0 = black; 1 = white). These variables were chosen based on previous research indicating that these variables are important to consider in evaluating individuals' employability capacities and career development (Coetzee 2014b,c).

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Bivariate correlation (Pearson's coefficients) analyses were calculated to assess the pattern of relationships between the variables of concern to the study. Point-biserial correlations were calculated for discrete dichotomous variables (i.e. the demographic variables). Canonical correlation analysis was used to study the multivariate relationships between the eight employability capacities measured by the GSAS and the three psycho-social career preoccupations measured by the PCPS.

RESULTS

Assessing Associations Between Employability Capacities and Psycho-Social Career Preoccupations

As can be seen from Table 14.1, the practical effect of the significant zero-order correlations between the eight employability capacities and three psycho-social career preoccupations ranged between $r \geq .15 \leq .32$ (small to moderate effect; $p \leq .05$), suggesting significant associations between the variables. The career adaptation preoccupations variable had no significant association with analytical thinking skills. Only a few significant correlations between the demographic (age and race) and construct variables (small practical effect) were observed. However, these associations were small in practical effect ($r < .30$; $p < .05$) and overall, regarded as negligible.

Table 14.1 Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 Age	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 Gender	—	—	—	—	-.06	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3 Race	—	—	—	-.22**	.19*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 Problem solving/ decision-making skills	4.59	.78	.89	.11	-.01	.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5 Enterprising skills	4.52	.78	.87	.16*	-.04	-.05	.87***	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6 Analytical thinking skills	4.56	.94	.86	.16*	-.07	.06	.74***	.70***	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
7 Interactive skills	4.76	.70	.93	.06	.04	-.07	.83***	.80***	.56***	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
8 Presenting/applying information skills	4.63	.77	.77	.13	.001	-.18*	.82***	.79***	.65***	.82***	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
9 Ethical/responsible behaviour	5.21	.73	.81	.22**	.10	.02	.74***	.68***	.61***	.71***	.69***	—	—	—	—	—	—
10 Goal directed behaviour	4.72	.78	.89	.02	.07	-.06	.85***	.78***	.64***	.79***	.79***	.73***	—	—	—	—	—
11 Continuous learning	4.75	.82	.88	.11	-.01	-.05	.86***	.83***	.68***	.86***	.79***	.71***	.87***	—	—	—	—
12 Career establishment preoccupations	4.50	.85	.94	-.06	-.02	-.25**	.23**	.25**	.16*	.26***	.30***	.19*	.30***	.23**	—	—	—
13 Career adaptation preoccupations	3.29	1.06	.88	.06	.08	-.30***	.15*	.18*	.04	.23**	.27***	.23**	.27***	.17*	.67***	—	—
14 Work-life adjustment preoccupations	3.45	.82	.70	.04	.01	-.26**	.22**	.29***	.18*	.29***	.32***	.17*	.26***	.26***	.69***	.56***	—

Notes: *N* = 160

****p* ≤ .001 – statistically significant. ***p* ≤ .01 – statistically significant. **p* ≤ .05 – statistically significant

In terms of the multivariate associations between the eight employability capacities and the three psycho-social career preoccupations, Table 14.2 shows that the full canonical correlation model was significant using Wilks's multivariate test criterion. Wilks's lambda (λ) = .7239, function 1: $F_p = 2.13$ ($p = .002$). The full model r^2 type effect size (yielded by $1 - \lambda$)

Table 14.2 Results of the standardised canonical correlation analysis for the first canonical function

<i>Variate/variables</i>	<i>Canonical coefficients</i>	<i>Structure coefficient (Rc)</i>	<i>Canonical cross-loadings (Rc)</i>	<i>Squared canonical loadings (Rc²)</i>
<i>Employability capacities canonical variate variables</i>				
Problem solving/decision-making skills	-.93	.46	.19	.03
Enterprising skills	.47	.57	.24	.06
Analytical thinking skills	-.36	.22	.09	.01
Interactive skills	.29	.65	.27	.08
Presenting/applying information skills	.78	.75	.31	.10
Ethical/responsible behaviour	.16	.56	.23	.05
Goal directed behaviour	1.03	.72	.30	.09
Continuous learning orientation	-.71	.51	.21	.05
<i>Psychosocial career preoccupations canonical variate variables</i>				
Career establishment preoccupations	-.42	.80	.33	.11
Career adaptation preoccupations	.49	.97	.40	.16
Work-life adjustment preoccupations	.00	.75	.31	.10
<u>Overall model fit measures (function 1):</u>				
Overall $R_c = .42$				
Proportion Function 1 = .17				
$F(p) = 2.13$ ($p < .002$); $df = 24; 432.75$				
Wilks' Lambda (λ) = .7239***				
r^2 type effect size: $1 - \lambda = .28$ (large practical effect)				
Redundancy Index (standardised variance of psychosocial career preoccupations explained by employability capacities): Proportion = .13				

Notes: $N = 160$

was .28 (large practical effect), indicating that the full model explains an adequate proportion of the variance shared between the two variable sets. The redundancy index results summarised in Table 14.2 show that the employability capacities represented by the GSAS variables were able to predict 13% (moderate practical effect) of the proportion of variance in the psycho-social career preoccupations variables.

Using $Rc = .25$ as the cut-off criterion, the canonical cross-loading Rc coefficients shown in Table 14.2 indicated that presenting/applying information skills ($Rc = .31/Rc^2 = .10$; small practical effect), goal-directed behaviour ($Rc = .30/Rc^2 = .09$; small practical effect) and interactive skills ($Rc = .27/Rc^2 = .08$; small practical effect) contributed significantly in explaining the variance in the psycho-social career preoccupations. These three employability capacities also contributed the most in explaining the overall employability capacities canonical construct variate. Overall, all three psycho-social career preoccupations contributed significantly in explaining the variance in the eight employability capacities. The career adaptation preoccupations ($Rc = .97$) contributed the most in explaining the psycho-social career preoccupations canonical construct variate and the most in explaining the variance ($Rc = .40/Rc^2 = .16$; moderate practical effect) in the eight employability capacities.

Figure 14.2 depicts the core pattern of significant associations observed from the empirical results. The discussion section will further explore the meaning and implication of these associations for graduate employability in the work context.

DISCUSSION

This chapter explored the association between employed graduates' employability capacities and their psycho-social career preoccupations in the 21st century workplace context. The results of the canonical correlation analysis indicated that employability capacities and psycho-social career preoccupations are significantly related concepts. This finding provides a unique contribution to the overall understanding of the two constructs as they manifest in the workplace context. More specifically, in line with social cognitive career theory (Lent et al. 1994), the results showed that career adaptation preoccupations (expectations about one's career outcomes) could largely be attributed to self-efficacious beliefs about one's social capital and goal-directedness. The more confident graduates are about their ability to function effectively, efficiently and responsibly as

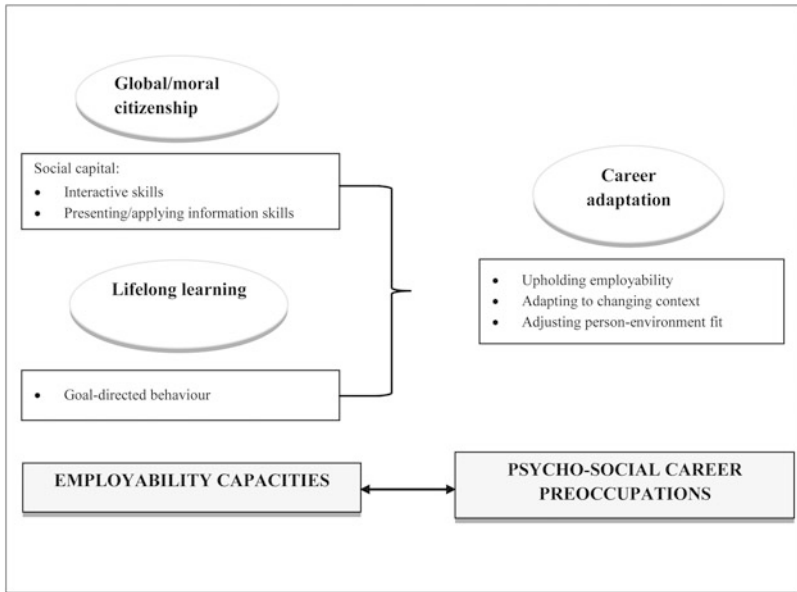


Fig. 14.2 Pattern of core-significant associations between employability capacities and psycho-social career preoccupations

a person in using information technology and media, and communicating and interacting with people from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and authority levels (present/applying information skills and interactive skills: Coetzee 2014b), the more preoccupied they appear to become about upholding their employability, adapting to changing contexts and adjusting the fit between their career needs/preferences and changing environment requirements (i.e. career adaptation preoccupations: Coetzee 2015). This finding supports the view that individuals' self-evaluations about their social capital are positively linked to their career identity development and career adjustment (Creed and Gagliardi 2015). Social development and interaction were also seen as essential aspects of graduates' employability and career advancement prospects by employers (Selvadurai et al. 2012).

Graduates' career adaptation preoccupations further seemed to have been activated by their positive evaluations about their goal-directedness (i.e. confidence in their capacity to proactively set goals for upholding their employability and a willingness to proactively engage in the process of acquiring new knowledge, skills and abilities throughout their life

and career in reaction to, and in anticipation of, changing technology and performance criteria: Coetzee 2014b). Goal-directed behaviour and career adaptation are attributes associated with sustaining employability by taking agency in proactively managing one's career (Coetzee 2014d). Coetzee et al. (2015) also found that positive self-evaluations or beliefs about one's lifelong learning capacities (goal-directed behaviour) significantly predicted adaptive behaviours such as confidence (efficacy), curiosity (motivation and willingness), and sense of control (taking charge).

The association between these constructs could be attributed to the notion that careers and goal setting and striving are embedded in social relationships and contexts (Creed and Gagliardi 2015). The quality of individuals' social connections as a means of creating value for them and advancing their goals (career aspirations) is reflected in their evaluations of and beliefs about their social capital (Creed and Gagliardi 2015; Jokisaari and Nurmi 2005). Individuals with higher social capital and goal-directedness are likely to become more optimistic about their future and employability (Creed and Gagliardi 2015).

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study was cross-sectional which limits establishing cause-effect relations between graduates' employability capacities and their psycho-social career preoccupations. Canonical correlation analysis is a maximisation technique, and, therefore, the results of this study are to be interpreted with caution; the possibility of overestimation that may occur in canonical models due to the amplification of linear composites should be considered (Hair et al. 2010). Longitudinal studies are required to contribute to a broader understanding of the association between the constructs and plausible causal directions among the variables. Generalisability of the findings is also limited due to the relatively small sample size. Further research with broader and more diverse population groups in various occupational fields is needed to determine the generalisability of the findings.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Despite the limitations of the research design, the study adds valuable new knowledge to the research literature on graduate employability by introducing the construct of psycho-social career preoccupations in relation

to employability capacities. Understanding graduates' employability from a career development perspective has become important in the light of the changing nature of careers and jobs in today's uncertain and more volatile employment context. The findings of the study are valuable inputs that can inform the design of interventions to develop graduate employability in today's workplace. Such interventions should address career self-management programmes that emphasise the development of employability capacities in relation to key career preoccupations. Formal career discussions concerning graduates' career preoccupations should be established to broaden their self-awareness about their career needs, interests, concerns and goals in relation to organisational employability requirements. Career development support in the form of mentoring, coaching and career counselling should be established to help graduates understand their career preoccupations and to develop and apply career strategies and employability capacities in achieving the career goals and aspirations embedded in their career preoccupations. Individuals' employability has been associated with their agency in proactively managing their careers beyond those offered by the organisation. Helping graduates develop important employability capacities and proactive career self-management attitudes and behaviour will help promote graduate employability in today's workplace. Well-developed employability capacities help graduates to function successfully within a rapidly changing work environment and to contribute to a range of employer requirements over the course of their working lives. Understanding the association between their employability capacities and career preoccupations which may include concerns about upholding their employability and adapting to changing work contexts, will set the stage for graduates proactively and confidently managing their relationship with work and with career and lifelong growth, learning and adaptation as precursors for sustainable employability.

In conclusion, this chapter and the empirical study made an important contribution to the theory of employability by extending an understanding of how individuals' preoccupations about their life-career are likely to be influenced by their employability capacities. The chapter positioned the notion of employability within the psycho-social realm of career construction and career identity development in the workplace context. The chapter extends employability theory by emphasising the dynamic interplay between individuals' employability, the evolving psychological self (career identity) and the social context in which the career is constructed.

In this regard, the chapter provided empirical evidence of the role of employability in individuals' psycho-social career development in the contemporary workplace.

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Developing Graduate Employability: The CareerEDGE Model and the Importance of Emotional Intelligence

Lorraine Dacre Pool

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses a model of graduate employability development, the CareerEDGE model (Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007) which includes Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a key component. Although previous models and theories of employability (e.g. Fugate et al. 2004; Knight and Yorke 2004) have alluded to adaptive emotional functioning as an aspect of employability, CareerEDGE was the first to give EI such prominence. There is scope for EI to have a direct impact on graduate employability but also an indirect impact via other aspects of employability development.

Graduate employability has been termed a ‘slippery concept’ due to difficulties with definition and conceptual clarity (Pegg et al. 2012; Sewell and Dacre Pool 2010). One of the key difficulties is the frequent conflation

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of the terms ‘employment’ and ‘employability’ and as pointed out by Pegg et al. (2012) a distinction needs to be made between ‘employment’ as a graduate outcome (measured using employment destinations data) and ‘employability’ which is viewed as a much broader concept, related to Higher Education pedagogy, personal and career development activities. Another issue is the overemphasis on generic skills development, which alone is not an adequate answer to the challenge of graduate employability (Tomlinson 2012).

A number of definitions attempt to capture the broader conceptualisation of graduate employability including, “*Employability is having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose, secure and retain occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful.*” (Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007, 2012).

This conceptualisation of graduate employability also shares much with the concept of ‘graduate attributes’, defined as:

“The qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institution and consequently shape the contribution they are able to make to their profession and society” (Bowden et al. 2000).

This would also concur with Hallett (2012) who wrote:

“It is refreshing to think that ‘employability’ might grow into something broader than a particular set of skills and competencies, into a richer idea of graduate readiness involving a moral capacity to work with other people with an integrity that fits not only the workplace but also other contexts of engagement and dialogue.” (p. 30).

The CareerEDGE model of graduate employability was developed in order to provide a clear, practical model that would allow this multi-faceted concept to be explained easily and could be used as a framework for working with students to develop their employability. It is an attempt to bring together the earlier work of researchers in this field into one comprehensive, coherent model that could be used to explain the concept to academics, careers guidance professionals, students, their parents and employers.

The design of the model (see Fig. 15.1) reflects an assertion that each component is essential to the development of graduate employability. The

mnemonic CareerEDGE is used as an aid to remember the five components on the lower tier of the model: **Career** Development Learning; **E**xperience (work and life); **D**egree Subject Knowledge, Skills and Understanding; **G**eneric Skills; and **E**motional Intelligence. The authors suggest that whilst students are within HE, they should be provided with opportunities to access and develop everything on this lower tier and essentially, for reflecting on and evaluating these experiences. This should result in the development of higher levels of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem – the crucial links to employability. The pathways may not be as direct as depicted, with areas of overlap acknowledged. This is particularly the case with Emotional Intelligence, which plays an important role in its own right but has the potential to impact on all the other elements of the model.



Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007)

Career Development Learning

Experience (Work & Life)

Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding and Skills

Generic Skills

Emotional Intelligence

Fig. 15.1. The CareerEDGE model of graduate employability (see Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007), p. 280)

The next section includes a brief explanation of the first four components of the model: Career Development Learning; Experience (Work and Life); Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding and Skills; and Generic Skills. This is followed by a more detailed discussion of the EI component and how this impacts on the other elements of employability development.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT LEARNING

Career Development Learning (CDL) in the context of Higher Education has been described as being,

“...concerned with helping students to acquire knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes which will equip them to manage their careers, i.e. their lifelong progression in learning and in work.” (Watts 2006, p. 2)

Bridgstock (2009), using the term ‘career management’ suggests that this may not have been given the prominence it deserves within the graduate employability agenda and argues for careful integration into courses from an undergraduate’s first year at university. Knight and Yorke (2004, p. 25) also include ‘skilful career planning and interview technique’ as one of the ‘seven meanings of employability’ that have the greatest appeal to them.

The most widely recognised model of CDL is known as the DOTS model (Law and Watts 1977). This acronym describes planned experiences to help develop:

- Self-awareness – in terms of interests, values, motivations, abilities etc.
- Opportunity awareness – knowing what work opportunities exist and what requirements they have.
- Decision learning – decision-making skills.
- Transition learning – including job search and self-presentation skills, such as application form completion, curriculum vitae preparation and interview techniques (Watts 2006).¹

As with all the elements of the CareerEDGE model, CDL is essential. A student may gain an excellent degree classification and develop many of the required generic skills, but if they are unable to decide what type of occupation they would find satisfying, or be unaware of how to articulate their knowledge and skills to a prospective employer, they are unlikely to achieve their full career potential.

EXPERIENCE: WORK AND LIFE

Another element from the lower tier of the CareerEDGE model is that of ‘experience’. The work experience component of this is crucial (e.g. Jackson 2014), but it is important for students to realise that they often have a lot of other life experiences that can be drawn upon in order to enhance their levels of employability. This is particularly likely to be the case for mature students.

One study carried out in the United States found that gaining work experience through internships was a key factor in the enhancement of students’ self-perceived employability (Qenani et al. 2014). The necessity for students to gain work experience now seems to be accepted by employers and most HE staff alike; indeed this was one of the major points made by the Wilson Review of Business-University Collaboration (2012).

Merely having experience of the workplace is not enough to enhance a student’s employability; it is the learning from the experience that really matters. According to Harvey (2005) learning from work experience is effective if it has meaning and relevance to future career development and has been planned and is intentional from the outset. Work experience should also be assessed or accredited and integrated into undergraduate programmes with the quality being monitored and all those involved, i.e. the employers, academics and students, committed to it. A process to enable the student to reflect on and articulate their learning is also a necessity.

However, these suggestions are in the main related to structured work experience provided by the HEI, for example sandwich placements. Students may also be able to enhance their employability through a range of work-related experiences, for example, summer placements, short job tasters, gap year work, summer internships, short term project placements, part-time casual work – e.g. bar work or temping, work shadowing, voluntary work or student union roles. Research carried out by Gbadamosi, Evans, Richardson and Ridolfo (2015) found a positive relationship between engaging in part-time work and career aspiration. Students who worked part-time were able to optimise these experiences to inform their career aspirations.

It is sometimes suggested that part-time working during term time is likely to interfere with academic work (Harvey 2005) and students do have to get the balance right. However, most universities now actively support students, often providing ‘job shops’ advertising part-time work

available to them. This is likely to be partly due to the recognition that students can learn significantly from their experiences in the workplace but also because,

“...of pragmatic acceptance of students’ need to work while studying because state support is no longer sufficient. Rather than ignore it or regard it negatively, academics are trying to get students to think positively about what they learn from their part-time work”. (Harvey 2005, p. 21)

DEGREE SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND SKILLS

This element is central to the model. For many students the main motivations for entering HE are generally perceived as to study a specific subject in depth and to gain the degree qualification which should then lead to enhanced employment prospects. There are also some occupations, for example social work, nursing and computing, where expertise in that subject is incredibly important but others, such as retailing and general management where it appears to be a general ‘graduateness’ that employers value (Yorke and Knight 2006). What is clear is that when considering graduate employability, the degree subject alone is not enough to ensure the graduate stands the best possible chance of gaining the employment they desire. Brown, Hesketh and Williams (2003) report one employer as saying they view academic qualifications as something now taken for granted that merely provide the first tick in the box for an applicant. Thus, it seems that the degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills are a crucial element of the model but *alone* are unlikely to secure occupations in which graduates can find satisfaction and success.

GENERIC SKILLS

There are issues concerning nomenclature where both the terms ‘generic’ and ‘skills’ are concerned. The term ‘generic’ has also been known as ‘core’, ‘key’, ‘personal’, ‘transferable’, ‘common’, ‘work’ or ‘employment-related’. Additionally the term ‘skills’ is often used interchangeably with ‘capabilities’, ‘competencies’, ‘attributes’, ‘levels’ or ‘learning outcomes’ (Lees 2002).

According to Bennett et al. (1999) the term ‘core skills’ is often seen by academics as the skills central to their particular discipline and it is therefore confusing to use it in this context. They suggest the term ‘generic skills’ is

used to represent the skills that can support study in any discipline and may be transferable to a range of contexts, both within HE and the workplace.

A large amount of literature has been published detailing the generic skills employers look for in potential graduate employees. The Pedagogy for Employability Group (2006), proposed the following list which they suggest research over a quarter of a decade has established as the generic skills employers expect to find in graduate recruits: imagination/creativity; adaptability/flexibility; willingness to learn; independent working/autonomy; working in a team; ability to manage others; ability to work under pressure; good oral communication; communication in writing for varied purposes/audiences; numeracy; attention to detail; time management; assumption of responsibility and for making decisions; and planning, coordinating and organising ability. Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) added the skill ‘ability to use new technologies’ to this list and also suggest that many of the terms often referred to as ‘enterprise skills’, for example, initiative and responding to challenges, could be included here. Commercial awareness is also something that many employers state is an essential attribute in potential graduate employees (e.g. CBI 2009).

Because of their prominence in the employability literature, there is a real danger of thinking that employability is just about the acquisition of various generic skills but it is clearly more complex than this. Bridgstock (2009) states that although employer driven lists of skills may form an important subset of employability, they do not address the complete picture of what graduates facing the prospects of the labour market need to have developed. Knight and Yorke (2004) would concur and suggest there is a *“widespread belief that employability is assured by the possession of skills. It is not”* (p. 24).

Therefore, although the CareerEDGE model acknowledges the importance of generic skills and sees them as a key element of graduate employability, it also stresses the importance of other contributing elements, for example Emotional Intelligence to which attention now turns.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Goleman (1998, p. 4) states that:

“In a time with no guarantees of job security, when the very concept of a ‘job’ is rapidly being replaced by ‘portable skills’, these are the prime qualities that make and keep us employable. Talked about loosely for decades under a variety

of names, from 'character' and 'personality' to 'soft skills' and 'competence' there is at last a more precise understanding of these human talents, and a new name for them: emotional intelligence."

This relates to Goleman's (1996, 1998) rather broad conceptualisation of EI and many would argue that this 'variety of names' does not exactly equate to EI. Despite this, there is good evidence to support the notion that even if these things are not the same as EI, they are likely to be influenced by it.

Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2004) define EI in the following way:

"...the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth." (p. 197)

This definition is derived from their four-branch model of EI (Mayer and Salovey 1997) which is an ability model as opposed to a personality-trait model which some researchers support (e.g. Petrides and Furnham 2001). The model suggests that EI consists of four related abilities: perceiving emotion (in oneself, others and other stimuli such as art and music); using emotion (to help with thinking and decision-making); understanding emotion (how emotions develop and change); and managing emotion (in oneself and in others) (Mayer et al. 2008b). Some researchers have argued that there is little support for including the second branch (using emotion) and now refer to the model as simply the Mayer-Salovey model of EI (MacCann et al. 2014). The ability viewpoint sees EI as an individual difference and something that develops in early childhood, then throughout life. EI as an ability is something that can be developed and improved through learning activities (Dacre Pool and Qualter 2012; Peter and Brinberg 2012).

There is good empirical-research evidence available to suggest that EI, as defined by the ability model and when measured validly, can predict significant outcomes such as better social relationships (Lopes et al. 2004), workplace performance (Côté and Miners 2006; O'Boyle et al. 2010), better decision-making (Yip and Côté 2013), stress resilience (Schneider et al. 2013), academic achievement (Qualter et al. 2012) and effective leadership (Walter et al. 2011). These outcomes are all likely to be important contributors to the overall employability of a graduate. The ability to form better social relationships will, for example, result in more harmonious working relationships with managers and peers. It will also

help graduates to develop their ‘social capital’, described as the ‘goodwill inherent in social networks’ (Fugate et al. 2004). Improved psychological well-being and stress resilience help to protect graduates from some of the negative aspects of organisational stress and a graduate’s potential for leadership is often considered important by employers. Additionally, a study by Nelis et al. (2011) concluded that EI might be a key element in securing a job, particularly in relation to the way people behave in interview situations. Candidates who were part of an experimental group provided with EI training were more likely to be hired than those who were not.

Yorke and Knight (2006) state that studies of what employers are looking for in graduate recruits tend to agree that it is the ‘soft’ ‘generic’ abilities and personal qualities that are important and they suggest that EI is of significance for successful interactions with other people. Some employers now include psychometric tests of EI in their recruitment and selection processes in addition to the more traditional cognitive intelligence and personality tests. This would suggest a growing recognition that actively recruiting individuals with good levels of EI will be of some benefit in terms of improved relationships for all organisational stakeholders, i.e. employees, managers and customers. In the UK, the Chief Assessor and Chief Psychologist who is responsible for recruiting individuals to the sought after Civil Service Fast Stream graduate programme, was recently quoted as saying, “We want people with good interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence ... But of course we need people with intellectual capacity as well” (Leach 2015).

The model proposed by Fugate et al. (2004) also includes a mention of EI within the ‘human capital’ dimension as something that influences employability. Additionally, ‘corporate sense’, one of the dimensions of employability included in the Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) model, is described as being built upon social networks, social skills and EI. Morley (2001) is quite explicit about what she views as the omission of EI in much that has been written about graduate employability. She states that,

“An area that has been excluded from the discussion relates to the affective domain. In the employability discourse, the world of work is represented in a highly sanitised and rational way. Graduates are hardly thought to require emotional intelligence, political skills or self-care in the face of occupational stress.” (p. 135)

Research by Nelis et al. (2009, 2011) provides empirical evidence that lasting improvements in levels of EI can be achieved through HE teaching

interventions. Dacre Pool and Qualter (2012) demonstrate that EI and self-efficacy in EI ability can be improved through teaching and learning in a university setting. Their research involved the delivery and evaluation of a taught module designed to develop students' EI knowledge, skills and emotional self-efficacy through a process of theory, practice and reflective learning. This was done through a specialised academic module but it should also be possible for students to develop their EI through activities embedded within their subject discipline. For example, any activities which include students working collaboratively, where they have to listen and understand the viewpoints of others and possibly manage their anxiety or frustration, can be great opportunities for the development of EI ability.

The inclusion of EI in the CareerEDGE model of graduate employability would appear to make a lot of sense. Not only is it an important element in its own right, but it is likely to underpin a number of important factors in the other elements. For example, considering the generic skill 'communication', if a person finds it difficult to perceive emotion in others, the first of Mayer and Salovey's factors, then how will they know how to react appropriately during an interaction? If a person is unable to manage their emotions effectively, there could be potentially serious consequences for team working, another generic skill cited as important by most employers.

Therefore, there appear to be some very good arguments for raising the profile of EI from something that is alluded to or mentioned as one of many personal qualities employers may be looking for, to an essential element in the development of graduate employability. Providing opportunities for students to develop their EI, and reflect on these experiences, results in improvements in their EI and emotional self-efficacy (Dacre Pool and Qualter 2012). Emotional self-efficacy predicts graduate employability which in turn results in greater career satisfaction (Dacre Pool and Qualter 2013). However EI and emotional self-efficacy also affect employability indirectly through their impact on other aspects of the CareerEDGE model.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND OTHER ASPECTS OF CAREEREDGE

EI has an important role to play in career development learning (Puffer 2015). For example, in order to make sound decisions about the future, students need to develop their self-awareness. Knowledge of the self,

including personality, motivations and interests in relation to possible career options is practically impossible without considering the emotional aspects of career development learning. Students need to identify how they *feel* about any careers under consideration, in particular going beyond pay and benefits to identifying how they might *feel* in a particular role. EI is associated with less career-choice anxiety (Puffer 2011) which should also contribute towards better career outcomes.

EI also has the potential to contribute to the ‘transitions’ aspects of CDL. A student or graduate who is adept at reading emotions in others will be able to react appropriately during employer selection activities. A good level of emotion management will also be helpful for dealing with the stress and anxiety of applying for positions. Nelis et al. (2011) found that they were able to improve emotional competence in students which then had a significant effect on their success in an interview situation (as judged by human-resource professionals). They suggested that during the interviews the students who had benefitted from EI training tended to refer more often to their feelings and took the feelings of others into account. They were also better able to manage the stress of the situation which resulted in calmer responses to the interviewers’ questions.

In relation to work experience, EI could impact in any number of ways, including gaining access to work experience opportunities as a result of positive relationships, succeeding in selection processes and achieving good working relationships during the experience. People demonstrating higher levels of EI are more socially competent, enjoy better quality relationships and are viewed as more sensitive to others than those lower in EI (Mayer et al. 2008a). Such positive interpersonal relationships developed during work experience activities will result in students being able to develop and maintain networks that will keep them ‘in the know’ in relation to future career opportunities (Dacre Pool and Qualter 2013).

Higher levels of EI are important in relation to successful academic performance (e.g. Qualter et al. 2012) and will therefore impact on degree subject knowledge, skills and understanding. The managing emotions branch of EI in particular is strongly related to problem-focused coping skills, which are associated with academic success. Students more able to manage their emotions show a tendency towards using problem-focused coping (as opposed to emotion-focused or avoidant coping), which is associated with higher academic grades (MacCann et al. 2011). EI has also been shown to predict success in medical school students in

relation to ‘interpersonal academic performance’ described as the ability to communicate well with others and an awareness of the social dynamics of a situation (Libbrecht et al. 2014); vital abilities for future healthcare professionals.

Many of the generic skills sought after by employers are influenced by EI. This is particularly the case for those often classified as ‘soft skills’ such as communication and negotiation skills (Mueller and Curhan 2006), public-speaking effectiveness (Rode et al. 2007), the ability to work in teams (Chien Farh et al. 2012), leadership (Côté et al. 2010; Walter et al. 2011) conflict management (Clarke 2010) and interpersonal decision-making (Fernandez-Berrocal et al. 2014).

REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

Providing students with the opportunities to gain the necessary skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes through employability-related activities is obviously of great importance. However, without opportunities to reflect on these activities and evaluate them, it is unlikely that this experience will transfer into learning and much may be wasted. Reflection allows the student to evaluate and make sense of experiences, contributing to more effective learning. Experiential learning in particular has the potential to enhance a student’s employability and reflection is the vehicle that enables the student to transform the experience into learning (Kolb 1984). If we consider a group of marketing students working to an employer’s brief of designing some marketing materials, the experience in itself is likely to be helpful in terms of adding to their subject knowledge. But reflecting on the activities, including their emotional reaction to events and other people, will lead to a much deeper understanding of themselves and others, which is essential for success in the workplace (Finch et al. 2015).

Within the context of employability initiatives, reflection often involves students identifying situations (either class-based or extra-curricular) from which they can learn something. They describe and analyse the experience, including their thoughts and feelings, trying to identify exactly what can be learnt from it and how they can use this learning in future. This type of reflective learning often takes the form of written learning logs or reflective journals but could also include audio, video and e-portfolios. Reflection can be seen as a key contributor to employability, both in its own right and in the way it underpins other employability achievements

(Moon 2004). There would also appear to be strong links here with EI, as being able to reflect on feelings and behaviours is crucial for a person to be able to manage emotion appropriately (e.g. Mayer et al. 2004).

Reflection can help a student to gain employment, by providing a means by which they can become aware of and articulate their abilities. But additionally it is an ability that will help them in their employment and as a contributor to lifelong learning skills; as such it is an essential element both in relation to HE learning and in the employment context (Moon 2004).

SELF-EFFICACY, SELF-CONFIDENCE, SELF-ESTEEM

Each of these three closely-linked elements of the CareerEDGE model has a huge literature of its own. The intention of the remainder of this chapter is to focus on those aspects that are of most relevance to employability. For example, one meta-analytic review found a strong positive relationship between self-efficacy and work-related performance (Stajkovic and Luthans 1998a) and another found self-efficacy and self-esteem to be significant predictors of job satisfaction and job performance (Judge and Bono 2001).

Self-efficacy

Perceived self-efficacy refers to a person's beliefs concerning their ability to successfully perform a particular behaviour (Bandura 1977, 1995). The importance of self-efficacy for employability was demonstrated by a longitudinal study which measured academic self-efficacy in adolescents (age 12–15) and then their job satisfaction (age 21). This found that higher self-efficacy beliefs were related to a lower risk of unemployment and greater job satisfaction (Pinquart et al. 2003).

Self-efficacy may have a vital role to play within graduate employability as people who have greater efficacy in their ability to meet educational requirements for particular occupational roles, tend to give more consideration to and show greater interest in a wider range of career options. They also tend to prepare themselves better educationally for these roles and show greater persistence when faced with challenging career pursuits (Bandura et al. 2001). It is highly likely therefore that this attribute will help a graduate to choose and secure occupations that will give them satisfaction and success.

Efficacy beliefs influence the way people think, feel, motivate themselves and behave and these develop through a number of different sources (Bandura 1995). The ones particularly pertinent to developing graduate employability are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences provided by social models and social persuasion (Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007).

Mastery experiences occur when people are given the opportunity to try a particular task for themselves. Work-related learning experiences would be a good example of the type of mastery experiences incorporated into employability activities. It makes perfect sense that if a student is given the opportunity to spend some time in a 'real' workplace and does this with a degree of success; they are likely to feel more efficacious about their chances of success in a job after graduation. Bandura (1995) suggests that mastery experiences are the most effective way of creating a strong sense of self-efficacy, and so play a vital role within employability.

Vicarious experiences provided by social models could occur when students are able to see others who have achieved the success they desire. The closer the others are in similarity to themselves, the more effective the experiences are. An example of this type of experience would be when successful recent graduates return to the university to give talks or meet with current students to discuss how they achieved their goals. Seeing how people similar to them have succeeded in the workplace, particularly graduates from their own university who quite recently sat in the same classrooms and lecture theatres, helps current students to feel that they can achieve this too. This can be a powerful motivator for putting their own plans into action. Social persuasion occurs when people are persuaded that they possess the capabilities needed to master a particular activity. This encourages them to put in more effort and stay motivated in order to successfully achieve their goals. There is an important role for tutors to play here, particularly in the way they provide feedback to their students.

Therefore by providing the opportunities for mastery experiences, vicarious experiences and social persuasion, then encouraging reflection on and evaluation of these experiences, self-efficacy can be increased (e.g. Schunk and Hanson 1985). A study by Saks and Ashforth (1999) demonstrated that graduates' self-efficacy in relation to job-searching was positively correlated with employment outcome. This could be because having a belief that your actions will result in the outcome you are hoping for, results in an increased motivation to carry out the necessary tasks to achieve the outcome. A lack of self-efficacy could result in a person viewing the task as not worth the effort, thereby almost ensuring failure.

Self-confidence

If self-efficacy is seen as a belief that one can make some impact on situations and events, as defined above, then self-confidence could be seen as the way this is projected to the outside world (Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007). Self-confidence appears to be something that can be observed and identified from a person's manner and behaviour. According to Goleman (1998, p. 68), people with self-confidence are able to present themselves with self-assurance and have 'presence'. This may be of particular significance in a recruitment situation where candidates who present themselves in a confident manner are likely to be perceived as more competent and therefore more appointable than a candidate who does not have the same degree of self-assurance.

It has been suggested that self-confidence can be viewed as either trait or state specific. Norman and Hyland (2003) intimate that if self-confidence is a trait, which personality theorists suggest is relatively stable over time, then those who lack self-confidence would be unlikely to develop it through educational activity. If, however, it is viewed as a situation specific concept, then it would be possible for students to increase their levels of self-confidence for any given situation. This would appear to make a lot of sense and most people will be aware of examples whereby people demonstrate self-confidence in specific domains (e.g. sporting ability) but not in others (e.g. a job-interview situation). However, with preparation, support and practice, it is possible for people to show increased levels of self-confidence within a specific domain (Norman and Hyland 2003). For example, a student who successfully gives their first ever presentation in front of peers and receives positive feedback is very likely to experience increased self-efficacy for that particular task. The next time they give a presentation, it is quite possible that this will be with a much greater feeling of self-efficacy and display of self-confidence. An increase in self-efficacy would hopefully translate into an increase in demonstrated self-confidence.

Self-esteem

People with global self-esteem have self-respect and a feeling of worthiness, but are realistic in their evaluations of themselves (Owens 1993). Without this realism, a person is unlikely to reflect on areas for improvement, which is crucial to the process of lifelong learning. Dweck (2000) does not see self-esteem as an internal quality that increases with successes

and decreases with failures. Nor does she think it is something we can give to people by praising them for their high intelligence. Instead, she considers it to be a positive way of experiencing yourself when you are using your abilities well in order to achieve something you consider of value. It is something people can be helped to get for themselves by teaching them to value learning and effort and use errors as a way of mastering new challenges. In terms of graduate employability, by giving students the opportunities to develop a range of skills and knowledge, then teaching them how to reflect on these experiences and learn from them, this should also be an effective way of helping them develop their self-esteem.

Respondents sampled from Foundation degree programmes in the study conducted by Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guile (2003, cited in Yorke 2004) which explored how much HE enhances the employability of graduates, reported the benefits they felt they had gained. Confidence, self-esteem and belief in their capacity to undertake degree-level study (self-efficacy) were all in the top five most prominently mentioned.

The three concepts of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem are difficult to distinguish and are often used interchangeably but for further reading Stajkovic and Luthans (1998b) provide some conceptual clarification.

CAREEREDGE MODEL: AN INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNT OF EMPLOYABILITY DEVELOPMENT

The CareerEDGE model approaches employability from the same perspective as Yorke (2006) who describes it as a multi-faceted characteristic of the individual. All of the components of the CareerEDGE model are important and necessary in order for a graduate to reach their full employability potential. Of course it is essential to point out that having employability does not *guarantee* a graduate a satisfying occupation, and Clarke (2008) draws attention to the fact that “... *even the most seemingly employable person may experience difficulty finding a suitable job in an unsympathetic labour market.*” (p. 269). As De Cuyper, Mauno, Kinnunen and Mäkikangas (2011) point out, the word ‘employability’ is derived from the words ‘employment’ and ‘ability’. Universities may be able to influence the ‘ability’ element which refers to the person’s skills and competences but have no control over the ‘employment’ aspects which are dependent on a number of issues, particularly labour- market demand. It is clear though, as Fugate et al. (2004) point out, that having employability will enhance an individual’s likelihood of gaining employment.

In conclusion, the CareerEDGE model of graduate employability is a straightforward, practical framework for use within HE that allows the concept to be explained to all the relevant stakeholders and the necessary strategies implemented. It raises the profile of the role of EI to a key component of employability development and attempts to ensure that employability is not mistakenly viewed as “just being able to get a job” or solely about the development of generic skills. Developing emotional competence is something of vital importance to future graduates who, let us not forget, are our potential future leaders, both in workplaces and society in general and there is credible evidence to support the notion that EI ability is something that HEIs can teach and students can learn. Students receive a broad education within HE, including the teaching of skills such as research and critical analysis, in addition to their specialist subject knowledge, but they are rarely taught something that is a fundamental basis for all human communication – emotional intelligence.

Including opportunities for students to increase their knowledge, understanding, skills and efficacy in relation to EI will help them become ‘emotionally smarter’ and is something that all universities should consider incorporating into their curricula.

NOTE

1. The letters ‘DOTS’ are arranged in this order to aid recall of the four stages. However these are presented here in their more logical order. For example, a person needs to have self-awareness, in terms of their interests, motivations, etc. and some idea of the opportunities available to them, before they can make an informed decision about which careers might suit them.

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The University and the Knowledge Network: A New Educational Model for Twenty-first Century Learning and Employability

Ruth Bridgstock

The higher education sector is under ongoing pressure to demonstrate quality and efficacy of educational provision, including graduate outcomes. Preparing students as far as possible for the world of professional work has become one of the central tasks of contemporary universities. This challenging task continues to receive significant attention by policy makers and scholars, in the broader contexts of widespread labour-market uncertainty and massification of the higher education system (Tomlinson 2012). In contrast to the previous era of the university, in which ongoing professional employment was virtually guaranteed to university-qualified individuals, contemporary graduates must now be proactive and flexible. They must adapt to a job market that may not accept them immediately, and has continually shifting requirements (Clarke 2008). The saying goes that rather than seeking security in employment, graduates must now

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‘seek security in employability’. However, as I will argue in this chapter, the current curricular and pedagogic approaches universities adopt, and indeed the core structural characteristics of university-based education, militate against the development of the capabilities that graduates require now and into the future.

GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

To date, the most dominant way universities have engaged with the employability agenda is to include ‘graduate attributes’ and ‘employability skills’ in the degree curriculum. These attributes and skills are argued to equip graduates with the skills to meet the challenge of performance in graduate-level professional employment. Knight and Yorke (2002, 2003) and Yorke (2004, 2006) take the position that employability is “a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations” (Yorke 2006, 8). Employability skills are most commonly categorised into discipline-specific skills and knowledge (skills and knowledge required for specific job roles), and generic/transferable skills (skills and knowledge that can be transferred from one employment context to another, such as written communication, digital literacies and teamwork) (Clanchy and Ballard 1995).

A large number of scholars have criticised various aspects of the employability skills approach to graduate employability. These scholars question which skills should be included in employability skill lists (e.g., Vilapakkam Nagarajan and Edwards 2014); how those skills should be taught and assessed within the university curriculum, and indeed whether it can be demonstrated that they make a difference to employability at all (Barrie 2004). Some have asked whether the prevailing approaches to employability skills are appropriate. For instance, Barrie (2004, 2006) and Jones (2009) argue for a more nuanced treatment of generic skills. Generic skills cannot in fact truly be generic, because skills and knowledge are acquired and used in disciplinary and other highly contextually specific circumstances. Thus, generic skills cannot simply be ‘transferred’ from university to professional work, and between work roles. Current approaches to the use of disciplinary skills as a path to graduate employability are likewise problematic. Despite attempts to build ongoing dialogues between employers, professional associations and universities about skill requirements – employers in all fields continue to report dissatisfaction

with graduates' disciplinary skill sets (Shah et al. 2015). In a recent study I conducted (Bridgstock 2016b), several employers in creative digital fields said that they preferred to employ humanities and social sciences graduates over creative digital graduates, because both would need extensive training, but humanities and social sciences graduates tended to be better critical thinkers and also 'knew how to learn'.

However, the most decisive criticisms of the employability-skills approach demonstrate that the graduate's on-the-job skills are actually only one small part of what determines their employability. First, employment opportunities of the type for which the graduate is qualified and is otherwise suitable must exist or be able to be created through entrepreneurship (Tomlinson 2012). For example, if the labour market is saturated with entry-level primary school teachers, only a sub-set of these graduates will be able to find or generate work in primary education, no matter how skilled they are. Second, the graduate must (i) be open to employment opportunities that are available or can be generated, (ii) identify within these opportunities those that will suit their needs and abilities, and (iii) acquire the work successfully. These issues speak to the central role of the graduate's career identity (Bridgstock and Hearn 2012; Holmes 2001, 2013; Tomlinson 2013), and also graduate career self-management (Bridgstock 2009) in an increasingly volatile labour market. It also raises the issue of documented equity issues and social inequalities in employment practices and job opportunities.

My biggest concern with respect to employability skills, and the sector's engagement with graduate employability in general, is the over-emphasis that we place on short-term employer and labour-market skill needs, and our under-acknowledgement of the massive disruptions to both education and the world of work that are being brought about by digital technologies. Rather than seeking solely to prepare students for today's jobs and labour market, we should be focused, as far as we are able, on ways to foster students' productive participation in the uncertain economy and society of future years and decades. Addressing these needs goes far beyond the catch-all future-orientated 'lifelong learning skills', and 'digital literacies', although both of these will certainly be required. Some of the current employability skills will continue to be of relevance in the future. However, I contend that continuing in the same vein as we have been will not do justice to a stated overall purpose of higher education as being about preparing students to be effective within the changing circumstances of their lives and work in an ongoing way (Stephenson 1998).

In the remainder of this chapter, I describe some of the labour market and job-role changes that are predicted to occur, and indeed are already occurring, under the disruptive influence of digital technologies. I outline how the university can add value more effectively in preparing students for the digital economy and society, and the ways that the university needs to change in order to facilitate this. In so doing, I draw upon empirical research into work and learning in the digital media industries, a very fast growing knowledge-intensive sector at the leading edge of digital technology transformation (Bridgstock 2016). My discussion connects several powerful themes in the twenty-first century learning literature into one integrated ‘knowledge network model’ of the university. These constituent themes include communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger 1999), connected learning (Siemens 2005) and informal learning. The chapter concludes by suggesting practical ways forward for universities to start embracing the possibilities afforded by the knowledge network model.

THE FUTURE OF WORK AND GRADUATE CAREERS

In the digital age in which we live, the exponential and combinatorial advancement of technology is changing the labour market into which graduates emerge, and the roles they are seeking to fill. Fast data processing, artificial intelligence, robotics, networked communication and cloud computing are all cited as reasons for the changes, which are predicted to accelerate even further over the next decade (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014). Economists are divided over the future net impact on job availability of digital technologies, but there is widespread agreement that up to fifty per cent of existing roles will be made redundant in the next 10–15 years (Frey and Osborne 2013). Even professional, non-routine roles such as accountancy or economics may be able to be automated within a few years. New roles and opportunities will be created along with the emerging technologies, although economists’ opinions diverge about the extent to which this will occur (Autor 2015).

The human-job roles that remain will change significantly because of digital technologies, and in fact have already been changing for some time. The teaching profession is a good example: Australian secondary school classrooms of the 1990s may have featured one desktop computer, with the majority of learning activities, assessment and record-keeping conducted on paper. Now students are routinely issued laptops or tablets, and

much of the business of education goes on digitally via learning management systems. Frey and Osborne (2013) argue that the roles that are likely to be ‘resistant to computerisation’, that is, roles that are unlikely to be made redundant by digital technologies, are of three categories: those that are high in creative skills; those that are high in human empathy and personal interaction (‘high emotional intelligence’ roles); and roles requiring very complex manual tasks and navigation of spaces. If new occupations are created to complement new and emerging digital technologies, they are also likely to require these skill sets, along with high-level digital technology use and making capabilities (manipulation or creation of digital technologies e.g., software coding; robotics) (Bakhshi and Windsor 2015; Foundation for Young Australians 2015).

The decline of the traditional organisational career and the rise of the ‘boundaryless’ career (Arthur et al. 2005) is another major influence in the future of graduate work. Economic, labour policy, organisational and socio-cultural factors all contribute to greater movement in the contemporary labour market than previously (Baruch 2015; Noon et al. 2013). It is no longer typical for professionals to maintain a single job for a lifetime; it is now common for people to move between jobs every few years, to work casually, to maintain multiple employment roles concurrently, to start their own entrepreneurial ventures and to move overseas for job opportunities (Baruch 2015; Stone 2013).

Digital networks are also the catalyst for new distributed models of work, employment and income (Nurvala 2015). As AirBnB supports homeowners to rent out their spare bedrooms, thus threatening major hotel chains, and the Uber ridesharing app challenges the taxi industry, there are moves towards distributed options for other ‘human services’ tasks. Amazon Mechanical Turk (2016) advertises that “we give businesses and developers access to an on-demand, scalable workforce” to cost-effectively perform small activities that at present cannot be automated, such as checking automated categorisations, creating titles for images or describing associations between images. The US-based Upwork, one of several rapidly growing freelance talent platforms, connects freelance workers with clients who require piece work, such as software and app development, design and creative services, data science and analytics and writing of digital copy. Upwork’s website (Upwork 2016) reports that as of the end of 2014, it had nine million registered freelancers and four million registered clients. Three million jobs are posted annually, worth a total of \$1 billion USD, with corporate targets to reach \$10 billion USD in six years. Distributed,

networked self-employment models of various kinds are becoming ubiquitous in the contemporary labour market.

PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

The capabilities that graduates will require in order to succeed in the future world of work that I have just described are clearly qualitatively different to those enumerated in traditional ‘employability skill’ lists (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia 2002; Young and Chapman 2010). Recognising this, attempts have been made to list and justify detailed competencies and capabilities that are required to live in, and contribute to, the future society and economy (Ananiadou and Claro 2009; European Union (EU) 2007). Academic and policy discourses have also emerged that address ‘Twenty-first century skills’. The lists and discourses are by no means unified in their enumeration of required capabilities, and in fact frequently present opposing views and competing definitions (Dede 2010; Voogt et al. 2013; Voogt and Roblin 2012).

The brief review of capabilities for the future workforce presented here is intended to highlight key themes and place them into meaningful and productive contexts, rather than providing an exhaustive list of specific skills and other attributes. Following from and extending on Jones’ (2009) view, I believe there is limited value, and possible danger, in providing decontextualised and genericised lists of desired individual skills and capabilities. While very difficult to avoid, this practice encourages a superficial ‘tick box’ approach to curriculum, and promotes a lack of specificity and depth in conceptualisation and teaching. Further, there are strategies beyond ‘skill development’, such as supporting the development of students’ professional networks, which we should pursue to more effectively prepare them for professional life.

In a workforce where simple routine tasks, and increasingly even higher-level tasks, can be automated, the greatest economic value is to be found in enterprise and innovation – producing new knowledge that results in new goods, services or processes (Drucker 2014; Sawyer 2006), whether this is on a self-employment basis, or within an organisation. Innovation processes are also highly applicable to the management and solution of complex social and environmental challenges (Sarasvathy and Venkataraman 2011), including what some have called the ‘wicked problems’ and now ‘super-wicked problems’ (Levin et al. 2012) of society – problems that are

difficult to define and virtually impossible to solve, such as climate change, the loss of biodiversity and poverty and international aid.

Successful innovation is based in creativity (del-Corte-Lora et al. 2016), which in turn is fostered by exposure to new people and new ideas particularly through trans-disciplinary social input (Granovetter 2005), or by individual expertise in multiple disciplinary areas that affords a unique perspective on a problem or opportunity (Bridgstock 2013). Innovation often begins with enterprise via the identification of opportunities in patterns of resources, collaborators or markets (Saravathy et al. 2005). It continues with other enterprise processes such as design thinking to develop and refine ideas (Johansson-Sköldberg et al. 2013), and effectuation – the implementation and integration of these ideas so that they can be brought to fruition (Obstfeld 2005; Tocher et al. 2015). All new ventures are associated with a degree of risk, and thus the ability to manage risk (such as by diversifying sources of capital) and recover from failure are needed by all those who engage in innovative work (Duening 2010).

Many of the opportunities for innovation and enterprise will be based in the digital world, and will require high-level digital citizenship skills (such as informational and media literacy), digital work skills (that is, work involving specialised use of digital tools) and digital making skills (that is, work involving creation using digital tools) (Bakhshi and Windsor 2015; Cobo 2012). The Foundation for Young Australians (2015) point out that more than half of the Australian population will need to be able to use, configure or build digital systems within the next 2–3 years (see also UK Forum for Computing Education 2014)

These digital skills will not just be information and tools-based; they will be focused on, and embedded into, social and digital networks. Networks are ideal mechanisms of information allocation and flow (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). They are instrumental to innovation processes, ongoing professional learning, and career development in the digital age (Bridgstock 2016a). Graduates must know how to develop and use social networks, including digital networks, for these purposes; because of the time needed to build a functioning professional network, it is advantageous for them to commence network building before they finish university, rather than starting from scratch when they leave.

Increasingly, innovation occurs through building external and internal networks of people, knowledge and resources, and finding new ways to link them (Mascia et al. 2015). ‘Open’ innovation processes are often facilitated by digital tools for collaboration, ideation, structured problem solving

and feedback, so collaborations for innovation can be globalised, and can include broad and diverse input or ‘co-creation’ from throughout the social network, including from consumers / customers (Frow et al. 2015).

Networks are also central to informal professional learning-processes (Field 2009). Individuals who can build and use relationships effectively to learn in an ongoing way at, and for, work, are more likely to have up-to-date and relevant skills and knowledge. They are therefore more likely to gain and maintain employment and be successful in professional contexts (Albors et al. 2008). Professionals use networks for professional learning in a number of different ways. For instance, colleagues often form informal communities of practice where information is shared via face-to-face and digital channels. They are also embedded into broader digital networks via social media, which if used well can be a key source of on-demand, ‘just in time’ information and skill development (Bridgstock 2016). The knowledge of large groups can be harnessed online through ‘collective intelligence’ crowdsourced approaches to learning (Leimeister 2010), the most prominent generic exemplar of which is Wikipedia. The power of digital networks for informal, personalised learning is considerable (Brooks and Gibson 2012). In order to take advantage of this power, learners must also possess the critical capacity to (a) select where to go online to learn and how; (b) filter data for credibility and usefulness; and (c) synthesise it with existing knowledge (Bridgstock 2016).

Career development activities have also changed because of digital networks. Individual branding, digital networking, online portfolios and resumes (such as LinkedIn) are expected ways to enhance careers (Nikitkov and Sainty 2014; Roman 2014). Lancaster (2014) discusses the results of one survey of American recruiters: 91% had used social media as an applicant screening tool, and 7 in 10 had made positive recruitment decisions based on information posted on social networking sites. Digital networks are also important sources of career information (Hooley 2012) and have become focal venues for some of the processes involved in professional networking (Bridgstock 2016a; de Janasz and Forret 2008).

A CALL FOR TRANSFORMATION OF THE UNIVERSITY

So far I have described an emerging world of work characterised by significant mutability, requiring ongoing adaptation and proactive individual management of learning and career. In this world of work, value is to be found in new knowledge production through innovation and enterprise,

often digitally focused, underpinned by trans-disciplinary social processes. Open digital networks are central to many aspects of professional activity, including innovation, career development and professional learning.

Meanwhile, universities continue to operate from within a largely industrial paradigm. The focus is on imparting content (knowledge and skills) via a fairly static pre-prepared curriculum that is quickly out of date and may not be very well aligned with learner needs to begin with. In the present model of the university, students tend to consume knowledge rather than producing or creating it (Neary and Winn 2009). They often learn and are assessed using approaches (lectures, tutorials, readings, exams and essays) that are quite removed from those used in professional contexts, and thus may be underprepared to self-manage lifelong professional learning. The relational and networked aspects of learning are also likely to be fairly impoverished in university education. While ‘group work’ with student peers is often an element of the curriculum, students will usually have little opportunity to build or use authentic professional networks prior to course completion. Universities are by and large walled gardens – closed ecosystems where learning and resources are kept secure from the outside world, including industry and community stakeholders. Much important learning actually happens outside the formal course environment (for example, through part-time work, co-curricular activities, hobbies, or volunteering), and yet there is very little recognition of capabilities acquired via these means.

To be of maximum value in preparing learners to contribute to twenty-first century society and economy, universities must start to move away from ‘delivering content’ to meet ‘industry skill requirements’. Disciplinary capabilities and professional accreditation requirements are still important, but can be acquired more effectively in a degree curriculum that also prepares students for the realities of learning and career self-management, trans-disciplinary practice, enterprise and new knowledge production, in a highly digitally networked world.

A NEW MODEL OF THE UNIVERSITY: EXPERIENTIAL, SOCIAL AND NETWORKED

I now propose a different model of university learning and teaching, one that is designed explicitly to meet the future workforce learning needs outlined in this chapter. It is intended as a provocation to a sector that is notoriously resistant to change, even in the face of significantly disruptive

external forces (Etzkowitz 2014), to encourage serious thinking about how we engage with our central role as educators for professional work, and to inspire new, more effective ideas and practices in this space.

The heart of the model is situated, experiential learning (Kolb 1984), where students learn ‘hands on’ through a progressive series of projects. These projects are either generated by an industry / community ‘client’ who submits a brief, or for more entrepreneurial projects, co-determined by students. Teaching staff provide guidance and support, but there is sufficient flexibility for students to self-determine their specific approaches to the project brief. This maximises student engagement, proactive behaviour and initiative (Barron 2006), and mimics what students will often be expected to do in the professional world. The projects do not simply replicate existing practices or outcomes; an emphasis is placed on new knowledge production and a ‘triological’ model of learning (Hakkarainen and Paavola 2009), to solve problems, identify and make the most of opportunities and generate new ideas, often by using or creating/modifying digital technologies. Students from different disciplines are supported to collaborate to find solutions or create new ideas, exploiting the innovation affordances of trans-disciplinarity. This authentic project approach necessarily adopts authentic assessment types, where project processes, completion and outcomes are assessed (evaluated). Students learn to risk-manage and evaluate their projects progressively, and self-correct them as needed. ‘Failure’ of a project becomes instructive and an opportunity to build resilience.

In this model, experiential learning occurs within a community of practice. Students are in regular meaningful (online and face-to-face) contact with professional experts, more experienced students and students at the same level of capability as themselves (Murdock and Williams 2011), as well as teachers who can support them with learning how to learn and making sense of their learning experiences. Expert modelling and mentoring occurs along with a process of what Lave and Wenger (1991) call ‘legitimate peripheral participation’, a very common relational way that professionals learn in communities of practice (Brown and Duguid 1991; Fuller et al. 2005). Under this model, beginning students start with simple and low-risk tasks that are nonetheless useful and legitimate to the project. Through these peripheral activities, beginning students gradually become more advanced contributors in later semesters and years. For instance, games-design students work with expert games designers, programmers and artists, who model the practices of games development.

These students interact with expert designers, as well as other members of the project team (including more advanced students) who understand the processes of games development to varying degrees and in various ways, according to their interests, capabilities and roles. Students gradually move from novice roles to a more advanced contribution, and as they do their tasks become more central and expectations are higher.

The model employs a balance of informal and formal learning, depending on the requirements of the learning context, student need and the availability of learning opportunities. While relatively few studies have to date examined the optimal interplays between formal and informal learning (Barron 2006), the best 'hybrid' learning seems to happen when it meets an immediate need, and involves pursuit of knowledge and skills wherever the best venue for that knowledge may be acquired. Learning is a combination of core curricula (covering topics such as productive collaboration, ideation and complex problem solving, project management and core-disciplinary content), coupled with opportunities to branch off to other specific interests in different contexts (Cobo 2012). Students can avail themselves of short online courses of study for technical skill development (the Lynda.com model may be useful here), attend face-to-face workshops and seminars, engage in informal learning or even acquire important underpinning disciplinary skills and knowledge within a more traditional face-to-face or online classroom situation. This knowledge can be acquired in the face-to-face or online 'classroom' and contextualised explicitly in progressive situated learning experiences.

Learning occurs in cyclical manner between authentic activity and other sites of learning (whether physical or virtual), plus learning through social interaction with peers and industry / community, with teachers scaffolding their processes of reflective and emergent meaning-making throughout (Nonaka and Toyama 2003). In contrast to the traditional one-size-fits-all 'sage on the stage' transmissive models of education on the twentieth century, twenty-first century academic teachers and other information literacy educators (Monge and Friscaro-Pawlawski 2013), must support learners to filter, compare, contrast, evaluate and recontextualise information, learning strategies and experiences, and identify new sources for relevant knowledge acquisition, which is what they will then do for themselves continually throughout the rest of their professional and personal lives. Students build critical capabilities and learn to self-manage their learning through this process, as well as actively construct adaptive career identities (Geijssel and Meijers 2005).

In addition to learning from and with the people in the student's immediate community of practice, they must also develop and learn to use their wider networks effectively, particularly digital networks. This is something that the university can support them with beyond the mere acquisition of skills and capabilities for networking. If the university has well-developed networks itself, it can share these with its students, thus optimising their ongoing capacity to learn, produce new knowledge and build careers. New connections acquired by students, teachers and other stakeholders can in turn be folded into the university's network. The learner's relationship with the university becomes a lifelong one; they continue to be connected to, and learn from, the network, and can return to the physical campus for further educational experiences and certifications if and when required. In turn, the university is further enriched by each new connection, and by the new knowledge that each of its connections acquire.

This model of university learning and teaching as experiential, social and networked, was developed through research into the ways that professionals in knowledge-intensive fields prefer to learn, and find most effective for initial and ongoing professional development (see, for instance, Bridgstock, 2016a). These learning strategies are highly applied, problem-based, and often self-directed because of the professional contexts within which they are adopted. All professionals, no matter what their field, are required to apply their knowledge and capabilities effectively in order to achieve outcomes. In part this is why I propose this more authentic model of higher education learning and teaching. However, the model can also be used in educational programmes that are less associated with specific vocational or professional destinations, such as humanities, social sciences and science degrees. Its incorporation in such programmes may enhance the employability of graduates from these degrees. In such a programme, 'situated, experiential learning' may constitute any of a fairly wide range of activities involving application of the disciplinary knowledge and skills that the students are learning (for instance, for sociology undergraduates, problem solving around building local community, or addressing overconsumption of certain kinds of resources), or research into a topic area. Thus, through their learning experiences during a programme that unfolds over several years, students are exposed to a range of ways in which their capabilities can be applied and are relevant to the workforce.

In the digital society, universities need to become distributed knowledge network hubs. The notion of a knowledge network is related to the

idea of a ‘learning ecology’ (Siemens 2005) encompassing industry, community, professionals, users, teachers and researchers. Siemens (2005) defines a learning ecology as a dynamic, rich, continually evolving system that reacts and evolves in response to both external and internal changes. If developed and maintained appropriately, the university learning ecology becomes the conduit and knowledge integrator for the latest university and industry generated research and practice trends, which students and professionals alike can access as needed, thus eliminating the challenge of curriculum relevance. Learners can forage within the ecology for task-relevant and up-to-date knowledge, information and connections, and derive meaning from it themselves, with the support and facilitation of teachers.

Universities must therefore build strong partnerships with industry stakeholders, other universities and education/training providers, to avail themselves of the most up to date information and knowledge. In short, they must become ‘meta-universities’ – overarching, accessible, empowering, dynamic, global, communally constructed frameworks of open materials and online platforms (Tapscott and Williams 2010). The universities with the most direct pipelines to the latest global industry and academic research knowledge in specific and targeted areas of excellence (Christensen and Eyring 2011), that can in turn supply this knowledge to learners in the most efficient and accessible ways, will be the most successful.

The distributed knowledge network elements tap into recent contributions from connectivist learning theory (Downes 2005; Siemens 2005). Connectivism recognises the central importance of networks to learning in the digital age, and that in the context of contemporary learning, “knowledge does not only reside in the mind of an individual, knowledge resides in a distributed manner across a network” (Siemens 2006). However, the model proposed in this chapter also relies on ideas from earlier theories, such as constructivism (learning occurs through construction of knowledge and meaning from experiences), and constructionism (learning occurs through experimentation and creative activity). It also relies on the relational learning theories of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1999). The model takes a pragmatic epistemological stance (Elkjaer 2009), where learning involves ongoing active construction of meaning by individuals, groups and networks through experiences, action, exploration, enquiry and new connections, with a focus on experimentation and the future.

WAYS FORWARD

If we accept that higher education can take a more effective approach to preparing young people for the future world of work and society, and the knowledge network approach may be a fruitful avenue may facilitate its achievement, the question which arises is: how do we get there from here? As discussed in this chapter, many of the aims, activities, structures and policies of current universities are constituted in a way that is antithetical to employing experiential, social and networked learning for knowledge production.

I suggest that there are actually numerous ‘seeds’ of knowledge-network activity occurring in most universities, and that these can be grown. For instance, there is much promise in work-integrated learning, which not only asks students to engage in important authentic experiential learning through internships and projects, but also starts to build their professional networks and those of the School. The WIL literature includes numerous instances of employability enhancement effects of such approaches in the literature (e.g., Nunley et al. 2016). How can the university consolidate, extend and capitalise upon these industry and community networks that they already possess? Many industry partners may appreciate targeted-staff professional development courses, opportunities for professional networking (perhaps also involving students, who can build their professional networks at the same time), research partnerships, and a pipeline to the best graduate ‘talent’ that the university can offer. In return, some may be happy to offer live or simulated briefs for student projects, mentoring to staff and students, or contribute in other ways.

Trans-disciplinary teaching initiatives offer another promising seed of knowledge-network activity. Enquiry or problem-based learning involving multiple Schools, or even multiple disciplines within Schools, starts to build students’ socially based trans-disciplinary capabilities and networks. Curriculum that focuses on enterprise and entrepreneurship and supports students to bring their new ideas for products, services and processes to the world is useful, and there is empirical evidence of positive effects on graduate employability (e.g., Bridgstock and Carr 2013; Rae and Woodier-Harris 2013). Co-curricular ‘students as partners’ schemes, which involve students partnering with teaching staff to co-develop curriculum or develop and run student initiatives, are likewise helpful to build students’ self-management, collaboration, innovation and enterprise capabilities. These schemes can also mean that students graduate with completed real-world projects to demonstrate their employability, as well as a

transcript listing the subjects that they have covered at university (Winter and Bridgstock 2016).

While the university is not solely responsible for ensuring that students are employed and employable, there is more that we can do to prepare them, and ourselves, for the future. The strategies that we can put into action need to be based on the requirements of the world of work into which graduates will emerge as professionals. In an economy and society that values complex problem-solving, innovation, social interaction and advanced digital work within a self-managed entrepreneurial career, we must foster the capabilities for these activities. We must also support students to build the social networks that will promote their ongoing learning and career development. In turn, the university must also become future-capable: it must adopt curriculum and pedagogic practices that are conducive to the development of twenty-first century capabilities, and build its own knowledge networks.

This chapter challenges educators and industry/community to work together much more effectively to build students' 'Twenty-first century' capabilities for productive participation in future society and economies. However, effective education cannot be seen as a panacea for the challenge of graduate employability. In order to be successful, even highly-skilled graduates require labour markets that will welcome them, make the most of their capabilities and foster their ongoing growth. There is a strong need for educational practice to be complemented by congenial human resources and staff-development practices from industry. In turn, both must be embedded into policy structures around education & training, workforce, enterprise and employment, and innovation systems that will ensure that opportunities are there for graduates to cultivate.

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Graduate Employability: Future Directions and Debate

Leonard Holmes

This book, and the contributions to it, are all premised on the understanding that the issue of graduate employability is an important one, meriting serious attention by a wide range of stakeholders. It is important for society as a whole, and for individuals undertaking higher education studies and their families, for employers and for the wider economy, for higher education institutions and for governments. It is an issue that sits at the heart of contemporary considerations of the nature and purpose of higher education and its relationship to society and the economy. Although varying between countries, it is of growing concern across the world as states seek to ensure that the governance of their higher education systems is consonant with political and economic governance.

It should be clear from the discussions by the various authors here that we do not consider employability in any narrow sense of a direct preparation of students for the work performance by graduates immediately upon gaining employment. Our concern is, rather, for the post-graduation lives of higher

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education students, lives that for most will extend for three or four times as long as they have already lived by the time they graduate. The quality of their post-graduation lives are likely to be strongly affected by the nature of employment they engage in, in terms of income, continuity, intrinsic satisfaction and so on. Whilst most academic staff in higher education institutions (HEIs) would probably be mainly motivated by their enthusiasm for their subject discipline, and a desire to share that enthusiasm with their students, we venture to suggest that they would also hope that those students do go on to what *they* would consider satisfying lives after graduation.

It should also be clear that the contributors share the understanding that graduate employability research can and should have implications for action, and that such action is possible. Graduate employability research should be *phronetic*, that is, oriented towards development of knowledge that not only has explanatory power in relation to social and political issues but also suggests practical action to address them (Flyvbjerg 2001). Of course, the nature of the issues to be addressed, and the *extent* to which it is possible to take action, is a matter for investigation and debate. But we suggest that graduate employability research should be oriented towards the possibilities for practical action, whilst insisting that such action should be informed by sound research.

RECONSIDERING THE CONCEPT OF EMPLOYABILITY

Much of the literature on graduate employability presents, at an early stage, some discussion of what is meant by the term ‘employability’. However, rarely do such discussions address the question of *what kind* of concept it is. In his book *Dilemmas*, the philosopher Gilbert Ryle drew attention to the difference between technical and untechnical concepts (Ryle 1954). When a term, a word or phrase, is used in ordinary, everyday, mundane discourse, it will tend to be used in an *untechnical* manner. We get along very well with such usage, and with the tendency for vagueness and reliance upon tacit understanding which we assume to be shared with those with whom we converse. In contrast, there are contexts in which we engage in more formal discourse, using key terms in a more technical, formal way – as *technical* concepts. Such technical concepts carry what Ryle called ‘theoretical luggage’, which may differ between different contexts of use. There is a danger that we may (a) confuse untechnical uses of a term with technical uses and (b) move unwittingly between *different* technical uses, forgetting that such different uses carry ‘theoretical

luggage'. Unfortunately, this seems precisely to be what tends to happen in discussions about graduate employability. General, widely shared notions that graduates should be employable, that higher education should prepare students to be prepared for entry to the kind of jobs appropriate for graduates, use the terms 'employable' and 'employability' mainly as untechnical concepts. However, it should be clear that the discourses of employability research, of curricular and pedagogic policies and practices of higher education governance policy, use the key terms in much more formal technical senses.

Moreover, as indicated in Chap. 1, the meaning of 'employability' varies between different discourses. Indeed, Gazier (1998) shows how the term has varied over the past century, particularly in policy debates. In recent times, mainly from the 1980s, the term 'employability' has been taken up within supply-side labour market policy within neo-liberalist political economic discourse, the notion becoming 'hollowed out', according to McQuaid and Lindsay, to have a "singular focus on the individual and what might be termed their 'employability skills'" (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005: 205). Of course, the term 'skill' is also one that is subject to the conceptual confusion arising from failure to recognise the technical/untechnical divide and the way that different uses of a term as a technical concept carries 'theoretical luggage' (Vallas 1990).

A common way of addressing, or at least giving the impression of addressing, the need for clarity of meaning is that of definitional declaration. One of the most quoted definitions is that produced by the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT), within the UK's Higher Education Academy, used in and cited from a number of publications by ESECT:

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 benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. (Yorke 2004: 8, and in other ESECT publications)

A similar definition is that stated by the UK's Confederation of British Industry (CBI) in a report published in collaboration with Universities UK:

A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy. (Confederation of British Industry 2009: 9)

The problem with such definitional diktat is that it can constrain the research agenda and debate. In both of these definitions, there is the notion of ‘a set of skills and attributes’. The ESECT definition states that these ‘make graduates more likely’ to gain employment and be successful etc. The research agenda that would seem to flow from this is to ‘discover’ what are these skills and attributes. And *that* research agenda is precisely what has been followed by a large number of studies, of varying quality, over more than two decades in the UK and similar periods in Australia and elsewhere: various lists and frameworks of ‘skills’ and ‘attributes’ have been produced, whose provenance is dubious in terms of their intellectual robustness. They often appear to be no more than the product of ‘brainstorming’ by committees and task groups, not the product of any recognised and accepted analytical method that may be deployed in a standardised manner in different contexts. The claims to be research-based are often supported only by surveys (e.g. with employers, graduates, students etc.) in which responses are given to the terms given, those responses often being in the form of Likert-scale rating type questions eliciting *opinions* e.g. on the importance of certain supposed skills or attributes. A major, yet unsubstantiated assumption is that the terms are *technical* concepts and that the survey responders all have the same understanding of the terms; such assumptions are dubious in the extreme (Hirsh and Bevan 1988; Holmes 2013; Otter 1997).

Moreover, surely the research agenda should encompass the question of what ‘factors’ (broadly understood) tend to lead graduates to gain employment etc., what factors tend to reduce the likelihood of such success, and how these factors bring about these differing outcomes in differing contexts. Indeed, we also need to identify whether or not these factors are amenable to influence during the period that students undertake higher education and, if so, how and to what extent. To pre-empt the agenda by specifying that those factors *are* skills, attributes (and certain knowledge and understanding) is likely to mislead and misdirect research effort, prematurely closing down potentially useful avenues for exploration, and shutting out alternative voices in the debate. That this is taking place within academia based on espoused values of rational enquiry and open debate, is surely a scandal!

It is therefore vital, we argue, that definitional diktat should be avoided and that the concept of graduate employability be opened up. Of course, the concept of employability, if it is to have any formal, technical meaning at all, must in some way be related to empirically observable employment

outcomes. Employability is not itself an empirical concept, referring to a state of affairs that is empirically observable; rather, it is a relational concept, referring to ‘factors’, i.e. a state of affairs or set of conditions, that are related to actual or anticipated employment outcomes.

THE NEED FOR SOUND THEORY

This creates for employability research a threefold set of questions:

1. What are employment outcomes that are salient and how are they to be measured?
2. What kinds of states of affairs, or set of conditions, might we consider as being significantly related to anticipated and/or observed employment outcomes?
3. How should we understand the nature of the relationship between employability and employment?

These may be treated as analytically separate, whilst recognising that they are interconnected.

Each of these areas is itself complex. As stated in the opening chapter, employability research may be, and has been, undertaken at the macro-level, the meso-level and the micro-level. Much of the empirical study of graduate employment outcomes has been undertaken at the macro-level, such as on the population of graduates exiting higher education institutions (HEIs) within particular time periods (e.g. the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education survey conducted annually in the UK, six months after graduation, and the follow-up survey three years later), or relatively large-scale longitudinal panel surveys (e.g. the FutureTrack study). Meso-level research has been undertaken, sometimes by analysing data from such macro-level studies in respect of selected characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability status (Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) 2015) or regional variations (Graduate Prospects Ltd 2016). Typically macro- and meso-level studies adopt survey-based methodology, mainly collecting and analysing quantitative data. At the micro-level, the focus is much more on individual graduates (Burke 2015; Dunne and Bosch 2015; Holden and Hamblett 2007; Holmes 2015). These tend to deploy qualitative data collection and analysis methodology, particularly through interviews with individuals.

The second area that gives rise to complexity in the field of graduate employability research concerns the conjectures we consider it reasonable to entertain, in order to help focus the research effort. Here we may note a disjunction between most research on graduate employment outcomes, and most policy pronouncements and employability initiatives. The outcomes research tends to focus on issues of socio-biographical backgrounds of graduates and educational paths taken (Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) 2015; Johnston and Little 2007); that is, it is conjectured that these backgrounds and paths are significantly related to the outcomes. In contrast, policy pronouncements and various employability initiatives are generally based on rather simplistic assumptions about ‘what will work’, often expressed in terms of skills and attributes. We might crudely characterise these as little more than the application of ‘folk wisdom’ based on ‘folk psychology’. The evaluation evidence in support is very weak, or even contradictory (Mason et al. 2006); the generalisability of, and ‘roll-out’ from small-scale and pilot initiatives is problematic, resulting in multiple publications detailing ‘case studies’ of initiatives with little contribution to a broader development of our understanding.

The third area raises the tricky area of causality. It seems necessary to hold onto an understanding of causality in which it would be rational to conclude, from research undertaken, that certain identifiable factors do, in fact, result in the observed outcomes. If they were not so, if there is merely a random conjunction of factors and outcomes, then there would be little point undertaking research, except perhaps as an entertaining pastime. Of course, the large-scale, mainly survey-based quantitative analyses of employment outcomes do indicate correlations between, mostly, socio-biographical backgrounds and educational paths. At this point, some might make the standard statement that correlation is not, and does not imply, causation. However, unless the statistical relationship identified is, at least, suggestive of some causal processes at work, we would not get very far in developing courses of action for promoting desired improvements in employment outcomes. A realist, but non-positivist, understanding of causality would seem to be required, as indicated by several authors, particularly Burke et al and Cashian (see also Bhaskar 1978; Harré and Madden 1975; Pawson and Tilley 1997). For this, what is required is sound theory that provides an explanation of how certain proposed factors tend to result in (cause) the outcomes observed, albeit that this tendency may be subject to other causal tendencies that interfere with, or augment, the causal process of interest.

We suggest, then, that the pressing issue for the field of graduate employability research is that of theory development. The search for ‘what works’ solutions, often expressed as ‘evidence-based practice’, often reduces to simplistic nostrums that fail to live up to the promised results (Biesta 2007; Pawson and Tilley 1997). At worst, they may be regarded as examples of ‘policy-based evidence making’ (Boden and Epstein 2006). Rather, we would argue, policy and practice should be research-informed, and that research must be theory-informed.

AGENCY AND STRUCTURE

The chapters to this collection have presented a variety of theories and theoretical approaches, within various disciplinary areas of the social sciences. Each makes its own contribution and relates to other chapters in varying ways and to varying degrees. A common thread that has run through many is that our theoretical understanding must take account of the extent to which employment outcomes are significantly determined by factors outside of the control of students and HEIs yet are to some degree amenable to action taken by students and by HEIs. Issues of structure and agency are at the heart of any theoretical understanding we need to develop for sound research (Tholen 2015; Tomlinson 2010).

The evidence from employment outcomes research supports this. There are clearly socio-biographical factors at work, as various studies show marked differences in employment outcomes, within a short period after graduation and more so several years later, relating to social class origin, gender and ethnicity (Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) 2015). Educational pathways, such as type of institution attended and course taken, are also indicated to be significant by the evidence (Britton et al. 2016). Individuals can do nothing to change the former, and are severely restricted with the regard to the latter except *to attempt* to gain entry to a course and institution that shows a tendency to be statistically related to high-level employment outcomes, particularly salary levels compared to costs (the graduate premium). Perversely, this may increase competition to such courses and institutions, giving rise to increased competition in the graduate labour market and reducing the extent to which the hitherto positive outcomes may be sustained.

Yet we must recognise that the evidenced relationship between such structural factors arises at the level of the population (of graduates, or cohorts of graduates), and avoid the ecological fallacy of inferring from

such evidence that these factors predict or explain at the level of the individual graduate. There *are* graduates whose socio-biographical backgrounds would, from the research evidence, suggest that they are destined for relatively poorer employment outcomes but who ‘buck the trend’ and have much greater success than the evidence suggests they should anticipate; and those who appear to be destined for a bright future, only for this not to materialise. Contingencies of good and bad fortune may play a part, but more importantly so does the role of agency on the part of the individual. A commitment to the idea that an individual student can take actions that may contribute, to a significant extent, to enhancing the likelihood that they later gain entry and progress within desirable and desired employment, is and should be a guiding principle, if we are avoid being promoters of a counsel of despair to a large number of entrants to higher education.

The challenge is to develop our theoretical understanding of how structural factors and individual agency relate to each other, and how this may vary in different contexts. We have seen how various chapters address this issue, drawing upon the work of Bourdieu and Archer, of Bhaskar, Lawson and Schatzki amongst others. Concepts such as habitus, practices, identity and capitals, afford a richer, more nuanced approach to the explanatory challenge than the possessive individualist (Macpherson 1962) and instrumentalist conceptualisation of skills and attributes (Holmes 2013). Moreover, only by meeting that explanatory need can we hope to meet the challenge of developing sustainable and effective modes of action to enhance employment outcomes, the test of any initiatives that claim and aspire to raise employability.

TOWARDS A MANIFESTO FOR RESEARCHING GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

Graduate employability research is perhaps now at a critical juncture. This book can be only one contribution to debate on this important and pressing matter, one that is both a public issue and private trouble (Mills 1959). Our concern has been to open up and raise the quality of debate, to show that there are concepts and theoretical approaches that afford richer, more nuanced approaches to research than the currently dominant discussions admit. The contributions herein are neither the first nor only attempts to aspire to such debate-opening. There is a need for amplification of supportive voices in the call for better theory and enhanced debate. To this

end we suggest that there is a need for a call for appropriate action, what we might term a ‘manifesto for researching graduate employability’.

Such a manifesto requires collegial and collaborative discussion in order to gain wide agreement by those sympathetic to the call for theoretical-sound, action-oriented research. For now we offer the following as key elements of such a manifesto.

1. The term ‘graduate employability’ is meaningful but its meanings vary between different discourses. Any discussion of graduate employability, where the term is used as a formal, technical concept, should make its meaning clear.
2. Graduate employability is different from, but related to, graduate employment. Research into graduate employability must take account of empirical findings from research into graduate employment outcomes.
3. The relationship between graduate employability and graduate employment outcomes is complex. Research into graduate employability must be informed by sound theory that has explanatory power.
4. The theoretical basis for graduate employability research should identify structural factors deemed to be related to employment outcomes, and the scope for, and ways in which, individual students and graduates may take action to influence their employment outcomes.
5. Empirical studies into graduate employability should seek to investigate the structural factors and affordances for agency, being sensitive to the contingencies that arise within different context.
6. Research into graduate employability should be oriented towards the practical implications for individual students and graduates, for higher education institutions and the management and staff within these, for policy-makers and agencies engaged in development and implementation of policy.
7. Any initiatives taken, by any institution or agency, should clearly indicate why, on the basis of supportable theory and evidence, such initiatives may reasonably be considered to be likely to be successful in achieving the outcome claimed for them.

We accept that these statements should be subject to discussion and debate, and welcome this. The last-mentioned statement is a direct challenge to the tendency for initiatives to be developed with little clear basis for responding to the question: why should we believe this initiative is

likely to achieve the aims set for it? We make this challenge not to criticise the plethora of employability initiatives that abound, often presented as ‘case studies’, as of no value; indeed, we believe that there are many initiatives that are likely to be of value in improving employability. However, unless we have some clear and defensible idea about *how* they work, and what are the elements that play the key part in their effectiveness (and what are not), the field will remain strewn with abandoned initiatives and pilot projects that did not outlast the individual and institutional enthusiasm and resource-investment provided at their outset. We remain optimistic that we can do better.

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