

## **Graduate Employability 2.0**

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## 8. GOING BEYOND ‘GETTING A JOB’

### *Graduates’ narratives and lived experiences of employability and their career development*

The most common definitions of graduate employability emphasise the possession of understandings, skills and attributes necessary to acquire graduate level work, perform adequately at work, and to build a career (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). University key performance indicators for graduate employability tend to focus on the proportion of graduates in full-time employment a few months after course completion (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2018). This chapter takes as its starting point that neither the dominant skills-based definition of graduate employability, nor the established key performance measures, are adequate, and that higher education institutions may be doing themselves and their learners a disservice by continuing to use them. We draw upon Business and Creative Industries graduates’ narratives about their career trajectories up to five years after course completion, exploring individual accounts of the value of professional relationships, and career experiences as they transition beyond university, to tease out a more nuanced conceptualisation of graduate employability. This emergent conceptualisation embraces longer time frames for career launch, and evolving career identities. It confirms the importance of the subjective indicators of success advocated by Jackson and Bridgstock (2018), incorporating graduates’ own aims and goals, and recognising the different ways that they can add value. Finally, it acknowledges that employability is influenced by a wide range of factors beyond the graduate’s skills and knowledge. By sharing graduates’ narratives and lived experiences of their early career trajectories, this chapter starts to suggest how universities can better foster graduates’ capacities to make meaningful and productive contributions through work and life.

#### GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY: DEFINITIONS AND MEASURES

Until fairly recently, higher education was primarily a vehicle for liberal and civic education for a small elite. Graduates were assured of professional employment at the end of their degrees if they sought it, particularly in the public service. However, over the last few decades, higher education has become much more tightly coupled to economic needs. Massification of degree enrolments, increasing economic emphasis on competition, efficiency and productivity, and human capital policy arguments about education driving economic growth (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2004) have changed the relationship between higher education and the labour market. The graduate employability agenda is a response to this evolving relationship that strengthens the vocational mission of higher education (Harvey,

2001. At the same time, for many students, a university degree has become a necessary but insufficient condition for graduate level employment.

The dominant conceptualisations of graduate employability reflect the economic drivers behind the agenda, and the key role that higher education is seen as playing in preparing highly skilled workers for the knowledge economy, thus driving economic progress (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2004). These graduate employability definitions focus on the possession of skills, knowledge and other attributes acquired through university education that enable individuals to secure and maintain employment. However, as some have pointed out (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2018; Tomlinson, 2017), such definitions overlook an important additional range of individual influences on employability, such as social, cultural and psychological capital, and identity. They also discount entirely the impact of “demand side” factors, such as the labour market, society and the economy more broadly (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). It does not matter how skilled a teacher a graduate of primary education may be – if they do not aspire to a career in teaching, if they have caring responsibilities and cannot commit to the designated teaching load, or if there are no graduate level teaching jobs available, they are unlikely to be employed as a teacher.

The key performance indicator and proxy measure for employability used in higher education is full-time graduate employment (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2018). This is gauged using achieved salary and full-time job attainment via an initial national, cross-sectional survey between four- and six-months post-course completion. Jackson and Bridgstock observe that this use of short-term graduate employment, essentially gauging the success of higher education in preparing students for work, is adopted in other developed countries yet criticised on a number of grounds. One is the fact that the strongest influences on full-time graduate employment relate to the local graduate labour market rather than educational factors (Karmel & Carroll, 2016). Another is that some industries, such as the creative arts, favour project-based ways of working, rather than full-time roles. Those graduates with “non-vocational” degrees may take more time to transition to the workforce and therefore may be inaccurately flagged as being less employable. Further, survey measures sometimes include an indicator of “graduate level” employment, yet do not measure the actual value (either level or type) that graduates add through their work.

Commentators on the future world of work point out that self-employment and “portfolio” ways of working will become more common as structural labour market changes continue under the influence of the “gig economy”, digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and cloud computing, and globalisation (Bakhshi et. al., 2017). Graduates can increasingly expect to hold multiple job roles, including on a self-employment basis, and recurrently seek or create work, as well as retrain and upskill (Foundation for Young Australians, 2015). Graduate outcome measures seem to operate at odds with these future ways of working and learning.

However, perhaps the most troubling aspects of current approaches to graduate employability definition and measurement relate to the fact that they overlook graduates’ own aims and goals, and their work and life circumstances. Analyses of student motivations for university study shows that while full-time employment

outcomes are important to some, others are motivated by the opportunity to ‘make a difference’ and fulfilling a purpose within or outside formal work situations. Others want to contribute to an area of knowledge or practice; some want or need to balance work and non-work activity; and a group of students enrol in university simply for the love of learning (Guiffrida et.al., 2013). These motivations change over the lifespan as the graduate’s circumstances change yet, for some, full-time employment may never be a possibility due to caring responsibilities, cultural requirements or disability/health considerations. It is important these diverse motivations and outcomes are recognised when measuring and benchmarking institutional success in what has become a highly performative higher education context.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDENT’S PERSPECTIVE

In this chapter, we join others in choosing to frame employability as encompassing a graduate’s ongoing capacity to live and work productively and meaningfully in an increasingly dynamic and complex society (see also Bridgstock & Tippett, 2019; Fullan, 1993). For us, employability is the capacity to “employ” one’s “abilities” in ways that are personally meaningful and appropriate and add value to the contexts with which the graduate is engaged. That is, graduate employability is the ability to harness one’s skills, knowledge and other attributes in order to add value across a range of different contexts across the life course, including family, community and civic engagement, as well as in work and career. We are interested in the graduate’s own aims and goals, and their life and work circumstances. By choosing this broad and subjective framing, we can explore how graduates are intentionally traversing and constructing life and work after course completion, and how they are making sense of their employability-related experiences.

Literature that explores undergraduates’ perspectives on employability while at university indicates that in the early stages of study, students tend to regard employability as an important broader aim of university education, but one that is not yet personally relevant (Tyman, 2013). Towards the end of the degree and approaching the transition-to-work, students are increasingly likely to focus on how they can strengthen their employability through the acquisition of skills, credentials and experiences. Tomlinson (2008) interviewed final year undergraduates in the United Kingdom and found that they were conscious of intense competition for graduate roles, but continued to place strong importance on their qualifications, believing that their degree classification would be used by employers to differentiate between graduate applicants in a competitive labour market. These graduates also believed that they needed to differentiate themselves from their peers in the job market by acquiring additional credentials and distinctive relevant experiences. These studies suggest that, like higher education institutions, students can think of employability in terms of skills and ‘possessional’ indicators such as credentials.

Holmes (2001) points out that this skills-based or “possessional” approach to employability is of limited usefulness in understanding the complexity of graduate career trajectories, and in preparing students for life and work beyond university. It assumes much of the process is “simply a matter of matching skills required and

skills possessed” (p. 112), when the influences on graduate employability are far broader and more complex than the possession of skills and credentials suggest.

While some studies suggest that undergraduate students’ conceptions of employability tend not to be particularly well-developed, often being about simply being able to get a job or increase their earnings because of their degree experiences (Tymon, 2013), others indicate that students gain an increasingly nuanced sense of what they want to achieve out of their careers over time and through experience. Maxwell and Broadbridge (2017) describe several dimensions of career aspirations among undergraduates, including enjoyment and satisfaction; career progression and opportunities to learn and develop; and opportunities to contribute through work.

A number of theorists have pointed out the advantages of a “processual” approach (Holmes, 2001) to researching employability, and also to employability learning itself (Bridgstock, Grant-Iramu, & McAlpine, 2019; Jackson, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017). By viewing employability as a process of sense-making, discovery, and self-construction (Savickas, 2011), a wide range of internal and external influences including skill development can be explored in context, through a subjective lens. An important central construct in the processual approach to employability is identity (Holmes, 2013; Tomlinson, 2017). Following Ibarra (1999), career identity is constructed over time through experimentation with “provisional selves” that are constructed and progressively refined through experiences and social interactions. This is not always an easy process as individuals learn to reconcile their multiple identities, such as personal, social and work.

Career identity provides both a frame through which students can interpret their capabilities and previous experiences, and a meaningful way to focus future activity. Over time, the student’s career identity starts to act as a cognitive compass (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004), supporting their learning and career choices, and helping them to make sense of learning experiences. Nicholas (2018) led one of very few empirical studies to take an explicitly processual approach to graduate employability, exploring the employability narratives of 32 liberal arts undergraduates. She found evidence for three basic stages of employability narrative/career identity development, embedded into an ongoing process of identity development and revision: Exploring, where the student is becoming more self- and career-aware, and is open to career possibilities; Packaging, where the student assembles identities, capabilities, values and interests, and tries multiple options; and Distinguishing, where the student has a well-developed career identity, and is focused on proactive career building.

Studies of graduates’ transitions from their perspectives also emphasise the central role of identity to the journey, and the sometimes uneven path taken by the graduate in developing a sense of themselves and cohesion within a new identity and community. Holden and Hamblett (2007) interviewed five graduates four times over a period of one year as they transitioned into the world of work. The authors document a need for what they call “learning about self” to a much greater extent while at university, in contrast to the current focus on which skills the student does or does not have; and argue for the power of reflective practice to support identity development. This is particularly important given the demise of the ‘job for life’ and

the increasing pressure on graduates to be able to navigate an often complex myriad of pathways, opportunities and challenges in the labour market.

We are also interested in graduates’ experiences of their transitions to work and career, and their narratives around their experiences. Using a processual and identity-development view to employability, we explore graduates’ perceptions of the value of university learning, and the roles of professional relationships and different career experiences in their initial journey through career and life post-graduation.

#### METHODS

A total of 31 one-hour interviews were conducted with graduates from undergraduate Business and Creative Industries degree programs offered by three Australian universities. The specific major areas of study for Business graduates included accountancy, actuarial studies, finance, advertising, human resource management, and management. Creative Industries majors included film and television, fashion, media and communications, digital and graphic design, acting and drama. Business and Creative Industries disciplines were chosen for career pattern contrast, with Creative Industries graduates being more likely to undertake multiple “portfolio” careers and be self-employed to some extent (Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016) than Business graduates, who are more likely to hold a single full-time job role and work as an employee.

Graduates had completed their degrees between one and five years previously. They were recruited through a combination of recruitment emails using email addresses drawn from institutional alumni databases, advertising on institutional alumni social media pages, and direct emailing eligible alumni contacts of teaching and careers staff known to the research team. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via Skype/Zoom between May and August 2018. Interview questions addressed: career aspirations; career roles; career movements and changes; career building strategies; the roles of people and tools such as social media in career development; and the value of various learning experiences while at university. Demographic and study characteristics of the interviewees are categorised in Table 8.1. At the time of interviewing, 18 graduates were employed in a single full-time role. Two were undertaking roles on a voluntary basis; three were self-employed either through freelance work or a start-up. The remaining eight graduates maintained portfolio career patterns, including a combination of full time, part time, casual, freelance and voluntary work. The most common portfolio career combination was full-time employment plus self-employment (three graduates).

*Table 8.1 Demographic characteristics of the interviewees.*

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Number of interviewees</b>
International enrolment	7
Domestic enrolment	23
Enrolment not stated	1
Female	21
Male	10

Business degree	18
Creative Industries degree	13
Employed full-time only	18
Portfolio career (multiple role types)	8
Volunteering	2
Self-employed only	3
Graduated 1–2 years ago	17
Graduated 2–3 years ago	7
Graduated 3–5 years ago	7

The audio-recorded interview data were transcribed and then coded and analysed using NVivo Version 12. For this study, we used a range of theoretically derived codes drawn from the literature, including career identity development, social career influences, and learning experiences at university.

## FINDINGS

### *Timelines and Trajectories*

The 31 graduate trajectories were analysed for the number and types of job roles that the graduates had undertaken since graduation, the length of time it had taken for them to become “established” in career roles, and to document other career-related activities and decision-making processes that they had undertaken during their first one to five years in the world of work. Particular attention was given to the period of time up to six months post-graduation, at which time the Graduate Outcomes Survey is administered across Australia.

A proportion of Business graduates across the three universities transitioned directly from their degrees into full-time employment, through recruitment via internship experiences or graduate recruitment programs. For the many who did not graduate with a job, the first few months after course completion was typically spent applying for jobs and undertaking career building activities through SEEK job advertisement site, recruitment agencies and LinkedIn, during which some graduates continued part-time or casual roles from university. By the second year after graduation, Business graduates had held an average of two to three “career” roles, with some movement as when graduate programs concluded, other opportunities opened up, and graduates gained a progressively better understanding of what they wanted to do in their careers. A minority held multiple concurrent roles, including self-employment (start-up) alongside paid, contracted employment. At the six-month point after graduation, many but not all had moved into their first “career” role; by the 12-month mark nearly all were established into career paths.

A much lower proportion of Creative Industries graduates moved straight into work after completing their degrees. On average, Creative Industries graduates had held six to seven job roles by the end of year two, often on a self-employed, part-time or casual basis, and which were likely to overlap with one another or be held concurrently in a portfolio career pattern. A proportion of graduates chose to enrol in further study, or to move to other locations to pursue work. Creative Industries

graduates were also likely to have undertaken post-graduation volunteering and internships. At six-months post-graduation, the majority of Creative Industries interviewees were working in at least one creative role, but many needed two or three years to become more established into a career trajectory.

Some Business and Creative Industries graduates undertook overseas travel or went backpacking after graduation, typically for between three and six months. In some instances, the graduate incorporated this overseas experience into their subsequent career identities and trajectories. For others, while the interruption was a valuable life experience, it resulted in some challenges in rebuilding career development momentum once they returned.

### *Identity Development and Career Patterns*

This study found broad support for three career identity categories, but these did not map well onto the *exploring*, *packaging* and *distinguishing* stages reported by Nicholas (2018). Instead, the interviews revealed that many graduates tended to engage in concurrent or overlapping cycles of exploring, packaging and distinguishing activities as they “tried on for size” successive iterations of career identities and roles. In our research, the most adaptive and functional career identities actually involved continuing to explore and being open to career opportunities and ongoing identity renewal, even when the graduate had achieved some career success. The identity categories identified in this research are *focused*; *flexible*; and *forming* identities. Three broad patterns of career trajectory aligned with these three identity categories, showing that the ways graduates were choosing to navigate their careers were tied to their evolving identities. Career behaviour and identity development were also linked with opportunities in industries and career roles of interest, exposure to industry experiences and social influences such as mentoring. The three identities found in the graduates’ career narratives are outlined below.

*Focused.* Graduates in this category articulated a certain and specific career identity and had established specific career goals during their undergraduate studies. These graduates were more likely to be targeted in seeking out mentors, establishing networks and selecting industry experiences, both before graduation and afterwards.

I have known from quite an early age that I wanted to do HR and that remained the focus of my degree throughout. I love my role. I moved into it about 3 months ago. It's fantastic because I'm working on cross-enterprise projects, and I'm surrounded by some experienced HR people. It's definitely lived up to my expectations of what I wanted to do. (U2 Business Graduate 1)

Focused graduates’ career pathways were navigated in different ways depending on industry, roles, specific career goals and contextual factors, and were not necessarily linear; however, these graduates were all highly strategic in working towards a strongly-defined career outcome.



When I've been approached for a position in the past I usually assess it on 1: what it can do for me professionally in terms of building new knowledge, skills, and abilities, but also 2: what I can contribute to the role, and then on top of that, 3: the perception of having that role. I started to critically assess things as to what the benefit is both for them and for me. (U1 Business Graduate 2)

Key challenges for some focused graduates related to implementing career building strategies in support of their goals. Given that focused graduates have specific and certain career aims, suitable opportunities may be quite limited. If the graduate also has a limited repertoire of career building strategies, they can find themselves frustrated and unable to obtain roles.

There was so much pressure, and as we came out of the theatre a lot of them [agents] were leaving. It was very stressful. It's almost as if the agents didn't know how much we were counting on them talking to us. And if someone gets to an agent first you can't interrupt them and be, 'oh by the way, I am so and so'. It didn't work out the way anyone imagined. We were all very disillusioned. (U1 Creative Industries Graduate 8)

Some advantages to embarking on a career with developed and certain goals in mind were observed, particularly around being able to engage in targeted career building activities earlier and more consistently than other graduates. However, focused identity can be a disadvantage, as graduates can "foreclose" (Marcia, 1987) on opportunities and pathways that may be worthwhile for them to pursue.

What I see in a lot of students now is they're really specific and they get tunnel vision, they see themselves in one place and one place only, and they're not willing to be open to new things, when really, there are so many other roles that you might not even know about. So, for example, I had no clue what global mobility was, but I said, 'look, I'm going to take an experience, see whether I like it. It's a six-month contract'. (U2 Business Graduate 5)

*Flexible.* While these graduates were drawn to the idea of a career aligned with their choice of undergraduate degree, their actual career identities were flexible, and evolved in an ongoing way. Career identity development occurred through industry experiences (both undergraduate and after graduation), and from interactions with mentors and other connections established as part of their developing networks.

At the time it seems so big and media is so competitive, and there are so many jobs you don't even know exist. I feel like I probably would have found it comforting to see someone just kind of meander their way through which is what I have done. (U2 Creative Industries Graduate 4)

For flexible identity graduates, their interests and values became cognitive and behavioural "anchors" for career development rather than identification with specific roles or industries. A commitment to pursuing interests and value-congruence permitted them the cognitive and behavioural flexibility to be open to multiple career options.

Honestly, the best thing to do is just put yourself out there, say yes to everything and you never know where you land. I did not see myself in Indonesia – 10 years ago I was a media student convinced that I would become either a journalist or a writer ... but then I realised there were other aspects of my interests that I really wanted to pursue. I will continue with my writing projects, and that's fine. I think my life has been a lot richer for it. (U2 Creative Industries Graduate 2)

Flexible identity graduates discovered career opportunities through the process of career navigation, and began to consolidate their broad career identities as they gained a greater understanding of how they could apply their skills and interests within or across industries.

One advantage of maintaining a flexible career identity is the ability to make the most of happenstance for career development. Planned happenstance career theory (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999) argues that there can be too much planning in career development, and that we also need the ability to turn unplanned events into opportunities for learning and career development. Planned happenstance was a strong theme in the interview responses.

I think that very few people end up where they think they want – where they see themselves in five, 10 years' time. There's this pressure to figure out your life as quickly as possible and then just be professional, but there's very little opportunities for you to grow if you head down the straight path, I think. The most interesting experience has come from all the detours and digressions that I've taken. (U2 Creative Industries Graduate 2)

*Forming.* These graduates were able to articulate broad and emerging career aims, but the aims were less well developed than for either focused or flexible graduates. These graduates needed more time and experience to learn about their career interests and values, and how these and their capabilities might fit with career opportunities. Forming identity graduates might take on volunteering, internships and part-time employment as a way of exploring the "fit" of different industries and roles. For many of the forming identity graduates, identity experiments were also ways to develop skills and confidence required to work towards career goals.

I didn't go into my media/law degree going, 'I know exactly what I want to do'. In fact, it took me ages to figure out what I wanted to do. But I think just having that practical experience – I thought the worst thing that's going to come out of this is I get some experience in this area and decide that I don't really like it and then move on. (U1 Creative Industries 3)

For some graduates, their current forming career identity was the result of discovering that a career experience or pathway did not suit them after all. Identity revision can involve trialling new roles and industries, and also explicit strategies to develop capabilities and new social networks.

I was working as a marketing coordinator. The job description included online marketing and offline marketing which is go out on street and talk to people; so basically like hawking and that wasn't a very pleasant job. I was really low paid ... and no job security. I was in charge of supplier negotiation and whole solution integration. I cannot accept that kind of thing, so I decided to resign ... I was depressed for about two months, really depressed. Then I applied for a job with a tutoring service. I was helping students to get through their marketing exams and assignments ... I hung out with my friend and we came up with several business ideas, one was educational tourism. (U3 Business 1)

*Trajectory Narratives: Individual Cases of Focused, Flexible and Forming Identities*

In this section, brief case studies of graduates whose career identities correspond to each of the three categories are presented to show the different ways that they have engaged with career development post-graduation, how their career identities frame their career behaviour, and how their identities have evolved over time in response to experiences of work and interactions with others.

*Case Study 1: Focused.* Case Study 1 graduated from a degree in acting with honours in 2013, and works as an actor and model on a contract basis. Her career identity as an actor can be described as focused, and she has developed specific strategies for pursuing contract work in the film and TV industry. As an undergraduate she had some exposure to industry, which helped to inform these strategies: "We didn't have work experience exactly, we role played how to do an audition ... we went to seminars where an [experienced actor] was speaking; we spoke with other actors and there was an agent that spoke with us".

Case Study 1 had difficulty finding work following graduation, and in response to limited opportunities, she moved to another city to restart her search for agents and acting work: "[After] emailing all the agents in that city I landed a contract with two agencies ... work was a lot of small bits on TV shows. I was doing auditions – maybe every fortnight". She also took on work at a theatre company and as a receptionist: "I was financially very stressed, so I felt I like I needed to have other jobs, but when things picked up with acting, I had to leave that work to make myself available for opportunities and I am still in that mode now". The work in the theatre company connected her with industry peers, but the work posed challenges as it was removed from her focused identity as an actor.

I met a lot of people like me who were actors/performers, stand-up comedians, drag queens who thought this is the right place for them to work because it's a creative environment at least ... some nights I was working there I had no idea why I was there. I thought I was better than that. I had all these identity issues.

Case Study 1 also signed with an overseas agent, sending audition tapes for potential overseas work. While none of these eventuated as acting contracts, her agent encouraged her to travel overseas for the pilot season: "She emailed me and said you

should move here – there is a lot of work here for you ... that was a rough year. I wondered if I was any good any more – if it was me or the environment”.

In each new city, Case Study 1 used similar strategies to find work.

I researched who are the acting agencies; collected a list of email addresses; made a pitch and included my show reel and links to work and I just copied and pasted that email to all of those agencies. I have done that so many times for so many cities. Each time feels like I am starting all over again.

In 2018, Case Study 1 moved to another overseas capital city where she has engaged four agents and secured three contracts for commercials. She is still highly focused on a career in TV and screen acting, using defined strategies to seek out and engage agents. She finds the lack of opportunities are a challenge: “I am still trying my best to make this work because this is what I want to do. I don’t know if I can blame it on luck or circumstance, but it hasn’t worked out for me the way I thought it would”.

*Case Study 2: Flexible.* Case Study 2 graduated from an industrial design degree 1.5 years ago, and is building a portfolio career that includes industrial design consultancy for architectural firms, 3D modelling for major films, personal design projects and university tutoring. His career identity is highly flexible, within the broad organising identity of “designer”. He describes his identity thus: “A lot of designers are interdisciplinary, you have a tool of design thinking which can be lots of different things. I guess I’m a generalist in terms of a designer; I do a lot of things”. This graduate’s career identity started to form during high school. “I always loved photoshop and making things creatively, but did have a focused direction for those skills. I had a Tumblr blog that let me post stuff as I was learning”.

Before commencing university, a suggestion from a family friend led to employment experience on a community renewal project with a local architectural firm, which led him to think that architecture could be the career path for him. However, he was not accepted into the Architecture degree program for which he applied, and so he enrolled in his second degree preference – an undergraduate degree in industrial design, which proved to be a good match for his interests and a focus for his creative abilities. The degree also provided him with a core design skill set that continues to underpin his practice across his different roles.

While studying industrial design, the visibility of his design work on Tumblr, along with recommendations from university tutors, led to employment as a design assistant with a global architectural firm, and in projection graphics with a local visualisation firm. These opportunities increased his understanding of how his creative skills could be applied in an employment context. They also developed his professional capabilities and helped him to contextualise the skills he was developing as an undergraduate.

I learned a lot in terms of ... how things should operate, how design works, how business works, how meetings should run, how software can assist, and that built up while I was working and studying at university. It put a lot of my university projects into context.

As an undergraduate, a university peer recommended him for work as a designer on a film project. The film's director helped raise his awareness of 3D modelling design opportunities within the film industry.

My interests have always been film making, story-telling; all these other things that I try and tie into my skill set ... he put me in the right direction but it was obviously my work and my portfolio that got me onto the art team [of a major global film company]. So it was the intersection of being prepared and chance.

This initial experience with film led to a number of employment contracts with major live action and animated films. A year and a half after graduating, Case Study 2 continues to use his professional networks and online design presence to secure contracts in 3D design for global entertainment companies, maintain contract work with the global architectural firm, and expand his career experiences through tutoring and research assistant work for the university's Head of Design. An open mindset has been fundamental to his career development: "Saying yes to one thing, it might not [always] go well, but it will lead to the next thing which is a fantastic opportunity. It's that mentality of always being open to stuff, and being known for it".

*Case Study 3: Forming.* Case Study 3 graduated with a Bachelor of Business in Marketing in 2016. At the point of graduation, he wanted to explore a career in marketing from an account executive or sales perspective. His career narrative to date continues on a forming trajectory, characterised by a series of explorations across different roles and industries. He currently divides his time between working in partnership in a friend's overseas venture, working as a private tutor, and continued involvement in his family's franchise retail business.

At university, Case Study 3 was a dedicated student, focusing on his marketing course and spending considerable time at the library. The relationships developed at university with some teachers and peers proved important in opening up opportunities for career exploration after graduation.

I met my business partner at the library, I helped him out with the management class, the economics class and he helped me out with statistics ... so after he went back to China he started a travel agency. So he asked me to help him out with the tourism side type of things. I have a bit of experience in education, so we decide that our product would be a catalogue full of education tourism.

In the last 1.5 years since graduation, Case Study 3 has tried a variety of marketing, sales-related, retail, and education jobs and projects across Australia and overseas, including periods of unemployment and active job search. Looking back, while these experiences had been fragmented, he affirmed their broad value and derived learning from most of them. For example, a supplier integration role gave him insight into online marketing and use of Google apps, which he has used in subsequent roles.

In the graduate's words, "my whole life value is I've got to try different things before I realise what kind of things I need to do. I've been changing things throughout my life since I was seven". However, he also describes himself as "a very long-term oriented person" and says that eventually he does want a home and family,

and pragmatically that he will require greater income and location stability, potentially by taking over some of the family business. With this ultimate long-term orientation, his current career development strategies are based on forming self-awareness and resilience, and developing his capabilities.

#### DISCUSSION

The graduate career trajectories and experiences presented in this chapter provide a strong counter-narrative to the conventional higher education employability discourse that emphasises short-term full-time employment as the key measure of success, and the possession of skills and capabilities as the way to get there. All of the graduates in this study were engaged in an ongoing journey of progressive sensemaking about who they were and how they were going to contribute to the world. At six months after course completion, when the Graduate Outcomes Survey is administered in Australia, the majority of graduates in this study were in the early stages of this process. For nearly half of the graduates interviewed, and for all three of the case studies, their journeys involved portfolio career patterns comprising multiple roles, sometimes across different industries.

For the graduates in this study, possessing well-developed capabilities for the career opportunities they wanted to pursue was important. However, the interviews showed that the graduates were well aware that learning continues beyond university, and that they could continue to hone their skill sets either informally or through further study as required. For these Business and Creative Arts graduates, what seems to be more fundamental to the ability to build a productive and meaningful career seems to be developing a career identity that is grounded in the graduate's interests and values and an awareness of current career opportunities, while staying open to further exploration, and being willing to keep learning and try different career building strategies. In considering disciplines beyond Business and the Creative Arts, it might be suggested that a flexible career identity might only be of use for graduates of non-professionally specific degrees. However, examination of graduate destinations from professional programs suggests that graduates end up pursuing a wider variety of pathways than often considered by universities or the students themselves. For instance, up 50% of Australian teachers leave the profession within five years (Gallant & Riley, 2014); a recent study of law graduates suggests that only two-thirds commence their careers in the law, with the rest employed across other professional employment (Melbourne Law School, 2017). Even when graduates stay in their professional fields, a flexible career identity can help them make the most of opportunities that may not be considered by others.

The findings of this chapter have important implications for the practices of university teachers, leaders, and policy makers. While a university curriculum based in disciplinary and transferable capabilities continues to be of value, students must also be afforded the opportunity to start to develop their career identities during the degree. This can be achieved by making room for learners to experience different career roles where they might apply their disciplinary learning. The experiences should include both anticipated roles such as traditional placements, and

unanticipated “horizon building” activities, such as service learning, start-up entrepreneurial opportunities, international mobility learning and multidisciplinary consultancies. Learners should also be given the opportunity to interact with professionals to forge and ‘test’ their emerging career identities, such as through informational interviewing processes, or career mentoring. Through the curriculum, the student then reflects on their successive experiences and interactions, in the light of an increasing understanding of their own values and interests. Over time, they learn to articulate a flexible identity narrative, which helps them make sense of learning in the degree, and drives their career building behaviour as they launch from university life into the multiplicity of possibilities that can happen afterwards.

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