Incorporating career development learning in a business work integrated learning framework

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Abstract

Over the last decade, our ways of life have been dramatically altered by the effects of globalisation and increased geographical mobility. The concept of a job for life is now irrelevant. It is vital in an increasingly competitive labour market that university students graduate with all the qualities necessary to gain and retain fulfilling employment.

Developing employability skills for graduates is an issue not only in relation to the first job students may obtain after graduation but is also important at future points of career progression. Students should position themselves in relation to future work and what they perceive to be appropriate and meaningful courses of future action to stay employable. To achieve this, program curricula must develop learning, teaching and assessment practices to encourage employability development. This process can be facilitated through career development education.

This paper proposes incorporating Career Development Learning in an early stage of a business faculty’s Work Integrated Learning Framework to prepare students on their career management journey and effectively develop essential career development and employability skills and attributes. It supports the development of university business graduates who can respond to changing economic circumstances making them more employable and adaptable at the workplace.

Keywords: Work Integrated Learning, Career Development, Employability, Lifelong Learning

Introduction

Over the last decade, our ways of life have been dramatically altered by factors such as globalisation, the rapid advances in information technology and significant demographic shifts (Miles Morgan Australia, 2010). The concept of a ‘job for life’ is no longer relevant. Most individuals will change jobs numerous times throughout their working lives. There has also been a trend away from permanent employment to contract/project/casual work. Now, both the individual and the labour market are subject to constant variation and transitioning from one work situation to another is common (Miles Morgan Australia, 2010).

It is vital in an increasingly competitive labour market, that students are equipped with all the qualities necessary to gain and retain fulfilling employment. To achieve this, course curricula must develop learning, teaching and assessment practices to encourage employability development to take place alongside developments in discipline specialisations (Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac, & Lawton, 2012).

One of the generic skills of concern is employability skills which relates to knowledge of the relevant profession, the ability to interact with the profession and seek a career (Freudenberg, Brimble, & Cameron, 2009). Developing employability skills for graduates is an issue for the higher education sector, not only in relation to the first job students may gain after their studies, but also important for graduate prospects at future points of career development or change (Pegg, et al., 2012). Students should position themselves in relation to future work and what they perceive to be appropriate and meaningful courses of future action (Tomlinson, 2007). This can be facilitated through career education.

Career education refers to the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned program of learning experiences in education and training settings which will assist students to make informed decisions about their study and/or work options and enable effective participation in working life” (Career Industry Council of Australia, 2006). Within the Australian context (McCowan & MacKenzie, 1997; Patton & McMahon, 2001), career education aims to assist students to develop knowledge and understanding of themselves e.g. strengths, abilities, skills; develop knowledge and understanding of the range of career opportunities available; learn how to make considered choices and plan options and effectively manage the implementation of the considered choices in adult life and work life.
A career can be defined as “a lifestyle that involves the sequence of work, learning and leisure activities through a lifetime. Careers are unique to each person and are dynamic throughout life (Career Industry Council of Australia, 2006). Career Development Learning (CDL) relates to learning about the content and process of career development of life. The content of CDL represents learning about self and learning about the world of work. Process learning represents the development of the skills necessary to navigate a successful and satisfying life/career” (McMahon, Patton, & Tatham, 2003). CDL includes employability skills – skills, knowledge and attributes required in the world-of-work (Smith et al., 2009).

This paper proposes incorporating Career Development Learning in the early stages of a Business Work Integrated Learning Framework to effectively develop essential career development and employability skills and attributes. In the next section, relevant literature is discussed. Next, a discussion of the theoretical backing and pedagogical aspects details of CDL in the WIL framework is made. A brief conclusion will sum up this paper.

**Literature Review**

**Career Development Learning and Work Integrated Learning**

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is a range of work-related activities and experiences built into a student’s study program. Reeders (2000) defined WIL as “student learning for credit designed to occur either in the workplace or within a campus setting that emulates aspects of the workplace”. WIL is a vehicle for developing essential graduate attributes are the qualities, skills and understandings that a university community agrees all its graduates should develop as a result of successfully completing their university studies.

WIL can be subsumed under and serve as a practical vehicle for the broader notion of Career Development Learning (CDL). McCowan and McKenzie (1997) argued that career education should be integrated with the curriculum rather than added as an extraneous service with its delivery shared by various parties and not simply by specialist groups.

CDL is a lifelong process of managing learning, work and transitions in order to move towards a personally determined and evolving future for the individual and society (Smith, et al., 2009). The process of CDL may be considered as cyclical stages, with a person progressively moving through each, generating an understanding of themselves at different points in time and finding solutions to career-related problems or challenges. It involves awareness of the many different lifespan roles and stages which require active involvement by individuals in decisions related to ongoing life transitions (Smith, et al., 2009).

Career management is essential to enhance chances of employability. This involves an intentional management of work, learning and other aspects of life through reflective, evaluative and decision making processes. It incorporates career building skills and self-management skills through acquisition, display and use of discipline specific skills and generic skills. Career building skills refer to skills relating to finding and using information about careers, labour markets and the world of work and then locating, securing and maintaining work as well as exploiting career opportunities to gain advancement or other desired outcomes. Self-management skills relate to the individual’s perception and appraisal of themselves in terms of values, abilities, interests and goals (Bridgestock, 2009).

Employability is taken as a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Yorke, 2006). The four critical pillars in the USEM model of Employability (Knight & Yorke, 2003) comprises Understanding (of subject), Skills, Efficacy - beliefs, self-theories, personal qualities and Meta-cognition encompassing self-awareness.

According to Watts (2008), CDL address the key issues of directionality and sustainability in relation to employability and enterprise. Directionality is important because while some of the competencies are generic, others are linked more closely to some career pathways than to others. Sustainability is even more important because without it, employability tends to be narrowly defined as ‘work-readiness’. It is CDL that transforms it into a focus on lifelong employability.

CDL takes a holistic approach in learning where it places the learner at the centre and focus to developing employability, which encompasses the value of learning in higher education as enabling and creative (Pegg, et al., 2012). CDL supports quality student centred learning opportunities across all aspects of students’ lives.
CDL is intrinsically student-oriented, entailing active student engagement. It is also critical that students be involved in the process of planning their learning experiences and participate in the selection and management of their WIL (Smith, et al., 2009). CDL is focused upon student learning plans and needs and it entails reflection upon learning undertaken in relation to those plans and needs. Including CDL activities in WIL can enhance its capacity for reflective learning (Smith, et al., 2009).

Theoretical Framework and Pedagogies

The field of career development is characterised by a variable and complex theoretical base. Three relevant contributions are listed and briefly described.

The Australian Blueprint for Career Development (ABCD) is a framework that can be used to design, implement and evaluate career development programs for young people and adults. The ABCD represents a significant policy outcome towards a national framework for lifelong career development. At its core, the Blueprint identifies the skills, attitudes and knowledge that individuals need to make sound choices and to effectively manage their careers (Miles Morgan Australia, 2010).

The Blueprint identifies eleven career management competencies that all Australians need to develop in order to manage life, learning and work. The blueprint also specifies competencies at different developmental stages of life. These are grouped into three areas: personal management, learning and work exploration and career building.

Personal management activities relate to the skills and self-knowledge, the types of work most suited to certain abilities, skills, talents and personal attributes like communications. Learning work exploration activities include knowing how to locate, interpret, evaluate and use career information and having knowledge of the world of work, society and the economy and understanding the interplay between each of these factors. Career building activities involve being able to identify work opportunities, secure/create and maintain a position in the workforce, having the ability to consider external factors in decision-making processes and improve career prospects, being able to balance work and personal life and managing a career to achieve specific goals (Miles Morgan Australia, 2010).

The Systems Theory Framework (STF) is construed as an overarching framework within which all concepts of career development described in the plethora of career theories can be usefully positioned and utilised in theory and practice (McMahon, 2002; McMahon & Patton, 1995; Patton & McMahon, 2006). A system is defined as a whole that functions as a whole by virtue of the interdependence of its parts (Kraus, 1989). Thus in terms of career development, an individual and his/her context would be regarded as a whole, and the reciprocity between an individual and his/her context would be regarded as the interdependence of its parts.

The centre of the STF is a circle representing the individual. The circle contains a range of intrapersonal influences on career development relevant to all individuals, yet different for each (McMahon & Patton, 1995). The path of career development needs to be considered in relation to contextual influences emanating from the past, such as family of origin and life experience and present influences such as stage of life and family life cycle. Future considerations such as anticipated lifestyle and employment market trends may also influence the career development of an individual (McMahon & Patton, 1995).

The STF is relevant for conceptualising work integrated learning through career development. Firstly, the centre of the STF highlights the range of personal factors which make up an individual’s career and work integrated learning is influenced by or it influences those personal factors. Work integrated learning is not just about developing skills – it can be a transformative pedagogy which entails a wider range of personal development and experiential learning (Smith, et al., 2009).

A conceptual framework developed in the United Kingdom which integrates the world-of-work, self-reflection and transferability across settings is the DOTS framework (Watts, 2006). The DOTS model consists of planned experiences designed to facilitate the development of Decision learning – decision making skills, Opportunity awareness – knowing what work opportunities exist and what their requirements are, Transition learning – including job searching and self-presenting skills and Self-awareness – in terms of interests, abilities, values etc.
Career Development in the university's WIL Framework

A comprehensive approach to formulating and delivering career development learning and work integrated learning should take into account if and how broader life and contextual factors impinge upon a student’s experience and learning journey (Smith, et al., 2009). A contemporary approach to developing university students’ and graduates’ careers requires a theoretical framework that captures the complexity of the current world-of-work (McMahon, et al., 2003).

An Australian university aims to address the elements in the studies above and at the same time incorporating aspects of the ABCD, STF and DOTS frameworks by introducing Career Development Learning in a core course in the Business WIL Framework in semester 1 of 2012. The motivation is to use career development learning as the overarching term pertaining to deliberate activities that go toward the improvement of an individual’s career including securing effective transformations from higher education into work life beyond university.

All the university’s undergraduate business students have the opportunity to experience WIL as part of their learning. There are four types of WIL available to them in the WIL Framework (O’Shea, 2008). The Business WIL Framework is an adaptation of the generic WIL Framework and is depicted in Figure 1.

The Business WIL Framework explicitly embeds skills development in three separate courses. These are in a core course in the first year, a major course in the second year and culminating in a capstone course Work Integrated Learning in the final year. This Framework supports the development of business students’ self-efficacy through CDL in WIL programs.

Self-efficacy is a central concept in social cognitive theory where it is defined as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997). The level of an individual’s self-efficacy is seen to be an important determinant of how well the individual copes with learning and performing at the workplace. Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organise and execute the course of action required to manage prospective situations. Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves and act (Bandura, 1995).

Students tailor their study programs to meet the expectations of employers in the job market (career management) (Hancock, Howieson, Kavanagh, Kent, & Tempone, 2009). They take responsibility for reviewing or assessing their own employability skills, addressing gaps and then pursuing appropriate ways to
CDL based on the DOTS model should include activities that help students to become more self-aware, to enable them to give real consideration to the things that they enjoy doing, are interested in, to motivate them and suit their personalities (Pool & Sewell, 2007). It is introduced in a core course, Accounting for Decision Making in the first year to raise business students’ awareness of employability and how to self-manage their studies and extra-curricular activities to maximise the employability. This approach is undertaken through curriculum-integrated strategies in which career development learning is an explicit vehicle for course-level learning outcomes (Smith, et al., 2009). These are tailored career and work-related tasks and events designed, delivered and supervised by the university and form the start of a student’s career management process.

In semester 1 of 2012, students were asked to write an 800-word personal reflection journal (10% weight) on one of the recorded 1-hour campus presentations on ‘Career Development and Employability’ provided on the course homepage. The presentations involved the university’s Careers and Employment staff in collaboration with the core course academic staff at three geographically dispersed campuses. The Assessment required on-campus students to attend and listen to a guest presentation on Career development/management at their campus and write their reflection journal on their campus presentation. For External students, students had to listen to any or all of the recordings and choose one presentation to write their journal.

On the completion of this assessment, students were assessed on their ability to meet the requirements of the assessment and achieve pre-determined course objectives. These are:

- understanding the need for career development building/management
- understanding how effective career building can improve employability
- knowing the university’s graduate qualities
- understanding what is reflective practice
- applying common models of reflective practice and
- writing reflective journals to demonstrate learning

In line with the university’s practice of teaching, practice and assessment, additional resources were provided to assist students in their assessment. A recorded Power Point file on career development and reflection was made available as a teaching resource. Two additional readings on career development/management and reflection practices were also provided. Students were also given a practice recording for self-reflection with suggested pointers on coverage and scope. A marking rubric was also provided as a reference to students. Marks were awarded for description of the event, identification of employability skills required, emotional response, self-analysis, learning with changed actions and referencing.

**Conclusion**

The Business faculty’s WIL Framework developed by incorporating CDL has concentrated on offering an opportunity to students to develop career development skills to enhance their future employability. By utilising CDL to connect workplace skills required and academic experiences, students develop a greater understanding of themselves, understand the employment opportunities available and prepare their transition strategies to employment or further study (Smith, et al., 2009).

Through initial reflection journal writing, personal development tools and careers advice are used to assist students in making connections between their career intentions and their learning, working, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. This approach connects labour market opportunities, personal development and aspirations, skills development, career management and learning support and informs students about the possibilities that exist for them in the working world (Pegg, et al., 2012).

Employability is not just about getting a job. It is about developing attributes, techniques and experience to enable a student to get a job and to progress within a chosen career with a long term and sustainability viewpoint. It is about learning and the emphasis is less on ‘employ’ and more on ‘ability’. The emphasis is on developing critical, reflective abilities with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner (Harvey, 2003). A graduate’s potential career path may not be linear and straightforward. The path of career development is one of constant evolution and may be cyclical (McMahon & Patton, 1995) which requires the graduate to constantly manage his/her career in view of societal uncertainties to stay relevant and employable.
References


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