Building Your Career: A Guide for Students

BUILDING YOUR CAREER: A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

Michelle Gander

FLINDERS UNIVERSITY
ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA

Contents

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Flinders University acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which its campuses are located. These are the Traditional Lands of the Arrernte, Dagoman, First Nations of the South East, First Peoples of the River Murray & Mallee region, Jawoyn, Kaurna, Larrakia, Ngadjuri, Ngarrindjeri, Ramindjeri, Warumungu, Wardaman and Yolngu people. We honour their Elders and Custodians past and present.
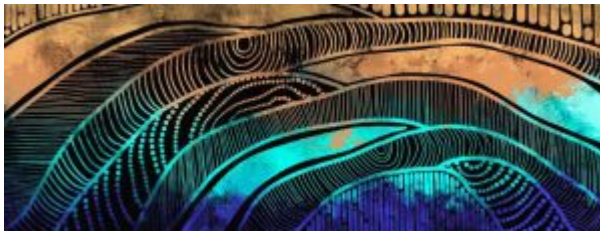
This artwork is the creation of contemporary Aboriginal artist Elizabeth Close, a Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara woman and Flinders alumna. This

artwork responds to and reflects the incredible natural landscape in and around Flinders. The artwork seeks to place into stark relief, the elements of earth and water, coast and landscape; sun, flora and fauna (Used with permission).

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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INTRODUCTION

About the book

This interactive book has been created as a useful companion for students in high school, vocational education, or higher education to understand the world of work and how to establish their career. The lessons in this book are also useful to many other readers especially those that are in the early stages of their careers and those looking to transition their careers – something that will happen much more in the coming years. The chapters in this book bring together scholarly research in employability in an engaging manner with practical advice and guidance on career management, including the use of multiple exercises. You can read the whole book cover to cover or dip into various chapters of this book to take what you want, when you want it.

This book is split into two parts. Part I 'Understanding Context', outlines a broad perspective of work and careers. It introduces readers to the concept of

organisational careers, traditional versus contemporary careers, external and internal labour markets, and the economic, technological and socio-cultural changes that have revolutionised work in the 21st Century, including an introduction to how transference of career management and employability risk has moved from organisations to individuals. It goes on to discuss the 4th industrial revolution and the gig economy and how these have impacted on graduate employability. It then introduces the 5th industrial revolution and Society 5.0. It introduces the concept of human capital, the importance of which has been emphasised by organisations and universities, but offers a critique of this concept based on the structural issues within society, which have as much bearing on employability as individual CVs. This integrated structural and agency issue leads to complexity in graduate employment outcomes.

Part II 'Taking Action' provides information on different career related activities to help you navigate the world of work more effectively. This section starts with reviewing how you can establish your purpose and career identity and provides exercises to reflect on and establish your values, match your personality with careers and how to review careers of interest more methodically. This section then goes on to discuss what's involved in a

personal brand, how to reflect on any discrepancy between your perceived and desired personal brand and how to re/construct your brand. Next we move onto professional development, how to plan your career and how to develop a professional development 5-year plan – with lots of exercises to step you through this process. Finally, we wrap up by looking at soft skills or competencies for employability success. Soft skills are critically important, but are often an overlooked part of employability, as they are much harder to teach in the curriculum, however, research reports that it is actually these skills that are most important for career success. This chapter goes on to take you through some of the less familiar soft skills such as resilience, with ideas on how to develop them over time.

PART I

UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT

1

THE CHANGING NATURE OF CAREERS

We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails

Dolly Parton

Learning Objectives

On completion of this chapter you should be able to:

- Analyse the drives responsible for the move from the modern to the postmodern organisation.
- Understand the internal and external labour market and how this influences organisational policies.
- Evaluate the positive and negatives of the contemporary career.
- Evaluate the impact of the move to individualisation and risk transference in the workplace.

Introduction

If a job is a specific work role that individuals hold for a period of time, a career can be defined as 'the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviors associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the person's life' (Hall, 1976, 12). This definition highlights the importance of the individual in constructing their own story of their career over time. This story is framed around individual career-related decisions, those that are considered important for the organisation and, just as importantly, what values and motivations (intrinsic and extrinsic) individuals have over the lifespan of their career; this is the most accepted idea of a career (Feldman and Bolino, 1996).

For almost 40 years now, labour markets in industrialised countries have been undergoing profound changes from a **modern** to **postmodern** economy. The most striking of these changes are, the increase in the proportion of skilled workers and the corresponding deterioration in the employment and pay prospects of less skilled workers (Katz and Autor, 1999), completely new types of jobs being created at a high rate, high levels of under-employment (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017), more part-time jobs being created than full-time jobs (Trading Economics, 2018), and the gig economy and casualisation of the workforce, which dominate in some industrial sectors (Abraham et al., 2017).

Labour Markets

Within traditional supply and demand models of labour markets, the conventional understanding suggests that job competition and associated benefits are directly controlled by economic variables (Osterman, 2011), and individual workers make few investments in jobs or relationship (Watcher and Wright, 1990). This system is known as the external labour market (ELM) and is common for many organisations. The main merits of an ELM are that open competition provides a wider choice

for appointments, and that outsiders bring new ideas to an organisation.

The ELM is contrasted with an internal labour market (ILM), in which posts are filled mainly by promoting existing employees. The main merits of ILMs are that individuals within an organisation are likely to know more about the strengths and weaknesses of the company than outsiders, and that having a reputation for internal promotion may assist in recruitment and retention of staff. Additionally, organisations with strong ILMs have recruitment, advancement, salary, benefits, and job design that are governed by published policies and procedures and a job's wage is determined by its characteristics (Doeringer and Piore, 1971). ILMs tend to be strongest in organisations and sectors with good collective bargaining. This leads to competition between organisational efficiency and maximising individual benefits to staff (Granovetter, 1981). Although ILMs can be created with strong unionisation, there is some evidence that unionisation leads to reduced salary compared with the ELM. Negotiations are often skewed towards deferred benefits such as superannuation, or fringe benefits such as vacation time, rather than current pay and rewards. In this context then the direct economic benefits of the ELM (i.e. salary) is transformed into other

types of benefit that some individuals rate more highly than salary (Watcher and Wright 1990). However, Hirsch and Shanley (1996) did argue that ILMs are too slow to match employee needs within a firm and that the ELM allows an organisation to move more quickly in response to the changing external environment, a proposition supported by the work of Zhou, Dekker and Kleinknecht (2010). ILMs tend to be found in large bureaucratic organisations in all sectors (corporate, not-for-profit, and the public sector).

Jobs and careers are carried out within specific organisations that have their own structures, rules and cultures, including in human resource management. As such there is often a close and mutual relationship between individual and organisational career management activities (Gander et al., 2019), although it remains unclear how these may influence individual workplace behaviour and how these may be changing in light of contemporary career theories (Sturges et al., 2005). The context in which careers are experienced is also likely to have an influence on career progression.

Traditional Organisational Careers

Pre-1970, organisational design was based on rational bureaucracy, formality, hierarchy, and rule-reliance

(Arnold and Cohen, 2013; Kanter, 1977). This organisational model was dependent for its success on dealing with a predictable external environment. It was also built around the heterosexual and nuclear family and the male model of work – the man went out to work, worked long hours, was the only, or main, breadwinner, and the woman stayed at home to run the household (with this work not actually being recognised as work of course!). In this era, male careers were based on the premise of long-term security with loyalty from both the employee and employer, with employees moving through an orderly vertically organised career ladder with career success measured according to hierarchical position, salary, status and responsibility (Kanter, 1977).

Figure 1.1 Ad from the 1950s "Don't worry darling, you didn't burn the beer!" (in the public domain).

This traditional organisational career was arguably the major form of employment until the early to mid-1990s with employers (both private and public sectors) providing long-term employment and guaranteed

benefits in return for high-commitment and high-productivity. However, extensive economic changes in the 1970s and 1980s led to organisations downsizing and de-layering to reduce costs, with many shifting from a vertical to a more horizontal organisational design, with the perceived need to develop generalists, and not just specialists, in order to respond to instability and change (Kanter, 1977).

It was argued that from the 1980s organisational design changed from the modern to the postmodern (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009; Nichols, 2007). Additionally, the workforce was changing with women entering the labour market at an exponential rate from the 1980s (Ortiz-Ospina and Tzvetkova, 2017). This needed to be reflected in new career models, and major new conceptual models were developed based on constructivist approaches to career theory, that is that individuals constructed their own social realities (Savickas, 1993; Sharf, 2013), which was the most important aspect of understanding people's decision-making processes and career stories.

Contemporary Organisational Careers

In recent decades, more dynamic careers have become apparent due to the collapse of long-term secure careers. Employees now develop their careers through horizontal

shifts between multiple organizations (Arnold and Cohen, 2008; Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). This type of career, in which employees must take responsibility for their own employability is becoming more dominant in the labour market (Vuori, et al., 2011), with employees having flexible contracts and changing jobs more often (forced and by free will). The contemporary career can be defined as one where individuals are free agents, not loyal to any one organisation, and who can move easily between organisations. Individuals are now motivated not solely by external success measures such as position title or salary but also by intrinsic satisfaction especially in terms of contributing to the 'greater good'. Characteristics of the contemporary career are mobility, flexibility, the need for meaningful work, self-actualisation, autonomy, skill development, skill utilisation, work-life balance and fulfilling relationships across organisations (Briscoe et al., 2006; Forrier et al., 2005). A career path in the contemporary organisation would include hierarchical and lateral moves, plateauing, periods outside of the labour market and career changes. Individuals therefore require external marketability and self-efficacy in their career attitude (Briscoe, et al., 2006). These contemporary careers place the emphasis for career development on the individual, a reaction against the traditional organisational career seemingly at odds

with the postmodern organisational era. This emphasis on career self-management highlights the concept of individual responsibility for continuing employment and career success, as there is no longer a promise from the organisation of a supported organisational career (Sturges et al., 2005).

All good?

The global economic, technological and cultural changes discussed above have resulted in a move to individualisation and responsibilisation. For 'the sake of their own material survival' individualisation requires people to 'make themselves the centre of their own planning and conduct of life' (Beck, 1992 in Rawolle et al., 2017, 111–112). This resulted in a move from a paternalistic society towards an individualised society where 'responsibility for bearing the burden of risk is not shared equally' (Beck, 1999 in Rawolle et al., 2017, 113). It has been argued that although this move towards individualisation is a move towards freedom of choice, in fact individuals don't have a freedom of choice but only a forced choice between a few alternatives. Other scholars have argued that individualisation provides freedom and autonomy (Roper et al., 2010). This argument between boundaried choices and individual agency plays out in a number of career theories.
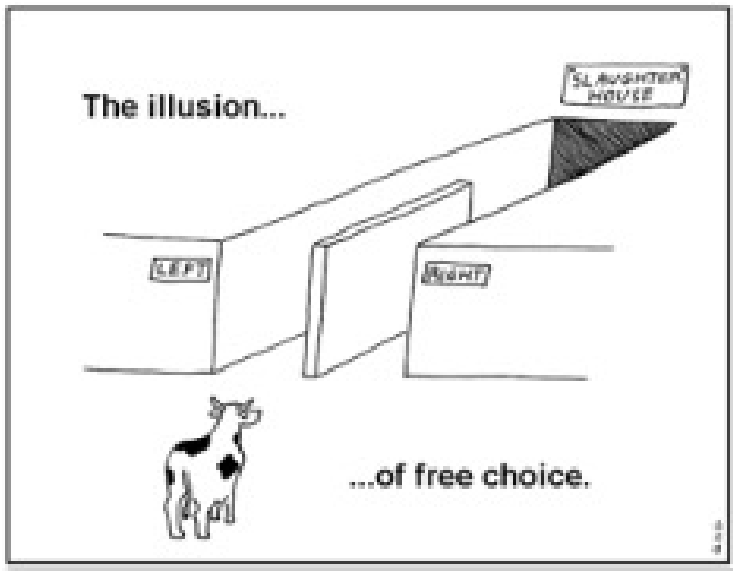
Figure 1.2 'The illusion of choice' ©Abstruse Goose
CC BY-NC 4.0.

It should be emphasised here that organisations have seemed to gain the most in terms of the move towards individualisation and the contemporary career. They are able to employ a temporary workforce, increasing and decreasing it as desired, and setting terms and conditions that are becoming increasingly disadvantageous to individuals (Tims, 2017; Worthington and McDonald, 2017; O'Donnell et al., 2016). They can increasingly demand multiple skillsets, with individuals needing to

maintain skills and qualifications, often at their own expense, to ensure ongoing employability.

Due to all of these changes the concept of organisational careers is in flux, with multiple new career theories being presented over the last two decades (Gubler et al., 2014), with many scholars arguing that the organisational career is dead (for example, Peiperl and Baruch, 1997). Many of those scholars have now accepted that career theory moved ahead at a faster pace than actual lived careers, and it is recognised that organisational careers are still relevant in today's economy although having changed from the traditional organisational career (Gander, 2021).

In Summary

To conclude then, organisational careers have changed drastically since the 1990s, when the traditional model of male careers – loyalty to an organisation, long-term tenure, paternalistic career management, and extrinsic measures of success started to wane due to global economic, technological and socio-cultural changes. It is important to understand how organisational external and internal labour markets work, with benefits and disadvantages of both models being apparent and how this affects individual benefits. Modern and postmodern

organisational models were outlined, with the impact of this being seen on organisations themselves and on individual careers with the move to an individual employment risk profile. In the next chapter we will now look at the graduate employability market.
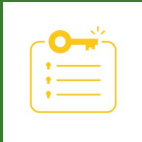
Key Takeaways

- The traditional organisational career model based on modernism, has given way to the contemporary organisational career model based on postmodernism.
- The above has been driven by global economic, technological and socio-cultural changes and have resulted in labour market transformation.
- External labour markets, with the ability of employers to respond to the market in terms of, for example salary and benefits, have responded with less secure work, higher salaries for highly skilled workers and reduction in salaries for unskilled workers.
- Internal labour markets, with their traditional payoff of lower salaries but better long-term benefits, have

> also been eroded with the reduction in power of unions.
>
> • These interacting changes have led to increased pressure on individuals to manage their own employability and to take on the risks associated with insecure employment.

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2

INTRODUCTION TO EMPLOYABILITY

> **The future depends on what you do today**
>
> Mahatma Gandhi

Learning Objectives

On completion of this chapter you should be able to:

- Understand what employability is and how and why

this is a contested concept.

- Appraise the current challenges around work, especially in relation to the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- Analyse the labour market challenges and evaluate the impact on individual employment outcomes.
- Integrate the wider socio-cultural environment and its impacts on individual employability outcomes.
- Translate the theoretical knowledge provided into a set of strategies for improving your employability on graduation.

Introduction

Some people know what work or career they want when they graduate – maybe not for the rest of their lives – but after completing school, college or university. Individuals who are attracted to more vocational work such as IT, accountancy, medicine, nursing, law, engineering and so on, have vocational and higher education courses they can enrol in, that provide them with the required level of training and knowledge to pursue their ambitions. Other people have a passion – think about those who want to be actors, musicians,

dancers, or filmmakers, they too have vocational and higher education courses that speak directly to them, to prepare them as artists and for (self)employment. Then, there are many others who at 16, 17, or 18 do not know what they want to do – and why should they? Enrolling in further study is always a benefit to future earnings; higher wages bring benefits beyond salary to individuals throughout the lifecourse. Is there something more though that educators can be doing to help prepare all students, regardless of their chosen path, for employment? Before we think about what this preparation might look like, let's find out a little bit more about the job market, or as it is often known, the labour market.

The Labour Market for Young People in the Early 21st Century

Research shows that most (86%) undergraduate students would prefer traditional employment, that is employment in which an individual is engaged in ongoing full-time work for a single employer at a time. This has been the cultural norm in most **global north** societies and clearly still holds value for young people entering the job market. However, government figures from various countries note that casual work now accounts for a significant proportion of work. For

example, in Australia in 2020, 20% of all work was casualised, and in the US that figure is higher at around 30%. These figures are likely an under-estimate as they often exclude seasonal workers, second jobs and undeclared income (Caza, 2020). This means that the labour market has changed to such a degree that people's individual needs for secure employment do not match the offerings of the labour market.

The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) noted that engagement of young people in the labour market was crucial for their own personal wellbeing and economic growth as well as the overall health of the economic system. However, the current climate of economic instability had led to greater hardship in finding secure and appropriate employment, maintaining employment, and the inexorable rise of casual work including the gig economy (on-demand work obtained through digital platforms); this means it is a highly turbulent time to be entering the labour market. However, it should be noted that in Australia graduate employment improved significantly in 2022, with overall employment for domestic undergraduates increasing from 84.8 per cent in 2021 to 88.3 per cent in 2022. The full-time employment rate also increased from 68.9 per cent to 78.5 per cent (QILT, 2022).

Watch this YouTube video to understand why the gig economy is often problematic.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/building-your-career-guide-for-students/?p=36#oembed-1

A report by PWC in 2022 (when unemployment was low) showed that globally young people (between 15 and 24 years of age) were more likely to be unemployed, although there was a large disparity from country to country, with Australia showing that youth unemployment was 2.5 times that of adults (Woodhouse and Thorpe, n.d.). The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA, 2020) also found that young people were disproportionately represented in flexible work and that from 2016 there had been a 340% growth in the number of people engaging in gig work with people aged between 18–24 years making up more than half of this number. Underemployment is also widespread for young

people (15–24-year-olds), which has increased in the past 10 years. There has been an increase in underemployment and involuntary part-time work since 2014, possibly due to the greater time taken for graduates to move from part-time to full-time employment (Chambers et al., 2021). Due to rapid technological changes, we can infer that changes in graduate employment will continue to occur and that educational institutions will have to revise both curriculum and employment preparation at a more rapid rate.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution

Continued change in the labour market is guaranteed, with many of the technologies indicated as part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (or 4IR) having already arrived such as 5G, fully autonomous vehicles, 3D printing, and narrow AI (artificial intelligence). 4IR is the next phase in the digitisation of work, driven by disruptive trends including the rise of data and connectivity, analytics, human-machine interaction, and improvements in robotics. It is named the fourth industrial revolution building on previous leaps in technological innovation. The first industrial revolution used water and steam to mechanise production. The second industrial revolution used electric power to provide mass production technologies. The third

industrial revolution used electronics and information technology to automate production. The argument for a fourth industrial revolution is the exponential rate of change and disruption happening in every industry, country and in our daily lives. As we continue to progress towards a new paradigm that includes quantum computing, advanced robotics, augmented reality, human/computer interfaces and regeneration of body parts (McKinsey & Company, 2022), over the next 10 years, we must acknowledge that not only do we not know how our lives will be altered, we also do not know what work and jobs will look like.

Read this article from McKinsey for an introduction to the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Early in 2023 OpenAI's ChatGPT rocketed narrow AI onto the radar of the general public. This chatbot uses machine learning to undertake tasks such as write resumes, cover letters, to generate art and policy and much, much more. One of ChatGPT's main abilities is

that, given a prompt, it generates text to give you an accessible and readable response. Along with providing information and answers, it can also aid knowledge workers to analyse and expand their work. For many users it is used to help generate and to supplement ideas, to process lots of information and to provide summaries. Narrow AI is already in the workplace, and will continue to expand into new areas, so it is critical to understand how to use the tool, so you don't fall behind.

Even the professions are not immune to the impacts of the fourth industrial revolution. Susskind and Susskind (2015) posit that professions such as medicine, law, teaching, accountancy, architecture, journalism and so on, will undergo significant and irreversible change as a result of the fourth industrial revolution. These authors argue that all professions will undergo two sets of changes. First, the professions will start to be dominated by automation and the current ways of working will be optimised through the application of technology. This incremental change is obvious and has happened throughout history; think for example the way that personal PCs changed ways of working seemingly overnight. Second, the professions will be dominated by innovation. Increasingly capable technological systems will transform the work of professionals and in the long

run this second type of change will prevail, and the professions will be dismantled incrementally.

 To get an idea of how ubiquitous artificial intelligence is, read one or more of these articles on [Wired](#).

With the reduction in current types of jobs, jobs that we can't currently imagine will be created (Wilson et al., 2017). There are many consequences of this and the World Economic Forum (WEF) reports that by 2025, 50% of employees will need re-skilling (Whiting, 2020). The WEF lists the top 10 skills that will be in demand from employers in 2025: analytical thinking and innovation; active learning and learning strategies; complex problem-solving and ideation; critical thinking and analysis; creativity, originality and initiative; leadership and social influence; technology use, monitoring and control; technology design and programming; resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility; reasoning (Whiting, 2020). As can be seen, the top six skills are very difficult to currently automate. These mostly soft, or transferable skills,

therefore, need to be embedded into vocational and higher education courses (V&HEIs) alongside more technical, disciplinary skills development.

The Fifth Industrial Revolution

The 4th IR is not without its limitations, however, and does not, for example, incorporate environmental sustainability, including the circular economy, human preferences, or worker welfare into its *raison d'etre*. To resolve those issues, Industry 5.0 will be powered by purpose, not profit. Industry 5.0 will harness its power to achieve societal goals beyond just jobs and constant economic growth. It promises to respect the environment and the well-being of workers. Leading up to this tipping point, some scholars are discussing the 'age of augmentation' where humans embed technology in their bodies – perhaps an 'internet of bodies'. It will also see humans and robots working together in the same space, known as collaborative robots or co-bots. This may all seem far-fetched, but some countries have already announced 5 IR strategies. For example, the European Commission has announced that industry will be based on the concepts of sustainability, human-centredness and resilience. Germany has announced a 2030 Vision for Industry 5.0, and Japan announced Society 5.0. Society 5.0

aims to balance economic development with social and environmental concerns (Xu et al., 2021).

The Employability Agenda

Many governments are becoming increasingly concerned about upskilling young people to have 'work-ready' skills including the critical ability for lifelong learning. This context has led governments in many countries, including in Australia and the UK, to drive the behaviours of V&HEIs to do more to ensure that graduates have the skills and competencies to be 'work-ready'. This type of activity has become known as the employability agenda. V&HEIs traditionally have taken a skills-based approach to the employability agenda, based on increasing human capital through upskilling in transferable skills, either directly through certain units of study such as communication or project management, or indirectly by embedding skills in units of study, for example, teamwork is taught through the use of group assignment activities. Work-integrated learning topics (a sort of internship) have also become popular and have often been made compulsory in degrees.

Watch our industry expert, Nicole Deacon, discuss the benefit of their degree and skill development.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/building-your-career-guide-for-students/?p=36#oembed-2

However, when UK students were asked to assess the development of career skills in their university programs, only 49% said they were actively developed (a figure which has been stable over the last four years; Daubney, 2020). The Chartered Management Institute (CMI, 2018) noted the importance of universities in helping students reflect on and maximise the skills they have acquired through their courses, part-time work, and other activities, but it is clear from the statistics above that many students have often not been able to identify the core employability skills being taught or have not been able to adequately express them to potential employers (Daubney, 2020). Students report finding it difficult to translate skills taught within their courses, into an employment pitch with only 27% of students reporting

they were confident demonstrating their work readiness (CMI, 2018). This is at odds with evidence over multiple decades, that higher education transforms students into highly employable individuals. What is does indicate is that students need support from their V&HEIs to help them articulate what their transformation has been, particularly in non-professional courses (Daubney, 2020).

What is Employability?

Employability in general can be defined as 'the capacity to be self-reliant in navigating the labour market, utilising knowledge, individual skills and attributes, and adapting them to the employment context, showcasing them to employers, while taking into account external and other constraints' (Small et al., 2018). The scholarly literature, however, suggests that employability can be defined in four ways.

Human capital development

Some scholars emphasise employability is mainly related to the capabilities of individuals, including personal assets and characteristics. This individual agency view of employability is that investment in education, training or other skills development (human capital development) is primarily an individual investment. The individual then becomes responsible for

their own employability, dependent on how well the labour market values the human capital developed (Delva et al., 2021; Tholen, 2015). This view of employability, and one that is the focus of much contemporary research, is that employability describes the individual content that makes a person successful in the labour market.

The approach above aligns to the view taken in the contemporary career literature which foregrounds individual agency and which argues that with the ongoing reduction in organisational careers offering job security and long-term prospects, individuals need to act to be employable or marketable. This shift has been driven through the concomitant rise in the portfolio career, the boundaryless career, precarious work, and the gig economy. Proponents of human capital development theory argue that individuals need to show career self-management behaviours, increase their human capital, and compete for work and careers as if the wider context has no impact on individual outcomes. The emphasis is on how well the person acquires and maintains 'employability' in a changing labour market. However, the effectiveness of these individualised approaches has been questioned (Holmes, 2013). Although research shows that there are better or worse employability profiles, and that some individuals 'win' and some 'lose',

there has been little progress made in understanding how this eventuates (Wilton 2011). Research has not been able to identify a generic set of personal strengths and actions aimed at enhancing human capital (Wilton, 2011) and Marginson (2019) argues that human capital theory lacks real-world complexity, partially based on the lack of context.

Labour market conditions

Other scholars suggest that the emphasis should be on the labour market as the driving force behind graduate employability and that it is these objective structural realities that have the biggest impact on graduate employability outcomes. Recently, however, in many employment sectors, there has been a weakening of the link between credentials and the recruitment requirements for early career roles. In the UK for instance, it has been shown that employers value 'job readiness' over a qualification so a CV with a history of work experience and behavioural competencies, is starting to be increasingly valued over a credential (Brown and Souto-Otero, 2020).

These two arguments, that individual factors and individual circumstances can be seen as separate, continues to represent employability strictly as a product

rather than a reflection of the complex and integrated process of being (Brown and Souto-Otero, 2020). More recently, scholars have called for a more structure-related understanding of employability, including graduate employability (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017), as individuals, even if possessing human capital, may face obstacles to successful employment outcomes.

Relational

Another viewpoint regards employability as relational, contextual, and conflictual and structured by inequalities (Clarke, 2018; Delva et al., 2021; Tholen, 2015). Opportunities for individuals competing in the labour market depend not only on their own skills, experiences, and abilities but on how other individuals perform and that different social groups are in competition for access to elite positions. Those that are successful are not there purely due to greater human capital but due to their ability to access positions, and employers do not make solely merit-based decisions (Woodard, 2005).

Combined approach

Still other scholars recognise that it is a combined approach which is important, that the external requirement for specific discipline knowledge, the need for individual self-efficacy and an understanding of

inequities is paramount (Cheng et al., 2022). Tomlinson (2017) developed a graduate capital model incorporating multiple factors that moved closer to a holistic understanding of graduate employability, but still did not address dis/advantage on entering and exiting higher education. Behle (2020) presented an employability framework for higher education consisting of individual factors (e.g., age, gender and ethnicity), individual circumstances (e.g., capitals accumulation), enabling support systems, and the labour market.

Although the third and fourth perspectives suggest that both agency and structure matter in shaping employability, there has been little progress made in understanding how some individuals 'win' and some 'lose'. Employability, then, is better conceptualised as an integrated agency and structure issue. Some scholars have tried to integrate the agency-structure dichotomy, notably through Bourdieu's **habitus** (Bourdieu, 1977) although the majority of graduate employability scholarship has centred around individual agency by way of human capital development (Abelha et al., 2020). This agency-structure argument can be seen writ large in the employment patterns of Indigenous Australians.

Indigenous Employment

Indigenous Australians remain significantly under-represented in the workforce. In 2018, less than half (49%) of working age Indigenous Australians were in employment, compared with 76% for non-Indigenous Australians. The [Indigenous Employment Index 2022](#) is the first comprehensive snapshot of Indigenous workplace representation, practices and employee experiences. The key findings of this research are:

- Just 5% of participating employers (40 organisations) fall into the highest performing category in terms of Indigenous employment practices and outcomes, however, almost a third fall into the lowest performing group.

- The mean Indigenous employment rate across surveyed employers is 2.2%.

- Employers often prioritise recruitment over retention and development.

- 76% of employers have Indigenous employment targets, of which 67% report regularly on progress. Organisations that report regularly had more than double the numbers of Indigenous staff than those that did not report regularly.

- Indigenous employees are almost entirely absent from senior management and executive leadership levels.

- Racism against Indigenous employees is common, with over 50% reporting direct or indirect racism.

Indigenous employment parity will only be achieved when Indigenous employees are present in the workforce in the same proportion as they are in the national population, at approximately 3.3%. This Indigenous employment research found that one-off measures to create Indigenous employment must give way to a more comprehensive and systematic approach.

No different from the organisations participating in the above research, universities also have under-representation of Indigenous people from commencing undergraduates, through to PhD students, and on to staff and senior leaders. Behrendt et al. (2012, paragraph 1) reports:

According to the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

People, Indigenous people comprise 2.2 per cent of the overall population, but only 1.4 per cent of student enrolments at university in 2010, including only 1.1 per cent of higher degree by research enrolments. Staffing levels are also low, with 0.8 per cent of all full- time equivalent academic staff and 1.2 per cent of general university staff in 2010 being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Universities Australia (the peak body for the higher education sector) and the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) have collaborated to produce two documents: the Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities (2011a) and the accompanying Guiding Principles for Developing Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities (2011b). Universities are currently implementing the key principles of the Best Practice Framework, which includes developing [Reconciliation Action Plans](#) to formalise their commitment to developing mutually beneficial partnerships that work towards closing the employment, health and education gaps for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The 2012 Behrendt Report (2012) recommended universities use the Best Practice Framework in all spheres of a university connected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including in discussions about graduate attributes. Two key principles that universities are working towards are:

- All graduates of Australian universities will have the knowledge and skills necessary to interact in a culturally competent way with Indigenous communities.

- Universities will operate in partnership with their Indigenous communities and will help disseminate culturally competent practices to the wider community.

A report on Indigenous graduate employability (Knight et al. 2015) has the following advice and guidance for students:

- Look for internships / work-integrated learning opportunities.
- Seek positive mentoring.
- Understand and highlight your transferrable

skills.

Individual Strategies for Improving Employability

Taking all that we have covered above, and noting that employability as an outcome is not solely dependent on an individual's human capital, what are some strategies that have been proven to have a positive effect on an individual's chance of securing a graduate job? A systematic literature review reported that although technical or discipline competencies were important so were transferable competencies or soft skills (Abelha, 2020). The most important of the soft skills identified for graduate employability were communication, teamwork, and digital skills.

If these competencies above are important, then how can students take opportunities to improve them? V&HEIs provide a range of opportunities for students to develop and utilise skills. The scholarly literature agrees that the following 11 strategies provide opportunities for increasing individual human capital (listed here in alphabetical order):

Capstone project: A capstone project can take many forms but it is a unique opportunity to carry out

independent group research on a real-world problem. It provides a vital role in preparing students for the world of work as it deals with complex problem-solving, requires teamwork, good time management and communication skills. Some courses will embed this as core in your course but if not, and there is an option topic, you should take the opportunity as it will provide a good way to talk to potential employers about how you combine discipline knowledge with soft skills to solve problems to achieve a good final outcome.

Careers advice and employment skill development: All V&HEIs have areas that offer careers advice and employability skill development so students should take advantage of all the resources at your disposal. Many universities offer opportunities to be involved with peer mentoring, leadership awards and so on. Although these extra-curricula activities are time consuming, they can help provide evidence of your work-related skills to employers.

International exchange: Study abroad programs are an excellent opportunity to boost your employability skills. In an increasingly globalised world, having in-depth experiences of another culture can be a useful way of

standing out. Couple this with some language study and you will be even better situated.

Mentoring: Mentoring has been shown to be highly effective in preparing students for future employment. Many universities run industry or alumni mentoring programs whereby they match students with graduates and/or industry experts who can help students find out more about that industry, introduce them to professional networks and provide industry-based career advice and guidance.

Networking or industry information events: V&HEIs will offer career fairs and it is worth exploring multiple opportunities throughout your study period. Institutions may also offer other opportunities to meet prospective employers often through course industry panels.

Part-time employment: Securing some form of paid employment, even if not in an area that you want to eventually work in is highly valuable for graduate employment later, and keeping this work for a length of time provides evidence that you are a reliable and valued employee, and you then have access to work-related referees.

Professional association membership: For some students who develop an interest in a particular area, joining a professional association may be helpful in developing your career identity. These associations often have heavily discounted student membership rates and opportunities for professional development and networking.

Professional development: Although we generally think about professional development when we have secured a job, this can also be done alongside your studies. For example, at Flinders University we have the Horizon Professional Development Award that allows students to gain formal recognition for extra-curricular professional activities; other institutions would have similar schemes. Professional development would also include building a portfolio of work if relevant, gaining records of achievement or undertaking additional study through free online learning providers to upskill in particular areas. These massive open online courses (MOOC) providers such as FutureLearn and edX have hundreds of employment-related short courses including with the potential to gain micro-credentials.

Social media: A professional social media presence is invaluable. Employers will Google people when they have

applied for a job and a LinkedIn profile and/or a professional website would be useful for ensuring your professional presence.

Volunteering/community engagement: If you cannot secure relevant part-time work through your studies, you can also undertake voluntary or community work in an area of interest. This is invaluable in proving to employers you understand a particular job or industry and that you not only have your qualifications but hands-on experience.

Work experience/internships/placements: This is one of the most important activities you can undertake whilst studying. A good placement opportunity not only provides you with an insight into that particular job and industry and work-related experience, it also links you in with relevant people and networks. The number of students that gain jobs where they have undertaken a placement is very high and this activity should be non-negotiable. Some courses will have these embedded as a course component but if not, try and make sure you do this as one of your option topics.

One thing that everyone can do is be prepared for any opportunities that come our way. Is there an opportunity

to use your skills to get work experience in some other way, as an active member of your student guild for example? When you have a job, are you ready if an opportunity arises in a different role or project? Being prepared and ready to step up when an opportunity arises is a critically important aspect of your career management strategy.

Watch our industry experts, Sean Tierney and Nicole Deacon, discuss the benefits of taking opportunities.

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In Summary

We have covered a lot of important context in this chapter, critical for understanding the broader factors in

determining employability; complete exercise 2.1 now to help think through these issues. It is important to recognise that employability isn't just about your own set of skills and experiences, your human capital, but is embedded more widely in the society in which you live, your background, and the labour market factors on graduation. The fact that the labour market is changing rapidly in terms of moving from secure employment to casual work and the gig economy, as well as the impact of the fourth industrial revolution, means that higher-order and soft skills are becoming increasingly important to secure a good job. That is not to say that increasing your human capital is not important, it is, and there are a number of activities that you can undertake alongside your studies. This chapter summarises 11 of these activities, some of which will be covered in further chapters in this book.
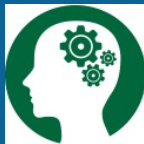
Exercise 2.1

Think about the following questions and prompts:

- Thinking about your own career interests, what impact do you think 4IR and AI will have on related jobs?
- Can you explain why securing a graduate job isn't just about individual human capital? What other groups of people do you think may be impacted on more structural-related issues?
- What are your thoughts on the 11 activities outlined to help secure a graduate job? Are you motivated to undertake some or all of these? How can you plan and set goals to achieve these?
- Reflect on your current skills and appraise which areas you need to gain more experience in, especially related to soft skills development.

Key Takeaways

- The job market is competitive, so you need to have

work experience as well as qualifications.

- Plan what activities you can do whilst at college/university to enhance your own employability.

- Concentrate on enhancing your soft skills, as well as your discipline knowledge, as employers are increasingly focused on these competencies.

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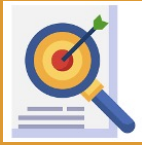
PART II

TAKING ACTION

3

ESTABLISHING YOUR PURPOSE AND CAREER IDENTITY

> To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment
>
> Ralph Waldo Emerson, American poet

Learning Objectives

On completion of this chapter you should be able to:

- Understand what professional purpose is and how this aids your career development.
- Reflect on your underlying values and aspirations and how these can be used to help define your career identity.
- Appraise the concept of career identity and reflect on how this translates to your own circumstances.
- Translate the theoretical knowledge provided into a set of strategies for improving your employability on graduation.

Introduction

For young people, self-perceived employability refers to 'the perceived ability to attain sustainable employment appropriate to one's qualification level' (Rothwell et al., 2008, p. 2). To help students develop their employability, vocational and higher education institutions (V&HEI)

have historically had a skills-based focus of employability as described in Chapter 2, but this has declined in more recent years as consensus emerges that employability provision needs to be multi-dimensional, experiential, and embedded in the curriculum (Artiss, 2019). In practice, learning to become employable entails undertaking multiple activities both within the educational setting such as work-integrated learning, and outside it, through for example part-time work and/or voluntary work. Employability practices in educational settings need to start with the formation of a **professional purpose** and the building of a career identity.

Professional Purpose

Professional purpose reflects an individual's level of commitment to developing a professional future aligned to their personal values, aspirations, and outlook. It has been argued that the rapid rate of change in the workplace means that skills learning is not a sufficient strategy on its own to raise employability. The new work environment requires the development of a growth mindset (we'll look at this in more depth in Chapter 7) and a deep understanding of an individuals own worldview, beliefs, and values (Bates et al., 2019).

Watch our industry expert, Sean Tierney, discuss value alignment, identity and job changes.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/building-your-career-guide-for-students/?p=46#oembed-1

Values represent basic convictions that an end-state is preferable to an opposing end-state. They contain a judgemental element that is related to an individual's ideas of right, wrong, good, and bad; they have both content and intensity attributes. The content attribute says that the end-state is important, and the intensity attribute specifies how important is it. So, if you think about a work example, the content attribute of autonomy in your job might be important but it might not be very intense, meaning that if other things that you evaluate as desirable are good e.g. a high salary, you may be willing to have less autonomy in your work. However, if your content attribute of ethical practice is very intense, then you might not work for a defence firm, no matter how much salary they offered. All of us have a hierarchy of

values that form our value system, and values, once developed, are fairly stable and enduring over time. A more likely scenario is that you might enter a workplace that you believe treats people equitably but then find out that this is not so and that favouritism leads to promotions for example, rather than being based on merit. This inequitable behaviour would go against your values system, meaning you'll be disappointed and become disaffected. This may lead to being less productive at work and ultimately leaving the organisation having not had a very good experience.

A professional purpose mindset commits someone to develop a professional future aligned with their own values and aspirations. For V&HEI students, therefore, time spent developing an understanding of your values, beliefs, and aspirations through reflection and practice, often but not necessarily aligned to your studies, will lead you to develop your professional purpose. This in turn leads to the construction of a career identity, which can be re-constructed over time. It is interesting that some research suggests that different age cohorts have different values (Table 3.1). Figure 3.1 shows the various generational cohorts and this is important to understand as current workplaces will often have four different age cohorts working together, potentially even five; Table 3.1

shows the four common age groups working together and their dominant work values.
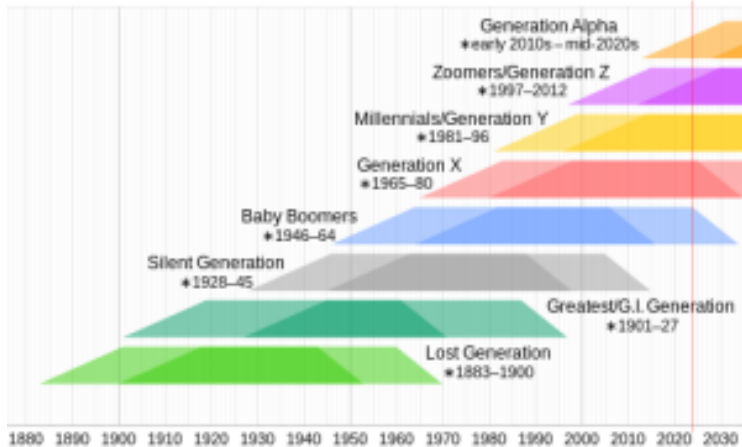

Figure 3.1 'Generation timeline' Cmglee, 2023. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Table 3.1 Dominant work values in today's workforce (adapted from Valantine, 2021)

Cohort	Age in 2019	Dominant work values
Baby Boomers	55-73	Success, achievement, ambition, loyalty to career
Gen X	39-54	Work/life balance, team-orientated, dislike of rules, loyalty to realtionships
Millenials	23-38	Confident, career focused, financial success, self-reliant, work flexibility, upward mobility, feedback
Gen Z	7-22	High aspirations, social responsibility, interesting and meaningful work, autonomy

Career Identity

Career identity can be described as a way in which individuals consciously link their own interests, motivation and competencies with acceptable career roles. Career identity has been reported to be an important indicator for both general well-being and career development and satisfaction (Praskova et al., 2015; Stringer and Kerpelman, 2010). Career identity develops through active career preparation activities such as

planning, exploration, decision-making and work experience. Individuals need to make sense of their experiences, become aware of their likes and dislikes and commit to career choices. This active reflection leads to the construction and re-construction of an individual's career identity and clarity of career path.

Research has shown that career identity is the foundation of an individual's perception of one's employability, and it is linked to better reasoning about future career opportunities, less career self-doubt, and future occupational attainment (Praskova et al., 2015). Therefore, if you are a current student or a recent graduate, spending some time reflecting on your career purpose and identity is time well spent so complete Exercise 3.1 now.

Exercise 3.1

Set aside some time to reflect about your values, ask yourself:

- What are you passionate about?

- What wouldn't you give up for a job or career?
- Imagine yourself in 20 year's time – what makes you happy? What are you doing if everything works out perfectly?

Then, take the Claremont Purpose Scale quiz to see how well your current activities meet your purpose.

Clarify your values by:

- Writing down your most important priorities.
- Discussing with your family and friends – this can help you clarify what's important.

Developing your career identity

There is evidence that university students who commit to career-related exploration during their studies are best able to adopt career self-management behaviours that enhance their employability after graduation (Artiss, 2019; Bates, 2019). Strauss, Griffen and Parker (2012) found that the more an individual holds a clear view of their future self at work, the more this will motivate proactive behaviour. Therefore, V&HEIs need to provide students with time to identify a view of their future work self, time to test out the identity, and to re-evaluate and re-

test it. This means that V&HEI should not leave graduate employability interventions towards the end of students' study time, but introduce these concepts from first year (Mullen et al., 2019).

Figure 3.2 'A career identity learning cycle' © Michelle Gander, 2023. CC BY-NC 4.0.

Artiss (2019) showed that provision of early career interventions promoted a sense of clarity about career intentions which in turn led to better satisfaction with work after graduation. This points to the need for students to have time to work through a number of iterations to identify and test the formation of their career identity. Using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, which is defined as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of

experience' (p. 41), Gander's (2023) career identity learning cycle (Fig 2.1) allows for individuals to learn through four different modes involving action/reflection and experience/abstraction: experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. The more time that students are provided with to go through this cycle multiple times, the stronger career identity that will be created.

Exploring Careers

If then, we need to go through cycles as highlighted in Fig. 2.1 to explore, test and reflect on what is important for us in our careers, how can we start this process? You've already started to explore your values in Exercise 2.1 so you should have some idea of what is important, and what you wouldn't give up. Career values have been found to be a critical aspect of an individual's motivations and takes centre stage in multiple career theories (Table 3.2) such as Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA, Dawis, 2001), Career Anchors (Schein, 1996), the Protean Career (Hall, 1976), and the Boundaryless Career (Arthur, 1994).

Table 3.2 Key career values in various contemporary career theories

TWA core values	Career anchors	Protean career	Boundaryless career
Achievement	Technical competence	Professional commitment	Skills utilisation
Comfort	Lifestyle	Work-life balance	Work-life balance
Status	Managerial competence	Personal development	Career development
Altruism	Service/dedication to a cause	Meaningful work	Meaningful work
Safety	Security/ independence		
Autonomy	Autonomy/ independence		
	Pure challenge	Learning/ growth	Skill development

Table 3.2 shows that although there is some difference in the values between the different career theories, many are similar and cut across all career theories mentioned. We can therefore infer that these values are critical to career satisfaction and if our values do not align with our careers, dis-satisfaction occurs which can lead to stress, burnout and depression which has been evidenced in multiple occupations including nurses and other health professionals, medics, teachers, blue collar and white collar workers (Tennant, 2001). As early Gen Zs (born 1997–2012) start to hit the workplace, research has shown

that this cohort prioritise meaningful work (Schroth, 2019). It has been reported that a growing number of young people are taking into account the climate commitments of the companies they work for. A recent KPMG survey showed that 20% of recent graduates and office staff had turned down job offers due to a company's environment, social and governance (ESG) factors, the percentage was higher for those aged 18-24 (McCalla-Leacy, 2023). This is one factor that is pushing companies to commit to embed such values into their organisational culture as part of their **triple bottom line**. For example, some large and well-known companies are committing to becoming net zero, such as Unilever, Salesforce, L'Oréal, Microsoft and Nike. Deloitte (2022) also suggest that there will be a new classification of worker. Where the industrial revolution gave rise to blue collar workers, and professionlisation to white collar workers, green collar workers will be about how decarbonisation influences their work and skills. To understand what a values-based, or meaningful career might look like for you, do Exercise 3.2 now.

Exercise 3.2

Set aside some time to reflect about what meaningful work means for you – work that is satisfying, meets your values and potentially contributes to solving a problem or problems you are passionate about.

To help you, you can go to www.80000hours.org. This website has been created using the results of 10 year's worth of research to help you figure out how you can use your career for good. You have 80,000 hours in your career – use those hours to do good!

Researching your career

One of main predictors of career success are the relatively broad and stable Big 5 personality traits: extraversion (also often spelled extroversion), agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism (Heslin, Keating and Minbashian, 2018). Personality plays an important role in career success because organisational life allows for stable traits to manifest in people's behaviour at work. This leads to the ability for personality traits to be accurately assessed and

aligned to varying careers. You may already have a strong indication of the career you want to pursue, in which case you can skip this section, or do the career test below just for interest. However, if like many students you do not really know the career you want to pursue, then the first place to start thinking about your career is to take a personality-based career assessment; go to Exercise 3.3 now and take the test.

Exercise 3.3

Many people need help in establishing what sort of careers are out there and what they have interest in and the personality for.

If you need help in exploring your fit with different careers, you could take the free online career assessment by Truity. Look for career test under the personality tests banner.

Other tests are available, for free and for a fee. You may also have access to career assessments via your local V&HEI Careers Service.

Once you have some idea of a career or careers you

want to find more about, then you can start researching these. You can do this easily online and by using your networks. For example, I took the test and, surprise, surprise one of the careers that best matched my personality was college professor! I then went online and Googled 'how to become a college professor' and got 614,000,000 results. The top one was from a major online recruiter (Seek.com), which provided a list of tasks this job undertakes. There were many more sites that I could have explored.

If I was now convinced that I wanted to follow this path, I could then start to use my real-world networks to see if I could find a college professor to talk to. The idea of [six degrees of separation](#) often holds true, so even if you do not know a college professor personally, then someone not too many steps away from you in your social network will – try to find this link. Once you have a contact, do not be afraid to reach out, most people will be generous with their time and talk to you. It would be best to go to that meeting with a few questions, so that you can prompt the person to answer the questions you really want answers to. If we stick with the college professor example, you could potentially ask questions such as: what does a typical day consist of? How much teaching will I do compared to how much research? Is

it easy to get promoted? What is it like to work in a university? And so on.

Career development opportunities

There are various ways to enhance your employability whilst you are studying. Many students already have part-time work, and this can be an excellent way of gaining several work-related skills, even if it's not work that you will want to continue when you graduate. For example, if you are a barista, you are gaining skills in customer service, time management, and staying calm under pressure – all soft skills (we will discuss these further in Chapter 7) that translate into any other type of work. Of course, ideally you could gain work experience in the career you think you want or work adjacent to that career. If you are studying to be an accountant, you can get work as a junior bookkeeper, if you are studying a creative arts course you could work as a theatre officer and so on. If getting paid part-time work in an area that you're interested in finding out more about is difficult, you could undertake some voluntary work. A caveat here, I know that for many students being able to do voluntary work is a luxury, and if you need paid employment then this should always take precedence, however, if you find time for voluntary work, and it is certainly relatively easy as many institutions will gratefully take on volunteers

especially in the charitable sectors, this will prove an advantage when you come to apply for your graduate job.

Within your course, especially at university, you will have the option of undertaking a work-integrated learning (WIL) experience. Many courses now have integral WIL components as core, but, even if one is not core, there should be a unit of study available to you that you can take as an elective. WIL has been shown to improve a student's **self-efficacy** and Martin and Rees (2019) showed that undertaking a WIL experience added value to students generally by, improving their self-efficacy, having an enjoyable experience, reaffirming their employment pathway, and providing a point of difference on their CVs.

In Summary

This chapter has explored how V&HEI have started to move beyond a training focussed approach to employability as a process approach and started to embed career activities within curriculum to help students find their professional purpose and career identity. We learnt that spending some time thinking about your professional purpose, your personality, and your career identity gives you a solid foundation to go and explore actual jobs to understand the requirements needed to be

successful. It is now time to move on to some practical activities you can do to enhance your employability.

Exercise 3.4

Think about the following questions and prompts:

- Reflecting on the outcome of the above exercises, do you now have a picture of your underlying values, aspirations and nascent career identity?
- Can you now start to explore some specific job roles to gain a better understanding of the requirements?
- Can you now develop a set of goals related to the above and a plan on how to meet them?

Key Takeaways

- Find your professional purpose by reflecting on your values and what motivates you.
- Explore how your personality aligns with different careers to ensure the maximum likelihood of career success.
- Use social media and real-world networks to find our more about a career you're interested in.
- Use part-time and voluntary work to gain work experience.
- Undertake a work-integrated learning / placement activity whilst you're studying.

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4

PERSONAL BRANDING

> **Until you've lost your reputation, you'll never realise the true value of good branding**
>
> Stacey Kehoe, Founder and Director of Communications, Brandlective Communications

Learning Objectives

On completion of this chapter you should be able to:

- Understand that personal branding is a process and a product and consists of values, drivers, reputation, behaviours, skills and image.
- Develop strategies for increasing your social capital.
- Appraise why personal branding can have positive outcomes in increasing prestige, visibility, monetary gains, self-awareness, and sensemaking.
- Reflect on your desired professional image and your perceived professional image for congruence or discrepancy.
- Translate the theoretical knowledge provided into a set of strategies for improving your personal brand.

Introduction

Personal branding has become an integral part of the career management debate. There are many reasons for this, not least, the ready access to social media. However, a fundamental driver has been the shift in careers. As we've seen in previous chapters, evidence suggests that fewer people are employed in organisations as the gig economy gains traction, and large corporations downsize as technology progresses and firms require fewer workers. Additionally, there are no 'jobs for life', as was the norm

until the middle of the twentieth century. It is suggested that young people today will have 18 different jobs and six different careers in their lifetime (The Foundation for Young Australians, 2020). A consequence of the above is that the responsibility for managing careers has moved from organisations to individuals. Even for staff that do continue to work for organisations, there are still multiple career transitions, either internally through restructures, or externally as you move on for various reasons.

Figure 4.1 'Personal brand' Peggy Marco, 2015. Used freely from Pixabay.

So, What is a Personal Brand?

Think about when you meet someone for the first time. We take less than a second (390 milliseconds to be precise) to form an impression of someone's personality based on their voice and other attributes (Bar *et al.* 2006; Thomson, 2014). Peters, in a 1997 *FastCompany* article said:

We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You.

I think that might be taking it at least one step too far, but with the gig economy and multiple career transitions leading to work decontextualization, people need to construct their professional work identities and a strong coherent personal brand may help people do this. Managing your personal brand is arguably more important now than ever before, indeed, the Personal Branding Group say that personal branding is not an option.

Personal branding can be thought of as both a product and a process. The scholarly literature on personal

branding is in its infancy but Gorbatov et al. (2018) offer the following definition of a personal branding product:

Personal branding is a set of characteristics of an individual (attributes, values, beliefs, etc.) rendered into the differentiated narrative and imagery with the intent of establishing a competitive advantage in the minds of the target audience.

Holloway (2013) notes that a personal brand consists of values, drivers, reputation, behaviour, skills and image and that everything we do affects our personal brand, including:

- The way we talk, walk and dress.
- Our education and class.
- The way we negotiate and meet our obligations.
- Our customer service and presentation skills.
- How we follow through on our promises.

The first two of these points are related to how we 'fit in' to the environment. Every organisation and often

every department within an organisation, has their own culture. Acquiring the correct social and cultural capital is critical for our career success. If you do not sign up to the organisation's expectations, the embedded culture acts as a gatekeeper, keeping out those who challenge the status quo and only letting those that fit through that gate and onto better roles. This can be seen in practice through the dearth of minority staff in senior management roles in most organisations – women, people of colour, differently abled, and LGBTIQ+ (Gander, 2022).

Gorbatov et al. (2018) also suggest that personal branding is a process undertaken to create the final product:

Personal branding is a strategic process of creating, positioning, and maintaining a positive impression of oneself, based in a unique combination of individual characteristics, which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery.

The question arises, why should I care about

developing a personal brand, what are the outcomes for me?

Watch a short clip of our industry expert, Sean Tierney, talking about personal branding.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/building-your-career-guide-for-students/?p=23#oembed-1

There are both intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes for you as an individual. For example, extrinsic outcomes include furthering your professional career, increasing social capital, visibility, prestige, differentiation and monetary gain. Intrinsic benefits, arguably more important for the long-term, include sensemaking, self-awareness, career motivation, self-realisation, credibility, influence, and self-promotion skills (Gorbatov et al., 2018). Interestingly, there are positive outcomes for organisations too, including increased retention and productivity as employees who are credible and authentic

have increased work satisfaction and higher task engagement (Roberts, 2005).

Personal brand as a product

People in a work situation will unconsciously form opinions about you. These opinions will be either positive, negative, or neutral. Your personal brand is intricately linked to your reputation and is made up of your biography, experience, skills, behaviours, appearance, and your name (James 2009).
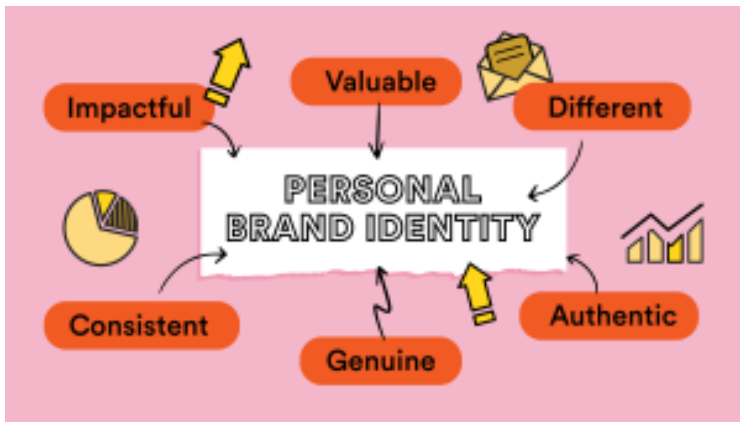

Figure 4.2 'Key traits for personal brand identity' © Michelle Gander, 2023. CC BY-NC 4.0.

The literature points to several key factors to having

a good personal brand (Montoya and Vandehey, 2003; Chan, 2018)

- You are different.
- You are better.
- You are authentic.
- You are genuine.
- You are consistent.
- You create a positive impact.
- You live your brand.

The idea of managing our personal brand is the process of taking all of the above and packaging these attributes into an identity that gives us that added *je ne sais quoi* above our competitors (for projects, jobs, promotions, etc.) – our desired professional self. Our personal brand then is the perception that comes to mind whenever people think of us – the perceived professional self. To start to define and therefore manage your personal brand, you need to understand what your current personal brand is.**je ne sais quoi**

Watch our industry expert, Sean Tierney, discuss the need for your personal brand pitch and authenticity.

> *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:* *https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/building-your-career-guide-for-students/?p=23#oembed-2*

Creating your Personal Brand

Personal branding comprises two key elements as first outlined by Roberts (2005): your desired professional image and your perceived professional image – how you as an individual want to be perceived and how in reality your personal brand is perceived (see Fig. 4.3). As Gandini (2016) noted you need to clearly understand what you intend to project to your target audience and then, that audience's reaction to it.

Figure 4.3 'Your perceived versus your desired professional image' © Michelle Gander, 2023.

To start the process of personal branding, you need to reflect on your current brand. See Exercise 4.1 to get started on this process. This exercise is encouraging you to undertake reflective practice. Simply put, it involves you thinking about what you do, to understand how other people see you. The difference in this way of reflecting is that compared to how we normally think, reflective practice requires a more conscious effort to develop an insight. Reflective practice is learning through and from your own experiences, moving towards the gaining of new insights. As this often involves examining assumptions about everyday practice it should be a valuable tool to use to reflect on our personal brands (see Fig. 4.3).
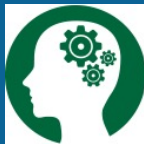
Exercise 4.1

Ask yourself the following questions in your work or educational context and be as honest as you can be!

- What do people think of me?
- If I had to choose three words to describe myself at work, what would they be?
- What's my reputation?
- What do people say or think about you when you're not in the room?
- Are you consistent?
- Do you always meet your promises?

The first step in this process is to gather feedback from others. This can be difficult but is critical in terms of seeing if there is congruence between your desired and your perceived self-image. There are many ways to do this. If you are currently a student then you could ask a variety of different people such as your lecturers, acquaintances, or work colleagues, if you have them. Try not to ask your close friends because they will probably not be able to be objective in their answers. If you do already work in an organisation then perhaps your human resource department has a 360° feedback tool. This is where you answer a set of questions about you

and your behaviours at work, and then you identify several colleagues to do the same, normally one is your manager and if you lead a team, one will be a team member. The trick here is to be brave and choose people who are not *automatically* going to give you 'excellent' in each area.

Re/Constructing your Personal Brand

James (2009) suggests starting to develop your personal brand by writing a statement of purpose. This statement guides you on how to manage your brand and acts as a filter for decisions that you make that deliver on your brand. For example, as a Dean (People & Resources) at a university, my purpose statement is:

To ensure a successful College, I will work as a conduit between the senior management of the University and staff in the College, to ensure organisational success through a culture of inclusion and support.

The second step is to determine your beliefs and unique take on the world in relation to your purpose, so again, mine would be:

I believe the world would be a better place if organisations supported and developed their staff to allow them to attain their work-related needs and ambitions.

The third step is to reflect on your principles so:

I will only work for organisations that truly value their staff.

Personal brands take time to develop. We can put the attributes into place, but it develops at its own pace; it is a long-term strategy. Brands grow organically, the best personal brands develop as a result of strong communication, a sense of purpose, and the person behind the brand backing up the brand's promise again and again. Brands demand consistency and clarity, a strong brand can withstand some shocks to the system but too much inconsistency or 'failure' leads to a rapid decline in brand status. Now that we have our brand strategy how do we go about developing it, or re-developing it, what are the different tactics we can use? If we re-visit the list of key factors outlined above, how can we ensure that we are different, better, authentic,

genuine, consistent, and have a positive impact? Gander (2014) notes that there are seven activities to construct your positive personal brand.

Work hard: I'm afraid there is no getting away from the first one! You must work hard. I don't mean long hours here, I mean when you're at work, you're at work so to speak. You need to get noticed and you need to know what skills to develop to get where you want to be. Nothing says more about your brand than achieving results. As those in the sports world know particularly well, results come from consistent work over years, not one amazing training session.

Do work no-one else wants to (sometimes): There are lots of opportunities to take on a bit extra work here and there from project managing to committee servicing, to being involved with recruitment. However, related to this is also knowing when to say 'no'. Understanding that some additional tasks can give you experience and new skills and that helping other people in the organisation is good, being overwhelmed with work to the point that you stop achieving results is obviously detrimental. Strike that balance.

Learn one new skill every few years: Choose one new

skill that will benefit your ambitions and make a commitment to become an expert in it. If it's a technology-related skill all the better as most people hate new tech! Can you become the expert in data analytics, or productivity tools? How about change management?

Sharpen your narrative: When people ask you 'what have you been up to lately?' (this happens a lot before meetings begin), Clark (2014) says we should not waste the opportunity to promote ourselves. How many of us have said 'oh, not much, the usual'? However, when developing and managing your personal brand take the opportunity to tell people something – you've been on a training course, you've written your latest blog post etc., or how your latest project is progressing. Self-promotion can be a bit nauseating if it's really blatant but if someone asks then take the opportunity, you never know: it might lead to some more interesting discussions and collaborations.

Network: You should not think of networks in a purely transactional way – the best networks are reciprocal. When you meet new people, seek them out on LinkedIn and other social media platforms, and share ideas. Grant (2013) wrote about 'dormant ties', those people you used to know but haven't been in touch with for a good while.

In the time that you haven't talked to them they will have made new connections and networks and if you rekindle the link they will share these with you; you can then return the favour.

Use social media: Social media is now integral in personal branding, and a good social media profile can enhance your brand, especially in a job-seeking phase. As a Gen Xer, I didn't grow up with social media but I was an early adopter of many of the different platforms. However, I acknowledge that the way I use social media is inherently different to Millennials and Gen Zers. I have quite a transactional relationship with social media – I use it professionally (LinkedIn), or socially (Instagram, although barely). Research has shown that Gen Zers tend to build their brands by using Instagram, perhaps as a result of the influencer impact (Vițelar, 2019). However, for a profession-based personal brand, individuals do need to go past Instagram, and everyone should have a LinkedIn account. Research has shown that for top executives, a well-planned personal brand strategy creates value for them and their organisations by gaining customers, awareness, and loyalty (Karaduman, 2013).

Social media offers the ability to manage many more peripheral connections than can be managed face-to-face

and certainly helps if you work across states or countries; social media also help you to share and promote your work to a wide audience. Needless to say, a professional work persona can be and should be created and managed online so that if someone Googles you, your professional identity is the first that is returned. To note, you must keep your profiles updated because 1) it is easier to do this regularly then when you decide you want to apply for a new job and you've forgotten everything you've done, 2) you never know who may stumble across your profile, especially recruiters, and 3) if you apply for a job, the recruitment committee will definitely look at your LinkedIn profile.

Personal image: Always a hard one this, but as they say *clothes maketh the (wo)man* (who first wrote this is debatable but makes for an interesting time spent down the Google rabbit hole!). If career success is what you're after, you are going to have to conform to the embedded and culturally acceptable clothing style of your organisation. Some leeway can work, you can establish that you always wear red lipstick, big jewellery, crazy socks etc. Some people famously have their work 'uniform' – think about Apple's late Steve Jobs and his jeans, trainers and black polo-necks. If you work in a more visual industry such as marketing or architecture,

more personality in your work clothes is the norm. The rule in general is, look around you, and then decide, are you going to conform to the unspoken uniform, or are you forging your own path?

In Summary

You might not agree with the premise of taking concepts from marketing *products* and applying them to marketing *yourself* but arguably there is benefit in doing the activities above to establish your personal brand and/or improve your reputation and visibility. Ensuring that your brand is congruent with your values is key for a successful career and it has been shown that it increases your visibility, income, self-awareness and sense of self. Personal brand work must always be a work in progress and requires you to manage, for example, your social media presence and your networks to ensure continued congruence with who you are and what people think you are.

Exercise 4.2

Reflect on the questions / prompts below:

- Think about your answers for Exercise 3.1 and reflect on what these mean for you right now.
- Think about some 'easy wins' for managing your personal brand. For example, can you create a LinkedIn profile, can you do some form of 360° feedback?
- Consider if you have time to develop a new skill so you can add it to your CV through activities at your college/university.

Key Takeaways

- Personal branding is critical for internal and external career outcomes.
- Personal branding is a process and a product.
- You need to actively review and manage your personal brand.

- Find your purpose, beliefs and principles.
- Manage social media to ensure a professional image.

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5

APPLYING FOR A JOB

> We need to accept that we won't always make the right decisions, that we'll screw up royally sometimes – understanding that failure is not the opposite of success, it's part of success
>
> Ariana Huffington, Founder of Huffington Post

Learning Objectives

On completion of this chapter you should be able to:

- Understand job seeking and develop a strategy.
- Create your LinkedIn profile.
- Develop your CV.
- Understand the requirement for professional cover letters and responses to person requirements.
- Reflect on the rules of the interview process and how to apply them in practice.

Introduction

You're just graduating, and you need to secure a job. You've decided that you want a new job. You want a promotion. You're in transition and you have to apply for a new job. You're bored and need a new job to ensure you grow and develop. Whatever the motivations, and there are many, the reality is the same: applying for jobs is a job in itself. It takes time and effort and should not be done any other way but well. Some industries are happy with a CV[1] only, for example if you work in the IT sector you look for a job on maybe SEEK.com, upload your CV and hit the Apply button. Then you're done until the recruiter calls you. For other jobs, including higher education and the public sector, but also many others, the application process requires multiple documents

including: a CV, a cover letter, and a separate document on how you meet each of the key requirements outlined in the position description.

I have been on more recruitment panels than I can remember and there are two types of people that stand out to me. The first is that some people obviously just send in a generic CV and letter, they clearly have not read the instructions and not tailored their application. The second is the people who have done all of the above. Why is this important? Some roles get hundreds of applications so please do not give the recruiter any reason to not read your application. If you have not followed the instructions for a job advert that results in 110 applications, what do you think will immediately happen? That's right – in the bin you go! So, you definitely want to be the second type of person. Of course, this doesn't mean you'll get shortlisted for an interview – you may not meet, or other people may meet more closely, the key requirements. But you want to at least be in with a shot.

Finding a Job

From the work you did in previous chapters, you should now have a good understanding of your values and motivations and hopefully an interest in a particular

career or job. Let's put all of that together and start applying for jobs. The first thing to think about is job adverts. You might be using one of the large advertisers such as SEEK.com, or a specific website for your industry. If you're trying to break into a new industry, then finding the place where organisations go to advertise is worthwhile, rather than just relying on generic sites, that way you won't miss out. First, read the job advert closely. Does it really interest you? If you need a job, then this will be the over-riding consideration, but if you are moving jobs, think clearly about if this is a company and a job you could spend time at for at least two years. You don't want to spend all that time applying for a role that you end up not really wanting. The application takes too much time and effort for that, let alone the interview process.

A caveat, most recruiters try to represent their jobs and companies truthfully, if a little glossily. After all, they are presenting themselves and putting their best foot forward to tempt you to consider applying to work for them. Read some of this information with a grain of salt, there may well be a terrible culture, a culture of overwork and so on, so some searching on the web might reveal more of what it is really like. There are recruiters out there of course, that will blatantly lie in their ads and there's not much you can do about this. If it sounds too

good to be true, it probably is. Again, some research on the organisation, some LinkedIn 'stalking', and just believing your 'gut' is the best you can do here.

If you think the role is for you, find out more information. Most adverts will have a link to the organisation's website, or the recruitment agency working on behalf of the organisation. Download the position description if there is one, and read it carefully; it will outline what the role will be doing, the context you'll be working in and provide the key requirements of the role. If you're still interested, read the list of person requirements. You need to meet most of these. There's a rule I'm sure you've heard, men apply for jobs when they meet 60% of the requirements, but women only apply if they meet 100% of them. This has been quoted extensively but isn't quite what it seems. Research by Mohr (2014) found that both men and women do not apply for jobs at about the same rate (41% and 46%, respectively) if they don't meet the stated requirements. Not because they don't think they can do the job, because they think they won't make the cut off anyway and didn't want to waste their time. Women also were more conscious about following the stated hiring rules, whereas men did not report this as a major indicator of why they would not apply for a role. This tells us then,

that women need to realise that it is sometimes worth applying for a role, even if they do not meet the stated requisites, because the hiring process is somewhat subjective.

Exercise 5.1

Create a job search strategy by:

- Going onto some recruiter websites and starting to review job ads. Some good websites include Seek, Indeed, Hays, Randstad, Adecco. You can refine your search by location, salary, key words and so on.

- If you want to get into graduate trainee schemes (GTS) in certain organisations, go onto their websites and review all of the information. You should do this the year before you want to apply so you know the cut off dates for applications. Organisations that run GTS include the public sector, the big 4 consulting companies – KPMG, EY, Deloitte and PwC, the big banks, resource companies and so on.

- Find a couple of roles that you want to find out more about and start to review the company. Go onto their

> website, their LinkedIn page if they have one, look for
> news items etc.

Let's start thinking about getting our materials ready so
that once you find a job, you're good to go.

LinkedIn

An important activity around managing your personal
brand is having an up-to-date and professional LinkedIn
profile (as discussed in Chapter 4). LinkedIn can also be
used to job hunt, and you can set your profile to 'actively
looking'. One of the good things here is that you can set a
privacy setting so that only those registered as recruiters
can see this flag, so your employer does not see that you
are job hunting. Setting up your profile is easy, and
LinkedIn guides you through this. One of the most
important things is to get a professional looking photo,
so do not use one that is outside of the work context.
A professional looking headshot is what you need that
takes up most of the space. You should also ensure that
it is a recent photo – the number of people I have seen
with 10-year old photos – it is not helpful if going to meet
a recruiter for instance, and they can't recognise you! You

can also add a background image that speaks to your story.

You can then write your 'About' section. This is the first thing that recruiters and people looking to connect with you will read, so spend some time thinking through the key factors you want to highlight. This is your career story, and it can be presented in various ways, none are wrong if it speaks to who you are. Have a look at other people's profiles to get some ideas and write a few drafts. You can then also list your relevant skills. You can also edit your URL, so it is more user-friendly; I altered mine for instance to MichelleGanderPhD, rather than one with several numbers and letters.

To elevate your LinkedIn profile, you need to start growing your network. If you are a recent graduate, look for your lecturers and ask to connect. Connect with your colleagues and ex-colleagues. Many people still do not like to be asked for connections outside of their wider network. I still turn down requests to connect if the person has nothing to do with my industry, or if they are just recruiters. I curate my connections around the higher education field.

You can also share content. However, it is better to

not just share but to comment on people's posts, and to engage with debates around your industry. You can also write longer articles and publish them on LinkedIn, which will provide an opportunity to show leadership in an area you're passionate about and engage more people.

The next thing is to then ensure that your profile matches your CV. I sometimes add a bit to the job title if it is very specific and other people might not understand it, but apart from that, be entirely accurate in your profile. You can add qualifications and certifications, projects, and ask for recommendations.

Curriculum Vitae

Writing a CV for the first time can be a daunting prospect. However, a full CV is necessary, and it should be short, accurate, provide key industry and job highlights, and be formatted so it is clear and easy to read. A well-presented CV will make the recruitment panels job easier, in that understanding your skills and experience will be easy. Whatever you do, do not make it hard for someone to figure out where you work, what you do, and what level of responsibility you have. If writing is not your strong point, there are some free applications that can help improve your writing. A very good one is Grammarly, there is a free version with basic benefits,

where you can cut and paste text to check for grammatical and more complex structuring mistakes; you can also upgrade to the full version for a relatively small monthly fee.

A CV is also a living document. At the start of your career, you want to be able to add a line to it every three months or so. Even for people in more senior roles, new professional development and achievements should be added regularly. Word has a CV builder, which can make setting out your information easy but be warned it does not necessarily provide information in the clearest way for the reader, dependent on which template you choose. There are also CV templates available from online resources. I should say that most recruiters suggest not using these templates as they do not necessarily translate well when you upload them to the specific HR software that companies use for recruitment. A Word document manually formatted will have better results; you can also pdf this if required (this also keeps the formatting as intended).

Structure
A quick note here, I am giving generic information that may not work exactly for some jobs. You need to understand your own industry and build your CV

accordingly. For example, I work in higher education and an academic member of staff's CV will look very different from most CVs. It will include all of the sections I detail below, but probably in a different order and will have many other sections such as grants, teaching experience, publications and so on. If you have not seen many CVs, you can often find peoples' online, so it's worth having a Google.

Your CV does not need to say CV at the top – it is obvious what it is. You should start with your name, including any post nominals you want to add in such as chartered accountant or Fellow, and basic contact details. In some industries include your citizenship and/or permanent residency details, police clearance, and/or working with children clearance.

Next, add in a short summary of your skills and experience. This is a key section to tailor to each job you are applying for as you need to add some key words important to the role. If you have professional qualifications include them here so they stand out, for example Scrum Master or PRINCE2 Practitioner, etc. Always write in the first person on your CV because it is yours. Talking about yourself in the third person is just weird!

Next comes the most important part, your employment. Start with your current, or most previous role, and work backwards. Include the dates you worked there, your exact job title, and organisation. If you have had time out of the workplace, do not skip this as it will seem suspicious, just add dates and provide a short description such as maternity leave or made redundant. If your job title is really specific to your organisation, you can adapt it so it's clearer for an external audience. I know someone who once had the job title of 'Major Projects Manager' which sounds a bit like he built bridges, so when he applied for another job, he changed it to IT Project Manager, which is a much clearer title for what he actually did. The next step is to write a short description, that is one sentence, about the company. Then describe your role within it highlighting your areas of accountability and including items such as the size of the team you directly and indirectly managed, and any budget responsibilities. One of the most important aspects that many people do not include is a list of key achievements in the role. This allows recruiters to understand your contribution and value add that you have offered to your current employer. I cannot stress enough how important it is to make these sections short and to the point. Too much information, putting in every

little detail, actually obscures the important aspects. At the beginning of your career, you may like to include more details as your CV will be shorter and sometimes it is important to say exactly what you have been working on, however, as you progress these statements should become pithier and high-level, to keep your CV as short as possible.

The next section should include any other activities that you undertake that contribute to skills and experience in your work. For example, I list the non-executive director positions I hold, which shows that I have work with boards leading those organisations and the skills and experience that comes from that. You might include for example, if you volunteer somewhere, what you do and the skills you have gained. I also list other activities that I do for the 'community' such as my journal editorships and reviews, you could list student roles you held.

Next comes your formal qualifications, what they are, when you got them and where from.

The next section should highlight any professional qualifications and awards such professional body

memberships, or a Dean's medal for your thesis, or other micro-credentials.

The penultimate section should be for anything else you really want to include. I should note here that many CVs include hobbies. It can perhaps make you look like a well-rounded human, so include if you want to, but most people don't really care. Finally, list your referees.

Formatting

I have seen some terrible CVs in my time. I feel both annoyed and sorry for the individual. You need to think about layout and formatting from the perspective of the person reading your CV, nowadays probably on screen. Therefore, as I mentioned above, clarity is queen. Firstly, do not include a photo. I never understand why people do this, your appearance has nothing to do with your capabilities for the job and in fact can result in discrimination. I'm sure most people have heard of the research that has been shown time and time again that the exact same CVs, dependent on whether it has a woman's or man's name attached, get selected for interview differently (clue, it's the men getting through; Cortina et al., 2021). People of colour also get called to interviews less often (Quillian et al., 2017).

For ease of reading on screen, I suggest the following: use Times New Roman, 11 point minimum; make sure it is all in the same font size; use bulleted lists where appropriate to break up long sections of text, for example your narrative summary could be followed by a bulleted list of your achievements; add some white space, but not too much; 2 cm minimum margins; bold in moderation, for example for your job title and employer; section headings to ensure clarity, for example Professional Development, Professional Experience; some colour but not too much; make sure your use of capitalisation is consistent; ensure that you don't leave orphans on a page – that means, if you have one sentence of a new section at the bottom of the page it is better to put another couple of returns in to start that section on the next page.

This is of course, all quite subjective. What I like may not be what you like but it is clarity and ease of reading that we're going for. Ultimately, your CV should be a shining beacon for your skills and experience, to show the hiring committee that you're worth talking to further.

Finally, remember to spell check. Print it out and check it, for some reason typos and errors are more visible in print than on screen. Ask someone to review it for you for errors, they can also feedback on ease of reading.

Really finally, remember to spell check (yes, again)!

Cover Letter

Think of a cover letter as a personalised introduction. It works to introduce you through your CV and your document on how you match the person requirements. There are many examples of cover letters online, just do a search so you can review a few. However, there is also a lot of bad advice out there and what I write below is gleaned from actual experience on many hiring panels over the years.

The cover letter should be addressed to whoever is hiring, no Dear Sirs/Madams here please. On the job specification there is often the title of the person who will be your supervisor so that you can search their website and find out the name of that person (if you're lucky their name will be on the document). Once you know their name, address your letter to them formally, that is 'Dear Ms Jones'; a good idea is to include a nod to the fact that most people are hired by a committee so 'Dear Ms Jones and the hiring committee'. Now, if you can't figure out whether that person goes by certain pronouns, Dear Ms/Mr is a good solution. If they hold a title ensure you use it, Dear Associate Professor Gander, for example. For the

first few sentences of the cover letter, I'm going to be controversial here, because if you Google how to write a cover letter, good examples are held up to be quirky and individual, telling a story about you. I'm here to tell you everyone I've worked with does not give this the time of day. Your cover letter needs to be professional, well-written, concise and informative. It is perfectly adequate to start your letter with the 'I'm applying for the role of Bookkeeper at ABC Ltd because I feel like this is the next logical step in my career and I am fascinated about how you at ABC make X widgets'. Unimaginative? Maybe. A good starter? Definitely.

You then go on to draw attention to your key skills that you bring to bear in this role. (I have a separate document with my key skills listed so I can cut and paste the relevant ones on my cover letters.) You should then discuss one major achievement that you think would transfer to this organisation. End on a positive note of what you can bring to them, what you can learn from them, and how pleased you will be to discuss your application further. Keep your cover letter to 1-page. Don't forget you must customise your cover letter for each role, it is noticeable if it is too generic.

Key Requirements

This is arguably the most important part of the application, if you have to do one. The position description will give the key requirements for the role, and perhaps some desirable requirements. You need to cut and paste each of these into a document and address each one individually. The first requirement is probably going to be related to the qualifications you will need to do the job, an easy one for starters. They will then go on and will be varied from one role to another and from one employer to another. Applications that stand the best chance of getting selected for interview will give a concrete example under each requirement. For instance, if there is a requirement for good verbal and written communication skills, an answer that is written in some way like the following is needed:

In my current role, it is critical that I have excellent verbal and written communication skills. For example, I am required to write project plans that are presented to the senior leadership team for approval. I also run stakeholder engagement sessions on projects I work on to ensure good communication with the business throughout the life of the project. I have been praised for my effective communication style.

This example shows how well I can communicate effectively to different audiences in both ways – written and verbal. I have also shown that this is not just my evaluation by including a feedback sentence.

Keep your document to the minimum number of pages you can but on the understanding that you do need to respond to all of the requirements. Some instructions will ask for not more than two or three pages, if they do ask you must stick to that length as I have heard of some recruiters dismissing applications because of documents being over-length (again, probably when receiving hundreds). I always include page numbers and I add my name in the header of the document. This is only helpful if applications are printed out, but some people still do this (me, sometimes!).

A word on formatting again, Times New Roman, 11-point, 2 cm margins – no tiny font and minimal margins to gain more space. Again, the same holds for the cover letter and CV – spell check, and spell check again.

Interview

You've done a great job and you've got an interview. How exciting! How terrifying! Well, yes, normally both

of those things but being prepared will take some of the terror out of the process. An inside tip, no one on an interview panel is trying to trip you up, we're there to find the best person for the job, we know people get nervous, and we try and put you to ease. Well, most panels do this, but of course there will be some outliers. If someone is terrible to you at interview think what they might be like to work for and perhaps say a polite 'no thanks.' The old adage stands I believe, if someone is not on their best behaviour through this process on either side of the table, it's just an indication of workplace and individual values and culture. I was once interviewed just after lunch, and one of the guys fell asleep. If people would not respect my time enough to, at a minimum, you know, stay awake, then I had already made the decision not to work there.

So, you've got the date and time. First thing, make sure you know where to go, who to ask for, and have a phone number handy in case something goes wrong. Next, choose your outfit. I know this shouldn't matter but it does. The formality will be organisation dependent. In my line of work, I always wear a suit. In my husband's line of work, he will interview in smart trousers and a shirt but no tie – we live in Australia, but back in the UK this would be too informal, and a suit and tie would be required. You need to understand the rules, however

employers do know, and especially for more junior roles, that not everyone can afford a designer suit. It is important to look polished and smart rather than expensively attired. There is privilege at work here of course, being able to buy a smart outfit isn't in everyone's ability. There are charities that can help supply interview clothes such as [Dress for Success](#).

At interview, greet everyone and look them in the eye. You can shake hands or not, it doesn't matter. Make yourself comfortable. The panel will ask a number of questions and you need to answer each thoughtfully. Most panels will require the STAR method of answering – situation, task, action, result. For each question you need to:

Situation: outline an exact situation you were in or task you needed to complete either in your current or previous role. Be specific and not general.

Task: outline what goal were you actually trying to accomplish.

Action: outline the exact actions you took to meet the task. Make sure the panel understands what your role was and what you did. It's very easy to use 'we' in these

situations, and to be fair much work is team-based so it seems natural. Your team is not trying to get this job though, so the panel needs to understand exactly what you contributed.

Result: summarise what the result of your action was. Was it successful or not? What did you learn, what might you do differently?

For example:

Situation: staff told me that the curriculum approval process in the faculty is unclear.

Task: I wanted to review and improve the business process of faculty curriculum approval.

Action: I spoke to a number of staff including the Associate Dean Education, Heads of Department, and lecturers to gather feedback on what they thought the process was in the faculty. I also spoke to staff in the

central registry to ensure what the process should include and some good examples in other faculties.

Result: I created and documented a new process, including process flow chart and presented it to the faculty's executive team. This was approved and was implemented immediately including a communication plan to ensure all staff understood the new process.

Often because you are nervous, your mind will go a bit blank around the examples you will want to give so preparation is a good strategy to overcome this. Review the person specification again. Obviously, when you wrote your application you gave some examples of how you met their key requirements and at interview you can use these examples again, or if you can, you can use some new ones. You can note these down on a notepad if you think you will forget, the panel will generally not mind this.

At the end of the interview, you will possibly be asked for any questions you have. I always think this a bit unfair as by that point your brain is overloaded. However, there

are a few questions I've heard over the years that are quite good, including:

- Is there anything that you feel I haven't answered in full?
- What's the first major priority for this role?
- What would success in the first three months look like?

If they don't offer it automatically, then do ask about the next steps in the process and when they will let you know the outcomes.

Don't overdo this part though. Most panels have asked everything they need from you and also want to stop to get coffee, go to the bathroom and so on!

Thank the panel and depart. You can send a follow up email to thank the panel for their time, but in my experience, this doesn't hold any weight. In organisations that take HR seriously, how you perform at interview is really the overriding factor on if you will be offered the role or not. To be honest, I think – except for an outlier here and there – most people who reach interview can do the job. The interview then is about persuading the

panel you're the best person for the job, and some of this is in the examples you give to their questions, but an important part of it is that you'll make a good colleague, so build rapport with the panel, if you can.

To note, phone and video interviews are starting to become common especially with jobs that have many applications and recruitment committees need to whittle down who they are actually going to interview in person. If you are asked to do a video interview, don't panic, you will be guided through the process. It might be a set of questions that you will need to answer, or it might be as simple as saying what your motivation is for the job. The key is to prepare as you would for a face to face interview, and follow the instructions they provide.

Assessment Centres

Sometimes organisations will use assessment centres as part of their recruitment process, especially for graduate trainee schemes. This format was originally used by government to recruit defence personnel, although eventually, other sectors picked this process up and it became particularly popular from the 1950s through to the 1970s; they are still used today, although it is much changed. Assessment centres have proved to be an effective way to find the best candidates for a job,

compared with interviews alone, as they simulate real-world situations and allow employers to assess your:

- performance,
- skills (e.g., teamwork, communication, problem-solving),
- behaviours,
- interaction with others,
- preparation levels.

Generally, assessment centres run over half a day and there are at least three or four different sessions to allow for evaluation. Activities could include group discussions (which lets you see how the individuals interact and who takes a natural lead), a role play, a problem-solving task, an ability or psychological test, and a structured interview. Most professional assessors operate a standard rating scale against each candidate for each exercise, and then the team of assessors consolidates their findings at the end of the session.

Summary

As you may gather from this chapter, applying for a job is not quick, or it shouldn't be. There is a lot of work in preparing all the documentation but once you have

got everything once, that is the most work you'll ever have to do. Each job I have applied for I have kept all the documentation for a time because many jobs have very similar person requirements, therefore you can cut and paste into new applications with small tweaks here and there. If you give yourself enough time to apply well, then your chances of getting an interview increase, that way you do not necessarily have to apply for lots of jobs to be successful.
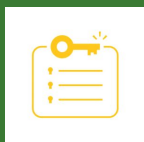
Key Takeaways

- Establishing a job search strategy is critical.
- Finding out as much as you can about the organisation you're applying to before you apply and definitely before the interview is important.
- Ensure you have an up-to-date LinkedIn profile – recruiters do use this.
- Ensure you have a clear and concise professional CV.
- Ensure you have prepared examples to give at

interview based around the person specification.

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[1] I use the term CV throughout, but this also means resume.

6

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

> At the end of the day, you are the only one that is limiting your ability to dream, or to actually execute on your dreams. Don't let yourself get in the way of that
>
> Falon Fatemi, Founders Node 10

Learning Objectives

On completion of this chapter you should be able to:

- Understand the importance of professional development planning.
- Reflect on the relationship between the individual's and the organisation's responsibility for professional development.
- Develop a 5-year professional development plan using the interlinked cycle of career planning setting your vision, goal/s, objectives and activities.

Introduction

Organisations globally agree that one of the biggest challenges they face is building and sustaining a strong talent pipeline and that strategically aligned talent management is key to the success of organisations (Stahl et al. 2012). Talent management is a process that aims not only to recruit high calibre individuals, but to retain them through ongoing development, to improve individual effectiveness and therefore the success of the organisation. Effective talent management increases staff well-being and job satisfaction and decreases intention to leave the organisation (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Organisations recognise that talent management is important, as in today's knowledge-based economy the

replacement of staff is costly and time-consuming (Horwitz et al., 2003). Most organisations then, invest in the ongoing professional development of their staff. Professional development can be defined as a lifelong process, for individuals in their professional context, to fulfill their potential.

Watch our industry expert, Nicole Deacon, talk about why professional development is important.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/building-your-career-guide-for-students/?p=85#oembed-1

Of course, you may still be a student and are thinking this chapter is not for me – you'd be wrong! It is never too early to start thinking about your development needs. This chapter will talk about professional development generally but remember all of the information below can be adapted to whatever situation you find yourself in, just

change the word from 'organisation' to 'university', for example.

Watch our industry expert, Nicole Deacon, talk about why you should think about professional development throughout your whole career, including as a student.

> *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/building-your-career-guide-for-students/?p=85#oembed-2*

To fulfil your potential, you should not hand over responsibility for your development to your V&HEI or organisation, you need to start proactively planning. Professional development planning in an organisation is normally part of an annual performance appraisal. Professional development plans really took off in the late 1990s as organisations recognised the importance of not only reviewing and setting goals and outcomes but recognising the importance of lifelong learning in meeting their strategic agendas. PDPs often mean

different things to different people, however, a review of the literature (Beausaert et al., 2011) shows that there is a common set of characteristics of PDPs as they:

- Must be completed by the individual in consultation with their supervisor (or career coach).
- Give a summary of the previous year's training and development, and which competencies the staff member wants to work on for the coming year.
- Act as a basis of discussion with your supervisor (or career coach).
- Serve as a decision-making tool.

As you can see these points above are easily translatable to a student perspective.

Professional Development Plans

The aim of a PDP is, fundamentally, to allow you to undertake a gap analysis – what does the organisation need you to be able to do, what do you need to be able to do, and do you have the competencies to meet those needs. This is why it is normally done in conjunction with a supervisor or career coach. In mature

organisations, conversations may also include what your career plans are and what training and development you need to undertake to meet those needs, which may be outside of your current organisation. These conversations should then lead to learning: formal courses, informal learning from peers, in-house training courses, and so on. Previous research has indicated that supervisor support is critical in terms of support for professional development (Kalidass and Bahron, 2015), especially for staff wanting to undertake external training or qualifications or being seen as someone who is worth investing time in to help manage their career. However, if the latter is not forthcoming, other people can help you think through your PDP – a career coach, a mentor, a colleague, or a friend. Sometimes, these people can have a clearer focus on you, more so than the organisation, especially if you are wanting to develop yourself to gain a promotion or to move jobs.

Take action

The outcome of a PDP conversation is action. As responsibility for individual careers has transferred from the organisation to the individual (Clarke, 2013), staff increasingly need to pro-actively manage their careers and capitalise on the opportunities that exist within organisations. Reciprocally, organisations must offer

these opportunities, including as supervisor support, to reap the benefits. Career management is characterised by an implicit understanding of the organisation/individual reciprocal interchange (Gander et al., 2019). Figure 6.1 outlines the different activities or characteristics that the organisation and the individual need to show in this relationship. For the organisation for example, a supportive culture for talent management and professional development is needed. This will lead to supervisors being trained and supportive in PDP discussions, and proactively supporting an individual to access what they need, internally or externally. Alongside this, the individual needs to take advantage of this environment, showing self-efficacy in managing their own career, being self-aware and reflective, and undertaking activities that will help in their development.

Figure 6.1 'The organisation/individual reciprocal interchange for career management' © Michelle Gander, 2023. CC BY-NC 4.0

Five-year plans

You can utilise the annual review that is aimed at developing you to be more effective for the organisation, to prepare for a more proactive career conversation. If you work for an organisation that does not really undertake this sort of process, you can still utilise the tools I will discuss below to start thinking about a PDP. What you really need to spend time on is creating your 5-year plan (5YP). I know what you're thinking, a 5YP – I can hardly plan for the next few months! I know this, because this is what I first thought when someone asked

if I had a 5YP, and many others have reacted this way when I have given talks on this subject. However, I know you have a goal or two, otherwise you probably wouldn't have picked this book up, we just need to analyse these goals and develop smart strategies around them in the development of your 5YP.

Figure 6.2 'The interlinked cycle of career planning' © Michelle Gander, 2023. CC BY-NC 4.0
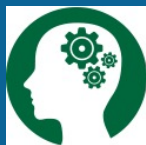
Vision

Figure 6.2 shows that there is a cycle for your planning process. You start by working out what your vision is – really what your passion is. It's not enough to have a goal

of, for example 'I want to be a CEO by 35'. You could do that, but if you were CEO of a company that went completely against your own values (as we discussed in Chapter 3), you'd have achieved your goal but probably be completely miserable. Passion or values alignment is a critical aspect of how successful you will feel. Extrinsic success such as job titles and remuneration can be drivers for performance, but the most long-lived and satisfying motivation comes from intrinsic drivers such as vision and mission alignment. Why do you do what you do? What is important to you? For example, I knew early on in my career that I enjoyed working in higher education – I really found my passion when I accidentally ended up at The Open University. This passion means that I work extremely hard because the work is benefiting individuals and society, and that is important to me. What's your passion? It might not be at organisational level but at department level. For example, in a human resources department, what area of this particularly fascinates you? Diversity and inclusion? Talent management? What about the finance area, what part of that work are you passionate about – business finance, corporate finance, risk, etc.? Once you understand your passion more, you can work down the hierarchy to think about your goal.

If you're still in education or at the start of your career,

think about what you did/have enjoyed doing at school, university, or in voluntary or casual positions previously. What made the activities enjoyable – the subject itself, the mission, the interaction with people? Try and figure out what you like, and what you want from the next five years. Do not worry though, you do not have to figure out now what you're going to do for the next 40 years! Career changes and transitions are part of everyone's experience in their careers now. I was made redundant at 28 and I took the opportunity to go back to university to get my postgraduate degree. This negative life event ultimately led me to finding my current career, which I love. We can all reinvent ourselves if we want to or need to. Adapting to change and being resilient is a key competency in the 21st Century world of work, and as change intensifies, our need to be flexible and agile also intensifies (more on that in the next chapter). Long gone are the days of one job, one career, one company.

Exercise 6.1 Write your vision

Set aside some time and ask yourself:

- When were you most satisfied in a job or subject?
- What do you think led to this being a time when you were satisfied? For example, did you believe in the mission of the organisation, or was it inherently interesting?
- Have you ever been in the wrong job? If so, identify what made you feel like this.
- What is your story to date? You could write this down and then identify key themes throughout.

Then, when you have thought through your past and present, think about your future:

- What have you always dreamed of achieving?
- What matters to you most?
- What do you want to contribute?
- What do you want to be known for?

Goal

You really should only have one major goal at a time. It is difficult to manage more than one, although it may well be achievable, especially if they can be aligned. Do you want to be a social media content creator? A librarian? A policy officer? Do you want your first permanent role

after graduation? Your goal will be your dream job (once you've got it, you'll continue to dream, and will need a new plan). Be pragmatic (if you've just graduated it's unlikely you'll be a CEO in five years, although you might!), but be ambitious – don't let anyone tell you that you cannot reach your goal.

Exercise 6.2 Set your goal

Once you have your vision, you can work on goal setting:

- List some of the roles that you think you'd really like.
- Now, find out where these types of roles are advertised, and have a look at the Position Descriptions. Don't hurry this aspect.
- If you can, use your networks to find someone to talk to who is currently in that role. If you do this, have specific questions, people will generally give you time, but do not want to waste time.
- Analyse all of your results and set the goal that feels right taking into account your vision and your

> understanding of the role.
> - Finalise your A goal.

Objectives

Once you've identified your A goal that you want to achieve in five years, you need to then think of some objectives to meet this goal. These objectives are like stepping-stones that can get you to your destination and can be one to three years in length. For example, if you want to be a librarian, do you hold the right qualification? If not, you'll (probably) need to achieve that first. If you need to get experience working with a team but you cannot do this in your current role, can you apply for voluntary work that requires teamwork, and maybe work your way up to a leadership role? Can you find opportunities in your student association such as standing for different roles, or becoming a course representative? There are lots of opportunities to gain different experiences at university. Set a timeline for these objectives to be met.

Exercise 6.3 Set your objectives

From your job search strategy find some position descriptions:

- Look through the ones that meet your goal and find the key areas that you will have to have experience in.
- Think about these key areas and how you could become knowledgeable and experienced in them.
- Think through how you can meet your A goal, how many steps away on a career ladder are you?
- Do you need an interim goal? This is your medium-term objective. Once you have identified your objective, analyse what it will take to achieve this. You should realistically be much closer to this so there will be fewer gaps in your CV.
- You should now have at least one objective if not more. Map out a timeline of when you want these objective/s to be met.

Feedback

This is when being self-aware and reflective is key. You

can do this in several ways. You can just think about this, and this works if you're naturally reflective, but it can be difficult. In fact, it's more likely that you will be overly negative and not honest about your areas of strengths rather than not seeing areas for growth. You can ask a few trusted acquaintances to provide you with feedback on your performance and areas they think you can improve. The key here is to be humble. No one is perfect, and if you ask for feedback you need to take it in the way it is offered. It is not criticism, it is a reflection of how others see you, which can be challenging but is also very useful in being able to step outside of your own head. You could also undertake a 360° feedback assessment if your organisation supports these. You could request a career coach or talk to a mentor.

Exercise 6.4 Set your activities

Get those Position Descriptions out again!

- Look through the ones that meet your goal or your objective and find the key attributes and requirements

needed.

- Now analyse how your current CV matches your goal and your objective. There will definitely be gaps for the goal and probably at least a few for the objective.
- What do you need to do to reach your objective and goal? Have you got the right set of qualifications or certifications?
- If you're at the start of your career, figure out which organisations you might like to work for and see if you can intern, or speak to people who work there.
- Are there any barriers for you not being able to start tackling your objectives? List them and find out how you can overcome them.

Your five year plan

If you have undertaken all the exercises above, you now have a rich data set in which to create your plan. My suggestion is that you have a written plan using whatever system works best for you such as Excel, Word, or Trello, anything that you will use and keep updated. This is not a one-off exercise; your PDP is a live document and needs updating as you progress on undertaking your activities.

If you're towards the start of your career, aim to have something ticked off and added to your resume every three months or so. This becomes more difficult the more senior you get, but lifelong learning and a growth mindset should ensure that we are constantly open to and engaged in learning.

In summary

Hopefully, the simple sets of activities in this chapter, and ideas for how to take PDPs seriously, will help you think through and analyse what you want, create your own values and objectives, how you might get there, and ultimately create a solid 5YP to help you keep track of activities that may lead to you achieving your goals.

Key Takeaways

- Have a career planning discussion with a trusted friend or mentor.
- Ensure you have a five-year professional development plan (5YP).

- Work our you vision, goal/s, objectives and activities.

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7

COMPETENCIES FOR EMPLOYABILITY SUCCESS

This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments—everyone can change and grow through application and experience

Professor Carol Dweck, American psychologist, Stanford University

Learning Objectives

On completion of this chapter you should be able to:

- Understand what soft skills are and why they are important.
- Develop your understanding of some key competencies.
- Practice the development skills listed under each competency.

Introduction

Policymakers all agree, the future lies in lifelong learning. Yet, the challenge is how to make this a reality and ensure that institutions, resources, motivation and time are available to enable people to acquire the right skills at the right time. Lifelong learning and skills development tops the priority lists of all labour market policymakers around the world. They are extensively addressed in most recent international initiatives, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD) Jobs Strategy and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Future of Work Declaration. Increased focus is placed on the combination of working and learning, especially for young workers entering the labour market for the first time. Another key element is to better identify the types of skills that people should anticipate learning. Policy initiatives are focusing on better connecting business to educators, promoting the development of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) skills, and enhancing 'soft skills' which encompass human interaction capabilities and the ability to learn. This chapter is about these soft or transferable skills.

Soft Skills

Soft skills is a contested term, with other terms including traits, behavioural competencies, interpersonal skills or qualities, non-technical or non-domain skills, and personal characteristics or attributes (Al Asefer and Zainal Abidin, 2021). In this chapter, I will use both soft skills and competencies to refer to the same thing – the skills that are behavioural and non-technical or discipline specific. Soft skills such as empathy, curiosity, self-control, influencing, self-confidence, communication, etc. are critical in all aspects of life, including employment, and employers are now seeking graduates

who have both academic qualifications and high levels of behavioural competencies (Succi and Canovi, 2020). Al Asefer and Zainal Abidin (2021) in their review of employer perspectives on graduates' skills noted that universities must help develop these skills during a student's program of study.

 Watch our industry expert, Sean Tierney, talk about the importance of soft skills.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/building-your-career-guide-for-students/?p=93#oembed-1

Universities prioritise discipline specific knowledge, and of course, historically, this has been why students have studied at university going back to the founding of the first true university in Bologna in 1088. For centuries universities were more of an association or a guild for learning the professions, such as law and theology. As universities developed, discipline specific research and

study was the norm, integrating sciences and arts for comprehensive general learning and cultural knowledge. Since the massification of higher education in the 1980s, graduate employability has come to the fore and now universities are teaching soft skills implicitly and explicitly in their curriculum. However, soft skills are often overlooked in this model, and are notoriously hard to teach due to the need for an individual's deep introspection and continuous practice to develop these skills over time.

Competencies for Success

As part of my research, I have developed a 'Competencies for Employability Success Framework' (Fig. 7.1). This framework is based on a variety of sources including the scholarly literature, the World Economic Forum's Future Jobs Report, and feedback from Flinders University's industry partners. These competencies are not the tasks associated with particular jobs, they identify behaviours, that is how an individual does the job. The competencies are common across all roles, though some will be more important in some jobs than others. This competency framework has been designed to help individuals develop their soft skills for employability success across the life course.

Figure 7.1 'Competencies for Employability Success Framework' © Michelle Gander, 2023. CC BY-NC 4.0

This framework provides a guide to the most valued behaviours but has not defined the level of these behaviours due to the diverse nature of employment. The most important aspect of this framework is that it gives individuals an ability to take control of their own development. Once an individual has reflected on their

current expertise in each competency, individuals can then put in place activities to enhance areas that require development.

The framework will help individuals to:

- Self-assess against each competency through a reflective approach (as discussed in Chapter 3).
- Seek structured feedback from others on each of the competencies.
- Create a development plan for action (as discussed n Chapter 6).
- Identify and develop weaker behaviours to improve performance.
- Identify ways to build upon and maximise existing strengths.

This next section will unpack some of the competencies that you currently may not be as aware of: a growth mindset, creativity and ideation, flexibility and agility, resilience and self-presentation.

Strategic Skills
Growth mindset
How do you achieve more in life? In study? In work?

Professor Carol Dweck's research showed that individuals who believe they can develop their talents, tend to achieve more than those who feel that their abilities are innate and fixed (Dweck, 2006). She coined the term 'growth mindset' and established a new field in organisational psychology. However, the scholarly research on the concept of growth mindset is more nuanced with some studies showing that a growth mindset is a positive predictor of academic success (Limeri et al., 2020) and that short growth mindset interventions can improve student performance (Yeager et al., 2019), whilst other research has shown that there is no correlation between growth mindset and academic achievement (Li and Bates, 2019).

However, those individuals with a growth mindset seem to see opportunities rather than obstacles, challenges to be overcome instead of unbreakable barriers. The quote at the start of this chapter points to research that says that everyone can change and grow through life, although of course not everyone can be good at everything. The opposite of a growth mindset is a fixed mindset. An individual with a fixed mindset believes that people inherit qualities such as intelligence, talents and personal characteristics and that they are stable over the life course.

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Growth mindset has been described in greater detail by Knell and O'Mara (2017, p. 10):

Your mindset is the characteristic way you face challenges and adversity: as opportunities to learn and grow, even from failure (a 'growth' or 'incremental' mindset), or by retreating to safety, and being wary of failure (a 'fixed' mindset). Mindsets manifest themselves in how you talk to yourself ('I can't do that, because ...' or 'I'd like to try that, because ...'), and in your behaviour (going forward to the challenge, with a determination to learn, or avoiding the challenge because of fears about the stigma of failure).

The impact of a growth versus fixed mindset can be seen from the following examples in Table 7.1.

Situation	Fixed mindset	Growth mindset
You receive a lower mark on an assignment than you were expecting	Gutted, I am so terrible at this subject, I may as well not try any harder as I'll never improve	Bummer. What do I need to do to improve for the next assignment? I need to find out where I went wrong and what I can do differently
You get an unexpectedly high mark on an assignment	Yay! I am so clever	Yay! I worked really hard on this one, I'm glad it paid off
You start a new project or task	I hope this is going to be easy	Ooh, I hope this is interesting and I learn some new stuff

Table 7.1. Example growth versus fixed mindset situational responses

Interestingly, this fixed and growth mindset concept has been applied to organisations as well as to individuals. Some organisations believe that talent is innate which leads to a 'culture of genius' in which talent is worshipped and employees either have it or don't. The consequences of that approach is that there is an emphasis on promoting individuals who are naturally gifted, leading to a competitive culture, selfish behavours, reluctance to share knowledge and information, an emphasis on personal achievement compared with

collective growth. Organisations that foster a growth mindset or a 'culture of development' perform better than those with a fixed-mindset culture; they are better able to cope with challenges, change and adversity (Dweck et al., 2014).

How to hack your mindset

As highlighted in the Introductory section, there are activities that you can undertake to improve your mindset. It should be noted that people aren't wholly one or the other, there is a continuum between fixed and growth mindsets.

Reflect on your own mindset. Consider how you currently approach challenges; use Table 7.1 as a prompt.

Review others' successes. Who do you look up to? How did they achieve their success?

Seek feedback. As we've discussed in other chapters, it is always good to get feedback from others, as self-reflection is very difficult, and it helps you test your own inferences.

Learn something new. Get comfortable being uncomfortable.

<u>Set goals</u>. Showing self-efficacy, including goal setting has been shown to be a good determinant of success.

Creativity and Ideation

Innovation is a process with several steps: empathising, defining, ideating, developing, and testing. Ideation is a creative process that generates and develops something new and valuable, in business terms often a new or improved product or service. Ideation provides direction for innovation, as in a competitive marketplace the ability to innovate has immense value as it enables companies to differentiate their products and services. Creativity is a skill-based activity that can be learnt over time and uses both technical and soft skills.

You will already be familiar with some ideation processes, even though you may not know this is what you are doing! For example, do you brainstorm or map ideas for your assignments? If so, you are undertaking an ideation process. Creative ideation refers to the process of generating new and original ideas in response to often undefined problems – how can we differentiate our service from our competitors, or how can we take this product, change it, and gain more market share. In 1962

Newell et al. (Minai et al., 2021) proposed a set of unified criteria for an idea to be considered creative:

- It must be both novel and useful.
- It should require rejection of previously accepted ideas.
- It should be the product of intense motivation and persistence.
- It should emerge through clarifying a problem that was previously vague.

To understand what innovation looks like in practice, we now look at two case studies.

 Case Study #1 Innovation at NZHIA

Hemp is one of the fastest growing plants and has been used for its fibre for 50,000 years. Historically is has been used for paper, rope, textiles, clothing, food, insulation, and animal feed (and other consumable products as well!)

In 2021, the New Zealand Hemp Industries Association (NZHIA), a non-profit organisation that supports the growth and

development of all aspects of New Zealand's hemp industry, partnered with Webtools Agritech, a leading provider of agriculture consulting services.

Together, they set out to discover new uses for hemp, develop new hemp products, and identify innovative ways to produce, process, and manufacture hemp. They did this through launching a nationwide challenge that brought together researchers, industry leaders, entrepreneurs, and other parties to contribute and collaborate on ideas. The challenge received 391 submissions, and from those 391, 31 were turned into transformational innovations, ranging from nappies to high-end dog treats, to eco-friendly homes.

 Case Study #2 – Innovation at Lululemon and Strava

Lululemon is a yoga-inspired, technical athletic apparel company. Strava is a digital platform that records all types of exercise/activity and provides a community of like-minded individuals. In 2019, Lululemon sought to create a digital transformational experience that benefited people's physical and mental wellbeing, so they partnered with Strava to inspire a global community as well as reach new customers. They built a

Lululemon community on the platform, inspiring hundreds of thousands of athletes through global challenges. Lululemon reported a 10-fold return on investment and 220,000 participants in the first year.

How to hack your creativity

<u>Increase your good mood</u>. Creativity seems to be high when a particular region in your brain, the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), is switched on. What switches on the ACC? A good mood. However, the opposite is also true, if you're in a bad mood our brain returns to a logical, tried and tested option. So, to increase your creativity try regular exercise, a good night's sleep and mindfulness practice.

<u>Allow time for slow-time</u>. With the constant ability to distract our brains, what we really need to enhance creativity is to allow our mind to wander in what I like to term slow-time. Deadlines can be stressors, and people can be stressors; to hack our creativity we need to build time into our day that allows for solitude and daydreaming.

<u>Set limits</u>. Studies have shown that some limitations

can enhance creativity – sometimes a blank page is too much so having a framework to work within can help creative thinking.

Operating skills
Flexibility and agility

As the workplace continues to evolve, organisations have come to realise that agility and flexibility are the keys to their future success. Workforce agility is a business strategy prioritising employees' flexibility, responsiveness, and adaptability. These two terms are often used interchangeably, so what do we mean by them? Let's use the Merriam-Webster's online dictionary definitions:

- Flexible: capable of bending or being bent; easily changed; willing to change or to try different things.
- Agile: able to move quickly and easily; quick, smart, and clever.

So, when an organisation's workforce is flexible in the business environment, it is considered agile. The need to be adaptive has many drivers, such as from changes in the market, technological advancements, or unexpected

events (the pandemic being a good example). Being agile has many advantages such as:

- Increased flexibility to better cope with business conditions and market demands.
- Responsiveness to unexpected events.
- Boosting of innovation and creativity (there it is again, creativity and innovation).
- Improvements in collaboration and teamwork.
- Increased employee satisfaction.
- Improvements to the company's ability to meet diverse customer needs and markets.

We've discussed the benefits of agility for organisations, how about for individuals in the workplace? Individuals can benefit from adopting an agile mindset by thinking about the following items.

<u>Your Reaction</u>. None of us work in isolation, and our workplaces are complex and constantly changing. How you react to these external inputs will affect how you respond; this is an especially important issue when things go wrong. We can react emotionally, in fact we can't help it, but we can respond more logically.

Your Response. A flexible individual knows when it is time to let go of the past and make changes. As the author Stephen King said 'Kill your darlings, kill your darlings, even when it breaks your egocentric little scribbler's heart, kill your darlings'. In the workplace this means you don't hold on to your old ideas, plans, or strategies if feedback is that they are now not appropriate in the changed environment.

Your Strategy. The above takes a lot of hard work and adjustment, which is why individuals who are flexible and agile are so valuable to their organisations. It is a constant back-and-forth between your current ways of working and responding to the external environment cues to develop new strategies and new ideas.

Individual Skills
Resilience

Resilience, what is it and can we improve it? Resilience is the ability to adapt to difficult situations and individual resilience combines our psychological traits, external factors, and our learned behaviour (Pemberton, 2015). Our ability to bounce back from life's obstacles is, without a doubt, an essential aspect of resilience. For example, when some form of trauma strikes, we all respond in normal ways such as being upset, or angry, or

in pain, etc. but resilience allows us to keep functioning. Resilience is not about putting up with something or figuring it out on your own; in fact, asking for support is part of being resilient (Neenan, 2018).

Resilience has been shown to be a learned trait. Findings from Robertson et al. (2015), indicated that resilience training can improve personal resilience and is a useful means of developing good mental health and subjective wellbeing in employees; resilience training had several wider benefits including enhanced psychosocial functioning and improved work performance.

 Case Study #3 Resilience

A manager working in a high pressure environment had to deal with over 200 emails a day and wanted to learn 'greater email efficiency' in order to reduce the times she felt anxious and overwhelmed by this onslaught ('It's doing my head in', i.e. perceived loss of control). When she thought like this, she avoided her emails which then added to the backlog.

This person showed resilience by reaching out to a coach and asking for help. Help, for example, through devising an email

classification system and brief criteria for choosing each category, as well as increasing the time spent on her emails by taking it from other areas.

These measures restored her self-confidence, her anxiety and avoidance dropped sharply: 'I'm controlling the flow of emails now rather than me believing they're driving me round the bend!' Additionally, future resilience is built in as resilience is a learned behaviour (Adapted from Neenan, 2018).

The benefit of having resilience is that when some setback or challenge occurs – and it will – you have the psychological tools to cope and bounce back. Dependent on the severity of the challenge, you might not bounce back unchanged, but bounce back you will. However, if you lack resilience, and you don't have coping mechanisms you can call on, you become overwhelmed by your emotions. There's one or two things we can guarantee in life and suffering a few horrible events is inevitable, such as the serious illness or death of a loved one. I've led a pretty regular life and I've had several impactful events – the death of my father when I was 15, being made redundant at 28, and losing my mother to dementia, but life, as they, goes on.

How to improve your resilience

Resilience then is the ability to adapt to difficult situations and protect yourself from serious mental health conditions. If you'd like to become more resilient, consider the following tips.

Take care of yourself. Research has shown that people who take care of their physical wellbeing through healthy eating, exercise, good sleep and some form of meditation for example, show positive mental health outcomes (Wickham et al., 2020). It has also been shown that a small network of good social connections and strong relationships is also vital for good mental health (Umberson and Karas, 2010).

Be proactive. Don't put your head in the sand and ignore your problems. Figure out what needs to be done, make a plan, and take action; reach out to your family and friends.

Learn from experience. Think of how you've coped with hardships in the past. Consider the skills and strategies that helped you through difficult times.

Journal. Writing about past experiences helps you identify positive and negative behavioural patterns and

guides your future behaviours, it has been shown to be one way to manage good mental health (Sohal et al., 2022).

Organisational Skills
Self-presentation
Self-presentation in this context, means aspects of your personal brand, which we discussed in Chapter 4, but also other aspects of confidence. For example, are you confident in your interactions with strangers in your current professional situation? Are you confident in introducing yourself? Of presenting formally? Of taking a phone call at work?

Watch our industry expert, Sean Tierney, discuss the need for self-confidence.

> *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/building-your-career-guide-for-students/?p=93#oembed-2*

Self-presentation is any behaviour or action made with the intention to influence how other people see you and/ or your organisation. We generally want to present ourselves as favourably as possible so that the other person has a good perception of us or the organisation we're representing.

In order to achieve this, it often requires that we behave a certain way and match our behaviour to the circumstances which can help us connect to others, develop a sense of belonging, and attune to the needs and feelings of others.

Case Study #4 Self-presentation

Michael is a new manager. At his first team meeting, someone makes a joke that he doesn't quite get. When everyone else laughs, he smiles, even though he's not sure why.

By laughing along with the joke, Michael is trying to fit in and appear 'in the know.' Perhaps more importantly, he avoids feeling (or at least appearing) left out, humourless, or revealing that he didn't get it, which may hurt his confidence and how he interacts with the group in the future.

You will find yourself in many situations where you have to introduce yourself, so knowing what to say and confidently is important. Maybe it's at a job interview, for a presentation, or meeting someone at a networking event. You often have to introduce yourself by email to people you don't know, and the suggestions below apply to this written form as well.

Firstly, you should summarise your professional standing:

Hi, my name is Michelle, and I am an Associate Professor in the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at Flinders University.

Secondly, very briefly explain your experience, which is why you're there:

I have over 20 years of experience researching organisational careers.

Thirdly, try and end by leading into the contest of the meeting:

If you have any questions about graduate employability, please do reach out and we can discuss this further.

The other's perspective

As we noted when we were discussing personal brand, people will have sub-conscious expectations of you dependent on the situation. These expectations may be based on cultural, societal, professional, and organisational norms, such as that business people are expected to look smart. Again, as we noted previously, you can push back against these expectations, but a severe mismatch can lead to cognitive dissonance, where individuals come into contact with something – whether an idea, person, or belief – that causes them to question their own internal beliefs and values. In a work situation this may result in people, at best not listening, or at worst just leaving. To note, this is particularly important if you want to say something difficult or controversial.

*How to improve your self-presentation skills*

In most circumstances you'll find yourselves in, this

list of tips will allow for a confident and considered interaction:

- Know your subject and audience.
- Speak clearly and concisely.
- Use open, friendly language.
- Keep it engaging.
- Make eye contact.
- Be yourself.

In Summary

You might be more focused on developing your technical or discipline skills right now if you are currently a student, but I cannot emphasise enough how critical soft skills are in the workplace. Try and take as many opportunities as you can to develop some of the competencies that you feel are not your natural strengths; as I note above practice really does make perfect.
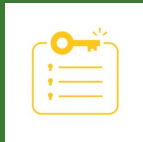
Key Takeaways

Type your key takeaways here.

- Soft skills are as important as your technical/ discipline skills.
- Take time to reflect on the Competencies for Employability Success Framework.
- Develop a plan to improve your weaknesses.
- Soft skills can be improved through practice.

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Flinders University is committed to publishing high-quality open textbooks which meet the needs of students and educators. This book has been peer-reviewed by two academic subject experts from two different institutions. The full-text was openly reviewed by each reviewer.

Reviews were structured around considerations of the intended audience of the book and examined the comprehensiveness, accuracy, and relevance of the content. Reviews were also focused on diversity of perspectives, longevity, clarity, consistency and structure.

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