Graduates, careers and career agency:

What we know and what we need to know

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Introduction

- Competitive transition to employment
- Graduate career experiences
- Careers theories and concepts
- A research agenda
Graduation success

- Achievement recognised
- Shaped by university experiences
- New knowledge, skills and attributes
- Ready for work?
- Valuable transferable experiences? (Gedye, Fender & Chalkley, 2004).
Facing an unknown future
How do graduates
- shape their futures (Barnett, 2012)
- invest in their careers
- make correct career decisions
- maintain control over their career choices
- stand out in the crowd?
It is a competitive transition

- Competitive, fluid times, different markets, new technologies (Castells, 2011)
- Erosion of jobs for life (Arthur, 1994; Baruch, 2002)
- Succession of employers (Tams & Arthur, 2010)

Possibly resulting in very different or fragmented (Holden & Hamblett, 2007) career patterns to previous generations
What are graduate career experiences?

Review what we need to know

Review what we know

From graduates themselves......
Why graduates?

• A particular group of employees
• New knowledge and attributes gained within a different curriculum to that of their predecessors
• Accomplished in knowledge skills and other qualities
• Different expectations of work and supervision
• Not inexperienced
• Create a distinct set of interests around career agency
• Expect transitory and multi-organisational futures
• The ability to manage these futures implied
# Careers theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT WE KNOW</th>
<th>WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past - progression up an organisational hierarchy (Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth &amp; Larsson, 1996, p.52)</td>
<td>Do graduates:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boundaryless careers (Arthur &amp; Rousseau, 1996)</td>
<td>• have a career approach; e.g. a portfolio approach? (Mallon, 1998)</td>
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<td>Protean career theories (Hall, 1976; Hall &amp; Moss, 1998)</td>
<td>• develop a unique career? (Sullivan &amp; Baruch 2009)</td>
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<td>• take charge of their careers? (Hall, 2004)</td>
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<td>• have an agentic role? (Briscoe, Hall, &amp; Frautschy DeMuth, 2006)</td>
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## Career agency concepts

### What we know

- Work-related social engagement, past experiences and future possibilities, investment in their careers (Hall, 2002)
- Free and independent choices (Tams & Arthur, 2010)
- Emphasize employees’ roles in managing careers and mobility (Roper, Ganesh & Inkson, 2010)

### What we need to know

- How do graduates invest in their careers?
- Do they have free and independent choices?
- Do they have a significant role in managing their careers?
Traditional and alternative careers

• Much critique of fluid, deterministic and static nature of linear approaches to careers
• Protean and boundaryless career scrutinised
  • Ideologically - alternative careers concepts mirror wider neoliberal discourses (Roper et al., 2010)
  • That they focus on managerial careers rather than broader careers (Roper et al., 2010)
  • Over terminology issues with boundaryless career theory and
  • Poor empirical support (Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh & Roper, 2012).
Traditional and alternative careers

• This paper does not attempt to resolve such issues, but in developing the argument is mindful of them

• For the purpose of this paper
  • 'traditional careers' refer to linear careers (where organisations are held to be more 'in charge' of the process)
  • 'alternative careers' refer to flexible careers in which individuals are in charge
Ask graduate employees

- About their careers and career agency
- About their transition to employment
### Graduates’ transition to employment

#### What we know
- Align undergraduate and employer expectations (Sturges, Guest, Conway & Mackenzie Davey, 2002)
- Employability aspects of degree influence transition (Brooks & Everett, 2009)
- Career support strategies (Kanye & Crous, 2007)
- Career management strategies important (Sturges et al., 2002)

#### What we need to know
- What do graduates expect?
- How do graduates apply their graduate attributes after employability?
- Are support strategies valid for contemporary graduates?
- How are career management strategies facilitated?
### Graduates’ post-graduation experiences in employment

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<td>Cultural capital to human capital (Grayson, 2004)</td>
<td>Are graduates career capital?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Little disillusionment with education despite gaps (Brooks &amp; Everett, 2009)</td>
<td>What do they need to fill the gaps?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employability interventions added value (McIlveen &amp; Pensiero, 2008)</td>
<td>Do they need to fill the gaps themselves?</td>
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<td>Graduates were not asked about interventions – what do they think?</td>
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</table>
Graduates’ post-graduation experiences in employment

**What we know**

- Problem solving between mentors and protégés assisted transition (Saarnivaara & Sarja, 2007)
- Other inputs are needed for success (Kwok, Adams & Feng, 2012)

**What we need to know**

- What type of projects and problems?
- Who decides on the inputs?
Conclusions - the complex context

Careers in the changing world of work

Old, traditional, linear, hierarchical

New, alternative, contemporary

Boundaryless mindset

Protean orientation

Graduate perspective

Transfer of Knowledge, Skills and Qualities

Context for graduate attributes

Achievement outcome

Success outcome

Boundaryless - individually navigating the changing work environment

Protean - Values driven and self-directed in their career experiences

Graduate careers
Conclusions – a research agenda

- Organisations, economic communities, nation states perspectives (Roper et al., 2010)
- Graduates’ perspectives on careers and transition needed
- Graduates’ preparedness for role(s) in career agency explored
- A nuanced understanding of graduates’ career agency important for stakeholders

Such research could develop and thus opening up a new research agenda


References


THANK YOU – ANY QUESTIONS?