The troublesome nature of significant learning for UK university business school students

Alex Tymon

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Declaration of originality

I certify that whilst registered as a candidate for this degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

Alex Tymon

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This PhD provides new ways of thinking about the little discussed concept of significant learning for UK business school students, based on a synthesis of published academic journal articles. These eight articles adopt a pragmatic approach to educational research, using a range of methods to uncover perspectives of educators, employers and students. They aim to explore pedagogic practice, seeking evidence of positive learning outcomes alongside barriers and challenges encountered. Individually, the outputs probe both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and span a range of topics including critical reflection, employability, leadership, proactivity and networking. When taken together, they enhance our understanding of significant learning by identifying its troublesome nature for UK business students. Cumulatively, this work adds to conceptual and theoretical knowledge, whilst also highlighting implications for policy and practice.

One contribution, to a more nuanced understanding, is that significant learning involves a complex interplay between three dimensions, namely context, content and methods. Moreover, these three dimensions are troublesome for UK business school students, both independently and when taken together. The dimensions overlap and interlink so that the troublesome nature of significant learning is magnified and questions are raised as to whether the context dimension is more dominant. These conceptual and theoretical contributions have implications for practice and policy. Intuitively, significant learning is an attractive idea for educators of business students, but the troublesome nature uncovered means practical adoption may not be easy. This troublesome nature is likely compounded by the current context of UK business schools and thus policy changes may be needed to make significant learning a reality.

LIST OF SUPPORTING PUBLICATIONS

1. Schyns, B., Kiefer, T., Kerschreiter, R., & Tymon, A. (2011). Teaching implicit leadership theories to develop leaders and leadership – how and why it can make a difference. *Academy of Management Learning and Education,* 10(3), 397-408. DOI: 10.5465/amle.2010.0015

2. Schyns, B., Tymon, A., Kiefer, T., & Kerschreiter, R. (2012). New ways to leadership development: a picture paints a thousand words. *Management Learning,* 44(1), 11-24. DOI:10.1177/1350507612456499

3. Mackay, M., & Tymon, A. (2013). Working with uncertainty to support the teaching of critical reflection. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 18(6), 634-655. DOI:10.1080/13562517.2013.774355

4. Tymon, A. (2013). The student perspective on employability. *Studies in Higher Education,* 38(6), 841-856. DOI:10.1080/03075079.2011.604408

5. Mackay, M., & Tymon, A. (2016). Taking a risk to develop reflective skills in business practitioners. *Journal of Education and Work,* 29(3), 332-351. DOI:10.1080/13639080.2014.939160

6. Tymon, A., & Batistič, S. (2016). Improved academic performance and enhanced employability? The potential double benefit of proactivity for business graduates. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 21(8), 915-932. DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2016.1198761

7. Tymon, A., & Mackay, M. (2016). Developing business buccaneers: employer expectations of emergent leaders. *Human Resource Development International,* 19(5), 429-446. DOI:10.1080/13678868.2016.1166710

8. Batistič, S., & Tymon, A. (2017). Networking behaviour, graduate employability: A social capital perspective. *Education +Training,* 59(4), 374-388. DOI:10.1108/ET-06-2016-0100

CONTENTS

5. Concluding discussion

6. References

7. Appendices

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

My published work focuses on pedagogy for UK business students in an era when the role of business schools, and subsequently what is taught and how, is contested (Beyes, Parker & Steyaert, 2016). Based on a belief that business school educators should continuously and critically review what and how they teach (Mackay & Tymon, 2013), I adopt 'Deweyan pragmatism' as a paradigm for my research (Biesta & Burbules, 2003 p107). As such, the journal articles submitted (appendix 7.2.) use a variety of methodologies to explore the perspectives of educators, employers and students in the areas of critical reflection, employability, leadership, networking and proactivity. This narrative synthesises the findings to show how, when taken together, they contribute to knowledge by providing new ways of thinking about the little discussed concept of significant learning.

Significant learning, it is claimed, can lead to enhanced learning outcomes when used to guide pedagogic decisions (Fink, 2013; Fink & Fink, 2009; Rogers, 1959; Rogers & Frieberg, 1994). The original discussants take a purely conceptual approach, providing definitions and proposing it as a potentially valuable idea for universities (Rogers, 1959; Rogers & Frieberg, 1994). The only other key writer on significant learning takes a predominantly practical approach with a 'how to guide' that includes a revised taxonomy, this is proposed as a solution to criticisms of HE in the US (Fink, 2013). My work sits between these two positions and contributes by expanding and connecting both. I build on the conceptual ideas of the early proponents, in highlighting three interconnected dimensions that are involved in significant learning. At the same time, I take a more critical approach to Fink (2013), identifying significant learning as being more complex than he asserts, by illuminating the troublesome nature of the concept. Overall, I suggest significant learning could be a useful philosophy to underpin UK business school teaching and enhance our

understanding of how this may be achieved; whilst illuminating the issues and challenges involved in doing so.

This introduction goes on to provide more detail on the research approach which informs both the topics and methodologies of the papers presented and the subsequent reflections for this narrative. The concept of significant learning is then further expanded upon leading to a summary of the contributions I make to knowledge through this thesis. First, however, I examine elements of the research background that make UK business school pedagogy currently so challenging which justifies studies in this area.

1.2. Research background

Business schools continue to grow, in size and prominence, across the globe and mass teaching methods with formulaic assessment are now the norm (Parker, 2013; Parrott, 2009). Yet, the increasingly competitive global market means business degrees must be useful and relevant if interest in them is to be maintained (Beyes, Parker & Steyaert, 2016; Wilson & McKiernan, 2011; Wilson & Thomas, 2012). Ensuring this relevance and usefulness is particularly pertinent in the UK, where business and management is now the largest tertiary education and research area (Pettigrew, Cornuel & Hommel, 2014). Thus, what is taught and how in UK business schools are timely and important questions. The answers are intrinsically linked to the long-contested role of the business school, which is heavily influenced by stakeholder expectations (Beyes, Parker & Steyaert, 2016). These include: employers, government, professional accrediting bodies, society and students, as well as academic, management and other staff employed within institutions (Tymon, 2013).

Globally, the debate on the role of the business school was recently stoked by the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, which engendered renewed interest in the liberal arts approach to business education (Sullivan, Ehrlich & Colby, 2016). Although this stimulated

some discussion in the UK, a liberal arts approach continues to be rare here (Beyes, Parker & Steyaert, 2016). Parker (2016) attributes this to the structure of UK universities, where business, like other disciplines, remains isolated. Rather, debate here about what is taught and how tends to alternate between two opposing camps of stakeholders: those who champion a focus on the more vocational study *for* business, versus those wanting more critical study *of* business (Perriton & Singh, 2016).

Also, uniquely relevant for UK business schools is the funding landscape, which is accused of creating marketization and 'vocational credentialism' (Beyes, Parker & Steyaert, 2016 p7). Accordingly, course content has become a management concern, driven by cost and resource considerations (Parker, 2013). Educators who should make informed pedagogical choices are pressured 'to deliver "marketable courses"' conforming to 'received ideas about employability and studying *for* business' as opposed to more critical perspectives (Perriton & Singh, 2016, p82). Örtenblad and Koris (2014) are amongst those who claim this focus leads to lower-order learning, for the here and now, as opposed to enlightenment for the future. Parker (2016) goes so far as to claim that UK universities have for some time been 'dumbing down' to keep the money 'sloshing in ' (p498).

A further pertinent factor for UK business schools is the recent Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). However, the Higher Education Academy concludes there is no agreed definition of, or accepted way of measuring, teaching excellence or quality (Strang *et al*, 2016) and TEF has relied on mostly quantitative measures, for example student satisfaction, progression and employment rates (Department for Business Skills and Innovation, 2016). This means the perceived reality for most educators is an increased level of audit and conformity (Bulman, 2015). When added to student consumerism concerns, with universities in fear of being sued for breach of contract (Anderson, 2010; Renteurs, 2016; Taylor &

Sandeman, 2016), the result is less time and incentive for academic experimentation and pedagogies of risk (Bulman, 2015; Strang, 2016).

My research adds to this ongoing conversation by illuminating difficulties encountered by educators interested in significant learning against this backdrop and suggesting that the situation is more complex than the traditional two camp divide.

1.3. Research approach

The assumptions that underpin my research are most closely aligned to `Deweyan pragmatism` (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p107). Pragmatists have an action orientation (Hammond, 2013) and, as with most educational researchers, I am guided by both personal and professional interests, alongside explicit and implicit beliefs of what is practical (Morrison, 2007).

Ontologically I veer towards constructivism, believing humans create meaning but within a social framework (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Thus, although the individual is unique and important to my research, the context of formal education is highly structured. Individual approaches to learning are not possible in the true sense, nor are they sought by most students. So, despite a belief that all students will and should leave university with a different learning experience and outcome, I recognise that this is tempered and shaped by a shared experience of input.

My epistemology is strongly influenced by my background as a business practitioner, which leads me to problem solve and seek solutions. I am what Brown (2006 p9) describes as a `hybrid researcher` using both `detective` and `doctor` approaches. Being more concerned with research `*for* education` rather than `*about* education` (Biesta & Burbules, 2003 p1), I see issues, investigate symptoms, diagnose causes and search for ways to do things differently. For example, when investigating the symptoms of poor engagement in career

management teaching (Tymon, 2013) or exploring the potential double benefit of teaching proactivity (Tymon & Batistič, 2016), the aim is to inform curricula content and pedagogic practice. As such, the value of my findings is a better understanding of educational practice that may explain phenomena but more importantly for me, should lead to action and enhanced outcomes.

The pragmatic approach to educational research emphasises 'multiple tools of inquiry' rather than proposing specific research methods (Biesta & Burbules, 2003 p108) which is evidenced in my papers. I aim to select the most appropriate data collection and analysis methods to address the research questions, but always with a view to presenting practical implications. For example, focus groups, interviews, educator narratives, drawings and individual student assignments were all used to collect qualitative data (Schyns, Tymon, Kiefer & Kerschreiter, 2012; Tymon, 2013; Tymon & Mackay, 2016; Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). However, analysis of these has often been quantitative in nature to identify themes and trends that may inform action, e.g. coding of leadership drawings (Schyns *et al.*, 2012), or weighting of responses from focus groups and interviews based on frequencies (Mackay & Tymon, 2016; Tymon, 2013). When using quantitative data collection methods, such as surveys (Mackay & Tymon, 2016), assessment marks (Tymon & Batistič, 2016) and scale measures (Batistič & Tymon, 2017), the analysis drives recommendations for educators as well as identifying contributions to theory. Ultimately, this cumulative review of my work reveals that, despite a concern with student learning, it is the action of educators that I seek to influence.

1.4. Significant learning and my research

Each of my papers contributed to theory and practice at the time of writing, and has been recognised individually, as evidenced by publication within peer-reviewed academic journals.

Some outputs are explicitly linked together, for example two papers on Implicit Leadership Theory (ILT), two on critical reflection, and others have an employability focus. Initially, the overall connection between these may seem opaque. However, the reflection undertaken for this narrative reveals an overarching theme: what is taught and how, that will have meaning and value beyond the university years for UK business students. This concurs with the idea of significant learning. Concisely defined as `whole person learning` (Rogers & Frieberg, 1994, p36), significant learning is `more than an accumulation of facts, it is learning which makes a difference` (Rogers, 1959, p232). It involves integrated, pervasive and meaningful content, with value to learners and, even in the Higher Education (HE) setting, requires some level of self-initiation and autonomy (Fink, 2013; Rogers & Frieberg, 1994). Importantly, significant learning leads to action, affecting learner behaviour, attitudes, and even personality (Rogers, 1959).

I have only recently discovered significant learning as an idea, as a result the term is not explicitly used in my published work. However, when taken together my papers add to what is known about this concept within the UK business school environment and raise questions for further research. My cumulative reflection reveals that for UK business school students, significant learning involves a complex interplay between three dimensions: context, content and methods and each is individually troublesome. Moreover, the three dimensions are interconnected which magnifies the troublesome nature of significant learning for UK business school students.

Other theoretical frameworks were considered for this narrative. For example, the well discussed theories of: autonomous, experiential and transformational learning and, pedagogies of risk (Barnett, 2007; Lombardi, 2007; Mezirow, 2000; Weimer, 2013). However, from my perspective these theories predominantly focus on just one part of my work, the how of learning or methods. Whereas significant learning also identifies the

importance of content (Rogers, 1959; Rogers & Frieberg, 1994), and this wider lens seems a better fit for my contributions. Similarly, threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2005) was another potential underpinning theory, but this also seemed too narrow in its predominant focus on content. The concept of significant learning spans methods and content and my work contributes new insights to both. Furthermore, this concept is rarely discussed in HE literature, perhaps due to links with everyday informal situations, rather than in formal education.

An exception is Fink's (2013) `how to guide` for educators in which a revised taxonomy is promoted to create engaged and energetic learners, making a difference to students` lives beyond the university years. This taxonomy predominantly dictates content, but it does intimate that methods should be considered, and my work builds on this by emphasising the multi-dimensional nature of significant learning. Evidence in support of the revised taxonomy is presented in a collection of ten case studies from a range of disciplines in the US (Fink & Fink, 2009). However, other evidence is scarce, with just two academic papers found (Levine *et al*, 2008; Stoltz, 2017), and UK references to the adoption of significant learning as either a philosophy or practical approach for business students have not being found.

Intuitively, the practical nature of significant learning makes it an attractive idea to an educator of my background and beliefs and I question whether this concept is transferable to the UK business school context. In doing so, I identify a third dimension to significant learning, context, and my research adds to our understanding of this. Overall, I believe significant learning can be used as a philosophical approach to curriculum design which could be fruitful for multiple stakeholders. Thus, I expand the idea of Rogers and Frieberg (1994), that not only *can* significant learning be applied to formal education settings, but that

it *should* be. The three dimensions I have identified are subsequently used as headings in the following sections of this narrative to present a synthesis of my research contribution.

The context dimension, discussed in section two, concerns UK stakeholder views and perspectives on the role of the business school, which are a contextual factor that influences decisions about the curriculum (Wilson & McKiernan, 2011). My research focuses on perspectives of specific educators, employers and students. The synthesis uncovers a lack of homogeneity and consensus in stakeholder views, which I assert is troublesome for educators making pedagogic decisions.

Section three (the content dimension) makes the case for three topics being significant, ILTs, critical reflection and proactivity, based on evidence that they engage students mentally and emotionally, whilst having potential for long-term meaning and value (Fink, 2013; Rogers & Frieberg, 1994). Further synthesis shows connections between these topics, with potential for teaching synergies, but also the shared troublesome nature of them, in the challenges they create for educators who include such content.

Within the methods dimension (section four) I discuss two specific examples: an authentic, experiential, problem-based activity and an unexpected drawing exercise. I argue these are significant as both encourage self-discovery, caring about the topic and becoming an autonomous learner (Fink, 2013), and can change behaviour, attitudes or even personality (Rogers & Frieberg, 1994). When considered together with other learning-centred approaches more generally, I conclude that although these may lead to significant outcomes, they are troublesome for educators.

In the concluding discussion (section five) I emphasise how the three dimensions to significant learning are individually troublesome, but also that they overlap and interconnect which magnifies this troublesome nature. This provides a more nuanced understanding of

this little discussed idea, with conceptual and theoretical contributions, as well as

implications for practice and policy.

2. The context dimension

2.1. Introduction

My research explores views and perceptions of different stakeholders on the contested role of the university business school (Alajoutsijarvi, Juusola & Siltaoja, 2015; Beyes, Parker & Steyaert, 2016; Rayment & Smith, 2013). These views are one important contextual consideration amongst many (for example: cultural, economic, political and social factors) that influence decisions on what is taught (content) and how (methods) (Cashmore, Cane & Cane, 2013).

Despite more nuanced categorisations, the literature tends to position business school stakeholders in two opposing camps (Ferlie, McGivern & De Moraes, 2010; Örtenblad, Koris, Farquhason & Hsu, 2013; Pfeffer & Fong, 2004). One camp takes a human capital stance, promoting shorter-term, economic and employability outcomes (see, for example, Tomlinson, 2017). Typically aligned to this in the UK is government, seeking a return on investments from a business school sector it strategically expanded (CBI, 2015; Wilson, 2012; Witty, 2013). This stance was recently reinforced by the strong employment focus of the TEF assessment criteria (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016). Perhaps unsurprisingly employers also lean toward this camp, reportedly seeing universities as producers of ready-made employees (see, for example, CIPD, 2017).

Driven by fee increases, some argue that this economic, human capital and vocational focus has spread to UK business students, fuelling the consumerisation discourse (Koskina, 2013; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009; Woodhall, Hiller & Resnick, 2014). In response, it appears many UK business schools now design their curricula to secure short-term student satisfaction in pursuit of higher rankings, recruitment and retention (Caza, Brower & Wayne, 2015). Perriton & Singh (2016, p78) assert that: this has 'narrowed the perceived purpose of a university business education to a vocational entry ticket'.

Stakeholders in the opposing camp, notably academics, believe business schools should develop a wider lens (Wilson & McKiernan, 2011) and support curiosity-driven learning that meets societal needs for citizenship behaviours (Ferlie, McGivern & De Moraes, 2010; Rayment & Smith, 2013). They argue that market discourses and consumerisation erode and undermine the broader ideology of higher education (Starkey & Tempest, 2005; 2008) which reinforces unhealthy values and encourages irresponsible behaviours in graduate managers (Alajoutsijarvi, Juusola & Siltaoja, 2015; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009). These stakeholders promote criticality, developing a willingness and capability in students to challenge accepted management mantras (Sambrook & Willmott, 2014). Such graduates are more likely to make social contributions and achieve personal fulfilment in the 'life of their times' (Sullivan, Ehrlich & Colby, 2016, p24). This stakeholder group opposes a fixation with technical information and tool acquisition (Sambrook & Willmott, 2014) such as a focus on 'how Dell, Apple, or Hewlett Packard got it right' (Wilson & McKiernan, 2011 p466).

My research adds to this debate by exploring the views of less frequently documented stakeholders. These include students, who may have different perspectives to other groups (Gunn & Fisk, 2013), employers seeking graduates with leadership potential and university educators committed to learning-centred pedagogies. When taken together, my findings uncover conflict and contradictions, both between and within stakeholder groups and thus challenge the simple notion of two camps. I conclude that this makes the context dimension of significant learning troublesome.

2.2. Stakeholder views and perspectives on the role of the university business school
A lack of engagement and motivation to learn in career management units led me to explore undergraduate student views on employability (Tymon, 2013). Although virtually all opined that employability was important, for a large majority their perspectives were narrow, short-

term and linked to individual economic outcomes of employment (Tymon, 2013). Thus, student views appear to reflect government and media fixation on short-term employment outcomes as measured by DLHE statistics (Cashian, Clarke & Richardson, 2015) which supports assertions about consumerisation of students (Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009; Woodhall, Hiller & Resnick, 2014). This emphasises the dominance of government and employers as stakeholders.

Students' short-term, consumerist and economic perspectives are further evidenced in Mackay and Tymon (2013; 2016), albeit with postgraduates. When faced with approaches that they perceive as ambiguous, designed to foster critical reflection, a common response is frustration or even bafflement. Workload and time anxieties predominate, alongside a belief that university should provide technical knowledge and the one best solution or ideal answer (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016).

These views appear again amongst employers recruiting graduates with leadership potential, where the majority seek standard technical knowledge, context specific skills and generic competencies (Tymon & Mackay, 2016). Few consider responsible or new paradigm leader qualities, ethical behaviour, moral vision or the global citizen (Tymon & Mackay, 2016). This starts to address speculations I make in Schyns *et al* (2012) and Tymon & Mackay (2016) on whether employer dissatisfaction with graduate managers links to a mismatch between what is taught in business schools and organisational reality.

Two studies focus on educators who believe business schools should provide more than technical or procedural knowledge (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). They believe in curiosity-driven learning and critical thinking, which accords with the notion of the public interest or critical business school (Alajoutsijarvi, Juusola & Siltaoja, 2015; Ferlie, McGivern & De Moraes, 2010; Rayment & Smith, 2013; Wilson & McKiernan, 2011). However, I show that these educators encounter multiple challenges when trying to facilitate

less overt 'slow learning' (Jessop, McNab & Gubby, 2012) in the form of resistant students, sceptical colleagues and inflexible systems (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016).

Taken at face value, these findings reinforce stereotypes of employers and students as instrumental, short-sighted consumers, firmly situated in the economic and human capital category of business school; whereas university educators are beleaguered academics, striving against a culture of conformity, trying to uphold traditional university values to create better longer-term outcomes. However, this is too simplistic. Probably most clear from my research is the complexity created by competing views and perspectives, both between groups and, also within groups, which is rarely emphasised in the literature.

2.3. Competing views and perspectives between groups

In Tymon (2013), contradictory responses suggest social desirability might be involved when students discuss the importance of employability. There is sparse evidence of them having any real commitment, even to the narrow, short-term view emphasised by government, employers and universities (Tymon, 2013). Even less evidence exists that student views accord with current thinking in the academic literature, where the focus is increasingly on sustainable employability (for example: Dacre-Pool, Sewell & Qualter, 2014; De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2015; Holmes, 2013).

My research also shows a difference in views between students and some educators (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). Here, many students show a consumer and instrumental learning orientation, seeking short-term vocational relevance and simple solutions. This conflicts with broad philosophical learning approaches used by their university educators who recognise that in the messy world of business, simple answers are not enough (Mackay & Tymon, 2016). Moreover, I illuminate how the approaches of some business school

educators conflict with institutional and professional accrediting body requirements for conformity (Mackay & Tymon, 2013).

I also show a difference in views between educators and employers seeking leadership potential in graduate recruits (Tymon & Mackay, 2016). I report that most of these employers show little interest or concern for the global citizen concept, which conflicts with a traditional liberal arts approach to university teaching, aiming to improve moral vision and ethical leadership capability (Tymon & Mackay, 2016). I speculate that an exclusive focus on market-led, employer needs may produce buccaneer leaders 'with a dubious moral compass' (Tymon & Mackay, 2016 p440).

2.4. Competing views and perspectives within groups

The challenges of competing expectations between groups is further compounded by ambiguity and heterogeneity in views and perspectives within groups. For example in Tymon (2013), similarities in different employability frameworks are noted, but so too is the limited alignment between academic institutions and, more notably, amongst employers. This ambiguity amongst employers is echoed in Tymon & Mackay (2016) where 85 distinct skills, behaviours and characteristics are sought in graduate recruits, but with very limited convergence. Hence I question the realism of employer and government expectations of a business school education (Tymon & Mackay, 2016).

Similarly, the perspectives of students are heterogeneous, and not just between undergraduate and postgraduate groups. In Tymon (2013) the views of first, second and final year undergraduates differ in their appreciation of, and interest in, employability, academic grades and experience. Similarly, in Mackay & Tymon (2013, 2016) even though some students gain a real appreciation of critical reflection and experiential learning, this is

at different times, and others just appear to go through the motions, whilst a few remain resistant.

Interestingly, intra-group divergence also occurs amongst university educators. Some are willing to adopt pedagogies of risk and recognise that even with instrumental learners and a highly structured curriculum, such approaches can enrich the future lives of students, whereas others do not share this view (Mackay & Tymon, 2016). Some educators go further and decry new approaches to learning used by peers as: `just practitioner training-games type activities` (Mackay & Tymon, 2013 p649).

2.5.Conclusions about the context dimension

Context is a dimension of significant learning because, amongst other factors, stakeholder views and perspectives affect the ability of business schools to offer quality education (Cashmore, Cane & Cane, 2013). The literature tends to positon stakeholders in two camps: those with mostly short-term, economic and human capital persuasions; and those with longer-term, broader, liberal-arts perspectives. When taken together, my research uncovers that the first group is more dominant which pressures those in the second. Moreover, I show that stakeholder views are ambiguous and heterogeneous, both between groups and, perhaps more importantly, within groups. This raises questions about whether UK business schools can be all things to all people, whilst adding to the contestation on the role of the university business school. I demonstrate that stakeholder views and perspectives are more complex than just two camps and thus the context dimension of significant learning is troublesome.

3. The content dimension

3.1. Introduction

This section synthesises my research around three content topics: implicit leadership theories (ILTs), critical reflection and proactivity which, when taken together, I contend have potential to be significant for UK business students. To have true individual significance, learners would select content, but as Meno's paradox illuminates, this is not practical within the confines of formal education, as students cannot plan to learn what they do not know exists (Semetsky, 2005). Few students can recognise content that may have future significance, as value of learning can take five years or more to be recognised (Sambrook & Willmott, 2012) and so educators make decisions. However, these decisions are not made in isolation, demonstrating an overlap between significant learning dimensions.

Curricula content is influenced by debates on the role of the business school, as discussed in section two and so the literature again tends towards two extremes of thought, neatly labelled the 'barbell curriculum' by Sullivan, Ehrlich & Colby (2016 p25). In this analogy weight is given to technical, applied, operational knowledge at one end, and development of thinking skills, reflexivity, and corporate citizenship at the other. Significant content aligns with this latter camp, in being integrated and having meaning or value to learners in the longer-term (Fink, 2013; Rogers & Frieberg, 1994). A global criticism of modern business schools is that little attention is given to the linkage between these extremes of content and that barbells are overly tilted towards the technical end, which reinforces instrumental attitudes in students (Sullivan, Ehrlich & Colby, 2016). In the UK, academics claim managerial tools and techniques are given priority over *'knowing self* and *managing self'* (Sambrook & Wilmott, 2012 p7). Thus wider, longer-term development, that has real meaning, is pushed out (Cashian, Clarke & Richardson, 2015; Holmes, 2013, Wilson & McKiernan, 2012).

Maton (2013; 2017) states there is always more content than space for it in the curriculum, which causes segmentalism and meaningless courses. Although academics acknowledge this, many continue to live with the surface-level learning that results (Weimer, 2013). The following synthesis of my research makes the case for ILTs, critical reflection and proactivity being significant content that can overcome some of this criticism. This section also identifies similarities and connections between these topics, including potential teaching synergies. However, it concludes by showing the shared challenges in teaching this proposed significant content, and asserting that when taken together, it is a troublesome dimension.

3.2. The case for implicit leadership

In Tymon & Mackay (2016) my finding, that ninety three percent of graduate employers say they look for leadership potential, provides evidence that university business schools continue to be seen as a pipeline for future leaders (DeRue, Sitkin & Podolny, 2011). Yet this study also shows little consensus amongst employers on what the term leadership potential actually means (Tymon & Mackay, 2016). Moreover, much literature suggests that leadership cannot be taught, rather it is learnt through experience (Gurdijan, Halbeisen & Lane, 2014; McCall, 2010; Yukl, 2013). Thus, I assert one reason for low employer satisfaction with graduate recruits is a lack of understanding that a university is best suited to providing a broad education rather than training in *how to* knowledge and skills (Tymon & Mackay, 2016). The question then is: what might be significant content for leadership education? ILTs, which are little recognized outside of academia, offer one suggestion. (Schyns, Kerschreiter, Kiefer & Tymon, 2011).

My two ILT papers (Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012), are less focussed on traditional approaches, such as presenting a dominant, pre-defined, ideal model of a leader and

expecting individuals to change their behaviour to fit this (Ford and Harding, 2007). Rather, I support the teaching of newer paradigm, relationship models, such as ILTs, which have potential to be significant on many levels. Learning about ILTs exposes implicit beliefs, which is the first step in behaviour change, to develop the flexibility needed by modern business graduates (Schyns *et al.*, 2011). For example, learning about ILTs can help students as future global citizens by demonstrating the existence of unconscious bias, such as gender and culture stereotypes (Schyns *et al.*, 2011). This is important as, despite claims to the contrary, my research shows that the Think-Manager-Think-Male phenomenon (Schein, 1975; 2001) is still very prevalent (Schyns *et al.*, 2012). For students as future leaders, learning about schemas and prototypes can support them in being granted leadership in differing contexts (Schyns *et al.*, 2011). For students as future followers, understanding ILTs shows there is no overall truth to what makes effective leadership, rather it is socially and culturally constructed (Schyns *et al.*, 2012). A further potential benefit is that exposure to ILTs opens the door to appreciating implicit theories in general, which supports wider learning about self and professional development (Waring & Evans, 2014).

3.3. The case for critical thinking and reflection

In common with others, I report how some educators believe that students need more than technical procedural knowledge to face the unpredictable uncertainty of their futures (Mackay & Tymon, 2016). We promote critical reflection, as a life-long, life-wide skill that encourages the questioning and challenge of practice to prevent habitual responses (Mackay & Tymon, 2013). However, I further contribute to knowledge by adding views of other stakeholders.

In Tymon & Mackay (2016), I show that a few employers seek graduates who can demonstrate a reflective learning mind set and critical thinking. In addition, my work

presents evidence, albeit limited, that some students value critical reflection as learning

content that develops the self-awareness needed for transformational change (Mackay &

Tymon, 2013). An illustrative comment is: ` [Reflecting] has improved my metacognition i.e.

thinking about thinking – my thinking process has been transformed` (Mackay & Tymon,

2016 p 343). I conclude that such students have begun to overcome the allure of solid and

quantifiable facts or certainty, recognising that critical reflection better prepares them for the

messiness of workplace reality (Mackay & Tymon, 2013).

However, I recognise that positive student views are nearly always after the fact and

report how many experience anxiety, concern or even fear both before and during the unit in

question (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). Also, as noted earlier, my research reinforces that

these students are not an homogeneous group; they see value in learning to critically reflect at

different times, because it is an `iterative process` that needs `time and space in a teaching

programme` (Mackay & Tymon, 2013, p 652).

3.4. The case for proactivity

Most graduate employability frameworks include personal attributes linked to proactive

personality (Tymon, 2013) and therefore this has potential significance for students` future

lives. Whilst acknowledging scepticism (see, for example, Holmes, 2013 and Tomlinson,

2012), my more recent research shows that over sixty percent of employers seek graduates

who demonstrate a proactive approach (Tymon & Mackay, 2016). However, as mentioned

under the context dimension, students may not be overly concerned with employability, and

the related teaching and support offered, at least not until close to graduation (Tymon, 2013).

I speculate whether this lack of interest is linked to lower levels of proactivity, a notion that

continues to stimulate further research.

Interestingly though, many academics also show limited interest in employability, questioning their role, and that of the business school, in this regard (Jameson, Strudwick, Bond-Taylor & Jones, 2012; Tomlinson 2012). Thus, I have taken to using the term 'marmite units' when referring to career management teaching in recent presentations (Harrison & Tymon, 2016; 2017). However, virtually all educators and students are concerned with academic performance (Shagrir, 2015) and this underpins my recent study on the potential double benefit of proactivity (Tymon & Batistič, 2016).

The literature asserts that proactivity is a valuable employability attribute, but I show that it is also linked to better academic grades (Tymon & Batistič, 2016). Specifically, two related proactivity constructs, proactive personality and personal initiative, are complementary with the interplay between them giving the best academic results. The worst combination, which has practical implications for university business schools, is high proactive personality and low personal initiative (Tymon & Batistič, 2016). Consequently, I recommend the development of personal initiative, which unlike personality can be learned, by including content such as: the proactive process; change management and, interestingly in the light of the last sub-section, critical reflection. I assert that doing so could help students low on proactive personality perform better academically whilst reducing potential negative outcomes for those with higher proactive personality (Tymon & Batistič, 2016).

The argument for proactivity is further reinforced in Batistič and Tymon (2017). Based on networking capital literature (Huggins, 2010; Huggins, Johnston & Thompson, 2012), I assert that students can use networking behaviour in a calculating or exploitative way to improve their employability. Importantly though, I highlight that such focused behaviour is typical of those higher in proactivity (Batistič & Tymon, 2017).

3.5. Connections

The case for ILTs, critical reflection and proactivity as significant content is made separately, but synthesising this body of work also reveals connections. Firstly, they are atypical and unexpected content, which is troublesome for educators. Students with short-term consumer orientations look for simple formulaic `how-to` technical content, so learner resistance is common with these significant topics that are not easily addressed through knowledge acquisition (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Schyns *et al.*, 2011). Even when teaching leadership, which is perceived as a technical topic for many business students, challenges arise. Asking learners to articulate, criticise and challenge their underlying assumptions is troublesome (Sambrook & Willmott, 2012), as this is `an underdeveloped capacity for most adults` (Schyns *et al.*, 2012, p15).

Critical reflection is widely recognised as a valid topic within HE (see, for example, Vince, 2016) and can, therefore, be justified to students and academic colleagues. However, I show it is resisted by students with an instrumental mind-set, when it seems divorced from the degree subject (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2014). With proactivity, some educators and students may be motivated by connections to employability (Batistič & Tymon, 2017), but this is a contested agenda for students and academics (Tymon, 2013).

Overall my papers conclude that students demonstrate unease when they believe technical content has been sacrificed to make time for topics they perceive as more opaque (Batistič & Tymon, 2017; Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Tymon & Batistič, 2016). This is compounded by resistance shown by some academic colleagues, who express surprise at what they perceive as a lack of technical content (Mackay & Tymon, 2013). This could be because some faculty associate quantity of content with academic integrity (Weimer, 2013).

A second connection, linked to the first, is the difficulty in teaching this content. ILTs, critical reflection and proactivity are not discrete knowledge-based or technical topics

that allow students to just read the book chapter and answer the exam question in a simple formulaic way; they take time, effort, and iterative practice to develop (Batistič & Tymon, 2017; Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Tymon & Batistič, 2016). However, educators willing and able to adopt the necessary methods may find this challenging in the current UK business school context, which further demonstrates an overlap between the dimensions of significant learning. As discussed in the last section, the prevailing context is characterised by student consumerism and institutional pressures for conformity. As a result, there is a risk that significant content is excluded in place of knowledge that is easier to justify, teach and assess (Bulman, 2015), unless arguments can be found against this.

This synthesis of my work reveals one such argument: the potential for teaching synergies created by the connections between the content topics I promote. I assert that learning about ILTs uncovers and then challenges assumptions (Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012) which are also fundamental to critical reflection (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). Critical reflection in turn is a method I recommend for enhancing proactivity (Batistič & Tymon, 2017; Tymon & Batistič, 2016). Going full circle, enhanced proactivity can provide learning motivation and perseverance (Major, Turner and Fletcher, 2006). I therefore suggest this would help with the iterative development needed for ILTs and critical reflection.

3.6. Conclusions about the content dimension

The content of UK university business school courses is debated (Sullivan, Ehrlich & Colby, 2016). Some claim there is insufficient technical content, others assert that not enough time and space is given to longer-term, broader ideas and theories or self-development (Cashian, Clarke & Richardson, 2015; Holmes, 2013; Sambrook & Wilmott, 2012; Wilson & McKiernan, 2012). I sit within the second camp and believe there needs to be a realism about what a university is best placed to deliver. I argue for more focus on broad education that

maximises flexibility of graduates and equips them for life-long learning (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). To that end, I propose three topics, ILTs, critical reflection and proactivity which support development of the self-awareness and multi-perspectivism that students will need to deal with the complexities and uncertainties of their future world (Sullivan, Ehrlich & Colby, 2016). When considered together, I assert that these have the characteristics of significant learning content in being pervasive and transformative, with potential meaning for students long after they have left university (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994).

Overall my work contributes to knowledge by showing that significant content is troublesome. It is commonly resisted by students and colleagues alike and requires time and space (Batistič & Tymon, 2017; Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Tymon & Batistič, 2016). Early positioning in the curriculum may enable at least some students and educators to start witnessing the potential significance of content they have resisted, and there is potential for teaching synergies. Nevertheless, choosing these topics over more technical ones and making programme-wide temporal changes, demands educators who are willing and able to champion troublesome content.

Furthermore, this synthesis shows an overlap between the dimensions of significant learning. Decisions on content are influenced by the context discussed in section two. In the current UK business school context, I question whether educators are willing and able to choose significant content or whether time and space can be created. The answer to these questions may lie in whether methods can be found to overcome some of the challenges of troublesome content, which further demonstrates dimensional overlap, and is the theme of the next section.

4. The methods dimension

4.1. Introduction

This section synthesises my research with reference to methods, which I assert can facilitate significant learning for UK business school students. It begins with two specific methods: first, a multi-layered, authentic and experiential activity (Tymon & Mackay, 2013; 2016); and secondly, a deceptively simple, unexpected drawing exercise (Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012). Evidence of outcomes from both is summarised, in response to calls for such data (Weimer, 2013). Connections are then made between these and other methods used for teaching significant content, namely: the need for scaffolding, facilitation skills and learner motivation alongside the importance of assessment and temporal considerations. I conclude that, overall, significant learning methods for UK business school students are troublesome.

Significant learning methods engage students mentally and emotionally, spark subject-related curiosity and engender a learning orientation (Fink, 2013), and should transform behaviour, attitudes or personality (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Although such transformations are most often associated with one-off disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2000), it is claimed they can occur in universities with learner-centred methods (Weimer, 2013). However, the current reality for many students is quite different. They face a diet of lecturer-centred, mass teaching methods, accompanied by formulaic unauthentic assessment (Perriton & Singh, 2016; Parker, 2013; Wilson & McKiernan, 2011). This results in disengaged, bored and passive learners (O'Neil & McMahon, 2005) which ultimately reinforces instrumental student attitudes in business schools (Sullivan, Ehrlich & Colby, 2016).

One heralded solution to this is technology, promoted in the literature as the ideal answer for our digital native students. Studies conclude that it provides convenience, speed, and easy access to information (see, for example, Colón-Aguirre & Flemming-May, 2012).

Importantly though, recent critics of technology in HE have begun to differentiate between efficacy of learning versus efficiency of knowledge acquisition (see, for example, Henderson, Selwyn & Aston, 2017; Kirkwood & Price, 2014). Recent literature recognises that fundamental changes beyond the use of technology are required for meaningful and effective learning (Albert & Beatty, 2012; O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015), notably the use of student or learner-centred approaches and authentic assessment to create autonomous, curious and engaged learners (James & Casidy, 2016; Parrott, 2009; Weimer, 2013).

However, Weimer (2013) reports that literature promoting learner-centred approaches often focuses on increasing student enjoyment or satisfaction rather than enhancing learning. Perriton and Singh (2016) concur and promote caution with the term student or learner-centred. They warn that consumerisation of UK business schools leads to constant adaptation to meet changing tastes or preferences, at the expense of subject matter demands, and promote taking learning-centred approaches when making pedagogic decisions (Perriton & Singh, 2016). This is a nuanced distinction that is important to my work. For example, I discuss student resistance to methods designed to facilitate significant learning and the anxiety sometimes created by authentic assessment (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). I assert that, as with content, students may not recognise value until after the fact. Thus, although I report on methods that adopt commonly accepted learner-centred principles (Weimer, 2013), in this narrative I deliberately use the term learning-centred.

4.2. An authentic and experiential learning method

Two of my papers (Mackay and Tymon, 2013; 2016) explore a learning-centred, multi-layered teaching method, to facilitate technical knowledge and business skills acquisition, alongside development of critical reflection. Using the principles of paragogy (peer to peer teaching and learning) (Corneli, 2012; Corneli & Danoff, 2011), student groups work on

problem-based scenarios that drive preparation and delivery of an assessed facilitated learning session for their peers. Sessions include the giving and receiving of feedback so that reflection as a skill is embedded in the unit (Mackay & Tymon, 2013). Students then complete an individual essay where they reflect on technical and personal learning, again this is assessed. This method aligns with the notion of `authentic learning` that `focuses on real-world, complex problems and their solutions` (Lombardi, 2007 p2). It defies the idea of a single, prescriptive solution, emphasising the complexity inherent in everyday reality for these future managers (Mackay & Tymon, 2016). Students dynamically construct the route, and take ownership of their own learning, with educators as facilitators as opposed to definitive experts (Mackay & Tymon, 2013).

My data provide evidence of beneficial multi-level outcomes. Firstly, learners consistently identify student-led sessions as the most energising part of the course (Mackay & Tymon, 2016). Such mental and emotional engagement is important to significant learning (Fink, 2013), but is also desired by those concerned with student satisfaction ratings (James & Casidy, 2016). Secondly, students report increased technical content learning (Mackay & Tymon, 2016). This demonstrates the power of paragogy as a method (Corneli, 2012; Corneli & Danoff, 2011) and meets the needs of students with a short-term instrumental focus, hungry for technical solutions. Thirdly, more than surface learning is demonstrated with many students developing the valuable business skill of facilitation which, alongside technical knowledge, is transferred beyond the classroom (Mackay & Tymon, 2016). This provides evidence requested by Lombardi (2007) that authentic learning cultivates portable skills, enhances flexibility and results in longer-term and more significant outcomes. Fourthly, some students demonstrate reflective learning skills recognising that critical reflection is relevant and valuable (Mackay & Tymon, 2016). Finally, my findings respond to questions from James and Casidy (2016), who ponder whether authentic assessments

(integrated and aligned), enhance engagement and learning. My research shows the grading of the facilitated session and reflective essay enhances enjoyment, perceived value and perseverance (Mackay & Tymon, 2013). Subsequently, I propose educators recognise that assessment is an integral part of methods and take a `pragmatically reflexive approach that respects instrumental learning` (p 651) to support longer-term more significant outcomes.

4.3. An unexpected drawing method

My two papers on ILTs (Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012), describe a relatively unique drawing exercise that enables a shift in perspective that characterises significant learning (Land, 2011). The exercise uncovers students` assumptions about leaders and followers, which are then challenged to develop social awareness (Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012). This can facilitate behaviour change, which is fundamental to effective leadership development (Lord & Hall, 2005; Olivares, Peterson & Hess, 2007).

In Schyns *et al* (2011) this exercise is contrasted with more traditional, teacher-centred methods which I conclude lead to socially desirable responses that fail to access unconscious schemas held by individuals. The result is poor learner acceptance of tacit beliefs, such as gendered or cultural prototypes, superficial discussion and surface learning (Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012).

In the learn*ing*-centred method of drawing, different beliefs and assumptions are discovered experientially, then challenged and debated (Schyns *et al.*, 2011). I report how students have `"Eureka!" moments` discovering prototypical views such as gendered stereotypes and the negation of followers (Schyns *et al.*, 2012, p 404). Thus this method engages emotions, which is rarely seen with traditional approaches, and is significant in making students more open and receptive to self-discovery and the views of others (Schyns *et al.*, 2012). I assert that, by being unexpected and fun, drawing disarms learners, and so

circumvents some of the recognised difficulties in facilitating transformational learning, such as initial learner resistance. However, discovering underlying assumptions and criticising self or others is difficult for students, and enabling this sensitively, in an unthreatening way, is a key task of educators (Schyns *et al.,* 2012) which requires scaffolding and facilitation skills.

4.4. Scaffolding and facilitation skills

The two methods discussed are examples that can facilitate deep and meaningful learning, but they share a common characteristic in being challenging for students and educators. Such methods create friction (Mackay & Tymon, 2016) and involve conflict (Schyns, *et al,* 2011), and these are what stimulate significant learning. With these, and other learn*ing*-centred methods, there is no comfortable assurance of passively listening to a lecturer`s sequenced delivery, rather students are active and risk social exposure; and this ambiguity discomforts them (Mackay & Tymon, 2016). Such methods can also be troublesome for educators as they cede control to students producing unexpected outcomes (Mackay & Tymon, 2013).

Successful learn*ing*-centred methods require educators to manage the certainty versus risk balance, through what Coulson and Harvey (2013) define as scaffolding (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). In illustration, the drawing exercise needs explaining so that students understand *the process* of what they are being asked to do, but without influencing what they draw – *the outcome* (Schyns *et al.,* 2011). Scaffolding includes ensuring key learning points are surfaced but not dictated, such as gender, culture and followership, in the case of ILTs (Schyns *et al.,* 2011; 2012). Scaffolding involves facilitation to build trust, so that students take ownership of their own learning, especially when assessment is integrated, as anxiety levels rise in these cases (Mackay & Tymon, 2016).

My research illuminates how these methods also challenge educators as they have to balance tension levels, judging when to stand back and when to intervene (Mackay & Tymon,

2016). Remaining in the background, flexibly orchestrating student-led debate and self-discovery, creates fears of losing control and threatens credibility (Mackay & Tymon, 2016), which is not easy for educators.

Having the courage and reflexivity needed to invite the anarchy of unpredictable outcomes calls for `humility`, `admissions of fallibility` and `steely nerves` (Mackay & Tymon, 2013 p650) and such facilitation skills need to be developed. However, most educators do not have degrees in pedagogy, rather they learn experientially on the job and, if lucky, with mentoring support (Örtenblad & Koris, 2014). It is far simpler to use didactic, lecturer-centred, surface approaches to learning (Baeten, Kyndt, Struyven & Dochy, 2010; McCune & Entwhistle, 2011; Weimer, 2013). Thus I question whether learn*ing*-centred approaches are too challenging for some, especially in the current, resource pressured context of HE, compounded by TEF concerns for student satisfaction and NSS scores.

4.5. Learner motivation

A further common theme I uncover, with significant methods, is the need for learner motivation. Examples from my research include, student disengagement with career management learning (Tymon, 2013), and instrumental learners who question participative methods, preferring to be `*taught*` (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). In response, my papers suggest educators are more overt in enhancing learner motivation (Batistič & Tymon, 2017; Tymon, 2013).

It is recognised that business students may be more extrinsically motivated (Lucas & Tan, 2013). My research proposes that rather than fight against this, educators might stress instrumental outcomes for these consumer-oriented students. Promoting potential individual benefits to motivate learners, at least in the short term, may result in longer-term gains (Tymon, 2013; Tymon & Batistič, 2016). Importantly, I also propose that short-term

34

learning motivation can be honed through assessment artefacts, as these create perceived value, which can lead to longer-term and significant learning gain (Mackay and Tymon, 2013; 2016). Thus, my research illustrates how assessment is an inherent part of the significant learning dimension.

4.6. Temporal considerations

Integrating assessment with the learning method and motivating learners can reduce the time needed for learning. This need is more acute when time and space are needed for iterative development of content such as critical reflection, proactivity or strategic networking (Batistič & Tymon, 2017; Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). Moreover, I concur with Macvaugh, Jones and Auty (2014) who assert that skills such as these need to be introduced in the university first year to create a better chance of mastery. This may also increase opportunities for students to see value in this learning whilst still at university, which in turn can enhance motivation. Such temporal considerations accord with those who promote a programme wide approach to pedagogic design (see, for example, Jessop & Tomas, 2017).

However, pressures exist within UK business schools to sacrifice the slow development of skills for quicker delivery of technical content (Mackay & Tymon, 2016); but I challenge such *either/or* assumptions (Tymon & Batistič, 2016). For example, the authentic and experiential learning method presented in section 4.2, illustrates how multi-level learning outcomes can be achieved with careful consideration of methods and integrated assessment (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). However, this is only possible if educators are prepared for a troublesome ride.

4.7. Conclusions about the methods dimension

Recent literature on methods within HE recognises that although technology is efficient and student friendly, it is not a silver bullet, rather learner-centred approaches are needed. I make a further distinction, proposing that learn*ing*-centred approaches are needed for effective, significant learning. In support, I present evidence of multi-level outcomes from two such methods, an unexpected drawing exercise and a complex, authentic, experiential activity with integrated assessment. However, the overall synthesis of my papers uncovers the troublesome nature of such learn*ing*-centred methods. They require time, space and early positioning for iterative development. Educators must scaffold and facilitate learning to balance certainty and risk, as well as build learner motivation, but in the current UK business school context, this may be challenging, which demonstrates the overlap between the dimensions of significant learning. In a context of increasing massification, institutional pressures for conformity, and student consumerism, lecturer-centred methods and formulaic assessment may win out. I assert that overcoming this *either/or* debate is possible and make suggestions for doing so, such as the integration of authentic assessment and programme-wide design, but overall, I conclude significant learning methods are troublesome.

5. Concluding discussion

5.1. Introduction

This linking narrative synthesises eight published journal articles that investigate teaching and learning within UK business schools. This section reports on the resultant contributions to knowledge, under the following headings:

- conceptual and theoretical;

- research methods;

- implications for practice and policy and;

- reflections and future research.

5.2. Conceptual and theoretical contributions

Conceptually, I add to an understanding of significant learning by identifying that it has three dimensions for UK business students: context, content and methods; and they are all individually troublesome. Moreover, the three dimensions are interlinked, which magnifies their troublesome nature. These contributions are further explained below.

5.2.1. Three dimensions of significant learning: context, content and methods

Existing literature defines significant learning and describes its potential in formal education settings (Rogers, 1969; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). This synthesis of my work both uncovers, and contributes to, what is known about three dimensions of significant learning.

Within the context dimension, I add the views of less researched stakeholders on the role of the UK business school. Cumulatively, my findings show that economic, human capital, short-term and vocational perspectives are becoming more dominant. This is the case for business students (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Tymon, 2013) and many graduate

employers (Tymon & Mackay, 2016). As a result, university educators who believe in broader and longer-term learning outcomes are in the minority and face increasing resistance from other stakeholder groups (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016).

In the content dimension, my work proposes three topics as significant: ILTs, critical reflection and proactivity (Batistič & Tymon, 2017; Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012; Tymon, 2013; Tymon & Batistič, 2016). In contrast to technical knowledge which can date, learning to be proactive, challenge assumptions, and critically reflect, is meaningful and timeless. Together, these topics can enhance adaptability, flexibility and autonomous learning ability, to provide value and thus significance far beyond the university years (Fink, 2013; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994).

To be significant, learning should also engage learners mentally and emotionally, whilst leading to transformed behaviours, attitudes and/or personality (Fink, 2013; Rogers & Frieberg, 1994); thus, methods is an important third dimension. Here I present evidence from an unexpected drawing exercise to uncover assumptions about leaders and leadership (Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012); and a multi-layered, authentic method using paragogy, embedded reflective learning skills, and integrated assessment (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). My data show that these learn*ing*-centred methods mentally and emotionally engage students whilst supporting the acquisition of technical knowledge, which appeals to more instrumental stakeholders (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). Furthermore, students gain insights into personal schemas and assumptions, that when challenged may lead to behaviour change (Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012) and some become critically reflective (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). Thus these learn*ing*-centred methods are significant by being pervasive and leading to self-discovery, autonomy, action and transformational changes (Fink, 2013; Rogers, 1959; Rogers & Frieberg, 1994). In addition, I respond to questions from James and Casidy (2016)

by showing how integrated and aligned assessments enhance significant learning (Mackay & Tymon, 2013).

5.2.2. The three dimensions of significant learning are individually troublesome

In addition to identifying three dimensions my synthesis reveals that each is individually troublesome. Linked to context, my findings uncover troublesome ambiguity and heterogeneity, both between and within stakeholder groups. Low consensus *between* groups is seen in Tymon (2013), with views on employability differing between students, the business school, employers and government. In Mackay and Tymon (2013; 2016) instrumental students resist broad philosophical approaches taken by some educators.

Heterogeneity in views and perspectives *within* groups is evidenced in a number of studies. Employers have divergent views when seeking graduate recruits (Tymon, 2013; Tymon & Mackay, 2016). Educators have differing beliefs on adopting risky pedagogies (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). Student perspectives vary, both between different years (Tymon, 2013) and even within single cohorts (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). Overall, these ambiguities show the context of HE is more complex than the two-camp position often implied in the literature. I assert that this is troublesome and ponder whether UK business schools are destined to end up pleasing no one.

The content I propose as being significant is troublesome in being frequently resisted by students, and even some lecturers, when it fails to meet instrumental expectations (Batistič & Tymon, 2017; Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012; Tymon & Batistič, 2016, Tymon, 2013). Both express concern at the time and space needed to allow iterative development, especially when they perceive technical or 'how-to' knowledge has been sacrificed (Tymon, 2013; Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Tymon & Mackay, 2016).

Resistance to significant content is echoed in, and compounded by, the methods dimension. The types of methods I promote as being significant are not always welcomed by students or institutions (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012). A focus on achieving long-term, deep and meaningful outcomes is often accompanied by initial student dislike and dissatisfaction (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016). For this reason I make the nuanced distinction between learn*ing*-centred methods rather than learn*er* or student-centred. Significant methods require scaffolding and skilled facilitation to create the right balance of risk and trust (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Schyns *et al.*, 2011). Yet this is troublesome for educators who are employed for their subject expertise and may lack training in pedagogy (Örtenblad & Koris, 2014).

5.2.3. The troublesome nature of significant learning is magnified by interlinked dimensions
In addition to identifying three individually troublesome dimensions, this synthesis also reveals they are interlinked, which magnifies their troublesome nature. Significant content needs to have long-term value and meaning for the individual, yet Meno's paradox (Semetsky, 2005) dictates that educators make this selection and also choose methods for them, that will facilitate deep learning. However, these decisions are not made in a vacuum. Content and methods choices are influenced by the contextual dimension of stakeholder views and perspectives, which is troublesome in a number of ways.

Business graduates face uncertain futures, and thus what they learn should equip them to grapple with this, if degrees are to maintain relevance and usefulness. Yet the dominance of economic, short-termism in stakeholders (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Tymon, 2013; Tymon & Batistič, 2016; Tymon & Mackay, 2016) means preference is likely given to technical content that may be less significant in the longer-term. Second, in a context of consumerism, learn*ing*-centred approaches are often resisted by instrumental students, at least

initially (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012), and may be side-lined in favour of less significant methods that meet short-term expectations. Third, in the current massified context of UK business schools, time and space needed for iterative development may not be given and the required facilitation skills for effective scaffolding could be hard for educators to acquire. So, if educators take the path of least resistance, and succumb to the dominant contextual perspective, students and other stakeholders may perceive short-term gains, but this will not equip graduates for sustainable futures. Yet if educators adopt significant content and methods, these may be under-valued and resisted by other stakeholders.

Going further, and perhaps most troublesome, is the lack of consensus amongst and between stakeholder groups (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Tymon, 2013; Tymon & Mackay, 2016). This ensures there will be disagreement, and probably dissatisfaction, regardless of what content or methods are included, which demonstrates the potential power of the contextual dimension. Thus, my work also contributes questions for ongoing research. These include: to what extent can university business schools be all things to all people, or is there a risk that they will please no one? Can the views and perspectives of all stakeholders be met simultaneously? If not, then who should take priority? Are the three dimensions of significant learning equally important, or does context dominate? Is this a business school specific conundrum?

5.3. Research methods contributions

My work also reveals contributions to research methods literature. Being a pragmatic, hybrid researcher, I explore problems and seek solutions to improve educational practice; thus, I use tools of inquiry that best suit the research questions, rather than being wedded to traditional quantitative or qualitative methods (Biesta & Burbules, 2003; Brown, 2006). To illustrate: in

two papers I use purely quantitative methods (Batistič & Tymon, 2017; Tymon & Batistič, 2016) as a way to justify space for significant content in the curriculum. In Mackay & Tymon (2013) the method is solely qualitative as I search for explanations for resistance to significant methods and content. However, most of my research uses mixed methods of data collection and/or data analysis, as this both explains phenomena and identifies themes and trends that can drive action (Mackay & Tymon, 2016; Schyns *et al.*, 2011; Schyns *et al.*, 2012; Tymon, 2013; Tymon & Mackay, 2016). Importantly, though, I demonstrate how educational pragmatists can develop unique research methods to best address their questions. This is evidenced in: the novel method of coding drawings with independent coders (Schyns *et al.*, 2012); adopting a theoretical model for the scaffolding of learning to frame data collection and analysis (Mackay & Tymon, 2013) and; adapting well-established learning evaluation techniques from the field of HRD for educational research (Tymon & Mackay, 2016). Thus, when taken together, this synthesis of my papers reveals a distinctive and unique approach to data collection and analysis that can influence the actions of educators.

5.4. *Implications for practice and policy*

For educational pragmatists (Biesta & Burbules, 2003), the concept of significant learning is attractive and Fink's (2013) practical guide to programme design is welcome. However, there is limited evidence of outcomes when adopting this approach (see, for example, Fink & Fink, 2009; Stolz, 2017). My findings add to this by providing data from the UK business school setting.

Starting with a positive, one practical implication is the identified links between proposed significant content topics (Batistič & Tymon, 2017; Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012; Tymon, 2013; Tymon & Batistič, 2016). Learning about ILTs demands that students challenge their own and others' assumptions, this is also needed for

critical reflection, and proactivity is linked to both of these topics. This creates potential synergies for teaching methods which can reduce the time and space needed for learning such content (Batistič & Tymon, 2017; Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Tymon & Batistič, 2016).

In contrast, a negative implication for practice is that significant learn*ing*-centred approaches are rarely popular with students or other stakeholders, at least in the short-term, and so educators should be prepared for resistance (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Schyns *et al.*, 2011; 2012). My research proposes two solutions to this which demonstrate that the three dimensions of significant learning are linked practically as well as conceptually.

First, I propose that either/or assumptions about technical content versus wider, longer-term learning should be challenged, as both can be achieved with careful pedagogic design (Tymon & Batistič, 2016; Tymon & Mackay, 2013). I also contend that educators take a pragmatic approach and do not fight stakeholder views. Rather they can use instrumental orientations to overcome initial student resistance, which can motivate learners towards better, longer-term outcomes (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016; Tymon, 2013; Tymon & Batistič, 2016).

A policy implication is that business schools, and the wider HE sector, need to clarify the role of a university education, which may help stakeholders appreciate what formal education is best placed to deliver (Tymon & Mackay, 2016). However, this too may be troublesome. There is an irony that two of the contextual factors which make significant learning an attractive concept for business schools include the environmental uncertainty of students` future lives and the financial need to ensure programmes are useful and relevant; but at the same time, a further contextual factor, stakeholder views, is dominated by economic, short-term, vocational perspectives, which makes it less likely that significant content and methods will be adopted. Thus overall, I show that significant learning within UK business schools is troublesome

5.5. Reflections and further research

This process has been important for my reflexivity as an educator. Wearing the shoes of a student, I have experienced the difficulties of research and academic writing with all the associated uncertainties. I have already changed my own teaching in response to this by increasing opportunities for formative feedback and more overt teaching of academic literacy, in particular semantic waves (Maton, 2017). To accommodate this, technical content has been reduced to make space for deeper learning of what I regard as significant content. Whilst methods are being reviewed to seek opportunities for synergies and double benefit I expect troublesome responses from students and perhaps other stakeholders in response. I also appreciate that this unilateral action may have limited impact, but these changes to practice will provide a basis for further research, with the aim of providing evidence on which others can base pedagogic decisions. This further demonstrates that I am an educational pragmatist (Biesta & Burbules, 2003), the discovery of which has been another valuable outcome of this process.

Significant learning is a recent discovery that has been helpful in guiding the review of my work and is a promising avenue for further research. My current projects include evaluating a career management unit and exploring student engagement and both are informed by this concept, as I look to build on the work of Stolz (2017) who asks whether significant learning can be assessed. A further area of interest, which space did not allow for in this narrative, is threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2005). The content topics discussed in my work may be considered as a new generic form, in the context of UK business schools, and I intend to continue this line of inquiry.

As with all research my work has limitations, which each of my papers discusses at an individual level but, cumulatively, I highlight the following ones. No one can directly control

student learning, we can only manipulate content and methods (Brewer & Henderson, 2016);

thus all learners are unique and there will always be variations in what they learn.

Additionally, Deweyan pragmatism asserts that solutions are never simple, static nor

universal (Hall, 2013), rather educational pragmatists accept the provisional nature of

knowledge (Hammond, 2013). Overall then, findings and solutions, including those presented

here, are contextual and fleeting (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). However, as stated at the start of

this narrative, I believe business school educators should continuously and critically review

what and how they teach (Mackay & Tymon, 2013) and my research, on the troublesome

nature of significant learning in this UK environment, makes an important and original

contribution which enables them to do so.

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Appendix 7.1.

Contribution to co-authored papers

In Schyns, Kiefer, Kerschreiter & Tymon (2011), I led on sections of the paper where learning theory and implications were discussed and, as one of three authors who had used the drawing exercise, contributed equally to other parts.

I initiated the ILT study where drawings were analysed (Schyns, Tymon, Kiefer & Kerschreiter, 2012). I set up and managed the data collection, wrote the methodology section, and contributed equally to the discussion and findings.

The two critical reflection papers with Margaret Mackay (Mackay & Tymon, 2013; 2016) were jointly authored, although I took responsibility for data collection in Mackay & Tymon (2016).

In Tymon & Mackay (2016), I was principal investigator, obtaining internal funding and managing data collection. The paper was jointly authored.

I was lead researcher in Tymon & Batistič (2016), planning the study and collecting the data, before being supported in quantitative data analysis by Sasa Batistič.

Batistič & Tymon (2017) was a jointly managed study and co-authored paper.

Teaching Implicit Leadership Theories to Develop Leaders and Leadership: How and Why It Can Make a Difference

BIRGIT SCHYNS
Durham University

TINA KIEFER
University of Warwick

RUDOLF KERSCHREITER
Freie Universität Berlin

ALEX TYMON
University of Portsmouth

Implicit leadership theories (ILTs) are lay images of leadership, which are individually and socially determined. We discuss how teaching implicit leadership theories contributes to developing leaders and leaderships by raising self- and social awareness for the contexts in which leadership takes place. We present and discuss a drawing exercise to illustrate different implicit leadership theories and discuss the implications for leaders and leadership, with a particular focus on how leaders claim, and are granted, leader identities in groups.

Day stated in 2001 that "the interest in leadership development seems to be at its zenith" (581), yet a decade later, interest in leadership and leadership development seems to be unbroken, both in academia and, of course, in practice. This special edition on teaching leadership serves as a further indicator of this interest. To date, most leadership literature focuses on leaders as such: their leader-related skills, personal characteristics, and behaviors (e.g., transformational leadership; Bass, 1985; charismatic leadership, Conger & Kanungo, 1994; authentic leadership, Walumbwa, Luthans, Avey, Oke, 2009). Hence it is fair to deduce that the vast majority of the teaching and development is focused on leader skills, characteristics, and behaviors. This draws a distinction between leaders and other participants in the leadership process, such as followers.

However—as Day (2001) pointed out—leadership is more than just a skill set of an individual, it has also been conceptualized as a social process. He differentiates "leader development" (focused on individual skills) from "leadership development" (focused on the wider relational or social context in which leadership takes place). As Iles and Preece (2006) argue, leader and leadership development are often seen as the same thing. They highlight the usefulness of differentiating between both types of development, arguing that self-awareness is a part of leader development and that social awareness is a facet of interpersonal competence for leadership development. Social awareness includes, for example, empathy, service orientation, and developing others. Bolden and Gosling (2006) stress that this is an important part of leadership, arguing that leadership has to move from individualistic to collective forms.

The social context (leadership development) has

received considerably less attention in research and practice than the individual leader (leader development). With respect to social context, generally, there has been a call for more attention to the specific context in leadership development (see e.g., Liden & Antonakis', 2009, call for leadership researchers to include followers' influence on leaders in their research). We aim to address this gap here by focusing on both the individual leader and the social context in which leadership occurs. Specifically, we outline how leaders operate in social contexts that encompass different cognitive schemas about leaders and leadership, including their and their followers' schemas. Therefore, one way of integrating social context into leader/leadership development is by addressing leaders' and followers' images of leaders in general or so-called implicit leadership theories. *Implicit leadership theories* are conceptualized as everyday images of what leaders are like in terms of traits and behaviors (e.g., Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994; Schyns & Schilling, 2011). Therefore, implicit leadership theories, as theoretical constructs, focus on the social context in which leadership occurs.

Teaching implicit leadership theories develops leaders and leadership by raising awareness of this social context and of one's own implicit leadership theories and how they might or might not match the social context. The latter is vital for understanding interactions between leaders and followers in organizational settings. The reason for this is twofold: As De Rue and Ashford (2010) argue, a match between a person's implicit leadership theories and his or her self-concept facilitates the taking on of a leader identity. At the same time, the acceptance of someone as a leader is only possible if there is a match between the implicit leadership theories of potential followers and their actual perception of that person. De Rue and Ashford call this process *claiming and granting leader identity.*

However, implicit leadership theories are, by nature, not necessarily conscious to those who hold them. Therefore, we suggest that teaching implicit leadership theories through an awareness-raising exercise develops leaders and leadership by making these images more explicit and, thus, helping leaders and followers to better understand (a) how such implicit leadership theories develop and play out in the social context of leadership, and (b) how leader identities develop and are shaped.

Consequently, our aim of this here is twofold: First, to introduce the theoretical underpinnings of implicit leadership theories and discuss how and why teaching implicit leadership theories can affect leaders and leadership. A particular focus lies on how leader identities are shaped. Second, we

present an exercise that can be conducted in a teaching or training context, which aims to raise awareness of different implicit leadership theories. We discuss how this exercise may help develop leaders and leadership in various contexts. To achieve this, we draw on Day's differentiation between leader development and leadership development to analyze the usefulness of teaching implicit leadership theories, particularly the concepts of self-awareness and social awareness, as crucial elements in both leader and leadership development. At the same time, we integrate De Rue and Ashford's (2010) notion of how a match between leaders' and followers' implicit leadership theories helps to shape leader identities.

In the following, we first outline the background of implicit leadership theories before introducing an in-class exercise to illustrate how implicit leadership theories can be accessed and how raising awareness for different implicit leadership theories can affect various partners in the leadership process. We then use the elements of the exercise to explain how and why teaching implicit leadership theories is important for practicing and teaching leadership.

With the introduction of this exercise, we respond to Bell's (2010) call for "evidence-based teaching" (7), that is, teaching that "includes current, impactful research in our classes" (7), and address what Burke and Rau (2010) call the research–teaching gap. We do this by providing one example of how to teach a heavily theoretical construct, based on very recent research. Teaching students,[1] and thereby (future) leaders and followers, about implicit leadership theories serves a multiplier function in that they can distribute the knowledge acquired in class into their organizations.

UNDERSTANDING IMPLICIT LEADERSHIP THEORIES

The concept of implicit leadership theories was first introduced by Eden and Leviatan (1975; see also Eden & Leviatan, 2005). They deduced the idea of implicit leadership theories from Schneider's (1973) implicit personality theories. Implicit leadership theories are images that everyone holds about the traits and behaviors of leaders in general (e.g., Schyns & Meindl, 2005). Similar to stereotypes, implicit leadership theories serve to explain the other person's behavior and also the observer's

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[1] We use the term *students* here in the broadest sense. The exercise we outline, as well as its intended aims, are relevant for undergraduate and postgraduate students, but also for adult learners, such as those that are already in leadership positions.

reaction toward that person (Kenney, Schwartz-Kenney, & Blascovich, 1996; Schyns & Schilling, 2011). This means that when meeting or observing a "leader," certain leader images are activated, and the behavior of this "leader" is interpreted in line with these images. For instance, research by Lord and colleagues (see Lord & Maher, 1993, for an overview) has shown that information about success influences the extent to which people are regarded as leaderlike. This means that people mentally connect success and leadership, and this connection feeds back into their perception of a "leader." At the same time, Lord's categorization theory (e.g., Lord, Foti, & de Vader, 1984) shows that implicit leadership theories can be categorized at hierarchical levels. On the superordinate level, the differentiation is between characteristics of leaders versus nonleaders; on the basic level, distinctions are made between different types of leaders (e.g., business vs. political leaders); and on the even less abstract, subordinate level, these leader prototypes are further specified (e.g., leaders of a certain political party).

We know that implicit leadership theories develop early. Ayman-Nolley and Ayman (2005) conducted a study among children and found that they had no problem drawing a "leader," or differentiating what they considered a typical leader. Antonakis and Dalgas (2009) similarly showed that children already have implicit leadership theories. Research among adults confirms interindividual differences in implicit leadership theories (e.g., Felfe, 2005). These implicit leadership theories are also relatively stable when the context changes (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004). So, while on the one hand there is a distinct individual aspect to implicit leadership theories, on the other, cross-cultural research has shown that implicit leadership theories are influenced by culture (House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002), thus highlighting a socially shared aspect of implicit leadership theories.

The idea that implicit leadership theories function similarly to stereotypes has prompted research on the influence of implicit leadership theories on the perception of actual leaders. More specifically, research assessing individuals' implicit leadership theories has shown that the mental images individuals hold influence how they see a person labeled "leader," including their own supervisors (Schyns, Felfe, & Blank, 2007; Shamir, 1992). For example, individuals who hold a romantic view of leaders, that is, those who overattribute company performance to leaders (cf. the romance of leadership model; Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985) perceive their leader as more charismatic

(Shamir, 1992). Together, these findings lead to the conclusion that the perception of actual leaders is not independent of the perceiver's implicit leadership theories. To quote Cummings, "It has been said that leadership is like beauty—you know it when you see it" (2007: 143).

From a practitioner's perspective, leadership is taught because there is a belief that the behavior of leaders can be influenced to improve performance and output of organizations. However, research into implicit leadership theories casts doubt on whether this is the whole story, as it emphasizes the role of perceptional processes in the effect of leadership. Thus, traditional leadership trainings (or rather leader trainings), focusing on individual skills and behaviors, may have—at least to a certain extent—overly optimistic expectations placed upon them. At the very least, it should make us wonder whether the traditional leadership development concepts are sufficient in their focus on leader skills and behaviors and why we are not including more concepts and ideas that highlight the importance of the social context and leadership as a process.

The knowledge of implicit leadership theories is still scarce in organizations; therefore, spreading the word about the implications of socially shaped perceptions due to implicit leadership theories and their implications seems vital. Teaching students at different levels can serve as a fast and easy way of transferring knowledge about implicit leadership theories into organizations. Knowledge about implicit leadership theories in turn can, and should, directly affect how leaders and followers are trained, assessed, and developed. In the following, we outline an exercise useful for teaching leadership in different contexts.

IMPLICIT LEADERSHIP THEORIES DRAWING EXERCISE

The challenge of assessing implicit leadership theories (ILTs) is that they are, by definition, part of our implicit knowledge and, therefore, difficult to assess. To develop and raise self- and other awareness,[2] the cognitive schema that are implicit leadership theories (Kenney et al., 1996) need to be "uncovered." This appears difficult with conven-

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[2] Prior teaching exercises to raise self- and other awareness include one suggested by Mirvis (2008), where he describes how he takes executives out of their familiar context into extreme environments (e.g., taking leaders of a car company to inner-city orphanages) to raise their self- and other-awareness and to improve their dealing with diversity. Although not as extreme, our exercise has a similar goal.

tional methods (e.g., presenting ready-made case studies).[3] In the following sections, we outline the aims and structure of the exercise, clarify some of the important contextual factors, and provide theoretical arguments for its effectiveness before turning to explaining the reasoning behind its features in more detail using three illustrating examples.

The implicit leadership theories drawing exercise has three aims. First, to make individuals aware of their personal implicit leadership theories, second to facilitate the negotiation of socially determined implicit leadership theories and, third, to help participants become aware of differences between implicit leadership theories in various social contexts and discuss the implications for leaders and leadership. We thereby address several theoretical issues, namely, self-awareness of implicit leadership theories, social awareness of others' implicit leadership theories, and awareness of how self- and other implicit leadership theories may or may not match and, ultimately, how this match influences the negotiation of leader identities. This integrates Day's (2001) differentiation between leader and leadership development and De Rue and Ashford's (2010) claiming and granting leader identities. The core of the exercise focuses on the leader versus nonleader differentiation and, thus, on the superordinate level of implicit leadership theories categories according to Lord et al. (1984). However, as we outline below, according to Lord and colleagues, it also can be adapted to more specific levels, that is, basic or subordinate levels of implicit leadership theories.

The Exercise Explained

We developed the implicit leadership theories drawing exercise in three parts of equal importance, to address the above aims. Exhibit 1 shows the instructions. It consists of self-reflection (Part A) and two group exercise parts, consisting of a group discussion and a group drawing (Part B),

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[3] Our approach fits neatly into earlier attempts to use drawings in leader and leadership development. The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) uses a drawing exercise in the context of their concept "leading creatively." In contrast to our exercise, the exercise is not directly linked to leadership, but rather explores how both left and right sides of the brain can be used in one exercise, combining rational and emotional thinking (Cartwright, 2009). Cartwright argues that drawing is linked to problem solving and that it helps leaders in slowing down when considering a problem rather than taking rushed decisions. While we agree that drawing exercises tend to force students out of their comfort zones, and that it can help them address everyday problems in different ways, our exercise has a more specific aim in that the drawings are used not only as a stretch exercise but also to uncover specific implicit knowledge.

EXHIBIT 1
Sample Exercise for Teaching Implicit Leadership Theories—Instructions to Students

The implicit leadership theories drawing exercise
  (A) Individual reflection (10 min)
      • On your own, think about leaders in general. From your perspective: What characteristics do they have? What did they do (and what don't they do)?
  (B) Group discussion and drawing exercise (30 min each)
      • Interview each other: What did you find? Which points do you agree/disagree on?
      • Then, discuss the following points: What are other factors that impact on leaders' effectiveness? How, if at all, are your views about leaders rooted in culture? What are possible explanations for agreements/disagreements? [modifications depending on context]
      • In the group, make a drawing of your "leader."
  (C) Plenum presentation and discussion (5–10 min each)
      • Present and answers questions in class, one group at a time.
      • Discussion of following questions: What are similarities and differences between the drawings? What stands out for you? How effective would the leader of one group be in the context of another group? What is the role of followers in these drawings? [modifications depending on context]

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and last, the presentation and discussion of the drawings in class (Part C).

First, before starting the drawing, each student reflects on images of leaders. The aim is to start the reflective process and is self-centered, thus focusing on self-awareness. In the second part, when working on the group drawing, the discussion that is necessary to get the drawing started helps students realize how their ideas about leaders are similar to, or different from, others' leader images, tapping into both self-awareness (in the sense that one's implicit leadership theories differ from others' implicit leadership theories) and social awareness (knowledge about what others' implicit leadership theories look like). The drawing makes this even clearer, as not only words can be used to express opinions, but also parts of the drawing (e.g., "I would put the followers next to the leader").

Last, when the drawings of all groups are presented and discussed, students realize the variance in implicit leadership theories, again raising social awareness but also self-awareness by highlighting the similarities and differences between their own and others' implicit leadership theories. We found that when working in, for example, culturally homogeneous groups and presenting to groups from different cultural backgrounds, students realize that implicit leadership theories contain a culturally shared aspect. This discussion

about similarities and differences in implicit leadership theories in general, and cultural communalities in particular can be enhanced by using drawings from earlier groups with which the drawings of the current groups can be contrasted.

The exercise is designed to work equally well with undergraduate and graduate students, individuals with and without leadership or work experience, and executives or teams from a single or different organization(s). Indeed, while we present only the exercise here and not data on its effectiveness, we have used the exercise on these different groups several times over the last years and judging from the feedback, the exercise has challenged ways of thinking in all.

Teaching Different Groups and Different Context

The instructions can be modified to address the general aim of the course and the context in which the exercise takes place. Two types of modifications are useful: First, the group composition can be varied; second, the type of leader can be specified (see Lord et al.'s categorization theory).

Depending on context and group composition, the instruction under Part B can be modified to focus on cultural or social differences (e.g., for culturally diverse groups or to extract gender differences), or on professions (e.g., physicians vs. nurses; IT vs. HR departments). Hence, paying attention to group composition is important in this exercise. An example of such a modification may illustrate this point. After discussing their findings and areas in which they concur or disagree, students can be asked to discuss factors impacting on leaders' effectiveness in their specific context (e.g., budget cuts in the public sector). They can then be asked to discuss how they believe their views are affected by their professional backgrounds. In terms of group composition, groups should be homogenous with respect to the profession of the members, for example, nurse-only groups and surgeon-only groups in a health service context. In this way, differences between those professional groups can be highlighted in the general discussion.

With respect to type of leader, the exercise can be altered in Part A so that rather than thinking about leaders in general, students could be encouraged to think about, for example, "leaders in health-care." Depending on the specific learning goals, the exercise can be repeated for a specific context or to illustrate changes in implicit leadership theories over time. For example, students can be asked to draw a second picture of a leader in a specific context and would then be asked to discuss the differences between the general leader

and the context-specific leader.[4] This relates to Lord's categorization theory (e.g., Lord, 1984). The first picture would be the leader versus nonleader level in Lord's categorization, and the second picture would be an example of an implicit leadership theory on a lower level of abstraction.

Where student groups are more homogenous, such as BA students, who also have little experience with leadership, it can be useful to later discuss in the group whether and why it was difficult to identify characteristics of a leader and to draw that leader. Sometimes, when students are reluctant to start drawing (e.g., stating that they cannot draw), it can be useful to provide other material, such as magazines, so they can do a collage rather than a drawing.

THE ADVANTAGES OF VISUAL METHODS IN TEACHING IMPLICIT LEADERSHIP THEORIES

Visual methods such as drawings have been readily used in development and education settings (Haney, Russell, & Bebell, 2004; Pridmore & Bendelow, 1995). Less frequently, visual methods have been used for research purposes, mainly in areas such as education or anthropology rather than organizational behavior or leadership (for an overview see Warren, 2009). As Warren (2009) points out, there are several different methods of employing visual material, such as taking existing material and using it to conclude, for example, an organization, or asking interview partners to draw in response to a question (see, for example, Bagnoli, 2009). The exercise we propose uses the latter approach.

As Crilly, Blackwell, and Clarkson (2006) point out, language can sometimes be unspecific and using language in (intercultural) studies has been criticized (Jepson, 2009). An example from our own use of drawings in teaching illustrates this problem: Students may point out that leaders need followers. However, the drawings add to this information by showing, for example, the size as well as the position of followers in relation to the leader, as well as the relationship between leaders and followers in a social context (see Figures 1–3 for examples). In line with Crilly and colleagues (2006), we believe that the students are best placed to interpret their drawings. Therefore, we ask students to verbalize their ideas in interpreting the drawings and conveying their meaning to other students.

Using drawing is particularly appropriate for

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[4] We thank an anonymous reviewer for this idea.

teaching implicit leadership theories, as it encourages "thinking outside the box" (Bagnoli, 2009). It allows for the expression of emotions (Barner, 2008), which may be difficult to achieve when exclusively using verbal techniques. Drawing can help surface tacit or latent constructs (Stiles, 2004). The exercise of drawing itself and then sharing the meaning of the drawing can help making implicit views explicit, thus raising self-awareness of implicit leadership theories.

HOW THE EXERCISE AFFECTS LEARNING

Although we cannot present data here to support the effectiveness of our exercise, there are several theoretical reasons why we assume that the exercise affects learning. According to Burgoyne, Hirsh, and Williams (2004), "there is astonishingly little evidence on how management and leadership development affects individual capability and performance of managers" (38). They argue that there are several reasons why finding a relationship between leadership development and performance cannot necessarily be expected. First, leaders may not apply the new competencies they have learned, for example, due to low motivation. Second, leaders work in teams, and leader development needs to include the ability to build social capital for leaders to improve performance. Third, leader development can have personal effects without leading to performance outcomes. So even when leaders acquire new competencies or capabilities in the development process, a transfer to their actual performance or the performance of the team or company does not necessarily follow. Therefore, looking solely at performance as an outcome of leader/leadership development may not be the best strategy for assessing the effect of development on leaders.

How, then, do we determine whether our exercise is "successful" in terms of raising self- and social awareness? Looking at the learning literature, we find that several aspects that are key to learning are included in our exercise and make us confident about the effects the exercise has on our students. First, as Burgoyne and colleagues (2004) point out, feedback is key in development. We use multiple sources of feedback and participants are able to discuss feedback with those participants who provided it. Second, our exercise incorporates several aspects of the experiential learning theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2005); namely,

- "Learning is best facilitated by a process that draws out the students' beliefs and ideas" (194). In asking students to draw a typical leader,

this exercise is specifically geared toward assessing and making salient beliefs and ideas about leaders.
- "Conflict, differences, and disagreement are what drive the learning process" (194). An important part of the exercise is the discussion about different images of leaders as an element of the drawing process and also in the larger group when the drawings are presented.
- "Learning is the process of creating knowledge . . . whereby social knowledge is created and recreated in the personal knowledge of the learner" (194). By drawing in groups and discussing the drawings in the larger groups, the students are made aware of the images of leaders that others have (social knowledge) and are able to integrate this knowledge into their own knowledge.

EXAMPLES

We have used this drawing exercise over 20 times in several different contexts over the last few years. We mostly used the exercise with mature MBA and MSc students (about 15 times) and in executive teaching (5 times). We have also used it in the context of a BA course on leadership (twice). While the exercise itself has not changed, we did adapt it to different contexts (see above, e.g., using "effective leaders" vs. "leaders in general").

Figures 1–3 illustrate implicit leadership theories drawings from three different cultural groups. Figure 1 shows the drawing from a group of United States students, indicating implicit leadership theories typical of "focus on leader," highlighting his/her skills, characteristics and behaviors. Figure 2 portrays the drawing of a Far-East Asian group. In their presentation, the students highlighted that to
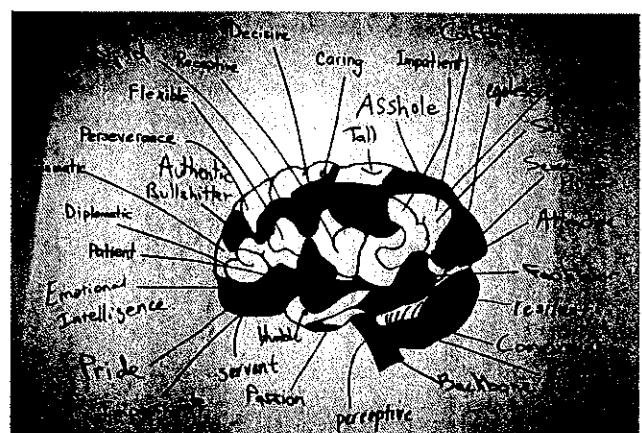

FIGURE 1
Prototypical Drawing With Focus on Leader Skills, Characteristics, and Behaviors (United States students). "An effective leader needs to be all these things at once."
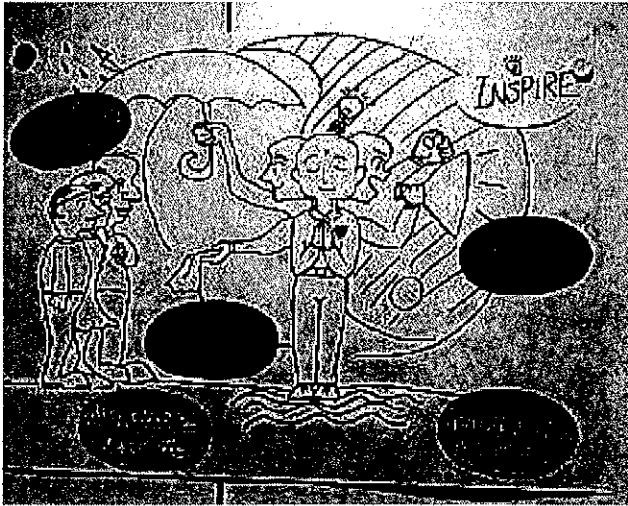
FIGURE 2
Drawing Highlighting a Wider Societal Purpose
of Leadership in Relationship to Followers (Far-
East Asian students). "An effective leader is
responsible for employees' and their families'
well-being."

be effective leaders need to be looking out not only for the well-being of their employees, but also of their employees' families. Figure 3 exemplifies the process that can lay behind the implicit leadership theories of effective leaders, involving many parties (e.g., shareholders, here Unions, represented by the octopus reaching out from the sea, or market forces, represented by the waves and weather). In
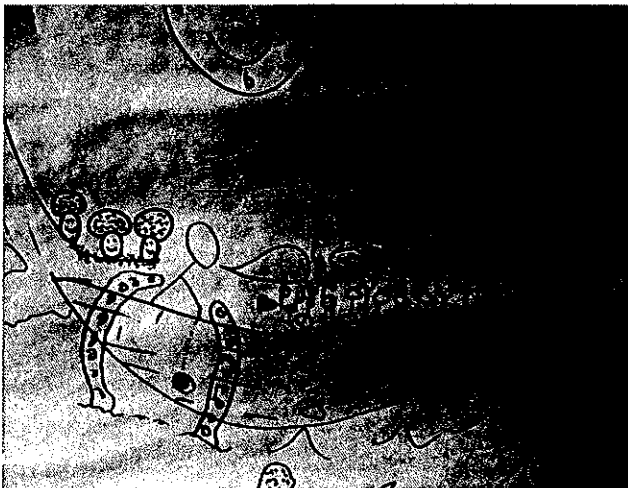

FIGURE 3
Excerpt of a Drawing Describing Different Power
Relations Within the Leadership Process in a
Wider Organizational and Societal Context (Latin
students). "An effective leader is in the same
boat with the followers and is just one aspect of
the leadership process."

contrast to the first two drawings, the third drawing describes leadership as effective, although the leader is not the most central figure but just one of many important contributors in the leadership process. Also of interest was that the characteristics attributed to effective leaders were similar in many drawings (e.g., passionate, charismatic, inspiring); however, the context in which leadership is "carried out" and "interpreted" varies considerably.

When presenting and discussing the drawing, different groups' implicit leadership theories are contrasted, for example, by comparing different drawings and highlighting similarities. Here, we often see that the topic of "charisma" appears in drawings even across different cultures, which is in line with the results of the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) study (e.g., House et al., 2002). The advantage of using this exercise as a group exercise (for a similar approach see Barner, 2008), is that it is often useful to ask students to what extent they found it easy or difficult to agree *within* their group to highlight individual differences. At the same time, instructors should highlight that these images can be influenced by social contexts (here, we introduced culture as a social context).

In our example, we could see that the presentation and discussion of drawings is a vital part of the exercise, as it often exposes very deeply rooted assumptions. For example, it is striking that drawings like the one depicted in Figure 1 often get challenged on the aspects that are represented (e.g., does an effective leader have to be "selfish"), but very rarely are questions asked regarding their absence of followers in the drawing.

The drawing in Figure 2, however, was strongly challenged by the North American group. One participant was particularly struck by the drawing, nearly incredulous: "You cannot be serious, how can it be the role of effective leaders to look after the families of employees?" The discussion that followed made clear just how deeply rooted cultural assumptions about leadership are. Figure 3 is a good example of drawings that highlight even more of the context in which effective leaders are seen to operate. In this drawing, an effective leader is portrayed as only one of the key factors in the leadership process. The leader is literally in the same boat with the followers, and the system (boat) is kept afloat by a whole series of processes and forces (leader, followers, markets, unions, and economy).

In the following, we discuss links between the implicit leadership drawing exercise and leader and leadership development, in particular the

ways in which the exercise helps to raise self- and social awareness; affects (leader and follower) cognition, motivation, and behavior; and shapes leader identities (in followers).

LINKING THE EXERCISE BACK TO LEADER AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Our exercise is aimed at raising awareness by making implicit knowledge explicit. It consists of several parts that are geared toward raising awareness about students' implicit leadership theories and how these are similar to, or differ from, others' implicit leadership theories, as well as the implications arising from this knowledge. An advantage of using a drawing method of teaching is that the students directly experience the prevailing differences themselves, rather than merely being told about them. By provoking conflict, differences, and disagreements to the way of thinking, the exercise stimulates learning (in the Kolb & Kolb sense), and many students experience a "Eureka!" moment when they realize how differently leaders and leadership are constructed, and how this may impact on the daily leadership processes.

The Role of Self- and Social Awareness for Leader and Leadership Development

One underlying assumption of our approach is that leaders and leadership cannot be developed independently of follower images of leaders and leadership. Most students who have leadership experience can recall an example of a situation where what they "normally do" was not effective in a particular context (e.g., a leader with a self-image as portrayed in Figure 1 leading in a context portrayed by Figure 2). Self-awareness of their implicit leadership theories can help leaders understand why they behave in a certain way to achieve goals, whereas social awareness of followers' implicit leadership theories helps them understand why this might not be effective in a particular context. The integration of self- and other awareness may, therefore, facilitate behavioral change (in all parties) toward a more effective approach in a particular context.[5] Thus, whenever leaders are trained to behave in a specific way, we argue that their and others' images of leaders and leadership need to be taken into account for training to be effective.

Before turning to a more in-depth exploration of identity, we first outline the broader implications of a raised awareness for cognition, motivation, and behavior. As mentioned in the introduction, many articles on leader development emphasize the importance of self-awareness for leaders and leadership. Hall (2004) calls self-awareness a "major aspect" (154) of leader development. As Krauss, Hamid, and Ismail (2010) put it, "Self-aware leaders are sensitive to how their actions affect others and have a greater capacity to adjust to situations" (4). Teaching self-awareness can be considered part of *leader* development. The drawing exercise also focuses on social awareness, which is part of *leadership* development. We define *social awareness* here very broadly as the awareness that leaders and followers have (or should develop) about images of leadership that others around them hold and how these might differ from their implicit theories. This includes an understanding about how I as a follower may react to leaders based on my implicit leadership theories and how leaders more generally are judged within a certain social context. This awareness forms the basis for the above-cited capacity to adjust effectively to various social contexts.

Cognition, Motivation, and Behavior

Our approach to teaching implicit leadership theories tries to overcome a central problem of leadership training and development, namely that it often ignores that leaders (inter-)act with their social environment (Day, 2001). Olivares, Peterson, and Hess (2007: 79) state: "Leadership requires that individual development is integrated and understood in the context of others, social systems, and organizational strategies, missions, and goals." Making leaders aware of the social context in which they work with respect to implicit leadership theories is the first step to alter their behavior in ways that will be more effective in their specific context. Thus, raising awareness of implicit leadership theories is complementary to leadership behavior training, as the latter sort of training does not include information about the implicit leadership theories context in which leaders operate.

Leaders who are aware of differences in implicit leadership theories between themselves and their followers (disagreement) and among their followers (differentiation, lack of consensus) have made a first step in altering their own behavior. Similar to cultural intelligence (Early & Ang, 2003), cognition is the first step when behavior needs to be adapted to different circumstances, followed by motivation to change behavior and, finally, actu-

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[5] Note that this is by no means to be confused with "pleasing the followers" or even "doing what they want."

ally behaving in line with the respective social context. Our exercise can serve as the first step to enhance *cognition*. It can help leaders to adapt their behavior according to the implicit leadership theories context in which they are operating. In addition, as leaders develop a deeper understanding of the context of leadership, our exercise can foster *motivation* in the leader to adapt his/her behavior to match this context. Finally, being motivated to try out new *behavior*, leaders will eventually improve their leadership as they receive feedback from their followers and can further adapt and refine their leadership skills. In this way, the awareness raised by our exercise can help leaders to stay alert to the necessity to adapt and refine their leadership. The same argument applies to followers, in that their awareness of their own and others' implicit leadership theories influences their cognition (which follower and leader behavior is adequate in a given context), and their motivation to change their own behavior and to improve the leadership process by engaging in these behaviors.

Identity

These concepts of self- and social awareness can be linked to different types of identity. Day and Harrison (2007) emphasize the role of three levels of identity: individual (also called personal), relational, and collective. The differentiation of different levels of identity goes back to Brewer and Gardner (1996), who argue that individuals have different levels of identities available to them and that, at different times, different levels of identity are activated. At the personal level, the self-concept is defined as traits that make the person different from others. The relational self-concept refers to roles taken on in relationships with others. Finally, the collective self-concept is the definition of the self in terms of group memberships as outlined in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

With respect to the different levels of identity, Day and Harrison (2007) argue that better leaders are able to use all three levels of self-concept, which is especially relevant in complex situations. Again, teaching implicit leadership theories can sharpen all three identities, in that self-awareness relates to individual self-concept and what leaders know about their own images of leadership. Social awareness relates to relational and collective levels of identity, in that leaders and followers need to understand how their images of leaders and leadership may shape their relationship, and ultimately, their collective identity. Only when im-

plicit leadership theories of leaders and followers match sufficiently, will leaders claim and be granted leader identity, will relationships be clear, and leaders be collectively endorsed (De Rue & Ashford, 2010).

Linking this idea to social exchange relationships, Flynn (2005) argues that in employee exchange relationships (of which leadership is one), the terms of the exchange are implicit when relational and collective identities are activated. In contrast, when individuals' personal identities are activated, they will engage in more explicit negotiations of exchange. However, as Flynn argues, different forms of negotiation styles based on different levels of identity can lead to conflict. By making implicit images explicit, the drawing exercise can render the negotiation of leader identities more explicit, thus provoking conflicts in the learning setting, and therefore, facilitate the negotiation of identities. At the same time, in the sense of De Rue and Ashford (2010), it can also make the implicit exchanges involved in the leadership process more explicit and start the process of negotiating a more effective leadership process within a social context.

Awareness of the variation of implicit assumptions can work in a similar way to diversity training, namely, that leaders aim to overcome differences and emphasize communalities to establish a joint group identity. This crafting of a joint group identity goes beyond making leaders aware of the social contexts in which they lead, and beyond establishing their social identities. In that sense, the social identity of the leader as a group member spreads to the other group members. Hence, raising awareness about implicit leadership theories can be integrated into the latest approach to leadership development, namely, training leaders about behavior relevant to group identity (e.g., social identity theory of leadership; Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011). To successfully build a group's social identity, the leader needs to be aware of the implicit leadership theories of the followers and how they fit to the leader's own implicit leadership theory (cf. De Rue & Ashford, 2010). The ultimate aim is for leaders and group members to have a socially shared social identity.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

We described an implicit leadership theories exercise and gave examples of drawings; however, we did not provide any evidence for the effective working of the exercise. Future research should, therefore, aim to collect data showing how the exercise affects the participants in their self- and other

awareness. For example, the exercise could be repeated with the same participants after they have gone back to their workplaces and then compare the drawings and comments to examine whether they have become more differentiated and less self-focused in the second exercise. Also worth examining is if the attributes named and drawn have changed when the exercise is repeated. Or even more simply, a questionnaire could be distributed before and after the exercise to see if and how the prototypical attributes of leaders have changed.

Another way of examining the effectiveness of the exercise would be to compare two groups of participants that have done the exercise with different foci (e.g., one focusing on cultural differences, one focusing on professional differences) and compare how their self- and other awareness has changed differently by looking at the attributes they name and compare the drawings in a repeat exercise.

In addition, the exercise could be compared to other methods of raising awareness. For example, to examine if the exercise actually raises both self- and other awareness, two groups could be compared: One which has undergone training or development using methods focusing on only one of those aspects and one doing our drawing exercise. A test could compare if there are differences in the awareness (self- and other) between those groups, for example, using questionnaires that focus on both types of awareness.

CONCLUSIONS

According to Cummings (2007: 143): "A good number of leadership scholars and practitioners of leadership development continuously search for innovative yet practical examples of what leadership looks like for educational purposes"—and we are no exception. The general learning outcome of our drawing exercise is that apart from learning about their own images of leaders and leadership, students understand that their implicit leadership theories have an individual and social component that others may or may not share. Based on the theoretical underpinnings of implicit leadership theories outlined, a key outcome of teaching implicit leadership theories is that students understand there can be no overall valid truth to what effective or "good" leadership is, and that it depends more on individual, social, and cultural constructions than on the characteristics and behaviors of the leader as such. Understanding this notion involves first, getting a sense of one's implicit leadership theories; second, understanding how and why we perceive leaders in a specific

way, and third, understanding that these constructions vary between different (groups of) people, which has implications for followers, leaders, and leadership. Thus, combining leader and leadership development by raising self- and social awareness of implicit leadership theories can facilitate the development of leader identities (cf. De Rue & Ashford, 2010) and, ultimately, ease the process of negotiating leadership more constructively and effectively, and hopefully with less conflict (cf. Flynn, 2005).

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Birgit Schyns (birgit.schyns@durham.ac.uk) is reader in management at Durham University, United Kingdom. She received her PhD from the University of Leipzig, Germany. Before moving to the United Kingdom, she lived and worked in the Netherlands from 2002 to 2006. Her research topics include leadership and career development. She has published widely on topics including leader-member exchange, transformational leadership, implicit leadership theories, followers' perception of leadership as well as employability. Birgit has edited several special issues and two books. She is an associate editor for *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* and *British Journal of Management* and serves on several editorial boards.

Tina Kiefer (tina.kiefer@wbs.ac.uk) is associate professor of organizational behaviour at Warwick Business School (UK). She received her PhD in organizational psychology from the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). Tina's research interests include implicit leadership theories, leadership in organizational change, and emotional processes at work, particularly in the context of ongoing change.

Rudolf Kerschreiter (rudolf.kerschreiter@fu-berlin.de) is professor of social and economic psychology and head of the Social and Economic Psychology Unit at Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. He received his PhD and his habilitation doctorate from Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich. His research interests include leadership and group processes, particularly implicit leadership theories, individual and group decision making, social information processing, and social identity.

Alex Tymon (alex.tymon@port.ac.uk) is a senior lecturer at the Business School, University of Portsmouth. She teaches human resources and management, having held roles in both disciplines for many years in industry prior to taking up teaching. Her main specialist HR field is learning and training with a particular focus on management/leadership development. Her research interests also include graduate employability and proactive personality.

New ways to leadership development: A picture paints a thousand words

Birgit Schyns
Durham University, UK

Alex Tymon
University of Portsmouth, UK

Tina Kiefer
University of Warwick, UK

Rudolf Kerschreiter
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Abstract
Mainstream leadership development often focuses only on leaders themselves and existing models that purport to help these individuals become better at leading. However, this sort of *leader development* (as opposed to leadership development) is questionable with regard to efficiency and effectiveness. We argue here that this may be due to a lack of acknowledgement of leaders' (and followers') implicit leadership theories (Eden and Leviatan, 1975) in the context of leader and leadership development. In an attempt to broaden the scope of leadership development, we present the results of using a drawing exercise as a learning tool. This exercise serves to assess leaders' (and followers') implicitly held images of leaders and allows for contextual information derived from the exercise to be included in development interventions. Results show that participants draw metaphors and symbols as well as real and generic people. Furthermore, most drawings are of male leaders, and only few drawings contain followers. Based on the results, we critically reflect upon implications for leadership learning and development and argue that implicit leadership theories can provide a valuable starting point for leadership development.

Corresponding author:
Birgit Schyns, Durham Business School, Durham University, Mill Hill Lane, Durham DH1 3LB, UK.
Email: birgit.schyns@durham.ac.uk

Introduction

Leadership development and training is costly, with the investment estimated to be between $10–50bn a year (Hannah and Avolio, 2010; Raelin, 2004: 131). Yet its effectiveness is unclear and transfer to the workplace remains a challenge (Burgoyne et al., 2004). Whilst many reasons for this problem exist, one key issue is that traditional leadership development has often focused on the leader as a person, the aim of the intervention being to change leaders' behaviour to fit a predefined dominant model of what a leader should be (Ford and Harding, 2007). However, this ignores the wider context of leadership in which leaders operate (cf. Day, 2001), including the role of followers in the leadership process. Consequently, there have been numerous calls for more critical approaches to teaching leadership (Cunliffe, 2009; Hansen et al., 2007; Sinclair, 2007). Disregarding the wider context of leadership can result in teaching a 'one-best-way' of leading, rather than acknowledging that leaders have different starting points and operate in different contexts. Day (2001) calls these different approaches 'leader development' (focus on the leader) versus 'leadership development' (focus on the wider context of leadership). Ford et al., (2008) outline a typical *leader* development session in which the participants' role mainly seems to be to listen to leadership theory and a trainer pointing out how they do not (yet) match the perfect leader profile (see also Ford and Harding, 2007). We agree that this type of training fails to recognize the complexity of a leader's situation and does not acknowledge the role of the follower in the *leadership* process.

A similar argument can be drawn from a relational point of view. For example, Uhl-Bien (2006) argues for a relational perspective of leadership, that is, a shift in focus from the individual to the collective dynamic and the meaning constructed within the collective. We argue here that leaders need a more contextual approach to leader development, which involves starting with raising awareness, both of their own and their followers' view of leadership (Schyns et al., 2011). Including followers in leadership development programmes is important as Hosking (2002) highlights an 'obvious potential limitation is the absence of "the led" and leader-led relations as an ongoing context for training' (p. 7). Leadership development, based on implicit leadership theories (Eden and Leviatan, 1975), acknowledges that leaders need a more reflexive approach. It takes into account that leaders need to increase their contextual sensitivity and match the expectations of their followers in order to be granted 'leadership' (De Rue and Ashford, 2010). Therefore, leaders and potential leaders need to find out about these expectations and how they match/mismatch with their own images of leadership, in order to help them to become better leaders in their context. For example, leaders and followers may differ in the degree to which they regard leadership as 'male' (**cf.** think-manager-think-male phenomenon, e.g. Schein, 1973; 1975; 2001; Sczesny et al., 2004) or the extent to which they implicitly include followers in the leadership process (i.e. their implicit followership theories, Sy, 2010). The core idea is to connect leadership learning and development to the images of leaders and leadership which followers and leaders have in their minds. Thus our approach is in line with conceptualisations of leadership as social construction, reflected, for instance, in Romance of Leadership (e.g. Meindl et al., 1985).

In the following, we first introduce the concept of implicit leadership and followership theories in more detail, outlining prior research and its shortcomings. We then present the drawing exercise and integrate it into the critical approach to leadership development. Next, we report on a study using the drawing method to underline our argument and explain how this method can be used as a starting point for leadership development. We outline how we analysed the drawings and summarize the results. Finally, we discuss the implications of these results for leadership learning and development.

Implicit leadership theories and how to measure them

'Implicit leadership theories' describe everyday images of leaders (Schyns and Schilling, 2011). The term was introduced by Eden and Leviatan (1975; see also Eden and Leviatan, 2005) who found that participants use the same schemas to describe leaders about whom they have no information as they would use for actual leaders. Subsequently, much research has shown that performance cues influence how we view leaders (for an overview see Lord and Maher, 1993), indicating that we have images in our mind that we apply to people labelled 'leaders' (Kenney et al., 1996).

Traditional assessments of implicit leadership theories inquire about traits, characteristics and behaviours expected of leaders, typically using either an open question format (e.g. Offermann et al., 1994; Schyns and Schilling, 2011) or using predefined lists for participants to rate (e.g. Epitropaki and Martin, 2005). Dimensions of traits found in an American sample include sensitivity, tyranny, intelligence, devotion, charisma, strength, attractiveness, and masculinity (Offermann et al., 1994). Similarly, implicit followership theories focus on the traits, characteristics, and behaviours of followers, for example: industry, enthusiasm, good citizenship, conformity, insubordination, and incompetence (Sy, 2010). Leaders' implicit followership theories are related to attitudes such as liking and relationship quality (Sy, 2010).

However, leadership research has moved away from the idea that (effective) leaders need particular traits or characteristics. Most leadership theories nowadays acknowledge the role of followers and the importance of interactions between leaders and followers in the leadership process (e.g. leader-member exchange, Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; transformational leadership, Bass, 1985). Consequently, alternative ways of assessing implicit leadership theories are called for that challenge the traditional focus on traits and characteristics.

Using drawings to assess implicit leadership theories allows learners to go beyond traits and characteristics when expressing their views about leaders and leadership, not least because using drawings, in the context of a leadership development intervention, is less familiar to participants. Many traditional leadership development programmes start with instructor-led discussions, clearly defining the role of a leader, and by implication, leadership (Ford et al., 2008). Opening a learning event with a potentially unexpected drawing exercise may encourage participants to engage in a personal and group exploration of the concept, which could facilitate cognitive learning (Kubota and Olstad, 1991). However, whilst the drawing exercise may be unexpected, it uses familiar teaching tools of flip chart and pens, and is therefore not too novel, which means participants are less likely to be sidetracked or diverted by the activity itself (Kubota and Olmsted, 1991).

Using a drawing exercise as a learning tool in the context of critical leadership development

As Ford et al. (2008: 29) point out, leadership is not achieved through a 'straightforward mechanistic process whereby a person is persuaded of the need for leadership, goes on courses and through practice becomes a leader'. Mainstream leadership development, however, often focuses (only) on the leader him/herself. Day (2001) terms this 'leader development' as the focus is on the leader as a person rather than the wider social or relational context of leadership ('leadership development'). Uhl-Bien (2006) differentiates between an entity perspective and a relational perspective. According to her:

> an entity perspective [...] focuses on identifying attributes of individuals as they engage in interpersonal relationships, and a relational perspective [...] views leadership as a process of social construction through which certain understandings of leadership come about and are given privileged ontology. (p. 654)

In addition, looking at the 'dialectics of leadership', Collinson (2005: 1422) argues that the differentiation between leaders and followers can be artificial as there are 'simultaneous interdependencies and asymmetries between leaders and followers'. Therefore, both leader and follower views need to be taken into account when developing leaders.

We argue here that leader and leadership development should use the leaders' and followers' own reflections about leadership as a starting point, rather than models established by leadership researchers. With respect to new leaders, Ford et al. (2008: 84) argue that they 'must be willing to analyse himself – or herself – and to discuss the self-analysis with strangers and with colleagues'. We expand on this and argue that the exercise we have developed serves to analyse the self (in the sense of one's implicit leadership theories) and to facilitate a discussion with other leaders as well as followers. This also answers Hosking's (2002) concern about neglecting the led in the process of leader development.

In order to get learners thinking about their ideas of leaders and leadership, we conducted a drawing exercise (cf. Schyns et al., 2011). In this exercise, participants form groups and think about 'leaders', before being given paper and pens and being invited to draw a leader. Using this method as opposed to other assessments of implicit leadership theories has several advantages: (a) it encourages the use of symbols and cultural representations to access prototypes and metaphors, adding an emotional element to the cognitive approach (Bryans and Mavin, 2006; Kearney and Hyle, 2004); (b) it fosters a group process; (c) it is language independent; and (d) it allows for context information to be included as – in contrast to as other assessments – it is not restricted to a list of characteristics.

Using drawings in leadership development can be placed in the context of 'arts-based methods in managerial development' (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009). Taylor and Ladkin (2009) argue that those methods are more effective than more traditional development methods as they include an emotional dimension. They differentiate four processes of the contribution of arts to leadership development: (a) skills transfer, (b) projective technique, (c) illustration of essence, and (d) making. Our drawing exercise is both an example for projective technique, as it uses an art form to make implicit knowledge explicit, and an illustration of essence (which is, according to Taylor and Ladkin, 2009: 58, 'conceptually similar to projective technique'). The drawings are an example of illustration of essence as they encourage tacit knowledge to become explicit and the sharing of meaning.

Returning to the point of arts-based methods and emotions, Taylor and Statler (2009: 20) argue that 'materials can trigger emotions, and emotions can enhance learning'. They discuss the use of different types of material and how they influence the emergence of emotions, suggesting that less structured material triggers more emotions. We argue that on a scale from non-emotional to very emotional materials, drawing would be midpoint, which may be appropriate for many leadership development programmes. On the one hand, drawing may stimulate emotion and therefore access tacit knowledge. On the other hand, drawing does not use highly involving material that might distract from the actual task (see also Kubota and Olmsted, 1991). The drawings should be used as a starting point of reflection about the (possibly changing) context of leadership rather than a purpose in itself.

The drawing exercise can also be placed in the context of double-loop learning, a process that encourages deep thought about assumptions and beliefs. Double-loop learning or transformational learning (Mezirow, 1991) encourages the exploration of and changes in values, beliefs, assumptions, and biases, helps learners to reflect critically as opposed to reinforcing traditional views and think dialectically, with the goal of fostering independent thinking (Brooks, 2004; Merriam, 2004; Pohland and Bova, 2000). The potential outputs of transformational learning for leaders therefore include: a rise in levels of self-awareness and increased capacity to develop new knowledge, skills,

talents, and attitudes (Brooks, 2004; Hannah and Avolio, 2010) and an increase in flexibility and ability to deal with ambiguities (Brooks, 2004; Merriam, 2004).

The rational model of double-loop or transformational learning involves a process starting with a 'disorienting dilemma', in order to drive a critical assessment of assumptions, followed by 'rational discourse', where new meanings are discussed and evaluated (Merriam, 2004: 62). In the case of our exercise, the disorienting dilemma can take many forms, for example participants may realize that their own images of leaders are not 'the norm' but that others have implicit leadership theories that are often quite different; or conversely they may discover that they have stereotypical views. They are also likely to discover much about their implicit followership theories and again how these differ, or not, from those of other people. The idea of transformational learning is that in order to change, learners first need to recognize a need for change. By understanding the differences between their own and other implicit leadership and followership theories, participants should recognize that the leadership process is far more complex than they expected; being shaped by different views and expectations; and this may encourage them to question their own part in the process.

However, facilitating transformational learning is not easy as initial responses can be negative and volatile (Young, Mountford, and Skrla, 2006). For example, issues such as the gendered nature of leadership can lead to resistance in the sense that participants deny that there is a gender issue, or learners can claim that of course followers are important. Resistance can take the form of 'Distancing' (p. 267), 'Opposition' (p. 268) and 'Intense emotions' (p. 268) which has the potential to block learning for individuals and groups (Young et al., 2006). Articulating and criticizing underlying assumptions about self and others is an underdeveloped capacity for most adults and therefore one role of adult educators is to enable this to happen in a sensitive and unthreatening way (Merriam, 2004; Pohland and Bova, 2000).

Using the drawing exercise as a starting point could overcome some of the initial challenges of transformational learning for two reasons. First, drawing is seen as a different and often fun activity (reverting to childhood and its associations with play), which can disarm initial resistance. This may prevent some of the denials explained by Young et al. (2006). By providing a conducive, dialogic context that encourages communication and discourse (Brooks, 2004), a drawing exercise can help share pre-existing knowledge of learners in a non-threatening way. Because participants have less fixed views on the interpretation of drawings than they do of words, the exercise can increase learners' receptivity of listening, as they seek to understand the drawings of others. This may encourage learners to explore their starting point as opposed to defending it, which could in turn enhance the sharing of social, political, and cultural history (Pohland and Bova, 2000). Second, the drawings produced can serve as a mirror to start reflecting about views on leadership. That is, the drawing can be used as evidence of, for example, the gendered views on leadership, or the negation of followers, whilst at the same time, putting this into a context that explains that this view is not unusual.

Method

Background of the drawing exercise

The drawings we analyse here were collected as part of an exercise aimed to raise self- and social awareness about implicit leadership theories (Schyns et al., 2011). Our drawing exercise aims at both leader and leadership development (sensu, Day, 2001) in so far that it makes leaders (and followers) aware of their own and, at the same time, others' implicit leadership theories. We argue

elsewhere (Schyns et al., 2011) that followers' implicit leadership theories constitute the social background in which leaders operate, thus leaders are granted their identity by their followers (DeRue and Ashford, 2010). Therefore if leaders' and followers' implicit leadership theories do not match, leaders will not be granted influence. However, as these theories are implicit, people are not aware of the images they hold and, therefore, do not question them, and even less, question in how far their images of leaders differ from others.

Sample and procedure

Our sample consists of N = 138 drawings collected in the context of teaching and development of undergraduate, postgraduate, and executive students. Drawings were constructed in typical group sizes of between two and five people. Where possible, groups were kept homogeneously, for example with respect to culture or profession.

After thinking about characteristics of leaders on their own, groups are asked to 'draw a leader' (for full instructions see Schyns et al., 2011). The instructions are deliberately kept unspecific so that groups have room for interpretation. No further clarification is given at this stage.

Analysis

In order to analyse the drawings, we created an inventory of the main features in the drawings and content-analysed the drawings (Lofland and Lofland, 1995; Weber, 1990). We developed a coding system, based on Ayman-Nolley and Ayman's (2005) approach for coding children's implicit leadership theories. The codes derived and frequencies are portrayed in Table 1. Ayman-Nolley and Ayman coded their drawings using the following categories: gender, skin colour, presence of violence, presence of followers, gender of followers, and relative size of followers compared to the leader drawn. We used many of the same codes here, apart from skin colour as there were very few other than white Caucasian leaders drawn. We also did not code for gender of followers, again due to the small sample size of drawings including followers.

In contrast to Ayman-Nolley and Ayman who decided only to interpret representations of actual people, we decided to interpret all drawings, including those that did not contain a person at all. Thus, our first code was used to differentiate drawings of people from drawings of metaphors or objects (code 1). We coded the gender of the person drawn as male, female, both, or no gender indicated (code 2). The category 'both' was used, for example, where half a female and half a male body were drawn. We also noticed after a first viewing that some of our drawings contained the depiction of a head/brain only, so we added this code to our scheme (code 3). Drawings that included both people and metaphors or symbols were coded first as drawings of people but coded again as containing symbols (code 4). As a lot of our drawings contained symbols in addition to people and we were interested in how far participants used the drawing method to go beyond leader characteristics, we also coded whether or not additional symbols were drawn. Finally, we coded if the drawing contained followers or not (code 5) and, if so, their relative size compared to the leaders depicted (code 6). The drawings were analysed by two coders who were not part of the original research team, meaning they had not used the exercise themselves nor were they highly involved in the research process up to this stage. The decision was taken to use 'innocent' coders to ensure that the influence of prior knowledge and assumptions was minimized. Instead of relying on inter-rater reliability, we used conferenced

Table I. Frequencies and percentages of the categories found in the drawings.

No	Category	Frequency	Percentage[a]
I	People versus metaphor		
	Real people	13	9.4
	Generic people	93	67.4
	Metaphor	30	21.7
2	Gender		
	No gender	40	29
	Male	76	55.1
	Female	8	5.8
	Both	12	8.7
3	Body		
	Head/brain	11	8
	Not only head/brain	125	90.6
4	Contains additional symbols		
	Yes	98	71
	No	37	26.8
5	Followers		
	Present	55	39.9
	Absent	81	58.7
6	Size followers		
	Smaller than leader	47	34.1
	Same size as leader	8	5.8
	Bigger than leader	0	0

[a]Percentages refer to the percentage of all pictures rather than the percentage per sub-category.

results, that is, the coders met after initial individual coding and discussed results until agreement was reached.

Results of the contents analysis

Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of the categories found in the drawings. While most groups drew a person, a surprising number of groups drew a metaphor (21.7%); often a lion ($N = 5$), despite the instructions 'draw a leader'.

In 29% of drawings no gender of the leader was identifiable. Of the remainder, 79.2% drew a male leader (55.1% of all groups).

Of the drawings 9.4% were of actual leaders; examples include John Terry,[1] Martin Luther King, Jesus, and Bill Gates, again predominantly male. With respect to the parts of the body that groups drew, 8% drew a head or brain only. Most of the drawings contained symbols in addition to people ($N = 98$, 71%).

In 58.7% ($N = 81$) of the drawings, no followers were present. When followers were drawn they were mainly depicted as smaller than the leaders in the drawing ($N = 47$, 34.1%). In the remaining 5.8% ($N = 8$) of cases, followers and leaders were drawn at the same size. In addition to those codes, it was noticeable that many drawings contained words to describe the leader. We have not interpreted the words here but focused on the drawings.

Discussion and implications for leadership learning and development

We analysed the drawings with respect to their overall content. This served to describe the drawings better but also to derive ideas for leadership development from this exercise.

Several aspects of the drawings emerged. First, some groups drew actual people as leaders (e.g. Martin Luther King, Hitler); others (the majority) drew generic people. Second, most drawings depicted male leaders and only a minority drew female leaders. Third, some drawings only showed a head or a brain as opposed to a full body. Finally, metaphors were used by some groups and many drawings contained symbols in addition to drawings of people. We will discuss all those aspects in the following, putting these results in the context of existing literature and use them to derive recommendations for leadership development.

Actual versus generic person

The majority of groups drew a generic person (e.g. a stickman); however, some groups drew a 'real' person (see Ayman-Nolley and Ayman, 2005, for a similar result in children's drawings). This reflects a differentiation between exemplar-based models and abstraction-based or prototype models (Hilton and Von Hippel, 1996). Abstraction-based or prototype model are more generic ideas about leaders in general while exemplar-based models use examples to describe the category as a whole. Therefore, it seems that leaders are mainly represented as generic persons; however, a substantial minority of individuals might compare their leaders against leader exemplars.

With respect to leader or leadership development, when exemplar leaders are drawn, explanatory symbols and words might be particularly useful to clarify which aspects of the drawn person are considered exemplary. This leaves less room for interpretation as other students involved in the session may view the depicted leader differently and might therefore interpret the 'wrong' aspect of this person as an example of the category leader. An example drawing can illustrate this point (see Figure 1). Here, a group of participants drew a 'real' person (Chhatrapati Shivaji) and illustrated with words why they thought this person was a good example of the category leader.

Here the exercise can help to go beyond extracting textbook knowledge from students. That is, when in traditional leadership development programmes the question of 'can anyone be a leader' is asked, it is often answered in a socially desirable or text book fashion. However, answering this question whilst analysing their own drawings may encourage participants to be more open about their actual beliefs and could therefore help overcome some of the resistance associated with transformational learning. This may mean going beyond standard answers such as 'anybody can be a leader' or 'leaders are born' to refining what is actually takes to be a leader for *them* or in *their* context.

Gender

Most of the groups drew a male leader and only very few drew a female leader or a leader presenting both genders (for an example of the latter see Figure 2). Research into the Think-Manager-Think-Male phenomenon (e.g. Schein, 1975, 2001) would lead us to expect to find more drawings of men than women in this context, though recent research suggests that the phenomenon is diminishing in so far as women are perceived as fitting leadership roles better than they used to (Bosak and Sczesny, 2011). Our drawings seem to indicate, however, that the Think-Manager-Think-Male phenomenon is still very prevalent. This result seems to support the notion that drawings
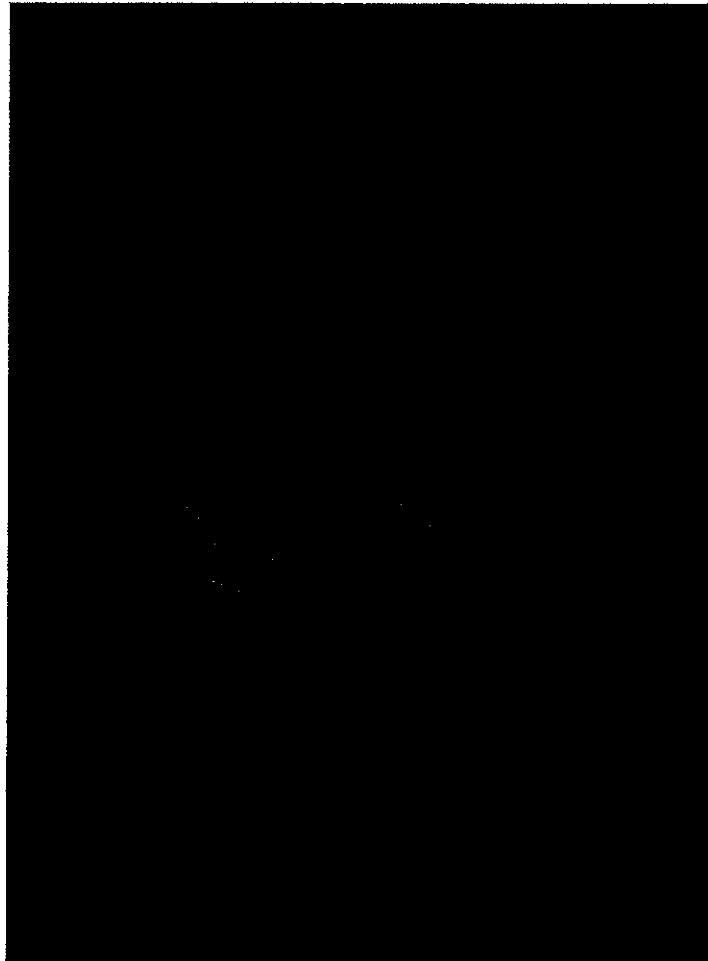
Figure 1. Drawing of a 'real' person as a prototypical leader.

may better access the implicit aspect of gendered leadership images than questionnaire-based assessments. In support, this result is similar to that of Nosek et al. (2006) when comparing explicit versus implicit assessments of stereotypes

As a starting point for leader and leadership development, images of male and female leaders can be used to draw attention to the gendered notion of leaders and to make this implicit aspect explicit. This may facilitate a discussion on gendered implicit leadership theories and, ultimately, help to overcome gendered stereotypes. In practice, it might stimulate a debate about male and female aspects of leadership and how male and female leaders can posses both typically male and female leader attributes. Here, transformational leadership could be used in the discussion: While this leadership style consists of different dimensions, the dimension of individual consideration is often considered typically female while inspirational motivation is more important for male leaders (e.g. Vinkenburg et al., 2011). This demonstrates that successful leadership styles can contain typically male and female aspects.

In traditional leadership development interventions the question of gender has the potential to stimulate socially desirable responses and can cause huge defensiveness in participants. Stites-Doe (2003) reports that even in an all female MBA class, her students denied that there are any gender differences regarding leadership or management. Our experiences in teaching MBA students are
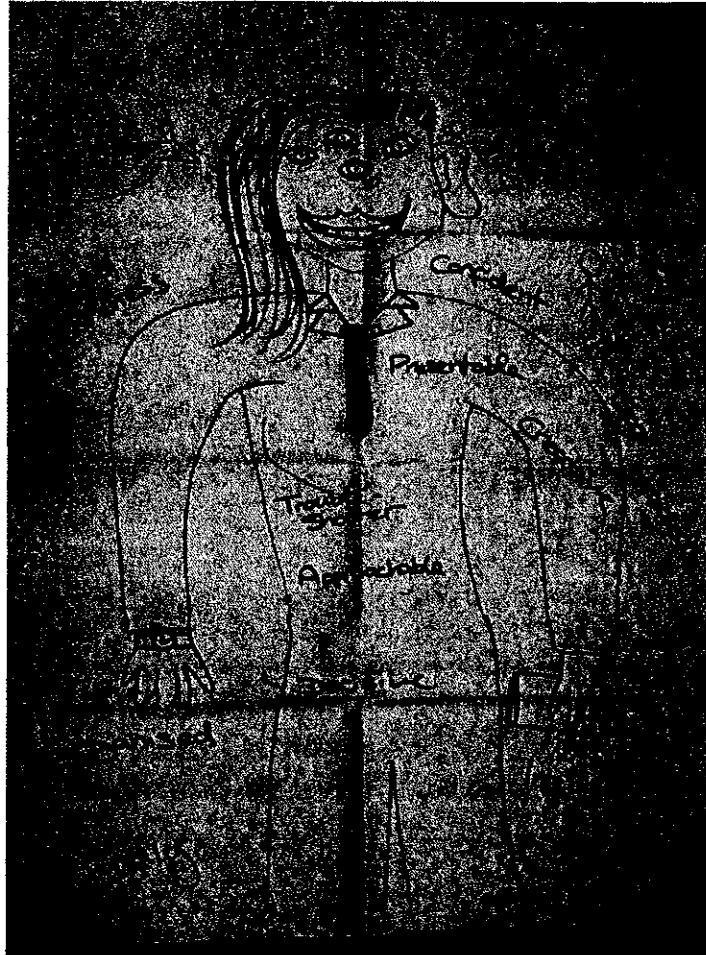
Figure 2. A sample drawing depicting both genders.

similar. For transformational learning to occur this defensiveness needs to be overcome and using the participants' own drawings to highlight their own implicit views may provide a good way of doing so.

Head/brain alone

We found that some groups drew a full body image of a leader and other groups only drew a head (for an example of the latter see Figure 3). While we do not want to over-interpret these differences, this finding can be situated in the recent discussion around embodied leadership (e.g. Ladkin and Taylor, 2010). It appears that some groups think of leadership as directed by the brain (or as Hansen et al., 2007: 552, put it 'intellectual/explicit knowing'), while others may see leadership as drawing on the whole body (similar to Hansen et al., 2007, notion of aesthetic knowing). Sinclair (2005: 402) argues that 'leadership [...] has been constructed as an activity of brains without bodies' and it seems this is indeed how some of our groups view leadership. It might be noted here that some pictures included enhanced features such as a large heart, large eyes, and other exaggerated features. Future research using larger sample sizes could focus specifically on this point and place the results into a discussion around the mind-body split (e.g. Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

Figure 3. Drawing depicting a head only.

An interesting discussion for leader and leadership development would be whether groups consider the brain as sufficient for a leader or if they consider other aspects as (equally) important. An example of such aspects of leadership would be social skills (Riggio and Reichard, 2008) or emotions which might vary in terms of their effectiveness, depending on the context the leader operates in (Lindebaum, 2010). It is plausible to expect leaders and followers to differ with respect to the brain (in terms of intelligence) versus social skill as they also differ in what they consider an important outcome of leadership (performance which may be more related to brain versus positive attitudes which may be more holistic, cf. Schyns and Wolfram, 2008). A discussion around these aspects of leadership would be useful to expose participants to a multi-dimensional view in leadership development.

Metaphors and symbols

A substantial minority of groups drew metaphors instead of people. Again, this is a result we would not have expected when starting to work with the drawing exercise. However, given that many of our groups consisted of non-native speakers, this result might, a posteriori, not be surprising. Non-native speakers may struggle to find language specific enough to express their thoughts (Crilly et al., 2006; Jepson, 2009). Therefore, where language is not available to express nuances, metaphors can be very useful. This notion might be supported by the heavy use of symbols in the drawings, even when people were depicted. This indicates that using drawings as a starting point for leadership development might be particularly useful in intercultural groups. However, one has to keep in mind that metaphors may not interculturally translate and that they might, therefore, still need explanation using language. Nevertheless, if the rational approach to transformational learning is adopted, then rational discourse is an important early step, which will facilitate the sharing of meaning and may provide additional learning connected to culture.

Followers

In the majority of drawings followers were absent. While 40% of the drawings contain an image of one or several followers, only a small number of drawings showed followers equal in size or position to their leaders. Thus the generalized implicit followership theory from our drawings would appear to be 'think follower think unimportant'. This confirms the dominant logic of western representations of leadership, which puts leaders' characteristics and behaviours at the centre of most leadership theories (e.g. charismatic or transformational leadership). For leadership development the question that arises goes beyond the question of leader characteristics. Assumptions can be surfaced about the role that followers play and the relationship between leaders and followers in a specific context. Therefore, the drawing exercise tells us something about how leaders are viewed but also about how leader-follower relationships are viewed. This information can be used as a starting point for leader and leadership development. Questions that guide this process could be: If this is the way we view leaders, is this also the way we *want* to view leaders here? Importantly, questions about followers or their absence could be raised: Who is it that enables a leader to be successful? and ultimately: Who or what is leadership for? Similar questions relating to relationships could be posed: If this is the way we view leader-follower relationships, is this also the way we *want* to view leader-follower relationship here?

Conclusion

The question we aimed to shed light on in this article is: What can be learned for leadership development by critically examining the images leaders and followers hold about leadership? We argued that (a) leadership development practices need to include leader and follower implicit leadership theories, (b) leadership development practices need to become more contextually situated, and (c) the drawing exercise presented here is a good starting point for leadership development. Using the results of the drawing exercise we illustrated how, based on this method, leadership development can overcome some of the potential barriers to traditional learning methods. Ultimately, every group will be different in terms of what they consider leadership to be and the degree to which they agree/disagree about leadership (development). This makes our exercise uniquely useful to develop leadership and leaders on the basis of the people involved in each specific case of leader-follower interactions.

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Note

1. This drawing emerged after the scandal surrounding John Terry which led to him being stripped of the captaincy of the English football team. It is noticeable that events like that influence the drawing exercise from time to time.

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Working with uncertainty to support the teaching of critical reflection

Margaret Mackay and Alex Tymon

The University of Portsmouth Business School, Portland Street, Portsmouth PO1 3DE, UK

This paper explores the cumulative reflections of lecturers examining their tacit assumptions of teaching practice. Despite extensive literature on the educational value of reflection, there is less visible research on teachers assessing their own reflective thinking. This longitudinal interpretive study uses Larrivee's assessment framework with a purposive sample of UK business students. Findings reveal insights for teaching reflection; acknowledging the discomfort of reflexive practice encourages learners to experiment with knowledge interpretation. The students' struggle to engage in reflection resonated with lecturers' parallel difficulties. The teaching approach balances deliberate structure with uncertain outcomes to trigger fresh interpretation of developmental theory and workplace relevance. Practice implications for lecturers are that harnessing uncertainty can provoke deeper insights that enable students to direct their learning and develop reflective skills. This case study offers a practical assessment example to enrich reflexive teaching, with scope to compare and replicate in different disciplinary settings.

Keywords: reflection; reflexivity; teaching practice; uncertainty; business education

The merits of reflection

Teaching practice always deserves consideration of new and critical thinking approaches. In difficult economic times, higher education institutions may demand evermore scrutiny of teaching practice and curricula as fit for purpose. One such critical practice is reflection with the potential to connect practice and theory, and seen as a highly desirable learning method (Holden and Griggs 2011). Thus, reflective learning is increasingly prominent in universities as a method of assessment of student learning (Francis and Cowan 2008; McKinlay et al. 2010; Stewart, Keegan, and Stevens 2008) and as a research methodology (Attard 2008; Rigg and Trehan 2008). Furthermore, critical reflection is widely viewed as evidence of practitioner competence in professional development practice (e.g. CIPD [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development] 2012; Smith 2011).

According to Valentin (2007), the teaching of human resource development (HRD) accentuates this requirement for critical practice due to the particular subject nature. Valentin argues that a critical approach to HRD study:

Should not simply be about how to *do* HRD, but also to *reflect upon* HRD. (172)

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*Corresponding author. Email: Margaret.Mackay@port.ac.uk

Consequently, HRD lecturers need awareness that what they teach in practice is what they espouse in theory (Holden and Griggs 2011; Kuchinke 2007); 'Simply put HRD lecturers need to practice what they teach' (Mackay and Tymon 2012, 552). This demands that current thinking on learning theories, including developmental, experiential and constructivist approaches are both taught and demonstrated by lecturers. As reflection and reflexivity are pivotal to these learning theories, it follows that critical reflection is important in the HRD teaching and learning process (Brockbank and McGill 2007; Kuchinke 2007; Trehan and Rigg 2011).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the learning of an HRD teaching team on an unplanned reflective journey. The case study is analysed from the lecturers' perspective and explores subsequent revisions to HRD teaching on a postgraduate professional programme. The dynamics of using experiential methods to support critical thinking triggered an extensive examination of HRD teaching. Identifying with students' frustration in internalising reflective skills, forced us as lecturers to revisit our own approach to teaching reflection. Despite extensive literature on reflection, there is less research on the teaching challenges in business education of assessing critical reflection in practice. We realise that critical reflection is not limited to HRD teaching but has the potential to enhance teaching in multiple subjects.

This paper first explores theoretical concepts of reflection, the study's context and explains an assessment lens used for methodological analysis. Then we analyse our reflective practice in turning a mirror on ourselves and illustrate current findings. We conclude with the team's learning and discuss implications for practice.

Theoretical concepts of reflection

This section defines reflection and reflexivity and outlines the case for using reflection on experience as a learning method in HRD. Reflection has been defined as an active and deliberate process of exploration and discovery, involving a periodic stepping back to consider meaning and the connection between experience and learning (Gray 2007; Lynch 2000; Raelin 2007). This involves cognition and emotion that stimulates reflection by questions such as: *How did that go? What went well? What didn't? And why?* These questions can guide reflective conversations in a search for new perspectives which facilitate sense-making of individual experience (Schön 1983). What differentiates critical reflection from mere speculative rumination is that it encourages deeper level learning, by questioning assumptions. A conversation to facilitate critical reflection could include additional questions such as: *How do I feel about that? What theory underpins this?*, and *What are my future options?* Critical reflection examines the theoretical frameworks that support perspective and belief (Gray 2007; Mezirow 1994; Rigg and Trehan 2008). This process of shifting perspective can lead towards a change in future action.

The focus of reflexivity is a conscious review of an individual subjective position. Within research, the concept of reflexivity ensures that the researcher's stance and methods are fully considered when creating knowledge (Smith 2011). Lynch (2000) describes complex inter-related levels of reflexivity: 'mechanical; substantive; methodological; meta-theoretical; interpretive; ethno-methodological' (34). Lynch argues that all levels involve a recursive turning back but proposes the manner and outcome of this turning differ between, and within, different categories. In this study's context, reflexivity relates to students being asked to develop their critical

reflective skills, as this requires conscious consideration of personal position, bias and assumptions. This may lead to deeper self-awareness about how judgements are made (Moore 2011) of particular relevance in management education. Cunliffe (2004) argues reflexivity should help managers be more than just technically effective but also support business managers to become 'critical thinkers and moral practitioners' (408). Reflexivity also matters to lecturers as researchers, as we need to be aware of potential bias in teaching critical reflection, and the value we place on reflective practice.

Kyndt, Dochy, and Nijs (2009) assert that reflection is a vital component to non-formal and informal learning within organisations in enhancing adaptability to workplace change (Raelin 2007). Moreover, an individual with reflective skills has enhanced learning agility (Lombard and Eichinger 2000) often linked to high potential. Thus, universities have a responsibility to teach critical reflection. Yet there is evidence to indicate that lecturers may not always model the behaviours of reflective learning. Holden and Griggs (2011) observe the irony of higher education tutors: 'extolling the virtues of experiential learning and the importance of reflective learning' (78) yet ineffectively applying this in practice.

Academic literature acknowledges that experiential learning and critical reflection is not straightforward; Merriam (2004) observes 'most adults have not developed the theory capacities for criticising the underlying assumptions of their own thinking' (65). Yet the skills of critical reflection can be developed (Stewart, Keegan, and Stevens 2008; Trede and Smith 2012). For example, Moon (2007) argues that reflective conversations can enhance the discipline of reflective writing to capture new learning. Similarly, Quinton and Smallbone (2010) attest that reflective writing supports thinking and allows the author to tease out a new interpretation of experience. Therefore, a focus on overt reflection through participation in experiential learning is important, but is often a painstaking exercise.

Challenges in teaching critical reflection

Barriers to active participation in experiential learning are well documented (e.g. Beard and Wilson 2007) and in addition, critical reflection appears obscure to many learners. For mature students who are full-time employees and studying while they continue to earn, this conceptual difficulty is more pronounced. The teaching aim of expanding thinking around inert theory may even seem irrelevant for these working practitioners who seek knowledge certainties. So a teaching challenge is to ensure structured activities do stimulate reflection on the ambivalences of business education. Meyer and Land (2005) attest that knowledge is troublesome in revealing intellectual ambiguity and uncertainty. In short, the more we learn the less we appear to know. For action-oriented practitioners this is a frustrating territory, exacerbated by the practitioner's difficulty in finding time to reflect (Pohland and Bova 2000). Furthermore, Lynch (2000) and Smith (2011) highlight numerous challenges in reflection and reflexivity including the dangers of becoming negative, overly self-critical and isolated. These barriers to developing critical reflection are not limited to learners, as tutors also confront hurdles.

The obligation for HRD lecturers to both teach and demonstrate critically reflective learning throws up a pedagogic dualism between the deliberate practice of reflection in a classroom context and the spontaneous nature of emergent learning

(Tymon and Mackay 2010). As lecturers, we ask students to question theoretical concepts, inquire into their experience and interrogate their assumptions. Yet we do this within the imposed boundaries of pre-determined learning outcomes that align with a university curriculum and professional body accreditation. The prescriptive structuring of reflection may inhibit the occurrence of informal learning and discovery. This contradiction sits alongside the recognition that reflection often occurs as a result of unpredictable experience in the workplace, or surprising realisations.

Case study methodology

The context of this study was a teaching review of a postgraduate programme for part-time students leading to an accredited qualification in human resource management. As these students are full-time employees, in a range of private and public sector organisations, the professional qualification influences an instrumental approach to the curriculum (Massingham and Herrington 2006). From our career history, as business practitioners recently turned lecturers, we were concerned to integrate real-world experience with university study. We wanted to make reflection integral to working practice by accentuating the relevance of this learning, bringing participants' business issues into play in the classroom for heightened engagement. This is a narrative of our reflective journey involving analysis of pedagogical choices in approach.

This interpretive case study began from a disorienting dilemma (Merriam 2004; Mezirow 1994) as occurs in many deep learning experiences. Following a regular end-of-year unit review, a new method of teaching HRD was introduced in the academic year 2008/2009, which involved extensive use of experiential learning, replacing a conventional teacher-centred approach. Despite our enthusiasm, students requested a return to lecturer-led sessions. They perceived experiential learning involved off-putting workloads and reduced subject clarity. Students voiced anxiety about an imperceptible link between group participation and the individual nature of the final assessment (Anderson and Gilmore 2010). The impact of assessment methods on learning is particularly influential as documented (Butler and Reddy 2010; Kuchinke 2007; Moon 2007). In summary, as lecturers reported the difficult and time-consuming nature of facilitative teaching, students expressed exasperation. The intended benefits of the new teaching approach pleased no-one. Thus, we faced a dilemma: to return to tutor-centred teaching sessions and minimise the practice of reflection to appease students, or to persevere with interactive student-led sessions to stimulate critical inquiry.

Analytical framework

We selected Larrivee's framework (2008) as an analytical tool to assess our own reflective practice in teaching. Although various models exist, we decided this assessment questionnaire was relevant to our pedagogical aims and offered a forum to creatively analyse and explore views on teaching practice. Larrivee delineates four levels of reflection which we applied as a lens to review practice. Table 1 illustrates the application of this assessment.

Table 1. Adaptation of assessment tool (Larrivee 2008, 342).

Assessment tool	Tutors' illustrative responses
Level 1: Pre-reflection	Let's just get through this
	This cohort will soon be moving on
Level 2: Surface reflection	Let's improve our technique
	Let's do it again but better
Level 3: Pedagogical reflection	Let's get authoritative research that backs this
	There's definitely more theory on this
Level 4: Critical reflection	Just what is our frame of reference?
	What do we believe?
	How does this condition our practice?
	Are we doing what we say students should do?

A brief description of each level follows. At level 1, Larrivee identifies a reactive response of pre-reflection: essentially a knee-jerk response to students' problems. This resonates with Jordan's (2010) contrastive view of 'reflection-in-action and knowing-in-action' where experienced practitioners address issues in a tacit manner relying on experience (392). At level 2, surface reflection, the focus is on technical methods to achieve specific goals; a tactical response to resolve short-term needs. Here techniques may improve technical efficiency without an overall evaluation of learning outcomes; technique may override content. Level 3, termed pedagogical reflection, applies theoretical concepts to teaching knowledge, theory and research. At this stage, the tutor may attempt to take a learner's perspective and constructively critique the approach, but still focuses on the 'how' of teaching rather than 'what' or 'why'. Our observation is that the lecturer maintains control and navigational steer over learning.

Finally, level 4 achieves Larrivee's (2008) sense of critical reflection; defined as a 'deep examination of values and beliefs' (344). Such critical reflection extends to lecturers' philosophical beliefs, as well as assumptions about the students' capacity, and willingness, to learn and adopt a reflexive approach. Hypothetically, this stage can turn conventional teaching on its head, promoting an apparent state of practice anarchy and inverting directional control. We aspired to this level for our students but were wary that at one extreme we could wander an endless hall-of-mirrors in pursuit of reflection (Gray 2007; Lynch 2000).

This assessment offers a useful lens to facilitate a milestone review but we recognise limitations in this case study. First, a retrospective assessment is based on cumulative reviews, debates and continuing conversations. This meshes a complex series of movements back and forth across reflective states which oscillate in a spiral rather than a linear motion. Yet the assessment tool implies an orderly progression of reflection from levels 1 to 4, so our narrative may suggest a coherent pattern overlaying reality that is visible with the benefit of hindsight. Retrospectively our approach was similar to Lynch's (2000) 'non-linear and iterative...cybernetic loopiness' (27). Therefore, we admit that a reflexive position is an evolving perspective.

Secondly, Mälkki and Lindblom-Ylänne (2012) assert that reflection is most closely associated with developmental change, which in our case has resulted in ongoing improvements. But we argue that deep reflection may identify competing

expectations that do not necessarily result in better teaching. Finally, we acknowledge that in selecting a single assessment method, we have defined our research within this structure. Mindful of these limitations, the next section demonstrates how this tool was applied to our learning journey and presents an emerging perspective through levels of reflection.

Analysis

The analysis is of the lecturers' self-narrative of the reflective process.

Level 1: response: situation ugly

During the first year of the new programme our initial response to student resistance and hostility was cursory, momentary thinking and close to unconscious reflection. As new business academics, we attributed these teething problems to the students' attitude. We dismissed learner objections to the unit as evidence of part-time students' instrumental orientation towards the curriculum. Our response was characterised by comments: 'They'll settle down soon...Let's get through this... this cohort will soon move on'. Such comments indicate our professional concern for disciplined classroom management as we sought to control the situation and limit any negative repercussions. Prior industry experience shaped our assumptions that management students prefer to wait for a briefing, or orienteering map, rather than direct their own learning. Only in conducting our reflexive review did we ask: 'Were we preoccupied with management control and student compliance?' pre-reflection in the tool. With the value of hindsight, we concede our reflections at this stage resembled tacit practitioner responses (Jordan 2010). We responded instinctively to criticism without modifying our reaction.

Level 2: Is it me?

In the face of student criticism, it would have been easy for the lecturing team to revert to conventional, transmission-mode teaching (Brockbank and McGill 2007). For academic lecturers, this position of certainty may represent a more comfortable ground of knowledge authority. As new business academics, we felt our credibility was at stake: 'Do the students think we're not really up to being academics? Does reflection just seem vague, fluffy stuff? Are we actually believable as university dons?' But the year-end review allowed time and space to analyse student feedback more carefully in the search for a better solution. Following this review, we decided to continue with the same teaching approach but introduce key presentational changes. For example, we provided more instructional clarity and eased workload demands by reducing the amount of student-delivered activity. These changes provided a better scaffold for student-led sessions, but control of direction remained implicitly with the lecturing team.

In retrospect, we had engaged in surface reflection, maintaining a practitioner belief in knowing what works and debating a seminal question: 'Are we limiting our analysis of teaching practice to technical questions about teaching techniques?' For example, based on our premise that HRD demands an experiential approach, we reasoned that student resistance was natural in reflective learning and could simply

be overcome by better teaching (Young, Mountford, and Skrla 2006) via improved instructions, or a better set up of activities. The presentational aspects of sessions absorbed us; and dissonance concerned us, when we heard established academics depict our new approach as: 'just practitioner training-games type activities'. We wanted to project authority through careful control and at this stage our process of reflection became more self-conscious.

Level 3: Why don't they get it?

During the following year, we engaged in more collaborative reflective conversations and dialogue that Butler and Reddy (2010) term 'real talk'. Furthermore, reflective journals and critical incident analysis (Gray 2007) surfaced awareness that some difficulties had been overlooked. For example, we appreciated that student workload pressures and anxieties about time pressure and examinations were valid. When we acknowledged learner unease was justified, we were more acutely aware of our own flaws. The mirror before us magnified our perceived inadequacies as new business academics. We realised by dubbing HRD as the 'unit horribilis' we had succumbed to reflexive discussion infected by negative self-absorption (Lynch 2000; Smith 2011). This led us to question our teaching of reflective practice, evidenced in the exasperated comment: 'Why don't they get it?' Yet rather than investigate student bafflement further, our response was to persuade them by citing more empirical research. We increased the use of authoritative sources: 'Look at these contemporary experts – this research evidences the value of experiential learning; this demonstrates that reflection does work'. In truth, these teaching solutions were enhancements to benefit students, but a pedagogical compromise in achieving critical reflection. Nagging doubts arose from the self-assessment question: 'Were we identifying alternative ways of representing ideas and concepts to students'? The students preferred to follow a lecturer's lead, or even ask for a short-cut, whereas our grand aim was to foster self-direction in learning.

Level 4: a closer look

Following these adjustments, the unit ran more smoothly but student resistance was still palpable. We had challenged a deliberate construction of HRD teaching but this approach collided with an institutional and professional body focus on specific learning outcomes, a traditional assessment and a student perspective governed by managerial instrumentalism. From career experience, we knew that action in the workplace is given a higher premium than critical reflection, yet we did not acknowledge this hurdle with the students up front.

There was an inherent contradiction in our learning design. As lecturers, we determined the layout and anticipated learning routes signposting outcomes. Students interpret this overt signage as the tutor knowing one distinctive path and want lecturers to indicate the superior route. We realised we needed to cede directional control and encourage students to explore alternatives, so that their learning route is dynamically constructed through a process of constant questioning. This enabled us to begin critical reflection and consider: 'Do we recognise our assumptions and the premises underlying our beliefs?' This probing question remains pivotal in examining our teaching, and attempting to address what it means for

lecturers to interrogate underpinning theories and implicit values of HRD. Now we were able to cross-examine *what* we were teaching, and *why*, as opposed to the mechanics of *how*. We jostled with these questions and importantly debated these with our students, so they could begin their own construction of a learning maze. Ownership and directional control of learning moved from tutors to students, as we became more spontaneous facilitators and less definitive experts. This resulted in fluid, invigorating sessions, sometimes demanding steely nerves. Yet we were still constrained by the unit ending in a conventional examination assessment.

A curriculum step change

Fortuitously, a change in professional body standards in the academic year 2010/ 2011 allowed for new assessment artefacts and we introduced a reflective writing assignment of student-led sessions. This complements an overarching continuing professional development portfolio that runs concurrently in another unit. This change has legitimised the explicit practice of teaching reflection and reflective writing. To further extend students' reflexive skills, learners collaborate in giving and receiving feedback to evaluate management applications as part of the session activities. This additional focus on student-led reflection takes time from a broader range of HRD syllabus topics, which Stewart, Keegan, and Stevens (2008) observe as a criticism of an emphasised use of reflective techniques. However, our findings have given us confidence that these changes facilitate more critical depth in HRD learning, and the merits of a reflective approach outweigh the apparent loss of topical knowledge content. In other words, greater depth of understanding and insight is preferred over topical breadth. This redesign addresses Kuchinke's (2007) call for reflective skills to be: 'not only talked about but also practiced and applied to the educational process itself' (121).

Feedback on the newly modified unit is underway and student reactions to the new unit have differed radically from those reported by Gilmore and Anderson (2011). Student-led sessions are rated as the 'most enjoyable' part of the course and minor issues centre on logistical arrangements; such as, group work formation and access of the virtual learning system. As a validation of learning, all students passed the assessed student-led delivery sessions. The reflective essays provided a full range of marks including several distinctions. However, these findings include a different cohort less aware of previous conventional sessions, and so comparisons within the longitudinal study are interpretive. Also, student records of their learning are subjective, reflexive and arguably demonstrate superior writing skills rather than deeper reflection in satisfying assessment criteria. Nonetheless, there is robust evidence from a range of student essays, feedback comments and journal writing that is indicative of critical reflection. For example, a student expresses the process of acquiring skills, applying reflection to individual learning and gaining a new perspective in her work:

> I have identified that to be more effective at work I need to gather constructive feedback and reflect...I appreciate how the more I understand about myself the more I will realise and identify how others perceive me, and what my own true strengths and weaknesses are...I have realised that I must look at myself to recognise how I can develop effectively. Previously I was too dependent on waiting for others to tell me.

This comment reveals how critical reflection can transform learner's action in the workplace.

Key findings

An unanticipated result of this reflective journey is the lecturing team's awareness of the need to continuously re-examine the teaching frame of reference. Although we sang the praises of critical reflection, we had a tendency, as new business academics, to react superficially in pre-reflection mode (Larrivee 2008). In a somewhat hurried evaluation, we had glided over the troublesome nature of our innovative approach, looking for quick-fix solutions to maintain authoritative control. Initial reflection on our identity as business academics highlights a predisposition to control the clarity of goals and presentational action. However, experiential learning and reflection thrives on spontaneity and requires an openness to experiment with divergent approaches. We admit this may be uncomfortable territory, and even counter-intuitive in difficult times when instinctively security is the stable situation of teacher as sole authority. Lecturers in reflecting on their own practice can model the behaviours of inquiry they want to encourage (Butler and Reddy 2010; Holden and Griggs 2011). This obligation to pause and consider alternative options, and even multiple starting points, stimulates more critical thinking.

We found that, in contrast to many business environments, the academic setting does enable a more critically reflective approach, with a formal review process providing a necessary stimulus for more critical reflection on pedagogical approaches (Pohland and Bova 2000). The challenge for lecturers is to use these opportunities for reflective practice and reflexivity. Being able to dwell in conversational reflective practice has spurred us to allow time and space for student reflection within the curriculum. This deliberate construction of activities gives learners' permission to pause, and think reflectively and reflexively on how theory influences practical activity in the workplace (Moore 2011). An explicit participant process for reflection avoids diffuse meandering, and allows for a conscious contemplative approach; for example a student wrote: 'I have found the self-reflective experience valuable as a learner, as it is not often that during our busy day to day lives we take time to reflect on our learning experiences'. Students were ready to take ownership of directing inquiry, when the learning activities were self-guided and experiential.

We have also highlighted, a tacit assumption, that organisational practice commonly favours one best approach that discourages critical examination which may delay management action. A student observed: 'Prior to the programme I would have just kept doing what I had always done and not question why'. Dominant action inhibits deeper reflection, and curbs students' motivation to invest time and effort in developing reflective skills. So, findings indicate that reflection has to have a perceived value to students so that they can enjoy, rather than simply endure, the learning challenge. In order to help create a perceived value, a congruent assessment artefact has proved beneficial in this case. Moreover, there is evidence that students appreciate the application of these skills in the workplace: 'I believe that the self-reflective process has enabled me to question current practices at work and identify ways these could be improved and developed, helped me add value to the organisation and reinforced my learning'. By taking a pragmatically reflexive approach that respects instrumental learning, this has addressed students' perceived

value of reflection. Admittedly, the significance of new learning and developmental progress can often only be appreciated in retrospect.

Conclusion

The contribution of this paper is to suggest that in teaching critical reflection the use of doubt and uncertainty are helpful stimulants in the process. For a learner to step back, examine alternative perspectives and make sense of experience, the learner needs to control the direction of questioning. Fostering this ownership of learning is complemented by experiential approaches within higher education. In grappling with theoretical assumptions students can question for themselves the relativity of concepts, and how to interpret the contingent nature of HRD. Deliberately wrestling with reflective learning can provoke lively debate among learners and tutors examining the ambiguities of theory and business practice.

As reviewed in the literature, critical reflection and reflexivity are of particular value in teaching the concepts of HRD. Reflection needs to be conscious for any depth of thinking to be evaluated and steer future action; what can be done or not done. The skills of a reflective practitioner are to exercise awareness of personal biases and beliefs in sense-making from experience. This is an effortful process of conscious awareness of reactions, perceptions and the influences of learning experiences. Specific developmental activities that explore tacit assumptions can reveal underlying contradictions in theoretical positions. A practice implication is that this iterative process requires time and space in a teaching programme to allow for the challenges of reflective practice.

In this study student-led sessions operated as a vehicle to interrogate viewpoints and theory; a chance to interpret the messiness of organisational reality and question the ambivalence of theoretical constructs. The delivery of such a learning maze, in a business school setting, precipitated a constant balancing of deliberate construction and improvisation. Rethinking our preconceptions of how students approach experiential and reflective learning enabled us to suspend judgement and allow students to consider multiple options. This can challenge lecturers' authority and disturb a tutor's equilibrium. This case study illustrates that a conscious assessment of teaching reflection can deepen tutors' awareness of the complexity of subjective frames of reference. A resulting implication is that experiential teaching to trigger reflection demands risk-taking, an admission of fallibility and perhaps humility as lecturers.

We commend the Larrivee (2008) assessment tool to promote effective self and team reflection. Yet the process of reflection is not as linear as the framework implies. We found that level 1 closely intertwines with level 2, as pre-reflection and surface reflection often occur simultaneously. Our assertion is that surface reflection initiates more conscious probing than pre-reflection, where responses are habitually tacit based on experience. In addition tutor collaboration, critical incident analysis and reflective discourse (Gray 2007; Moon 2007) prevented isolation and negativity (Lynch 2000; Smith 2011). Once we had started to critically reflect, the consideration of content over method, what is taught over how, was empowering and in the specific context of teaching HRD, Holden and Griggs' extra questions (2011) sparked insights. Sharing these debates with the students highlighted the interactive nature of

facilitating reflection. An implication is that a framework model, such as Larrivee's (2008), supports a review of teaching practice that can widen perspectives.

These findings illustrate that in holding up a mirror for business students, as tutors we must be equally willing to turn around the mirror and review our teaching practice. A practice implication is that lecturers' constructive acknowledgement of the challenges of deep reflection supports learners' parallel experiences. Appreciating comparable experiences of tutors and students is beneficial in energising reflective discussions. Our unsettling learning journey, occurring in step with the students' shared difficulties, has progressively expanded our understanding of reflexive challenges. Frankly, we were forced to revisit our interpretation of business education and pedagogical positions. These experiences may resonate with educators in comparable teaching situations and illuminate the strains of grappling with critical reflection.

This case study reveals that reflection involves a willingness to adjust the frame of reference where learning is uncertain (Meyer and Land 2005). Although certainty appears alluring as solid and quantifiable facts, yet workplace experiences offer messy uncertainties; a rich resource for reflection that can enhance the integration of practice and academic insight. This is sometimes uneven ground for learners as unpredictable outcomes may discomfort student expectations of a predetermined path.

In conclusion, teaching critical reflection opens up opportunities for students to interpret, question and challenge theoretical stances. Reflexive interpretation adds disorder and complexity to the assumed certitude of professional learning, and such reflection can avoid predictable responses to business turbulence. A teaching approach that harnesses a lack of certainty, and allows room for doubt can provoke more critical thinking; enabling learners to reassess business experience and clarify their own learning. Future research is to apply this framework to a larger group of cross-disciplinary lecturers to examine subjective complexity in approaches to teaching critical reflection.

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The student perspective on employability

Alex Tymon*

Centre for Organisational Research and Development, Portsmouth Business School, University of Portsmouth, Richmond Building, Portland Street, Portsmouth, PO1 3DE, UK

Despite ongoing debate about whether they can and should, most higher education institutions include the development of employability skills within their curricula. However, employers continue to report that graduates are not ready for the world of work, and lack some of the most basic skills needed for successful employment. Research into why this might be abounds from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, including government, employers, higher education institutions and graduates. Interestingly though, the views of undergraduates, the recipients of this employability development, are not well known. This could be important, because learning theory tells us that motivation and commitment of learners is an essential prerequisite for effective outcomes. So the question is raised as to whether undergraduate students are engaged with employability skills development. This article reports on a study exploring the views of over 400 business studies, marketing and human resource management undergraduate students about employability. Findings suggest there is only limited alignment between the views of students and other stakeholder groups. There are differences between first, second and final year students, which could explain an observed lack of engagement with employability-related development. Some suggestions for improving engagement are made, alongside ideas on what can, realistically, be done within higher education institutions.

Keywords: employability; graduate skills; development; proactive personality; engaged learning

Introduction

Despite ongoing differences in views amongst stakeholders on what employability is, whether it can be developed and, perhaps most heatedly, the role of higher education institutions in its provision, there is increasing pressure for all academic courses to include employability development. Evidence suggests that, although the provision of employability skills is not consistent, many universities are expending a great deal of effort on developing the employability of their students (Harvey 2005; Higher Education Funding Council for England 2003; Yorke 2004). Yet research continues to report that graduates do not have the skills needed for the modern workplace (Bowers-Brown and Harvey 2004; Cumming 2010; Heaton, McCracken, and Harrison 2008). In the UK, the 2008 survey by the Confederation of British Industry found that 48% of employers were experiencing problems filling jobs with appropriately skilled graduates. Branine (2008) reports on a survey of 700 UK-based employers, where more than 60%

*Email: alex.tymon@port.ac.uk

mentioned problems of poor-quality graduates in terms of their employability skills. These statistics could imply that this is a UK issue alone, and, as Jackson (2009) points out, there is significantly more research and survey data on graduate employability deficiencies in the UK than elsewhere. However, the demands of economic globalisation on higher education institutions across the world are recognised by many scholars (Cumming 2010; Jackson 2009; Kreber 2006). Kreber identifies employability as a key graduate outcome across multiple countries, and Jackson suggests that industry and governments worldwide would welcome effective ways to bridge graduate skills gaps. So the amount of UK data could be due to other factors; for example, the recent changes to university funding in the UK may have given the issue a higher profile for UK stakeholders. Either way, Cumming states: 'A dominant theme emerging ... is that many graduates lack appropriate skills, attitudes and dispositions, which in turn prevents them from participating effectively in the workplace' (2010, 3).

The nature of these skills can be derived from a study by Archer and Davison (2008). They found that communications was consistently ranked as the primary skill sought by employers, but in terms of employers' satisfaction with the quality of communication skills demonstrated by graduates, it ranked only sixteenth. Team working and integrity were ranked second and third in terms of importance, but only seventh and ninth in terms of satisfaction for employers. The authors go on to say: 'It appears that while many graduates hold satisfactory qualifications, they are lacking in the key "soft skills" and qualities that employers increasingly need in a more customer focussed world' (2008, 8).

This article aims to explore some of the myriad reasons why this situation may exist, including: the difficulties of defining the term 'employability' along with the transferable skills which it may include; and the extent to which employability matters to the various stakeholder groups. The article questions whether these skills can actually be developed, and if so, whether higher education institutions are the appropriate place to do so. The article then discusses what appears to be a less well-researched area: to what extent undergraduate students are engaged with the concept of employability, and are they willing and able to benefit from employability skills development in higher education institutions? This discussion is based on data collected from over 400 UK-based business students during October 2009.

What is employability?

It is suggested that one potential problem with trying to develop employability is a lack of coherence about what is meant by the term itself and the subsequent measurement of it. Most authors agree that employability is complex and multidimensional and warn against being simplistic when trying to define it (Harvey 2005; Holmes 2006; Rae 2007). Hugh-Jones, Sutherland, and Cross (2006) suggest that part of this complexity is because it can be viewed from three different perspectives: that of the employer, the student, and the higher education institution. Further complexity is noted by Rothwell and Arnold (2007), who highlight that employability can be viewed as having both internal and external dimensions. However, similarities exist across many of the definitions used, which resonate with that of Yorke, who defines employability as:

> a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes, that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. (2004, 410)

This definition and others (e.g. Harvey 2005; Little 2001; Pool and Sewell 2007) distinguish between the *ability* to get a graduate-level job and *employment*, potentially due to the external factors reported by Rothwell and Arnold (2007). Thus, as Wilton states: 'it is possible to be employable, yet unemployed or underemployed' (2011, 87). This difference, between employment rates and employability, makes measurement of the concept challenging. Currently, most stakeholder groups use statistics from graduate destinations surveys to measure employability, whereas what these provide is a limited snapshot of employment. Yorke's definition also places focus on quality and sustainability of employment, a theme mirrored by others (e.g. Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth 2004), who stress the future-oriented nature of employability, with a need for adaptability and transitioning in future career market places.

Most definitions recognise that employability requires the possession of skills, but also personal attributes, which are aligned to personality theory. This link to personality theory, along with the qualitative nature and future orientation of the definitions, presents yet further challenges to measurement of the concept of employability.

What are the skills and personal attributes that make up employability?

Many terms are used in the literature to describe transferable skills and attributes: '"generic skills", "attributes", "characteristics", "values", "competencies", "qualities" and "professional skills"' (De La Harpe, Radloff, and Wyber 2000, 233). Along with each term there is often a proposed framework or list, some stretching to as many as 80 items. Table 1 provides a comparison of six such frameworks from numerous different perspectives: Kreber (2006) summarises a list of what universities should provide, derived from the World Conference on Higher Education; thus she suggests it has considerable agreement across counties. Andrews and Higson's (2008) list was synthesised from multiple sources as a basis for interviews in four European countries with both employers and graduates. Abraham and Karns (2009) show competencies from both an employer and business school perspective in the United States; the top 10 in each category are listed. Archer and Davison (2008) provide a UK employer perspective, whilst Cumming (2010) cites an Australian government perspective.

Table 1 indicates some agreement on the skills and attributes linked to employability, both amongst the different stakeholders and internationally, with communication/interpersonal skills and teamwork appearing in all lists (see items in bold). However, there is less agreement on other items, and perhaps this is why authors such as Harvey (2005) and Yorke (2006) urge caution when assuming that there is agreement on what employability is. There are many examples where frameworks differ. Notably, these skill and attribute divergences are not confined to those between separate groups of stakeholders, as there is evidence to show that views also differ within groups of stakeholders. Differences between the views of *graduates* from the UK, Europe and Japan were indicated by Little and contributors (2003). Differences between *academics* across different higher education institutions and even within the same institution have been noted by Barrie (2007). The lack of shared understanding of skills, or attributes, has perhaps been best explored in relation to *employers* as a group of stakeholders. Little (2001) raised the issue of whether employers behave rationally when recruiting graduates and suggested evidence to the contrary, a view supported by Brown, Hesketh, and Williams (2003). According to Moreau and Leathwood, 'Employers may want, for example, someone who is strong and decisive, but they will inevitably read these qualities differently in different applicants' (2006, 319). This suggests that the three

Table 1. Comparison of employability frameworks.

Kreber (2006, 5) Multiple countries — competencies higher education institutions should provide.	**Andrews and Higson (2008, 413)** Employer and graduate perspectives: multiple sources.	**Abraham and Karns (2009, 352)**		**Archer and Davison (2008, 7)** Employers in the UK.	**Cumming (2010, 7)** Government in Australia.
		Top 10 competencies identified by businesses in the USA	Top 10 competencies emphasised in the business school curriculum in the USA		
• *Be able and willing to contribute to innovation and be creative*	• *Professionalism*	• **Communication skills**	• **Communication skills**	• **Communication skills**	• **Communication**
• *Be able to cope with uncertainties*	• *Reliability*	• Problem solver	• Problem solver	• **Team-working skills**	• **Teamwork**
• *Be interested in and prepared for lifelong learning*	• *The ability to cope with uncertainty*	• *Results oriented*	• **Team worker**	• *Integrity*	• Problem solving
• **Have acquired social sensitivity and communicative skills**	• *Ability to work under pressure*	• Interpersonal skills	• Leadership skills	• Intellectual ability	• *Initiative and enterprise*
• **Be able to work in teams**	• Ability to think and plan strategically	• Leadership skills	• Technical expertise	• *Confidence*	• Planning and organising
• *Be willing to take on responsibilities*	• **Capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking**	• Customer focus	• **Interpersonal skills**	• *Character/ personality*	• Self-management
• Become entrepreneurial	• **Good written and verbal communication skills**	• *Flexible/ adaptable*	• Business expertise	• Planning and organisational skills	• *Learning*
• Prepare themselves for the internationalisation of the labour market through an understanding of various cultures	• Information and communication technology skills	• **Team worker**	• *Hard worker*	• Literacy (good written skills)	• Technology
• Be versatile in generic skills that cut across disciplines	• *Creativity and self-confidence*	• *Dependable*	• *Results oriented*	• Numeracy (good with numbers)	
• Be literate in areas of knowledge forming the basis for various professional skills, for example, in new technologies	• Good self-management and time-management skills	• Quality focussed	• *Dependable*	• Analysis and decision-making skills	
	• *A willingness to learn and accept responsibility*				

Highlighted in bold = commonly cited items which appear in all frameworks.
Highlighted in italics = attributes with clear links to personality traits.
Highlighted by underlining = attributes potentially linked to proactive personality.

different perspectives mentioned by Hugh-Jones, Sutherland, and Cross (2006) could be significantly expanded.

In addition, any apparent agreement on skills, or attributes, is amongst a list of *labels* and not a detailed examination of what these mean to the individuals, or groups, concerned (Holmes 2006). For example, do 'communication skills' or 'team working' or 'flexibility' mean the same to any two stakeholders at the same time? According to Jackson, 'Empirical studies on graduate employability liberally adopt different terms for competencies, resulting in confused findings' (2010, 29), which is a concern if these studies are then used to inform policy or practice.

Can employability be developed and, if so, how?

Can skills be developed?

Skills are defined as: 'any component of the job that involves doing something' (Harrison 2003, 269), and include manual, diagnostic, interpersonal or decision-making skills. Along with knowledge, skills development is well documented in learning, training and development literature. Although it is recognised that some skills are more difficult to develop than others, there is agreement that skills can be trained or, at least, developed.

Can personal attributes be developed?

Personal attributes, on the other hand, cross into the differential psychology literature on personality traits and other individual differences such as intelligence or cognitive ability. Personality can be defined as: 'the overall profile or combination of traits that characterise the unique nature of a person' (French et al. 2008, 97). To what extent personality traits are inherited, or can be developed, is still a contentious subject (Rutter et al. 1997). But, even if personality can be developed, it is recognised that these highly individual traits are deep rooted, with many formed at an early age. They determine success, performance, and career choices, and any development of them is a long-term and slow process (Woods and West 2010). Table 1 shows that many of the items fall into the category of personality traits (see items in italics). Woods and West tell us that managers are looking for personality as often as skills, saying they want 'employees who are reliable, dependable, able to work under pressure, creative and enthusiastic. All of these reflect personality characteristics' (2010, 71).

In the United States, this area of research has been linked to 'proactive personality', a term defined by Seibert, Kraimer, and Crant as 'a stable disposition to take personal initiative' (2001, 847). Erdogan and Bauer add: 'Rather than accepting their roles passively, proactive persons challenge the status quo and initiate change' (2005, 859). A growing body of literature has shown some important links between proactive personality and career success from two angles. First, proactive personality has been shown to make adjustment to work a quicker and smoother process, resulting in people reaching effective performer status faster and more easily (Seibert, Kraimer, and Crant 2001). Second, there is a link to the process of job search, with people high on proactive personality more likely to succeed in this self-driven activity (Brown et al. 2006). Amongst the items listed in Table 1 are traits that could be linked to proactive personality (see items underlined), so perhaps stakeholders need to be more realistic about what can be developed in the higher education curriculum. Villar and Albertin (2010) summarise the work of many

authors when they suggest that the role of higher education institutions should be to encourage students to develop their proactive personality traits. They propose this is done by getting students to take more responsibility for their education through active participation in educational experiences and intentional investment in their own social capital. At the very least, this area deserves further research.

Are higher education institutions the best place to develop employability?

The advent of mass higher education seen in the last three decades, and related growth in the number of vocationally oriented courses offered, appears to have changed expectations for many stakeholder groups (Bowers-Brown and Harvey 2004; Wilton 2011). Certainly, there is an expectation from government and employers that higher education institutions have a responsibility to prepare graduates for the world of work (De La Harpe, Radloff, and Wyber 2000; Heaton, McCracken, and Harrison 2008). In response, higher education institutions continue to build employability into their programmes (Bowers-Brown and Harvey 2004; Fallows and Steven 2000; Harvey 2005). Data also show that the majority of graduates recognise that higher education institutions are trying to support the employability agenda (Doctorjob.com 2004; Wilton 2008). But the expectation that higher education institutions can, and should, develop employability is not universally shared.

Many authors maintain that employability is better and more easily developed outside of the formal curriculum (Andrews and Higson 2008; Ng and Feldman 2009; Rae 2007; Yorke 2004), with particular emphasis placed on employment-based training and experience. There is little doubt that employers and employers' organisations are probably best placed to provide this work based training and experience, which in the past they did. However, organisations are becoming increasingly reluctant to invest in developing the transferable skills of graduates due to economic pressures and beliefs about the lack of commitment from 'generation Y' employees (Jackson 2010), and so higher education institutions are expected to fill the gap and produce work-ready employees. Yet Cranmer (2006) concluded that there was no evidence to show that employability skills development within universities had any effect on employability, compared to employment-based training and experience, which had positive effects. Graduates themselves are aware of the power of work experience in developing employability skills, with as many as 90% saying, 'work experience was the best way to gain the skills they needed for work' (Doctorjob.com 2004, 2). In addition, students on degree courses that include a work placement (sandwich courses) are up to 14% more successful in finding graduate employment compared to non-sandwich course students (Harvey 2005), due to the high value placed on work experience by employers. Although this could also be due to the opportunities these students have had to develop contacts. But this evidence suggests a need to be realistic about the effectiveness of employability skills development within higher education institutions and whether they are the best place to try and do so.

Are higher education institutions able to develop employability?

In addition to the debate on whether higher education institutions are the right place to effectively develop employability skills, there is also the question of whether they are able to do so. Kreber (2006) points out the multiple pressures on higher education institutions which could make it harder for them to give increased focus to the employability

agenda: competing in the research arena; increasing numbers of students and their diversity, implying they are less prepared for university; along with declining resources. Rae (2007) tells us that universities are independent enterprises competing for student numbers in order to secure income, and this has not encouraged them to consider employers' needs when planning courses. He suggests that this has led to an increase in the number of 'trendy courses' offered at the expense of more traditional courses which employers value.

Should higher education institutions develop employability?

Far more contentious and fundamental than whether higher education institutions can develop employability skills is the philosophical question of whether they should.

Education in its broadest sense has been shown to positively correlate with both fluid and crystallised intelligence, core task performance and citizenship performance (Ng and Feldman 2009), all of which can contribute to employability. For some academics this broad education experience is not only sufficient, but is a core principle of higher education. They believe that higher education institutions are not the place to train graduates for jobs; that this is the responsibility of employers. Bowers-Brown and Harvey (2004) refer to the concept of the 'elitists', who believe there is an over-emphasis on vocational subjects, which is not the role of universities. Moreau and Leathwood (2006) talk about the increased focus on skills development threatening academic freedom. Kreber adds to this: 'some critics caution that universities could far too easily lose sight of such traditional values as curiosity-driven research, social criticism and preparation for civic life' (2006, 7). Some academics object to the philosophical changes being forced on higher education institutions (Jackson 2009), which appear to have coincided with a documented shift in the motivation to study, away from intellectual discovery towards a more instrumental approach (Massingham and Herrington 2006). Cornford (2005) argues that government-created expectations that employers' demands should be immediately responded to is the root cause of many higher education issues.

So, it is by no means clear whether employability skills can be developed and, if they can, the best way to do so. It is also debated to what extent higher education institutions can, and should, be part of employability skills development. But even if we can answer these questions another one remains: does employability matter?

To what extent does employability matter?

As with the definition of employability, the extent to which it is judged to matter varies by stakeholder group.

The government perspective

The UK government has a long-standing interest in higher education and employability, not least because it is the principal funder via taxation income. In more recent years, this interest has become more overt. Graduate employability has become a key objective for government and a performance indicator for higher education institutions. This focus on employability demonstrates what Cornford describes as 'an exceptionally instrumentalist approach' (2005, 41), and Wilton calls 'an economic ideology of higher education' (2008, 143) replacing the former view of what higher education

institutions are for. This suggests that *employment* matters to government but, as discussed earlier, this is not necessarily employability.

The employer perspective

Branine (2008) found that graduate employers are more interested in personal attributes and soft skills than degree classification, subject or university attended. This view is supported by the Confederation of British Industry (2008), with 86% of board executives putting skills and attitudes at the top of their list of demands; degree result was rated as important by 32% and university attended was rated as important by just 10%. Nevertheless, this is contradicted by other evidence. Research by Wilton (2011) confirmed findings from previous studies, by showing that new university students fared less well in the labour market than those from older universities. This could indicate that employers' actions may not be matching their words.

The graduate perspective

For many graduates the economic drivers are strong. They recognise the value of employability skills and that a degree on its own may not be enough (Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Tomlinson 2008). The number of students graduating in the UK has increased dramatically in the last two decades, more than doubling since 1991, which has potentially led to an over-supply of graduates who find it hard to start their careers (Branine 2008; Rae 2007). This is evidenced by an increase in graduate unemployment, increased competition between graduates, and higher levels of uncertainty about what graduates can expect from higher education (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2006; Moreau and Leathwood 2006). Not surprisingly, the increase in the number of graduates has also changed employers' expectations. A degree, once a bonus or differentiator, is now almost seen as a prerequisite for a job, even in sectors which in the past would not have needed a degree at entry level (Brown, Hesketh, and Williams 2003; Tomlinson 2008). Graduates are increasingly aware that they need additional skills and attributes for career success.

The higher education institution perspective

From the higher education institution perspective, the argument is simple: league tables can affect student numbers, which in turn affects funding. Despite arguments about the correlation between employability skills development and actual employment, higher education institutions need good employment figures. Therefore, they need to continue investing in, and promoting, employability development.

Wider society perspective

There are also those who suggest that employability skills are vital to society in general, as they enable people to contribute to the wider social environment (Brown, Hesketh, and Williams 2003; Wilton 2008).

The missing perspective

The missing perspective is the view of current students. Because these students are the intended recipients of employability skills development, their views are important. Most textbooks on learning theory highlight the need for learner motivation and engagement with the process to ensure effectiveness (e.g. Gold et al. 2010). Yet, we know little about the extent to which employability matters to current students, and what employability is from their perspective. Do they have similar views to other stakeholders on what transferable skills, or attributes, might be necessary? Do they think employability can, and should, be learned? Anecdotal evidence suggests that, for some students, most notably first and second years, there is a lack of engagement with the concept. These observations are supported by the literature (Rae 2007), which mentions the lack of appreciation by students of employability skills development.

Three other potential sources of current student views have been uncovered. Moreau and Leathwood (2006) carried out a longitudinal study with 310 mixed-discipline undergraduates. For these students, from a post-92 university, employability began to emerge as an issue as the study progressed and some of their findings are relevant to this article. Rothwell, Herbert, and Rothwell (2008) examined the beliefs of 344 undergraduate business students about their chances of success in seeking a particular type of work. Their findings included that the university attended had little impact on their self-perceived employability, as opposed to subject choice, which was rated as the top influencing factor. A striking finding was the perception that their level of engagement with studying was the least important factor linked to their employability. However, these researchers did not overtly explore the term 'employability' and its importance, nor the skills or attributes it may comprise. Tomlinson (2008) looked at 53 undergraduates and their perceptions of the role higher education credentials would play in shaping their future labour market outcomes. These students believed that degree qualification had lost differentiation value, and that there was a need to develop their wider employability. However, this sample group was limited to final-year students; we do not know if their views were the same earlier in their university career, when employability development could have occurred.

Methodology

Data was collected from first, second and final year undergraduate students in one post-92 UK university. Students were majoring in business studies/business administration, human resources and marketing. The final-year sample included sandwich students, newly returned from placement, and non-sandwich students. This conservatively includes 50% of the sample population for first-year students, 65% of the population for second-year students and 5% of the population for final-year students. It is recognised that the sample size for final-year students is low, and therefore care has been taken in reporting results from this group. There are other obvious limitations with this sample, which are discussed at the end of this article. The predominant method of data collection was via focus groups, which allowed the gathering of collective views and the collation of a joint construction of meaning (Bryman and Bell 2007). The non-sandwich final-year data was collected via questionnaire.

The questions posed were:

(1) What is your understanding of the term employability?
(2) What, if any, are the core/transferable skills that might make up employability?

(3) Either: (a) For first year students: To what extent do you expect the university to support the development of your employability, and how? (b) For all other groups: How much does university support the development of your employability, and how?

(4) To what extent do you think employability matters?

Findings and discussion

General findings

The number of responses per student increased by year, which indicates an increased confidence in self-expression. Focus-group observers reported that first-year students were more hesitant about contributing and their participation was far from equal. Second-year students appeared more confident in expressing themselves, with double the number of responses of first-year students, but again there was evidence that participation was unequal. Final-year students were extremely confident in expressing their views, with 14 times the number of items mentioned than by first-year students. This increasing confidence is of interest. It could be deemed to be evidence of enhanced communication skills and self-confidence, which regularly appear in employability skills frameworks, and which may suggest that these skills have been developed over the academic years.

Questions 1 and 2: what is employability and the skills/attributes it may encompass?

There is some alignment between the views the students expressed and the literature on the definition of employability and the skills and/or attributes it may include. All years and groups agreed that employability involved possession of skills linked to the needs of employers. In line with the literature, communication skills and team working were most commonly cited. Planning and organising and information technology skills were also commonly mentioned, and these appear in some of the frameworks reviewed for this article (see Table 1). All groups and years also agreed that personal attributes were an inherent part of employability, with the most commonly mentioned being: flexibility, adaptability, hardworking, commitment and dedication. Again this shows some alignment with the literature.

There was less alignment with the longer-term, wider definitions of employability (Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth 2004; Rothwell and Arnold 2007). This could suggest that these students are more concerned with the instrumental or economic view of employability discussed by Cornford (2005) and Wilton (2008). The final-year students did show some awareness of employability in its widest sense, suggesting it was about 'ensuring future employment'. This supports the findings of Tomlinson (2008), whose final-year students did consider longer-term advantages for graduates over non-graduates.

This pattern of alignment with the literature by academic year was also seen in relation to the value of qualifications or degree classification. Less than 40% of first and second year groups mentioned qualifications or grades as being connected to employability, whereas for employers a degree has almost become a prerequisite (Brown, Hesketh, and Williams 2003). Perhaps this finding may go some way towards explaining an observed lack of concern about grades for many first and

second year students, 'First-year results don't matter' being a comment anecdotally heard. However, views of final-year students on the worth of qualifications were similar to the literature, with comments such as 'Education is number one', and 'A degree is standard, you need more'. This confirms the findings of Tomlinson (2008), who reported that final-year students placed a great deal of importance on their qualifications and believed employers would use degree classification as a way to differentiate between increasingly large pools of graduates.

The importance of experience also revealed differences between the years. Final-year students stated that experience was essential, agreeing with the studies by both Moreau and Leathwood (2006) and Tomlinson (2008). This indicates an understanding of employers' wants (Cranmer 2006; Doctorjob.com 2004; Ng and Feldman 2009; Yorke 2004). However, experience was only mentioned by half of the first and second year groups. This may indicate that many of these students do not have an informed understanding, or awareness, of what employers are looking for at this stage of their education.

Question 3: development of employability skills in the university

Echoing the findings from Moreau and Leathwood (2006), top of the list on university support, for all groups and years, was the placement opportunity. This was closely followed by the (faculty) placement office's curriculum vitae writing support and the (central) careers and jobs centre. This implies that getting a placement and gaining experience was well recognised as a university support. A final-year student commented, 'The placement was the main reason for picking this degree', and responses for final-year students to this question were congruent with their other answers. Interestingly, this was not always the case for first and second year students, whose answers presented contradictions. The placement and job search support were rated as most important in answer to question three, and yet experience was not rated highly as a key employability skill in response to question two. This raises the question: do these students really value placements and work experience (at this time), or is this just 'lip service'? Perhaps this may explain the anecdotal, observed and researched lack of engagement with placement-related activities (Rae 2007).

All groups and years mentioned embedded activities, such as presentations, group work and meeting deadlines, designed to develop skills/attributes such as communications, confidence, teamwork and self-management. However there was less emphasis placed on these embedded activities compared to placements and work experience. The lack of emphasis on embedded activities could be due to the nature of them: do students recognise that they are designed to develop employability skills? However, this is a research stream beyond the scope of this article.

Another area of interest is the low perceived value of student-driven activities, such as involvement in societies, volunteering and other extra-curricular opportunities. These were mentioned by less than half the first and second year groups and not mentioned at all by final-year sandwich students. Conventional wisdom would view these as examples of demonstrating employability skills, and Tomlinson (2008) found that his final-year students believed that extra-curricula activities, such as societies and sports, were important. However, the evidence to support the value of these is mixed. For example, in respect of volunteering, Konidari (2010) found that the predominant reason for students carrying out volunteer work was to enhance their career and curriculum vitae. However, whilst students self-report that volunteering has improved

their skills and employability, there is little empirical evidence to show that it actually achieves this aim (Hill, Russell, and Brewis 2009). To quote Holdsworth and Quinn:

> While there are subjective data on how students feel they have benefited from volunteering and in many cases students do get jobs through volunteering (e.g. youth and conservation work), the absence of a control group means that statistically the case for employability is not proven. (2010, 123)

So, perhaps our students are right to ignore our suggestions that they develop their employability through volunteer work. But this does indicate a need for further research.

Question 4: to what extent does employability matter?

All students said employability mattered a 'great deal' or 'massively', but with focus on getting a job, any job, as opposed to employability in its wider sense, as discussed earlier. Comments included: 'There is no point in university without employability' and 'It can put you above the rest, competition is fierce'. The majority of first and second year groups went no further with this question, which may indicate that the topic is not really important to them at this stage.

For those who did expand upon why employability matters, reasons tended to be individually and instrumentally focused: 'job security', 'better pay', 'increased choice of jobs'. A small minority of groups went on to suggest that employability may improve quality of employment, with statements such as: 'It will give you a more enjoyable career' and 'It helps you plan your life and shows your development needs'. This suggests that, for only a small number of students, employability may be a wider and more valuable concept than employment. Very few groups mentioned the benefits to others, such as employers, higher education institutions, taxpayers and society in general. The lack of expansion on this question, for first and second year students at least, leads one to consider whether or not they really do believe that employability matters, and are therefore engaged with the development of employability skills.

Conclusions

This article set out to progress the discussion about the complex topic of graduate employability, most notably in the area of undergraduate engagement with the concept.

Whilst recognising that there is no universally accepted definition of employability, the views of most of these students are narrow in comparison to the literature. They seem to believe that employability is a short-term means to an end, being about finding a job, any job, or employment. Many of the literature definitions take a much wider stance, suggesting that employability should be more concerned with longer-term quality and sustainability of graduate-level employment. The more instrumental view of employability seems to correlate with the views of current and more recent governments, evidenced by the simplistic way in which employability is measured through employment statistics.

More alignment between student views and the literature was found in terms of the skills and personal attributes associated with employability. The most commonly cited skills were communication, team working, information technology, and planning and organising. Personal attributes agreed upon included flexibility, adaptability, hardworking, commitment and dedication. However, it should be remembered that there is no universal agreement on the content of employability frameworks, either between or

within stakeholder groups. Further, any agreement is just between 'labels', with little evidence to suggest that any of the interested stakeholders, including undergraduate students, share a common understanding of these terms. Nor is there concurrence about how they are assessed.

It is also unclear whether many of these skills and attributes can be developed in practice and, if so, what the role of higher education institutions should be. Putting aside the arguments about whether higher education institutions are able, willing or designed to develop employability, there is evidence to suggest there are alterative options which may be more appropriate.

Skills can be developed and are embedded in the curriculum, but many first and second year students appear to lack engagement with these activities. This must reduce their motivation to learn and inevitably impact on successful development. Higher education institutions could make improvements in this area, perhaps by increasing awareness of employability in its wider sense and the benefit to students of their engagement with the concept and/or perhaps by making skills development activities more overt. As individual benefits were clearly the main reason why students thought employability mattered, this could be a feasible objective, even if it does pander to the instrumental view of employability.

Personal attributes are more complex, with many falling into the category of proactive personality. Planned and explicit development of these is possibly outside the capability and remit of higher education institutions. Student-driven activities may be a way to develop proactive personality, but only a minority of these students recognised student-driven activities as a useful activity to develop employability. As an interesting aside, it could be that students who do commit to self-driven activities may actually be already high on proactive personality. Perhaps the way forward here is to focus on raising awareness of what employers need or want in terms of personal attributes, promoting the message of Villar and Albertin (2010) of the need for students to become more actively involved and responsible for their education, investing in their own social capital. Providing students with a better understanding of how student-driven activities can develop and/or demonstrate proactive personality could be a practical step.

Promotion of work-based training and experience may need to be reconsidered. There is clear evidence that these are the best techniques for the development of many employability-related skills and personal attributes. However, first and second year students may require more help to see the benefits of these activities, as their conflicting answers raised questions about their real engagement with the concept. Additionally, although experience is highly attractive to employers, there seems to be an increasing reluctance for them to supply development in transferable skills. This is certainly a theme which deserves further exploration.

Finally, there is the possible lack of importance associated with qualifications or degree classification by first and second year students, which is at odds with other stakeholder groups, including final-year students. If we are to raise the engagement levels of students in their first two years, they need to recognise that employers do put emphasis on qualifications, and because of the laws of supply and demand, employers can afford to be selective about grades.

Limitations of this study and further research

Various authors have suggested that business students should be more interested in, and have a greater awareness of, employability as they have opted to study a vocationally

oriented subject (Berman and Ritchie 2006; Jackson 2009; Parrott 2010). Therefore, these students could have a more informed perspective which may limit the potential for generalisation of the results.

Another limitation is the use of just one department in one post-92 university, meaning the results may not be representative. Rothwell, Herbert, and Rothwell (2008) showed there was little difference in student perceptions among three different pre-92 and post-92 universities. This, along with the reasonable sample size for first and second year students, should enable this data to make a useful contribution. However, further studies are recommended to validate the results, especially with final-year students.

According to Bryman and Bell (2007), there are limitations to qualitative data collection methods such as focus groups. These include: control, group dynamics and data analysis issues, all of which may limit the value of the findings and generalisations made. However, it is hoped that this article will provide some useful insights for those committed to the employability agenda and will provide a basis for further work in this area.

Areas of further research abound and include: more detailed analysis of the skills and attributes frameworks to explore shared meaning; empirical evidence for the value of volunteering and other student-driven activities; the discrepancy between students saying placements were of number one importance, but not rating experience highly as an employability element. One further research area that springs to mind is to what extent could proactive personality be a 'chicken and egg' situation? Simply put, are students who are high on proactive personality more likely to be involved in student-driven activities, finding placements and skills development activities embedded in the curriculum? It would be interesting to assess for levels of proactive personality at an early stage, and then relate this to their answers to the research questions used in this study, and their subsequent performance at and involvement in university.
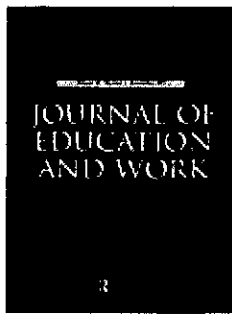
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Taking a risk to develop reflective skills in business practitioners

Margaret Mackay & Alex Tymon

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Taking a risk to develop reflective skills in business practitioners

Margaret Mackay* and Alex Tymon

The University of Portsmouth Business School, Portsmouth, UK

Critical reflection can support alternative decision-making in business practice. This paper examines the effectiveness of a risk-based pedagogy to engage practitioners in reflective thinking. Educators adopting a radical pedagogy in professionally accredited programmes face multiple challenges: learners often resist the process of self-reflection and stakeholders expect instrumental outcomes. A longitudinal study of human resource practitioners uses an interpretivist methodology to examine reflection through student-led learning and experiential activity. Findings show that a pedagogical method that overturns learner expectations stimulates dynamic discussion and reflection on experience. Implications are that effective risk-based teaching relies on establishing two conditions: (1) a scaffold structure which supports learner improvisation and (2) a lecturer willingness to continually orchestrate chance elements to maximise learning. This study contributes a practice-based understanding of the theoretical development of risk pedagogy, and adds new insights on the process of facilitating reflective skills to enable business practitioners to confront unpredictable work situations.

Keywords: pedagogy of risk; experiential learning; critical reflection; practitioner skills

Introduction

Reflective practice can help managers seek understanding of the cultural and political environment in which actions take place, and therefore guide decision-making in adapting behaviours and actions (Roessger 2013). This paper offers a response to Roessger's call (2013) to clarify the impact of reflective practice by exploring the theoretical basis and practical results of adopting a pedagogy of risk (Barnett 2007) to facilitate practitioners' reflective skills. A longitudinal research study focuses on a purposive sample of working practitioners studying part-time in a UK business school. The aim of the study is to investigate the challenges of using a risk-based approach in an educational setting with activities that stimulate practitioners to reflect on work experience, knowledge, attitudes and values. The contribution of

*Corresponding author. Email: Margaret.Mackay@port.ac.uk

this paper is to expand theoretical understanding of risk-based pedagogy and add practice-based insights of the process of balancing risks to animate reflection on experience. Developing practitioners' ability to consider assumptions and question practice can enhance organisational improvements (Gray 2007; Lassnigg 2012; Roessger 2013).

Contemporary business organisations need employees who can deal with the inherent risk of fluctuating economic environments. Rhee (2010) asserts an absolutist 'one size fits all' response to situations may limit business performance. Therefore, practitioners need the ability to cope with uncertainty, potential threats and reflect on alternative strategies (Shotter 2006; Weick and Sutcliffe 2006). Reflective practice is seen as an important aspect of business education in expanding the ability to challenge assumptions (Holden and Griggs 2011; Rigg and Trehan 2008) and examine practice variation. Critical reflection can enhance self-awareness, adjust perspective and support new decision-making frameworks (Cunliffe 2004; Moore 2011). The development of reflective skills (Raelin 2001) encourages investigation of action outcomes (*content reflection*), the process of achieving outcomes (*process reflection*) and the underpinning beliefs and values of organisational strategy (*premise reflection*). To attain this level of critical thinking, Raelin (2001, 19) argues that the practitioners need to develop reflective skills: 'practitioners reinvest in learning by participating in continuing education … [to] continually expand their solution database'. According to Billett (2008) supporting individuals' ability to continue to learn throughout their working lives is an important educational goal.

Consequently, higher education plays an important role in developing reflection and enhancing practitioners' ability to learn from work experience. To do so, Barnett (2007) advances a new pedagogy for teaching, learning and assessment that can facilitate learners' development. Barnett (2007) terms this approach a *pedagogy of risk*:

> the educator, as an experienced pedagogue, may displace himself into the pedagogical background and so orchestrate the students' experiences that they are left much more to their own devices and so take responsibility for their own learning. (2007, 119)

In short, the lecturer opens up the pedagogical space to student direction and invites anarchic elements of risk and unpredictability. Our aim in this research paper is to examine the use of a risk-based approach to teaching. We chose a pedagogy of risk to encourage practitioners to challenge organisational mantras, and stimulate critical reflection on theoretical knowledge and workplace practice. However, adopting a new, radical approach presents challenges for lecturers and often frustrates learners (Mackay and Tymon 2013). DeRue and Ashford (2012) observe reflection is not a favourite activity for time-pressed managers as organisations favour action. Critics

also question the vogue for reflection in business education (Fenwick 2001; Gray 2007; Holden and Griggs 2011; Rigg and Trehan 2008) as the impact remains elusive. Further, Roessger (2013, 16) asserts that reflective practice needs rigorous scrutiny:

> researchers need to clarify and confirm reflective practice's consistent impact on learning outcomes in instrumental learning contexts, as well as the degree to which reflective practice activities accomplish what they are intended to accomplish.

This study offers a response in illustrating the impact of reflective practice by drawing on Barnett's (2007) theoretical concept of risk pedagogy, and evaluating the effectiveness of this radical teaching approach in practice.

We begin by first, discussing the value of critical reflection for business practitioners; second, outlining a rationale for using risk pedagogy in education and third, exploring the challenges of student-directed activities that strive to balance risk and predictability. In an educational context, the use of a risk-based pedagogy is a commitment to work with the apparent contradiction of structured spontaneity. Next, we discuss the methodology, and present our findings. Finally, we discuss the theoretical development of risk pedagogy and share practice implications for educators and stakeholders in effectively triggering critical reflection that can shape future workplace action.

The value of critical reflection to practitioners

The value of critical reflection is to enable practitioners to adjust to unexpected situations, explore new possibilities and test out suitable options in untried contexts (Shotter 2006; Weick and Sutcliffe 2006). Cazan (2013) observes that educators can help students become self-regulating learners to improve their performance by engaging in meta-cognitive activities, such as reflection. So, how lecturers engage practitioners in business education that connects their learning capability with working experience is a pertinent issue. Developing the practice of critical reflection needs to actively involve learners as agents of their education; thus, the curriculum design respects Knowles' principles of androgogy (1980) inviting connections with business students' pre-existing tacit knowledge. Billett (2008, 56), for example, argues for this explicit acknowledgement of work experience in teaching and learning:

> To place individuals and their construction and sense-making, and ultimately their subjective experience not only as a component of pedagogy and curriculum practice, but also as an inevitable outcome.

To develop learning agility practitioners can take risks with experiential activities and navigate guided learning of critical reflection to integrate

academic theory, technical knowledge and practical application (Beard and Wilson 2007; Holden and Griggs 2011). However, developing reflective skills is not a natural process in learning and requires energetic facilitation and communicative learning. Raelin (2001, 12) recognises that reflective skills and reflexivity require effort and development: 'adults need to engage, to evoke their reflective consciousness in order to learn at this level'. This involves dynamic interactions through collaborative discussions, dialogic interpretations, shared group and individual self-reflections to facilitate professional learning. For example, Roessger (2013, 5) states:

> Through communicative processes, learners evaluate the subjective experiences of others, as well as interpret how their own frames of reference influence their actions and their perceptions of others.

An educational setting can provide a supportive space that liberates time to foster the linking of learning to practice, allowing practitioners to contemplate situations and exercise judgement to decide on appropriate courses of action. Business schools can offer experiential learning and spontaneous activity, but educators may feel constrained by stakeholder expectations and instrumental outcomes in taking a risk with pedagogy (Barnett 2007; Lassnigg 2012; Raelin 2001).

Why take a risk-based approach?

Within higher education, the literature reveals an extensive debate about the dominance of technical, instrumental learning for business; for example, Ghoshal (2005, 81) champions the case for business relevance restoring to business education 'what matters in organisations'; in essence a business-priority approach. Traditionally, higher education provides academic curiosity-driven learning, intended to benefit society by fostering citizenship behaviours (McCowan 2012). However, Betts (2004, 240) asserts that modern universities have increasingly become places of 'applied learning' with an instrumental, vocational focus. Instrumental learning is attractive to employers with a focus on procedural knowledge, concentrating on 'how to' do in business for improved competency (Roessger 2013). Aspects of procedural knowledge in the educational curriculum are legitimate (Deakin Crick and Joldersma 2007; Lassnigg 2012) and can be scaled up to minimise resource input and achieve predictable learning outcomes. Yet, these instrumental business priorities, in seeking an ideal technical solution (Rhee 2010), may restrict the exploration of alternative concepts. A business school curriculum needs to grapple with the competing claims of academic research and real-world practice to support practitioners' sense-making and reveal fresh insights (Lassnigg 2012; Rynes 2007).

We argue that technical, procedural knowledge is not enough to confront the demands of business unpredictability. Barnett (2007) maintains the first

task of higher education is to enable students to contemplate, identify and express their individuality on an ever-changing basis. This capacity to critically analyse and interpret business issues may be a skill of increasing value in turbulent contexts, where organisations seek employees who can be self-managing in embracing change, innovative in response and motivated to learn (Bledow and Frese 2009; Hakanen, Perhoniemi, and Toppinen-Tanner 2008; Major, Turner, and Fletcher 2006). Reflective practice is an active, deliberate, cognitive and emotional process that considers and connects experience to learning (Gray 2007; Lynch 2000; Raelin 2007). The lecturer can facilitate reflective skill development through an interactive teaching approach that resonates with the complexities of academic theory, workplace practice and organisational ambiguity.

Our premise is that risk is an inherent part of learning and teaching in the education system; and is integral to the everyday conditions that enable students 'to live with their own inner turbulence' (Barnett 2007, 127) and appreciate the diverse experiences of employment practice. A pedagogy of risk makes use of 'restrained anarchy' (Barnett 2007, 137) to provoke questions and new thinking. This teaching strategy defies the notion of a single, prescriptive solution and proposes an openness to complexity as a necessary condition to tolerate the ambiguities of work reality. Hence, a risk-based approach moves away from the security of didactic, knowledge transmission to what McGuire and Gubbins (2010) describe in a nurturing metaphor as 'sower and seed'; an educational approach that nurtures reflection to shape thinking and inform future action.

The challenges of risk-based pedagogy

Arguably an educational environment has few hazards; a gathering of like-minded adults can safely examine work experience and reflections in an atmosphere of mutual trust (Billett and Ovens 2007; Cranton 2011). Yet, educators face competing expectations in professional learning; such as instrumental credentials, organisational knowledge requirements and academic frameworks (Curzon-Hobson 2010; Lassnigg 2012; McNally and Irving 2010). Clinebell and Clinebell (2008) identify conflicting values between higher education's holistic development and the often short-term goals of business. Thus, as we strive to develop students' reflective skills, organisations demand short-term, instrumental competence. Moreover, professional qualifications dictate a university framework that specifies a planned curriculum, defined regulations and learning outcomes geared towards instrumental learning (Lassnigg 2012). Satisfying professional body knowledge requirements may reduce learning to 'potted' knowledge codified into bite-size units. This regulation of discipline topics, known as 'unitisation', may disguise the disorder of political and institutional reality (Gray

2007). Educators may want to encourage a nurturing approach to develop critical reflection but run into an emphasis on instrumental learning that circumscribes the curriculum.

Challenges in risk-based pedagogy for lecturers

Educators adopting a risk pedagogy invite unpredictable and complex elements into the educational setting. Ideally, this improvisational approach sets up a creative space for learning; a forum which is unrehearsed and open to questioning challenge. But this presents three major problems for lecturers: loss of control, threats to credibility and resource intensity.

First, as the lecturer's role changes from central expert in a didactic mode of teaching to process facilitator and guide in experiential student-led learning, there is the possibility of widespread disorder as Barnett (2007) predicts. Students lead their own group activities, select research choices and can take random directions which may result in shambolic classroom sessions. Students may be complicit in limiting the potential for different learning approaches, when as consumers they expect a clear product and service (McNally and Irving 2010; Roessger 2013); such as, a recognised qualification for career advancement. For educators, a loss of control could undermine the importance of the course content. Further, capturing evidence of student-directed learning is difficult, which is problematic within an increasing regulatory environment of higher education quality assurance (Curzon-Hobson 2010; Lassnigg 2012).

Second, working without a script removes the expected mantle of lecturer as authority figure delivering rehearsed evidence of advanced knowledge and expertise. Suddenly moving from chief protagonist to minor character, by following Barnett's (2007, 119) direction to retreat into the background, can be a disturbing role reversal for the lecturer. In addition, the lecturer may struggle to keep pace with divergent student progress, as individuals head in different directions. This approach can leave the lecturer feeling sidelined or with credibility under threat.

Third, a risk pedagogy is resource intensive: demanding skills of seasoned facilitators, and self-discipline to allow students to find their own way, object, criticise and challenge. Vigilant monitoring of learners' individual and collective needs is required in balancing a frank exploration of insights. But the lecturer also needs to make speedy judgements as to how to respond to emerging group dynamics and respectfully indicate when learners are off track. Such nurturing of reflection requires a lecturer's emotional investment to develop a relationship of trust with the learners (Curzon-Hobson 2010). These factors demand lecturer commitment, time investment and facilitative skills to achieve a productive learning environment. For the lecturer these multiple factors can make pedagogy of risk appear daunting.

Perceived risks for learners

A risk-based pedagogy can also present learners with two potential threats; these include unpredictable learning sessions which oblige students to embrace ambiguity, and experiential exercises that may undermine a practitioner's self-identity with the risk of social exposure.

First, the nature of the teaching removes a pre-determined sequence of learning topics and obliges learners to engage with a continuously evolving process. For the student, this open-ended intellectual space can be troubling. Barnett (2007, 143) notes: 'Space to engage with pedagogical challenges might lead a student lacking in self-confidence to shrink from the challenge'. There is no assurance of comfortably sitting back to passively listen to the sequenced delivery of a public lecture. Many students are baffled by unconventional interactive approaches and question the need to develop reflective skills. Challenging activities create biological increases in adrenaline and dopamine which can energise people and spark curiosity, but excessive tension is debilitating if there is too high a level of uncertainty (Rock 2009; Vygitsky 1978). In professionally accredited programmes, an instrumental focus may lead students to resist a curriculum that appears tenuously connected to qualification outcome (Anderson and Gilmore 2010). Reflection and reflexivity are neither natural abilities nor simply acquired (Coulson and Harvey 2013; Raelin 2001) and mature business students, in particular, find this type of learning challenging (Merriam 2004; Stewart, Keegan, and Stevens 2008). Cullen (2011) reports on studies that conclude students dislike reflective units and often fail to be critically reflective.

Second, this risk-based teaching approach can pose a threat to self-identity as an experienced practitioner. Organisational ways of working and dealing with cases have often a habitual response based on past practice. Critical reflection may challenge students' worldviews and question their experiences or assumptions of 'best' practice (Brooks 2004; Merriam 2004). Meyer and Land (2005) observe that the educational process can lead to learner disorientation. These challenges are exacerbated by social group interactions and the interrogation of knowledge. For example, Merriam (2004, 65) points out 'most adults have not developed the theory capacities for criticising the underlying assumptions of their own thinking'. Students are asked to lead the exploration of certain ideas expressing aloud thoughts and opinions which risk sounding foolish or even offend other students (Billett and Ovens 2007; McCowan 2012; Rigg and Trehan 2008). This social embarrassment and discomfort can threaten a student's identity as an expert practitioner.

To summarise, lecturers adopting a risk pedagogy may face resistant learners, a disinterested institutional context and consequently lose heart. Barnett asserts: 'The presence of risk is a necessary part of genuine higher education. It cannot be risk-audited away. A teacher's professionalism may limit the level of risk, but it cannot be extinguished' (2007, 150). We also

need to satisfy the instrumental demands of stakeholders as discussed in Mackay and Tymon (2013). Despite the challenges and potential threats of working with the unexpected, we argue that a risk-based approach can improve learner engagement and animate the relevance of critical reflection to work practice. This research study examines the evidence for developing reflective skills in more depth by expanding learning risks and uncertainties in an educational context.

Methodology

To reiterate, the aim of this paper is to explore the effect of using risk pedagogy (Barnett 2007) to promote critical reflection that can inform future action. Risk pedagogy is designed to encourage practitioners to challenge their assumptions and question institutional understandings; a socially subjective view of practice is therefore compatible with the study's aims. The research study uses an interpretivist methodology to explore interpretations of practice behaviour (Bryman and Bell 2007; Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2012). This phenomenological approach is supported by Billett (2008) as a means to discover interpretations of learning from work and practice. Moreover, what Cranton (2011, 84) notes as the potential for action research to challenge 'the underlying assumptions and premises of teaching' corresponds with the underpinning research design to address Roessger's call (2013) to clarify the impact of reflective practice on learning outcomes in instrumental learning contexts. 'Learning is tied to practice' (Raelin 2001, 44) and thus in seeking to connect work and education-based experiences, we use a risk-based approach to stimulate analysis and critical reflection on the processes and outcomes of practice. This study is based on a longitudinal, iterative approach to enhancing practitioners' reflective skills within a professionally accredited programme.

The study's educational context

The professional qualification we refer to here is a postgraduate diploma in human resource management accredited by the UK's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Learners as full-time working practitioners, and part-time students, are predominantly motivated to gain the CIPD professional qualification for career progression. Within this qualification, students are required to demonstrate reflective learning which underpins the technical focus of a human resource development (HRD) unit. This longitudinal study started in the academic year 2008/2009 with the introduction of experiential learning and student-led sessions. However, this new teaching approach encountered hostile resistance as reported by Anderson and Gilmore (2010). Students were irritated with a lack of explicit direction, and suffered cumulative panic as they perceived little connection between their

group-instructed learning and the examination assessment (Anderson and Gilmore 2010). In the face of public criticism, the lecturing team were momentarily tempted to resort to traditional didactic methods to reduce complex learning processes (Biggs and Tang 2007; Lassnigg 2012). But a key component of this research has been the commitment of two pairs of lecturers to espouse theories in practice and continue to re-examine adopted approaches. In short, we ask our students to reflect on work practice and so we did too. We applied the same critical review to our pedagogy in teaching reflection (Mackay and Tymon 2013), and in expanding our facilitation skills. As Billett and Ovens (2007) report, the facilitative capability of the teacher is important in enabling learning from reflection.

Consequently, after much research, discussion and the use of reflexive self-assessments, we determined to test out in practice Barnett's (2007) pedagogy of risk. To do so, we modified our teaching approach in two fundamental ways: (a) we provided explicit scaffolding for reflection on HRD and (b) we designed more appropriate assessment artefacts to demonstrate reflective learning. For example, to delineate a supportive framework, we provided structural signposts in the form of problem-based material packs. These created multiple starting points and included open-ended questions for students to initiate group discussion and group-led research. For assessment instead of an examination, we focused first on a student-led session of HRD technical learning and skills development, and secondly, a reflective writing assignment. Learners thus were assessed collectively as groups facilitating the HRD technical knowledge of the peer cohort, and individually through the written reflection on skills development and professional learning.

Data collection

We collected data to examine the effectiveness of adopting a risk-based approach to promote and facilitate reflective skill development. We designed the study to build on previous research (Anderson and Gilmore 2010; Mackay and Tymon 2013) and collected longitudinal data over two academic years 2011–2012 and 2012–2013. In order to maximise learning, students were expected to model and explain HRD technical practices, such as facilitating a training needs analysis exercise. The sample group on an HRD unit were taught in four different cohorts, and of the 68 postgraduate students, 52 are employed as human resource practitioners in a range of organisations including healthcare, defence industry manufacturers, local government, pharmaceutical services and retail work. The other 16 students have generalist administrative experience, and seek specialist work in human resources by acquiring a professional qualification.

The data from multiple reflective tools were collected over two academic years including: self-assessment, reflective essays, feedback reports, ongoing evaluation discussions and a narrative skills development portfolio of

continuous learning over the academic year. Table 1 summarises the data collected in three principal strands in response to a risk-based pedagogy: formal assessed work, student reflections and lecturer reviews.

To explain the relevance of these three data strands: the *formal assessed work* includes student-led sessions providing evidence of HRD technical learning, facilitation skills in action and subsequent reflection via a written essay on collective and individual learning of theory and practice. The individual development portfolios include reflection on broad skills development across the academic year and critical reflection on learning from work experience, and plans for further development.

The *student reflections* include informal rating of knowledge and skills using a self-efficacy scale developed from Holden and Griggs (2011). Students self-rated their technical knowledge, practice skills and confidence against the six learning outcomes of the HRD unit. In mid-unit reviews, in line with university quality assurance guidelines (Lassnigg 2012), students were asked to identify what lecturers could stop doing, start doing and continue doing to enhance learning. Similarly, individual unit questionnaires and later in-class discussion asked students to evaluate what they enjoyed or not about the unit; the usefulness of resources, lecturer support and the effectiveness of teaching and assessment methods. Finally, *the lecturer reviews* recorded ongoing discussions and peer commentary on the success of attempting to embed a pedagogy of risk in order to hone reflective learning skills.

Table 1. Data collection.

Sources of data	Instrument	Timeline (*academic year of 30 weeks*)
Formal assessed work	Student-led sessions	Weeks 9 and 10
	Individual HRD reflective essays	Week 15
	Individual continuing professional development portfolios	Week 20
Student reflections	Initial self-assessment and post-event of self-efficacy scale	Weeks 1 and 12
	Mid unit review focus groups	Week 6
	Individual unit evaluation questionnaires	Week 12
	In-class discussion based on unit evaluation feedback report	Week 24
Lecturer reviews	Ongoing informal discussions and observations	Weeks 1–24
	Mid unit review	Week 6
	End of unit review	Week 15
	End of year review	Week 30

On analysing the data, the research team sought evidence of students' technical learning, critical reflection and a student perspective on teaching informed by a pedagogy of risk. As learners in HRD, the focus on well-accepted training methods of learning evaluation (e.g. Easterby-Smith 1994; Kirkpatrick 1998; Warr, Bird, and Rackham 1970) enabled these same evaluative strands to be applied in the coding process of data analysis. This paper focuses specifically on the longitudinal data that examines a response to education grounded in a theoretical pedagogy of risk to nurture reflective skills.

Findings

In this section, we present and discuss our findings. We start with data that illustrate learners' encounters with risks, and discuss the scaffolding the lecturing team put in place to mitigate these perceived threats. We discuss data from lecturer reviews, and the implicit need for educators sustained attention, time investment and active facilitation skills in using a risk-based approach. Then, we provide indicative evidence of learning by taking risks; in enhanced technical knowledge, reflective skills acquisition and the impact of reflection on practitioner intention to transfer learning. Finally, we summarise our findings on the effectiveness of using a risk-based approach and the implications of structured improvisation for practitioner development.

Learners encountering risks

Most of the students expressed apprehension and fear in being expected to set out and lead the learning of others in HRD, such as training design and evaluation. For example, one senior executive voiced anxiety about facilitating peer learning; being accountable to the group put her on the spot in trying to interrogate a complex theoretical position of training needs analysis. A third of the students experienced self-doubt and concerns about the unknown subject area that indicates a discomfort with ambiguity. Others were daunted by the task to research, design, develop and facilitate HRD learning in practice; 'the task was scary' and the prospect seemed 'terrifying – in case I am exposed for my total lack of knowledge in this area'. A fear of appearing ignorant in front of other HR practitioners increased perceptions of threat in this learning approach. The skill of the lecturer facilitating was to judge when to intervene and address these concerns, by highlighting a particular concept for the group. Lecturers tried to balance a level of tension using rhetorical questions to engage learner reflections on work practice without generating too much anxiety (Rock 2009). Table 2 summarises learners' perceptions of risks and the lecturer use of scaffold techniques to minimise these threats.

The lecturer willingness to actively facilitate a learning process that balances uncertain threats with comforting assurance was key to provoking rich debate. The majority of students identified reflection as a difficult skill,

Table 2. Perceived risks and use of structure to support reflection.

Perceived risks for learners	Scaffold support
Undefined intellectual space (Barnett 2007) 'I felt disappointed and frustrated at our inability to learn from the other groups, that we had squandered our advantage in going last. During group activities I failed to interact with others to guide them sufficiently. As we failed to ask questions, our conclusion was vague and lacked input from others.'	Framework theory of HRD Problem-based questions Using rhetorical questions Inviting a questioning approach
Vulnerability of social exposure (Raelin 2001) 'This sounds ridiculous but when I was leading [*the group*] and trying to express what I understood about putting this really into practice my legs were shaking. My words got muddled and I must have seemed an idiot.'	Encouraging dialogue on experience Teaching peers to give and receive specific feedback Lecturer facilitation of collective discussion
Difficulty of reflective learning (Gray 2007) 'Reflective writing is a new skill that I have struggled to grasp ... I had not reflected on my work in this way; it was time-consuming and a real effort to consider my feelings, challenges and achievements.'	Reflective writing practice Impromptu coaching Tools to promote reflection

which resonates with the literature (Cullen 2011; Merriam 2004; Stewart, Keegan, and Stevens 2008). Billett and Ovens (2007) reveal students dislike writing down their reflections, and we recognise inherent difficulties in reflective writing (Stewart, Keegan, and Stevens 2008). Nonetheless, the discipline of writing expands the skills of critical reflection (Cunliffe 2004; Quinton and Smallbone 2010), and the lecturing team view writing as a significant learning tool. Arguably, the nature of assessment may constrain reflection and breadth in learning, but we posit that assessment through a reflective essay and skills development portfolio enables the probable application of learning beyond the educational setting. A criticism of this interpretation may be that lecturers' power governs assessment and demands a confessional turn (Fenwick 2001). Nonetheless, this assessment method of providing tools for reflection and an explicit framework is justified by Coulson and Harvey's (2013) research that scaffolding can support reflection on action long after the experienced event. This approach helps learners to embed reflective skills. For example, learners attest to expanding awareness of the range of alternatives in practice situations:

> The most meaningful aspect is being able to reflect on the sessions. This has improved my metacognition i.e. thinking about thinking – my thinking process has been transformed.

This supports Raelin's view (2001) of the need for meta-competence, a set of principles that encourages skill development and knowledge for trial in practice across unseen work situations. This critical thinking rejects an absolutist stance of one 'best' way in organisational practice.

Students affirmed positive reactions to a risk-based approach and rated student-led sessions consistently as the most energising part of the HRD unit. The improvement in response from the Anderson and Gilmore report (2010) may be due to a move away from an examination assessment. However, we suggest that the affect of a more apparent structural scaffold (Coulson and Harvey 2013) enabled us to balance the risks learners experienced. Also, the teaching team were committed to reflexive practice (Mackay and Tymon 2013) and through self-assessment continually refined their facilitation methods.

Lecturer reviews of taking risks

The teaching team had to practise self-discipline and selectively choose the emphasis of technical content in order to allow sufficient time for spontaneous discussions and analysis of emerging practice experiences (Ellis, Mendel, and Nir 2006; Moon 2007). A seed approach to teaching (McGuire and Gubbins 2010) invites a less predictable learning format when animated student discussion conducts knowledge discovery. Findings suggest that space and time are essential for learners to build trust in peer relationships (Curzon-Hobson 2010) and explore for themselves meaning in HRD theory and practice. Lecturers commented on their need from a 'background' position to sustain vigilance and allow open discussion to flourish risking occasional anarchy:

> Yes, there was heated debate ... a good session ... but then it got really hard trying to contain competing views and different discussions, so it didn't just deteriorate into a free-for-all.

The lecturers needed to modify their approach at key points, intervene to bring the HRD concept back into focus and deter loose digressions. Findings from the lecturer reviews were that scaffold techniques support the delicate balance in student responsibility for learning; the balance between too much risk causing learner fear and too little risk resulting in passive disinterest. Lecturers found that facilitating this balance is difficult and requires continuous attention. Lecturers invested in facilitative tools for reflection, as shown in Table 2; for example, teaching peers to give and receive specific feedback to inform observations and collective sharing of reflections 'for, in and on' experiential activities (Coulson and Harvey 2013). The reported benefits of lecturers' facilitative efforts were the high levels of learner enthusiasm and engagement with the HRD unit. Additionally, practitioners'

advanced business experience contributed to rewarding analysis of current practice for both lecturers and students in educational reciprocity (Cheetham and Chivers 2001; Knowles 1980). In other words, the advantages of actively facilitating student direction was the rich learning, thinking around HRD in practice and professional development.

Evidence of expansive learning from risk approach

Despite the challenges of taking a risk-based approach, the data suggest learning improvements in technical HRD knowledge and the development of reflective skills.

Technical knowledge

In a self-efficacy rating at the start of the unit, students' average score was 3.9 out of 10 in assessing their HRD technical knowledge and skills. At the end of HRD unit, average scores rose to 7.5 out of 10, revealing a marked increase in self-efficacy rating. This self-perception of HRD technical learning is reinforced by student-led assessments; marks ranged from 59 to 73% with a 64% median score. This compares with a lower average examination mark of 55% in 2008/2009. Most students demonstrated some level of in-depth, technical knowledge retention during an in-class evaluation discussion three months after unit completion. For example, they were able to correctly identify alternation between different evaluation models and critique the basis of theories in use by the lecturing team, which implies more than surface learning has occurred (Merriam 2004; Mezirow 1994). This acquisition of technical HRD learning is important to satisfy the instrumental outcomes of students (Deakin Crick and Joldersma 2007), their employers and the professional body.

Reflective skills

As working practitioners, these students valued the time available to spend on critical reflection, legitimised by the educational context. The action orientation of many organisations inhibits employees' capacity to reflect and learn from successful events and post-mortems (Ellis, Mendel, and Nir 2006; Roessger 2013). The opportunity to review the messiness of organisational practice and think through an alternative course of action was welcomed. For example, one practitioner commented:

> I believe the self-reflective process has enabled me to question current HR practices at work and identify ways these could be improved. So, that helps me add value to the organisation ... prior to the programme I would have just kept doing what I had always done and not question why.

Again, this demonstrates that lecturers inviting a questioning approach to promote reflection, and making use of rhetorical questions can connect educational learning to the workplace (Billett 2008). For example, in acquiring reflexive habits, a learner notes how he is applying critical reflection to organisational processes:

> I am becoming more confident in challenging the norm at work, questioning the why especially with some of the project work I am involved in; e.g. why do we use competency based interviewing.

This thinking around practice implies a change of view that can inform future action.

Transfer of reflective skills to workplace practice

We acknowledge that data from an educational setting can suggest good intentions to transfer reflective practice to the workplace which are then difficult to confirm (see Holden and Griggs 2011; Rigg and Trehan 2008). Nonetheless, students report enhanced confidence and specific competence development that affects behaviour on the job. For example,

> The Chief Officer has begun to take notice of the increase in my confidence levels and my ability to bring sound arguments to a situation without the emotions. I am now being asked to take the lead on HR matters which are delegated wholeheartedly to me.

Transfer of learning can be seen as evidence of the connection between theory, education and workplace practice. The extent to which educational learning transfers to a work setting is consistently questioned (Blume et al. 2010). According to Martin (2010), evidence for transfer of learning from training events to the job context is scant, with estimates between 10 and 40% of any transfer impact. However, in this study, *near* transfer was displayed by examples of applied technical learning; increased use of training needs analysis and evaluation methods. For example, one practitioner implemented changes to an induction process after appreciating the learning benefits of active involvement:

> I am changing the training process for new starters within the company's operations team. I plan to include more hands-on activity with the support of colleagues ... the new starter should retain more learning about the role than by just observation.

Transfer of learning in the broader use of reflective skills in non-HRD contexts, referred to as *far* transfer, was also evident in the social learning that enabled individuals to realise that others take a different perspective of their behaviour. This insight on group conversations illustrates self-realisation:

> My manager suggested I am underselling myself at work by giving an adverse impression. I tend to let off steam in the office after difficult transactions with clients. My class peers tend to be more honest than colleagues ... to them some of my behaviours seem negative and reactive ... Since this revelation, in meetings I now try to think over my remarks, before saying them aloud, to ensure my comments have the desired effect.

These findings illustrate reflective practice but development would need to continue to iteratively connect reflections of work and educational learning.

Limitations

We acknowledge limitations in this study and recognise the possibility that the written reflective skills may be interpreted as records simply to satisfy the demands of professional accreditation (Butler and Reddy 2010; Lynch 2000). The implied threat for educators when promoting reflective skills is that learning becomes a mechanistic exercise that imposes a form of self-audit on learners (Fenwick 2001). Contrary findings do indicate that some students consider the exercise of reflective practice as a panacea that will provide certainty for a management issue. In adopting a radical pedagogy, lecturers overturn practitioner expectations of the learning context, which consequently may inhibit student performance. The limitations of a prescriptive, single approach apply to an educational context as equally to business (Rhee 2010). In a commitment to enhancing practitioner learning, we need to strike a balance between the experience of random disorder and the lively stimulation of structured improvisation.

Conclusion

Our aim in this research study was to address Roessger's (2013) call for closer examination of reflective practice. We provide a response drawing on Barnett's (2007) theoretical pedagogy of risk to analyse the effectiveness of this teaching and learning approach in practice. The significance of this study, grounded in longitudinal research, is to illuminate our thinking about conceptual risk in higher education. In building on Barnett's work, we add to the theoretical development of the pedagogical method of risk and offer new insights from a practice orientation. The study with a purposive sample of business practitioners' reveals learner engagement in reflection through an interrogation of theoretical concepts tied to work experiences. Empirical data demonstrates increased HRD technical learning, and enhanced self-awareness through reflexive thinking. We recognise the impact of reflective practice (Raelin 2001) on working lives is difficult to confirm. Yet, the findings indicate that practitioners are animated by student-led discussion, which stimulates reflection on work experience. This radical pedagogy invites challenge and spontaneous questions which can strengthen the learning connections between unpredictable work situations and academic investigation.

The contribution of this study adds to theoretical understanding of how risk-based teaching can create friction that stimulates interactive learning. We build on Barnett's theoretical concept and add two significant practice implications. These are: first, the requirement to establish a supportive framework, and second, for lecturers to actively facilitate the effective process of balancing risk and certainty. First, a structural scaffold enables students to direct their own learning and reflect on knowledge and practice application; a reference frame offers learners structure without prescribing micro-content. We commend Coulson and Harvey's model (2013) to scaffold the development of reflective skills; this mitigates students' perceptions of threat and collectively emboldens a necessary relationship of trust. Second, to be effective a risk-based teaching approach relies on lecturers' willingness to actively facilitate peer interactions and promote reflection on work practice. Despite the institutional constraints of a professionally accredited qualification, lecturers can invert the traditional role of the pedagogue by students leading the group learning. The demands on a lecturer are willingness to flexibly orchestrate from a background position student-led debate that inspires knowledge discovery. In an instrumental learning context, a pedagogy that animates the dynamics of professional learning can enrich the development of reflective skills. Finally, based on this research study we assert that a risk-based pedagogical approach encourages learner engagement and animates the business relevance of critical reflection. Taking a risk with pedagogy, educators can foster reflective skills that enhance practitioners' ability to confront unpredictable situations.

Notes on contributors

Margaret Mackay is a course leader and senior lecturer for postgraduate human resource management programmes at the University of Portsmouth Business School. Prior to joining the university, Margaret held senior executive roles working with the British Council and HSBC in the Middle East, Europe, Latin America and the United States. Margaret specialises in reward and talent development with research interests in reflective learning, skills development and continuing professional development. Recent publications include: "Working with Uncertainty to Support the Teaching of Critical Reflection," *Teaching in Higher Education* (2013), and book chapters "Developing Employees," *Leading, Managing and Developing People* (2013).
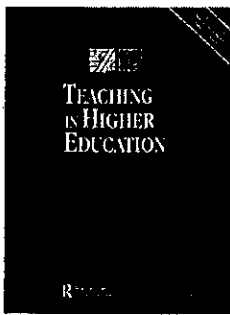
Alex Tymon is a senior lecturer at the business school, University of Portsmouth, United Kingdom. She teaches human resource development, leadership and management, which she also researches alongside graduate employability. Her recent publications include: "The Impact of University Students' Commitment on in- and Extra-role Performance," *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education* (2014); "New Ways to Leadership Development: A Picture Paints a Thousand Words," *Management Learning* (2013); "Working with Uncertainty to Support the Teaching of Critical Reflection," *Teaching in Higher Education* (2013); As well as book chapters in *Leading, Managing and Developing People* (2013).

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Improved academic performance and enhanced employability? The potential double benefit of proactivity for business graduates

Alex Tymon & Sasa Batistic

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Alex Tymon and Sasa Batistic

Department of OS and HRM, University of Portsmouth Business School, Portsmouth, UK

ABSTRACT

This study contributes to proactivity theory and debate on how universities meet competing stakeholder demands in an increasingly marketized higher education environment. We explore how the interplay between the stable facet of proactive personality and the situated behaviour of personal initiative influence academic performance. We hypothesized and found that students high on both these facets of proactivity achieve better academic grades than those low on both, or high in just one. Unexpectedly, high proactive personality with low personal initiative behaviour was the worst combination. Proactivity can be a valuable employability asset, which alongside academic grades is important to some employers as well as students and universities. We argue that nurturing student proactivity can therefore produce multiple benefits but with focus on the more trainable dimension of personal initiative behaviour. To this end we provide practical guidance for university curriculum design to simultaneously enhance graduate employability and academic performance.

Introduction

Debate about the role of higher education in developing graduate employability is not new and continues unabated (van der Merwe, McChlery, and Visser 2014; Turner 2014; Shagrir 2015). Despite a lack of consensus amongst academics there is increasing expectation from students, employers, governments and tax payers, who in the main fund universities, that more will be done to enhance graduate employability (Knight and Yorke 2003; Tymon 2013; Vuorinen-Lampila 2014; Tran 2015). As a result, universities have much to gain from pedagogic practice that can both maintain traditional academic standards whilst also enhancing employability. We provide a theoretical and practical suggestion in support of Reddy and Moores (2012) who promote the notion of a university education that combines enrichment of intellectual capital alongside development of vocational skills. In doing so, we concur with Jameson et al. (2012) that academics can protect traditional academic principles whilst also meeting political and economic demands by being proactive in curricula design. This study explores proactivity as an under researched

yet valuable subset of graduate employability which we posit may produce such a double benefit (Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth 2004; Villar and Albertín 2010; Lin et al. 2014).

In contrast to reactive or passive behaviour, proactivity is active, deliberate, change and future oriented (Grant and Ashford 2008; Belschak, Hartog, and Fay 2010) and has emerged as a topic of interest among researchers and practitioners in recent years (e.g. Thomas, Whitman, and Viswesvaran 2010; Bindl and Parker 2011). Although not universally appreciated, many organizations seek proactivity in their employees (Crant 2000; Den Hartog and Belschak 2007; Griffin, Neal, and Parker 2007; Hakanen and Perhoniemi 2008; Bledow and Frese 2009). Perhaps more importantly for graduates, there are valuable individual benefits (Seibert, Kraimer, and Crant 2001; Parker, Williams, and Turner 2006; Fuller, Kester, and Cox 2010) with evidence that enhanced proactivity can improve both job-search effectiveness and numerous elements of longer term career success (Seibert, Crant, and Kraimer 1999; Brown et al. 2006; Fuller and Marler 2009; Li, Liang, and Crant 2010). The attraction of proactivity to graduate employers and students makes it an important topic for universities. Thus one contribution of this study is the university setting, responding to those who claim the role of context in relation to proactivity is not fully understood (Parker, Bindl, and Strauss 2010; Lin et al. 2014). Importantly we look at the relationship between proactivity and academic grades as a more objective measure of student performance, thus building on previous research which used the subjective measure of academic self-efficacy (Lin et al. 2014).

We contribute further to theory by responding to recent interest in studying possible connections between various proactivity constructs (Chan 2006; Thomas, Whitman, and Viswesvaran 2010; Tornau and Frese 2013). Proactivity is an umbrella term for numerous constructs (Crant 2000), some being behavioural concepts and others personality related or dispositional (Fay and Frese 2001; Tornau and Frese 2013). The differentiation has practical implications in higher education teaching as the behavioural constructs are more malleable and so more trainable than the relatively stable personality-oriented ones. Our study enhances understanding of two such facets by looking at the interplay between proactive personality and personal initiative behaviour, complementing and expanding on previous research which looked at correlations between the two (Fay and Frese 2001; Tornau and Frese 2013). We address calls to strengthen the understanding of proactivity (Chan 2006; Thomas, Whitman, and Viswesvaran 2010) and increase the incremental validity of the constructs (Chan and Schmitt 2005; Tornau and Frese 2013) by exploring the moderating effect of proactive personality on personal initiative behaviour and outcomes.

Practically, this study provides pedagogic suggestions for university educators. Evidence exists that proactivity can be developed in the higher education context through an integrated approach to good curriculum design (van der Merwe, McChlery, and Visser 2014; Turner 2014; French et al. 2015). Our findings may guide such pedagogic design, enabling universities to enhance employability whilst maintaining focus on academic study, thus meeting competing stakeholder expectations. We start by reviewing relevant literature and explaining our methodology. We present results and discuss findings before concluding with recommendations for practice. We end with limitations and ideas for further study.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Higher education, employability and proactivity

Within an increasingly marketized higher education environment there is academic debate concerning the role of universities in developing graduate employability. Staff continue to be concerned with helping all students learn and achieve the best grades they can (Shagrir 2015), yet lament the struggle and tensions they face in trying to maintain 'principled teaching of academic disciplines' (Jameson et al. 2012, 28). Tymon (2013) asks whether universities are the right place for employability development and questions their capability to do so, critiquing how employability is measured. The theme of economization of higher education creating tension, contradictions and competing agendas is echoed by Tomlinson (2012), who explores the implications of expansion of the sector. Relevant to our study, business schools have been a key growth area for universities in recent decades (Wilton 2011). The perceived vocational utility of business courses potentially attracts more instrumental students and thus it is possible that an employability culture maybe stronger in such settings. Despite the debates on the role of higher education in employability, employment statistics have for some time been used as a key performance indicator for all university faculties (Knight and Yorke 2003) and the UK fee regime has increased this pressure so that Tomlinson states:

> Various stakeholders involved in higher education – be they policy makers, employers and paying students – all appear to be demanding clear and tangible outcomes in response to increasing economic stakes. (2012, 411).

However, universities may not be responding well to this challenge, with on-going criticism of their ability to turn out work-ready graduates and nurture key employability characteristics (Tomlinson 2007; Jackson and Chapman 2011; Tran 2015).

Some of this discontent is due to the disparate definitions and interpretations of employability. Generally academics recognize that the most often cited skills, communications and team working (Tymon 2013), can be embedded into the curriculum without having to replace technical content or sacrifice development of the critical thinking associated with a traditional university education (French et al. 2015). However beyond this, agreement is lacking on what employability is and how it could or should be developed by universities. In response, we concur with Lin et al. (2014) and believe an important and neglected subset of graduate employability in the literature is proactivity, with only limited theoretical evidence in existence (Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth 2004; Villar and Albertín 2010).

It is claimed that many employers see proactivity as a necessity in dynamic and global economies (Den Hartog and Belschak 2007; Griffin, Neal, and Parker 2007). Such employers assert the value of self-management, creativity, innovation and perseverance and claim to seek staff who embrace personal and organizational change as opposed to resisting it (Crant 2000; Hakanen and Perhoniemi 2008; Bledow and Frese 2009). Tomlinson (2012) is more sceptical, suggesting that many traditional graduate level jobs have been standardized and routinized in a free-market neoliberal world which may indicate proactivity would not be appreciated. However, he goes on to emphasize that in such an environment proactivity may be increasingly important for individuals with a growing focus on personal responsibility for career management and sustainability (Tomlinson 2012). Proactivity is

valuable to individuals entering the labour market because effective job hunting involves self-starting activities (Seibert, Kraimer, and Crant 2001; Parker, Williams, and Turner 2006; Fuller Jr, Kester, and Cox 2010). In particular, for graduates 'evidence shows that the transition from higher education to the labour market involves an active process' (Tomlinson 2007, 301). Graduates higher in proactive personality have increased job-search self-efficacy and the resulting effort applied to job hunting, unsurprisingly, produces more job offers (Brown et al. 2006).

Many graduates, especially those who have chosen more vocational courses, are likely to be attracted to other benefits associated with higher proactivity. Such students invest time and money in their human and social capital in order to enhance their career success (Tomlinson 2007). These potential proactivity benefits include greater job satisfaction and career success, improved performance ratings, more promotions and higher salaries (Seibert, Crant, and Kraimer 1999; Fuller and Marler 2009; Li, Liang, and Crant 2010). The wealth of potential benefits to students, alongside the attraction of proactivity to employers, provides a rationale for universities to be interested in how this graduate employability attribute may be developed. However, proactivity is a complex and multifaceted construct.

There are subtle differences in the various constructs that come under the umbrella term of proactivity (Crant 2000; Fay and Frese 2001; Tornau and Frese 2013). In the university context these differences matter as they affect the extent to which proactivity can be learned and thus taught. Some proactivity constructs such as proactive personality are considered to be dispositional – deep rooted individual traits, formed early and more stable over time (Grant and Ashford 2008; Parker and Collins 2010). Development of personality is a contentious issue and according to Wellman (2010, 912): 'Believing that higher education institutions have the ability to "teach" such traits may depend upon which side of the nomothetic vs idiographic fence one is sitting'. The meta-analysis of Fuller and Marler (2009) showed that proactive personality is a transferable attribute, positively related to career success across organizations. The few studies that report on age have not found a significant correlation (Erdogan and Bauer 2005, Bertolino, Truxillo, and Fraccaroli 2011) supporting the idea of the stable disposition. Therefore, the implication is that proactive personality may change little as a result of learning, training or education interventions.

Conversely, other proactivity constructs can be taught and developed (Kirby, Kirby and Lewis 2002; Brown et al. 2006; Chan 2006; Grant and Ashford 2008). These behavioural and less stable constructs include voice, taking charge and personal initiative behaviour (Bledow and Frese 2009; Parker and Collins 2010; Tornau and Frese 2013). Importantly, recent studies suggest personal initiative behaviour can be developed through integrated and constructivist approaches to pedagogic design without compromising traditional academic content (Turner 2014; van der Merwe, McChlery, and Visser 2014; French et al. 2015). Suggested teaching content includes change management techniques (Hughes 2010) and the proactive *process* of anticipation, planning and striving (Grant and Ashford 2008). Teaching methods proposed are integrative assignments with cognitive and practical elements that encourage self-directed learning and critical thinking (van der Merwe, McChlery, and Visser 2014). Such learning can then be reinforced by lecturers role modelling and positively rewarding personal initiative behaviour (Parker 1998). Such teaching content and methods can develop student proactivity and make them more

attractive to employers, thus contributing to the employability agenda. However, we assert that there may be a simultaneous, additional and more academically oriented benefit; that of improved academic performance.

Proactive personality and academic performance

Proactive personality has been both conceptually and empirically linked to superior individual performance in a range of contexts. Proactive individuals tend to engage in a variety of instrumental behaviours for personal gain such as goal setting, information seeking, innovation, negotiation, resource gathering, skill development and social networking (e.g. Ashford and Black 1996; Seibert, Kraimer, and Crant 2001; Thompson 2005; Fuller Jr, Kester, and Cox 2010; Parker and Collins 2010; Villar and Albertín 2010). Proactive personality is linked to high self-esteem, internal locus of control and motivation to achieve and succeed (Fuller and Marler 2009). A proactive disposition drives individuals to consistently 'scan for opportunities, show initiative, take action and persevere until they reach closure by bringing about change' (Bateman and Crant 1993, 105).

As a dispositional construct, proactive personality is generic, relatively stable and therefore transferable between contexts (Crant 2000, Grant and Ashford 2008). Thus we reason that students high on proactive personality will be instrumental in scanning the environment, anticipating possible future problems and engaging in behaviours to overcome these. One future problem often discussed with business students is finding employment. For more proactive students one solution to finding employment may be achieving high academic grades as these are used as a shortlisting tool by employers (cf. Tomlinson 2007, 2008). Additionally, proactive personality has been positively related to learning motivation and therefore successful acquisition of new knowledge and skills (Major, Turner, and Fletcher 2006), thus we believe it should be linked to academic achievement. Lin et al. (2014) showed that proactive personality predicts academic self-efficacy. Such beliefs in ability are known to positively affect actual performance, thus we propose that higher proactivity should be related to higher academic grades.

> Hypothesis 1: Proactive personality is positively related to academic performance.

Personal initiative behaviour and academic performance

Personal initiative behaviour is 'characterized by its self-starting nature, its proactive approach, and by being persistent in overcoming difficulties that arise in the pursuit of a goal' (Frese and Fay 2001, 133). Considered to be a situated behaviour, it is more malleable and perhaps trainable, than the personality facets of proactivity, but also less transferable between contexts (Bledow and Frese 2009). In other words, people can learn how to be self-starting, persistent and overcome obstacles in different situations and when such behaviours may be appropriate. In essence, proactive personality is the driver for action, but personal initiative behaviour may dictate how proactivity is enacted by enhancing situational judgement evaluation (Frese and Fay 2001).

The degree of personal initiative shown affects performance. Individuals with higher levels of personal initiative are more likely to change their behaviour appropriately, if

needed, than those with low levels who take conventional paths, accept existing conditions and concentrate on managing their emotions (Frese and Fay 2001). In the work context, those higher on personal initiative are known to negotiate flexible working conditions with better development opportunities (Hornung, Rousseau, and Glaser 2008) and are evaluated more favourably by their supervisors (Thompson 2005; Bledow and Frese 2009). Successful study at university requires an active approach to 'manage the cognitive and affective processes involved in learning' (Villar and Albertín 2010, 138). Therefore we expect that students high in personal initiative behaviour will work towards achieving better academic grades as they have learned how to study effectively and understand this may lead to enhanced employability (cf. Tomlinson 2008).

> Hypothesis 2: Personal initiative is positively related to academic performance.

The interplay between personal initiative and proactive personality and academic performance

Recent interest has been in studying possible interplays between the various proactivity constructs (Chan 2006; Thomas, Whitman, and Viswesvaran 2010). Proactive personality and personal initiative have been shown as moderately correlated, between 0.28 and 0.34 (Fay and Frese 2001; Tornau and Frese 2013), which suggests an acceptable discriminant validity between behaviour and personality. Less clear is the process linking proactive personality to behaviour and then outcomes, using alternative measurement tools (Tornau and Frese 2013). We seek practical and theoretical contributions by going beyond correlation analysis and explore the interplay between the stable trait of proactive personality and the more malleable construct of personal initiative behaviour. We believe both facets of proactivity are two sides of the same coin and the interaction between them is important. The level of proactive personality possessed by individuals affects how they perceive situations in general, whereas the level of personal initiative behaviour affects how change is enacted (Frese and Fay 2001; Chan 2006; Tornau and Frese 2013).

Individuals with high levels of proactive personality are by nature constantly looking for what they see as better ways to do things, and championing for their ideas, yet how they approach change is determined by their situated personal initiative behaviour (Chan 2006; Bledow and Frese 2009). For example, willingness to learn, enthusiastic participation and initiative are some of the most important elements of graduate employability (Fleming et al. 2009; Turner 2014). Yet willingness to learn is a personality trait which alone is of limited value unless it leads to positive action. To be useful, individuals need to know how to study effectively and participate or use their initiative appropriately; and these are learned behaviours. Therefore we contend that a combination of high personal initiative behaviour with high proactive personality will lead students to act in a fitting and productive manner to meet the desired goals of high academic performance and increased employability (Tomlinson 2007).

> Hypothesis 3: Proactive personality moderates the relationship between personal initiative and academic performance. The positive relationship is stronger in individuals with higher personal initiative and with higher proactive personality.

Method

Sample and procedure

We collected data from a purposive sample of 166 business school students. About 70% female and 30% male, which is representative of the courses selected. Fifty-three percent were aged 21 years or younger, 22% were between 22 and 25, 11% were between 26 and 30 and 14% were older than 30 years. Our participants completed a combined two-part questionnaire in paper-and-pencil format, taking between 7 and 15 minutes, in classroom settings. To overcome self-selection bias we gained access during normal teaching sessions so that all students in a group were asked to participate. We believe this is important for our study as students high on proactivity may be more likely to volunteer if a self-selection method is used, which would produce a narrower range of scores (cf. Rogelberg et al. 2001).

Measures

To avoid common method bias problems, we collected data from two separate sources: academic achievement from a university dataset and other variables from self-reported measures, which reduces the need for statistical remedies (Podsakoff et al. 2003).

We measured *proactive personality* using the 10-item variant of the Bateman and Crant (1993) original 17-item questionnaire developed by Seibert, Crant, and Kraimer (1999) (α = .77). Sample items include: 'I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life'; 'I can spot a good opportunity before others can'. Seven-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) were used for all questions.

Personal initiative measurement involves looking for indictors such as creativity, innovation and problem solving (Crant 2000). Bledow and Frese (2009) promote situational judgement tests (SJT) as a useful method for measurement, as personal initiative is defined on the level of observable and situated action for which Likert type scales might not be appropriate. Therefore we used their 12-item SJT questionnaire which presents descriptions of situations and asks respondents to mentally simulate that they are faced by them. For each hypothetical situation, respondents select from four or five choices the most and least likely action they would perform. A scoring system developed by the authors rates each response as: +1, 0 or −1, giving each question a score range of −2 to + 2. An indicative scenario is: a new computer program has been installed without detailed training which is causing you and others frequent errors and lost time. The possible answers include: organize a training session for you and others, work extra hours to correct the errors, read books to understand the programme, do not get upset about it as more practice will solve the issue.

Academic achievement was captured using degree classification marks (percentage grades were unavailable for all participants) grouped into four bands: 1 = below 40%, 2 = from 40% to 59%, 3 = from 60% to 69% and finally, 4 = 70% and above.

We also controlled for *age, gender* and *year of study*. We used age and year of study as a proxy for experience. Proactive personality, being a relatively stable disposition may not be affected by age (cf. Erdogan and Bauer 2005), but personal initiative is a learned situated behaviour and therefore students with more experience may have higher levels. Gender has been linked to academic performance with, in recent years, claims that females are

out-performing males at all levels of formal education (Schwartz and Han 2014; Vuorinen-Lampila 2014).

Analysis

We used a variance-based partial least squares (PLS) procedure to analyse our data which has been fruitfully employed as a modelling approach in management research (e.g. Cording, Christmann, and King 2008; Ringle, Sinkovics, and Henseler 2009). In contrast to covariance-based structural equation modelling such as LISREL or AMOS, PLS is a component-based approach (Esposito Vinzi et al. 2010). The primary goal of PLS is to maximize the variance explained in latent and endogenous variables (cf. Becker, Klein, and Wetzels 2012), which in our case is the SJT. Additionally, PLS is an appropriate solution for relatively small samples and enables the assessment of indicator and construct reliability as well as correction for measurement error (Bagozzi 1994). Covariance-based structural models require large samples, usually over 200 units, to achieve good estimates of model parameters (Marsh et al. 1998). PLS is immune to this issue as the power in the analysis is maximized (Birkinshaw, Morrison, and Hulland 1995) and does not require assumptions about multivariate normality (Fornell and Bookstein 1982). Given our sample size ($n = 166$), use of an analytical technique that maximized power while permitting simultaneous estimation of path coefficients seemed prudent. We used SmartPLS 2 software to carry out the analyses (Ringle, Wende, and Will 2005). In addition we used bootstrapping with 500 subsamples to generate t-values (Chin 1998).

Results

Descriptive statistics, validity and reliability

In Table 1 we provide descriptive statistics of all variables analysed in addition to their correlations and reliability indexes.

We analysed individual item reliability, internal consistency and discriminant validity to examine the acceptability of our measurement model. Factor loadings of measures onto reflective constructs of proactive personality showed good item reliability – all greater than 0.5 (Hulland 1999). The discriminant validity test requires that the construct shares more variance with its items than it shares with other constructs (Hulland 1999). Our data met the test of discriminant validity as the square root variance statistic is greater than the correlations in the corresponding columns and rows (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlations among the variables.

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Proactive personality	4.78	0.87	(.77)					
2 Personal initiative behaviour	0.41	0.57	.34**					
3 Academic performance	2.54	1.10	−.14*	.08				
4 Gender	0.30	0.46	.11	−.10	−.18**			
5 Age	1.86	1.09	.10	.12	−.14*	−.06		
6 Year of study	2.37	1.31	.02	.11	.04	−.20**	.76**	

Notes: Coefficient alphas are on the diagonal in parentheses. For gender, 0 = female, 1 = male. $n = 166$.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.

For the SJT we looked at the variance inflation factor (VIF) as an indicator of construct reliability. Multicollinearity does not affect the predictive effectiveness of the construct but may lead to estimation bias and unstable indicator coefficients. This could make the indicator validity questionable leading to overall problematic construct reliability (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Jarvis 2005). Fortunately our results showed no major concern, with the VIF value below 3.3 and all tolerance values being higher than 0.2, as required (cf. Diamantopoulos and Siguaw 2006). We assessed discriminant validity following convention (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Jarvis 2005) and standardized our latent variables, meeting the rule of thumb for this test with correlations between constructs being under 0.71.

Test of hypotheses

In Figure 1 we present the path coefficients for the PLS model. These statistics are standardized regression coefficients and are interpreted similarly to regression analysis coefficients. Also reported are squared multiple correlation coefficients (R^2 statistics) for all constructs. In contrast to other covariance structure analysis modelling, the primary objective of PLS is to minimize errors, meaning there are no overall goodness-of-fit statistics for PLS models. The model is evaluated on the basis of strong indicator loadings, R^2 values and significance of structural paths (Chin 1998).

Our first hypothesis linking proactive personality with academic success, arguing that this stable trait will lead to proactive engagement with study and therefore better academic outcomes, is not supported ($\beta = -0.065$, ns). Our second hypothesis linking personal initiative with academic success, based on claims that students who have learned how
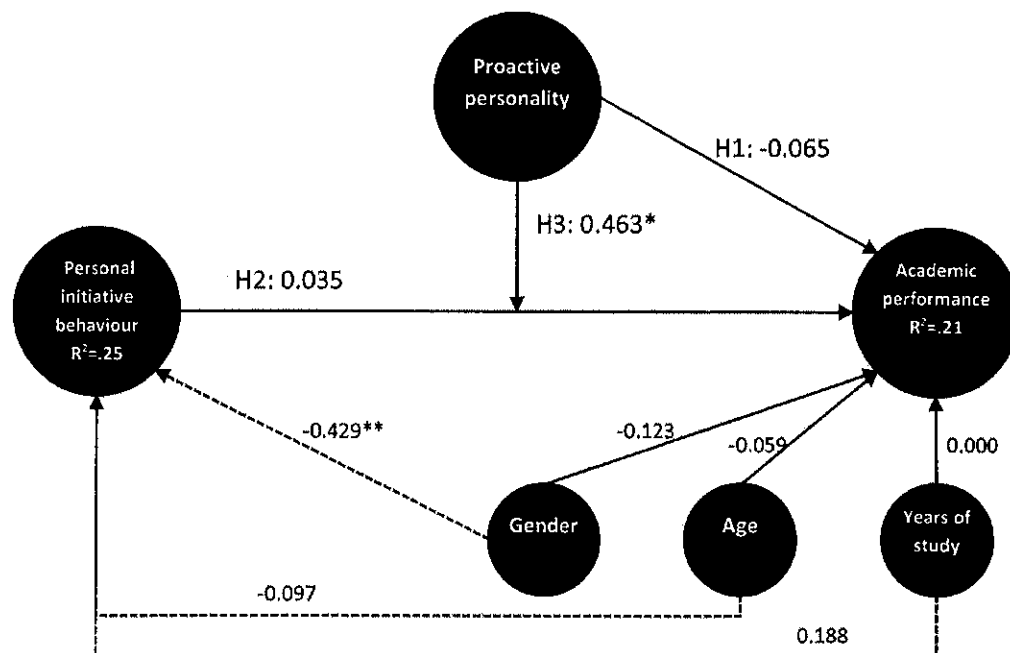
Notes: Standardized parameter estimates are shown. **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$. n = 166.

Figure 1. Structural model results. Notes: Standardized parameter estimates are shown. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. $n = 166$.

to take a targeted, active approach to study will achieve better grades is not supported (β = 0.035, ns). Our third hypothesis explores the moderating effect of proactive personality on the link between personal initiative and academic success. Results support this notion (β = 0.403, $p < .05$), as shown in Figure 2.

The interaction effect in Figure 2 first indicates that the relationship between personal initiative and academic success is positive in individuals with higher levels of proactive personality. Simple slope analysis (Aiken, West, and Reno 1991) indicates that this line is significantly different from zero ($p < .01$). Moreover, it also suggests that to achieve better academic success, students high in proactive personality also need to have high personal initiative. Importantly, we see that those who are lower on both proactive personality and personal initiative achieve better grades than those who are higher on proactive personality but lower on personal initiative.

None of our proposed controls is significantly related to academic success, however we did find a byproduct significant relationship between gender and personal initiative (β = −0.429, $p < .01$) with our model explaining fully 20% of the variance in achieving higher academic success.

Discussion

Our study empirically explores the interplay between two facets of proactivity – proactive personality and personal initiative behaviour, in the university context. We contend that higher levels of proactivity is both a desirable attribute for some employers and can also lead to better academic grades. This supports assertions that academic rigor and
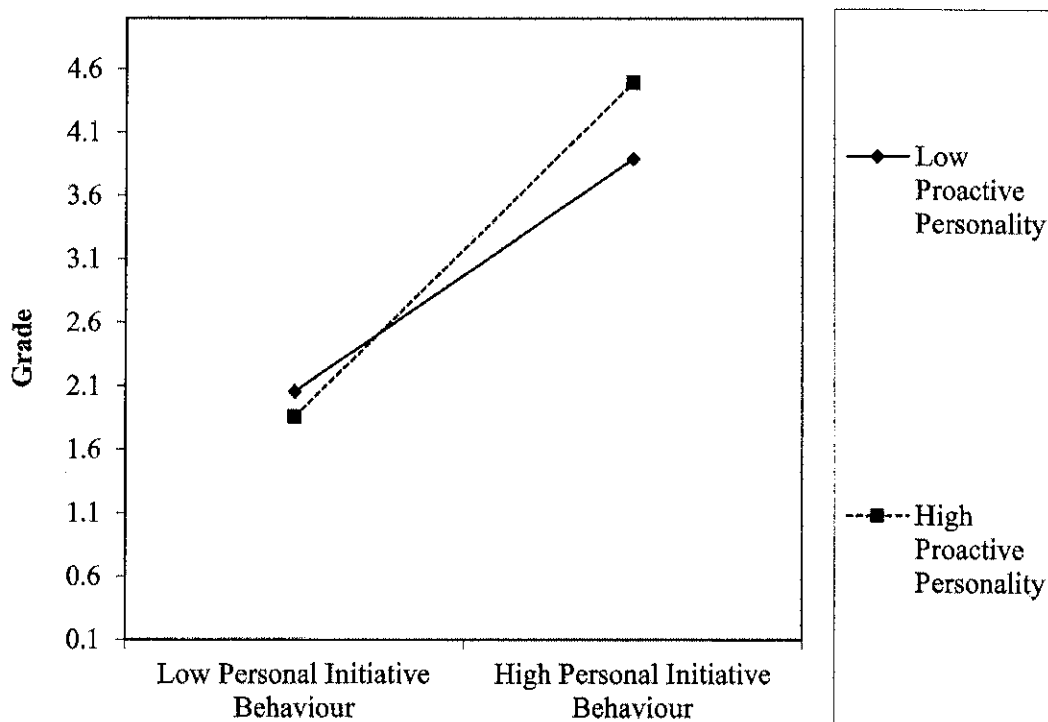

Figure 2. Interaction effects between personal initiative behaviour and proactive personality in predicting student academic success.

employability development can be complementary activities (Jackson 2014). Our results show that neither proactive personality, nor personal initiative behaviour on their own, significantly predict students' academic success but taken together, the interplay between both results in higher grades.

One potential reason for the lack of support for our first two hypotheses may be the nature of the constructs themselves. Proactive personality is a driver for action, but personal initiative provides the situational judgement that dictates the actual behaviours displayed (Chan 2006; Bledow and Frese 2009). Thus high proactive personality may have limited value unless it is targeted effectively towards behaviour moderated by situational judgement evaluation. Similarly, high personal initiative may enable students to target study behaviours effectively, but without the driver of high proactive personality, such abilities may remain under-used if not stimulated.

An interesting finding, not hypothesized, is that that high proactive personality with low personal initiative behaviour appears as the worst combination, resulting in the lowest academic grades. This raises questions about the perception of many that proactive personality is universally positive and supports the findings of Chan (2006) who challenges this assumption.

The only control variable with a finding of note is females having higher personal initiative and academic grades than males. We posit that this may be a contributory factor to the recent reported female advantage in formal education settings (Schwartz and Han 2014; Vuorinen-Lampila 2014).

Theoretical contributions

Firstly, we contribute to the literature on the interplay between various facets of the multi-dimensional concept of proactivity and provide further empirical evidence that the construct might be nomological in nature (Chan 2006; Thomas, Whitman, and Viswesvaran 2010; Tornau and Frese 2013). Our study reinforces the conceptualization of proactivity as both situational and dispositional, suggesting it might be useful to look at such constructs as two sides of the same coin. Our results support this notion as only the interplay of the two facets of proactivity together positively and significantly influence better academic performance.

Secondly, we expand upon the cross-contextual work of Lin et al. (2014) who showed proactive personality positively affected academic self-efficacy. We go further and show that proactivity can enhance academic performance using a more objective measure. Specifically, our results suggest that the best academic grades are achieved in students with both high proactive personality and high personal initiative behaviour. However, better grades are achieved when there is high personal initiative behaviour, regardless of the levels of proactive personality (see Figure 2). Thus, in the university context, both a situated and dispositional proactivity construct appear complementary which suggests that enhancing these may be valuable for academic achievement, albeit with caveats. One of these caveats links to our third contribution, where we show that high proactive personality on its own leads to the worst academic grades. This adds to the literature on the potential negative outcomes associated with proactivity and we can speculate as to why this may be the case.

Firstly, we wonder whether the self-seeking potential of high proactive personality (Grant and Ashford 2008) detracts from student engagement with the collaborative study methods increasingly used in modern universities (Mackay and Tymon 2014). Secondly, those high on proactive personality by nature constantly search for, and are stimulated by, variety and new ways of doing things (Erdogan and Bauer 2005). We question whether this need is recognized and rewarded by the structured and constrained nature of formulaic university assessments demanded by the increasing pressure for quality control and benchmarking (Turner 2014). Research in organizations tells us that those high on proactive personality are often unable to perform in low autonomy situations (Fuller Jr, Kester, and Cox 2010). As a result, much as employers claim to seek creative, innovative people, they often cannot cope with their rule breaking (Belschak, Den Hartog, and Fay 2010). As Tomlinson (2012) highlights there is a wealth of research on employer expectations, but the extent to which this is rhetoric is questionable. We posit that maybe the same is true in universities. Perhaps recent expansion in student numbers has led to a 'mass-produced' form of higher education (Tymon 2013; Vuorinen-Lampila 2014) that does not value, or worse still stifles, those who think outside the box. This may lead to lower performance levels. A comparative study on proactivity and achievement with different teaching methods and types of assessment may illuminate these points.

Finally, we also know that those high on proactive personality can struggle with self-imposed stress and pressure to act (Grant and Ashford 2008). In the university context, their self-starting, action orientation could drive them to over study, over-perfect or over commit to other activities at the same time. Without the situational judgement provided by personal initiative behaviour they may be unable to decide where to focus or even when it might be better to give up and save resources (Frese and Fay 2001). We argue this reinforces the need for development of personal initiative behaviour.

Practical implications

Many modern businesses claim to seek proactivity and some recognize the advantages of employees who can be self-managing, creative and persevering in ever turbulent times. Additionally, proactivity has vocational advantages for individuals such as students. As Tomlinson (2012, 414) asserts the challenge for today's graduates is to 'develop strategies that mitigate against unemployment and underemployment' as they embark on 'increasingly uncertain employment futures' and one such strategy is proactive career management. Proactivity is therefore potentially useful to students and subsequently of interest to universities and society, who are increasingly concerned with graduate employability.

However, not all academics concur with the assumption that higher education is responsible for employability development and believe that traditional university aims of developing intellectual capital and maintaining academic rigor are being compromised (Kreber 2006; Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Jackson 2009). Our research argues that both can be achieved simultaneously with careful curriculum design and so adds to recent literature that takes a more pragmatic approach to the role of higher education (Shagrir 2015). Such literature urges universities to consider multiple outcomes for different stakeholder groups, supporting the idea that a traditional university aim of enriched intellectual

capital can be achieved in addition to, and not instead of, vocational knowledge and skills (Reddy and Moores 2012; Mackay and Tymon 2013). Ironically, in the context of this research, some authors urge educators themselves to be more proactive in order to protect academic principles (Jameson et al. 2012). We show that increased proactivity can lead to higher academic grades, which are used by employers in recruitment decisions, and so are important to students' employability. Theory and research also emphasize the importance of proactivity as a desirable employability characteristic in its own right (Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth 2004; Griffin, Neal and Parker 2007; Tymon 2013). There-fore students and universities may gain double benefit if proactivity can be enhanced. The question is how may this be done effectively?

To this end, our key finding is that enhancing the more trainable facet of personal initiative behaviour, can lead to better academic performance for those who are either high or low on the less teachable construct of proactive personality. We argue therefore that universities should facilitate learning in personal initiative behaviour so that all students can enhance their academic grades. In particular this would help those who are high on proactive personality make best use of this potentially invaluable disposition as failure to do so results in the lowest academic grades.

To develop personal initiative, recent research commends good pedagogic design, employing an integrated approach (Turner 2014). French et al. (2015) use the term 'Cap-stones' to describe integrative assignments with both cognitive functions and practical elements to enhance personal initiative. Labelling this a constructivist approach to peda-gogic design, van der Merwe, McChlery, and Visser (2014, 287) concur that this can 'enhance proactivity in the curriculum'. We therefore recommend the following ideas as examples. Teaching techniques for proactively handling and managing change, based on the premise that most changes can be predicted and appropriate strategies adopted (cf. Hughes 2010). The proactive process of: anticipation, planning and striving (Grant and Ashford 2008) can be embedded in a range of pedagogic activities and assessed arte-facts. Critical thinking can be nurtured (Mackay and Tymon 2013), which is linked to proactivity development (Kirby, Kirby, and Lewis 2002). These ideas can be incorporated into modules that encourage critical inquiry and participative learning such as disser-tations amongst others (van der Merwe, McChlery, and Visser 2014). Importantly, any and all of these personal initiative behaviours can and should be enhanced by lecturers both modelling and positively reinforcing desired actions (Parker 1998; Mackay and Tymon 2013).

Limitations and future research

Despite our contributions, we recognize limitations, including but not limited to the fol-lowing. Firstly, focusing only on the interplay between personal initiative behaviour and proactive personality, we exclude other constructs, facets and factors that could influence proactivity. For example the influence of trust, lecturer support and the social cost of behaviour might be considered (Parker, Williams, and Turner 2006). Additionally, we recognize that other factors will impact academic grades, such as students' prior ability and study experiences. Studies could be designed to take these variables into account. Sec-ondly, as our data comes from a cross-sectional sample, we cannot unambiguously infer causality. Future research should conduct three-wave longitudinal studies that could make

causal claims (Ployhart and Vandenberg 2010). Thirdly, using only a UK business school sample limits generalization of the findings thus validation studies would be helpful.

Future research might explore different teaching and assessment methods to uncover which may have the most impact on personal initiative adding to our understanding of how proactivity works in the university context. Studies might also explore our important and surprising result that those high on proactive personality but low on personal initiative perform least well in terms of academic grades. We suggest that a further multilevel approach and more complex research design (cf. Mathieu and Chen 2011) would be useful. We know from organizational research that 'situational opportunities and constraints' play a role in influencing employee behaviours such as organizational citizenship, absenteeism, turnover and performance (Johns 2006, 386). In the same way situational constraints and opportunities may affect student behaviour and so deserve exploration.

Conclusions

In this study we conduct a PLS analysis on 166 university students to show that better academic grades are achieved when they possess both high proactive personality and high personal initiative behaviour. Importantly, our results indicate those who are high on proactive personality but low on personal initiative behaviour perform least well. Theoretically we contribute to the growing literature on the potential negative outcomes associated with proactivity and provide empirical evidence, in the university context, that proactivity might be nomological in nature. Practically this study may go some way towards soothing tensions and appeasing those within higher education who question the role of universities in graduate employability (Jameson et al. 2012; Tomlinson 2012). Shagrir (2015) identifies that academics have different perceptions of their role in higher education; some are more focused on the employability agenda than others. Nevertheless, all lecturers are concerned with academic achievement. Our study provides guidance on one way both agendas can be achieved through development of proactivity, specifically the more malleable and trainable facet of personal initiative behaviour. We propose ideas for an integrated approach to curriculum design that could facilitate employability development without losing academic rigor in teaching, thus producing the potential for double benefit.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Developing business buccaneers: employer expectations of emergent leaders

Alex Tymon[a]* and Margaret Mackay [a]

[a]*Organisational studies and Human Resource Management Department, Business School, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, UK*

This study investigates employer expectations of graduates to inform pedagogical practice within a context of industry–university collaboration. Employers' views of graduates as future leaders are explored through interviews, focus groups and a survey, with a regional sample of 146 managers. Findings show employers have different understandings and diverse expectations of leadership traits and generic competencies. Employers anticipate future graduates will need greater adaptability and flexibility for volatile business contexts; with some highlighting rule breaking that implies a buccaneer approach rather than responsible leadership. The dissonance between an academic aim to educate socially responsible, global citizens and industry demands potentially undermines the coherence of partnership. Consequently, this study casts doubt on implicit assumptions that practice-informed, industry–university, collaboration will deliver better leaders. The main implications are that educators need to clearly communicate to employers how university learning transfers into actual work practice, and for graduates to better articulate their broad capabilities. The research offers fresh insight into on educators' responsibility to nurture critical thinking in graduates with the learning agility to question and responsibly navigate organisational rules. The study also contributes to the industry–university partnership debate by revealing the academic complexity of developing future leaders given the multiple lenses of practice-informed views.

Keywords: emergent leaders; employer expectations; industry–university collaboration; responsible leader development; business buccaneers

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine employer expectations in recruiting business graduates with leadership potential. The Witty Review (2013, 13) stressed the importance of university–industry collaborative research 'rooted in a sound understanding of a locality's comparative economic advantage'. This study responds to Witty's call with a focus on regional employers based in an affluent business sector of the UK's South East. The notion of industry–business school partnerships is affirmed by the Wilson Report (2012) that depicts universities as 'anchor institutions' for business development and economic growth. Industry collaboration is encouraged as a new source of higher education revenue, essential for economic survival. Hence the relevance of the industry–university discourse for the future of business school education (CBI 2015). However, this raises a question as to whether funding interests

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*Corresponding author. Email: alex.tymon@port.ac.uk

may run counter to academic integrity and autonomy. This research is timely in examining government policy ideals of pedagogic approaches to leadership development that equip graduates with 'real'-world skill; what matters in industry (Dries and Pepermans 2012; Pfeffer and Fong 2004). One specific skill set often expected of business school graduates is leadership potential. The study therefore investigates employer perceptions of an effective leadership skill set from a work practice position.

Industry invests heavily in leadership training as indicated by estimates of annual development spend ranging from $10 billion in the U.S.A to $30 billion worldwide (Hannah and Avolio 2010; Reade and Thomas 2004). Despite this financial investment, leadership results are disappointing: only 38% of organisations rate their leaders as excellent or very good, while 31% believe their leaders are poor or at best fair (Boatman and Wellins 2011). Recent recessionary pressures have increased the focus on leadership, but, in many cases, leaders are found wanting with calls for more responsible and ethical leaders to address the diminishing trust of followers (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2013; Patel and Hamlin 2012). Cunningham (2010) argues there is little evidence of better leadership in organisations despite the prominence of leadership education in business schools. Employers still look to universities to sustain a pipeline of effective leaders despite debates about leadership education as an employability factor (Tymon 2013). As Caza, Brower, and Wayne (2015, 80) observe: 'Perhaps the critics of business education are correct and we are not doing enough to prepare future leaders'. Consequently, a perceived dissatisfaction with the academic provision of graduate leadership education warrants investigation.

This ongoing study, grounded in a UK business school, seeks to highlight the specific competencies that employers rank as important for emergent leaders. The research questions centre on: What do employers look for in recruiting graduates with leadership potential? To what extent is there consensus, or divergence, of view across a range of employers? How do employer expectations align with a university education oriented towards the development of socially responsible citizens? This empirical study adds fresh insights into employers' articulation of graduate qualities and their perceptions of leadership concepts embedded in university curricula. The study reveals the complexity of practice-informed education that constrains the integrity of academic independence in developing the leadership capability and moral vision of graduates. This paper begins by reviewing the assumptions of industry–university collaboration and the curriculum scope of leadership development including traditional, new paradigm theories and responsible leadership. Then we discuss the phenomenological intrepretivist research methodology. Next we present the data with an analysis of findings and discuss the implications of this study. We conclude by providing evidence of the complex pedagogical dimensions in interpreting what employers say they expect of graduate recruits. In doing so, this study reflects on diverse industry expectations of future leaders and the multiple challenges of practice-informed education.

Leadership education

Business school and industry collaboration

The context of industry–university collaboration assumes that diverse stakeholders share common aims in leadership education. In this paper, the term business school will be used to refer to a *university* business school, rooted in a specific UK higher education institution (HEI), in contrast to privately funded business schools. Universities are seen as

central in filling a skilled talent pipeline, and the UK government places increasing economic demands on higher education to foster social mobility, enhance employability and strengthen business collaboration (Thune 2011; Ferlie, McGivern, and De Moraes 2010). The Wilson Report (2012) highlights this economic role for universities in the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century' acknowledging the critical linkage of education and business growth. Moreover, the Witty (2013, 15) argues the facilitation of economic growth is a mutual aim of industry partnership:

> for many universities effective economic engagement is actually one of the conditions of success... effective economic engagement is not an alternative to excellence in research and teaching but enabled and catalysed by it, and vice-versa.

Arguably, the ideal envisaged is for stakeholders in industry and academia to learn from each other, to accord with the contemporary demands of a global economy and inter-connected environment. These aspirations are summarised by Thune (2011, 43) as HEIs expect that:

> Cooperation with industry will contribute to strengthening the academic environment and create high quality and relevant study programmes that are attractive to prospective students.

This underlines the assumption that a business school curriculum informed by practice will boost graduate employability, enhancing students' practical skills and knowledge through education. In addition, industry collaboration ensures the currency of educational programmes and boosts graduate perceptions of academic relevance. Such partnerships are used to promote business school enrolments in demonstrating practical work-related opportunities, and positive outcomes for students, employers, universities and government (Wilson 2012). In spite of the laudable aspirations of industry–university collaboration, there are claims that the fundamental values of corporate business conflict with the overarching principles of higher education.

A primary duty of university educators is to teach the values of ethical practice, professional ideology and civic responsibilities; emphasising the impact of business on civil society (Ortenblad and Koris 2014; Ferlie, McGivern, and De Moraes 2010; Pfeffer and Fong 2004). Many academics assert the civic duty of education in nurturing respon-sible citizens who will work within societal values of the common good rather than as individual mercenaries. Adopting this stance dictates that universities guide leadership education and development towards responsible, ethical and sustainable models. Pfeffer and Fong (2004) underline the danger of business schools imitating management con-sulting firms that steers academic research towards a narrow market-driven agenda away from broader research of intellectual curiosity (Mabey 2013; Ferlie, McGivern, and De Moraes 2010). Alajoutsijarvi, Juusola, and Siltaoja (2015, 283) accuse business schools of adopting a neoclassical ideology which 'dictates the type of knowledge that becomes a best-selling commodity is the right type of knowledge'. Consequently, Ferlie, McGivern, and De Moraes (2010, 64) posit that to ensure academic integrity and detachment:

> Business schools need to be decoupled from the narrow interests which have funded them and consider much broader societally relevant concerns.

This proposition may appear naive in an institutional context of government policy that urges greater industry collaboration to sustain economic needs. Still, recent UK

controversy reveals the damage of overdependence on specific donors. As two such examples, the Libyan funding donations to the London School of Economics and opaque resourcing at the London Metropolitan University underline the risks of corporate interests directing educational curricula. The detrimental impact on academic reputation and sullied academic integrity can threaten a university's stability.

The focus of leadership education

Research studies attest to employers' dissatisfaction with graduate recruits; Jackson (2010, 48) notes: 'Almost all of employer respondents reported college-educated work entrants as "deficient" in leadership skills although considered very important by a significant majority'. The gap between the supply of effective leaders and employer demand for better leadership is a perennial problem for many organisations (Alajoutsijarvi, Juusola, and Siltaoja 2015; Elmuti et al. 2005). Broadly, this is interpreted as a failure in higher education provision to meet industry needs. Alternatively, from an educator's viewpoint, this may be seen as industry reluctance to invest in leadership education that builds on university learning. There are various potential explanations for these differing viewpoints on the content and outcomes of education.

For example, there has been a renewed focus on the teaching of responsible, ethical and sustainable leadership (Blakeley and Higgs 2014) due to a decline of trust in business leaders (CIPD 2013; Patel and Hamlin 2012). This has increased scrutiny of the effectiveness of leadership development in business education. Blame for dysfunctional leadership during the recent economic global crisis was attributed to business schools (Elmuti et al. 2005). Moreover, recent academic literature indicates a shift away from traditional models of leadership qualities towards a new paradigm of leadership which is less leader-centric (Mumford et al. 2009; Schyns et al. 2011). New paradigm approaches emphasise relationship management, and highlight the importance of followers' participation. A shift in power and control is significant in these theories; for example, leader-member-exchange (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995), distributed leadership (Gronn 2000), and servant leadership (Greenleaf 1977). According to Kellerman (2008), employee followers have become bolder, through empowerment, and consequently savvy business leaders need to adapt. Drawing on contemporary research on dynamic, participative organisations (Friedman 2005), most business schools now teach these new paradigm theories of leadership. These contemporary academic models of leadership imply that traditional organisational hierarchies dominated by command-and-control leaders have given way to flatter structures of diverse employees.

However, we question the extent to which new leadership styles and ethical leadership are visible in the realities of organisational practice. In times of rapid environmental change, employees seek security in powerful leaders (Bligh and Schyns 2007). Termed the romance of leadership (Meindle, Ehrlich, and Dukerich 1985), this perception glorifies a leader as a highly capable individual to whom employees look for confidence if job security is under threat. As Raelin (2011, 197) observes:

> Leaders make a pact with followers that accord the former power, and privilege, in exchange for the assumption of the weight of responsibility in an increasingly ominous world.

In short, employees relish the idea of a heroic leader, whereas a participative, democratic approach such as distributed leadership might appear threatening. Perhaps the 'great men' traits (Grint 2005) of traditional leadership styles alleviate employee anxiety about

business survival. Therefore, employers may be more likely to seek graduate recruits who conform to traditional stereotypes of leadership behaviour as opposed to new paradigm leadership theories espoused by a business school curriculum.

Competing expectations of education: employers, students and government

If employers, students and government expect graduates to leave university having been trained in context-specific skills and knowledge, then they may be disappointed. One fundamental cause of dissatisfaction could be a misunderstanding of the terms leader and leadership, training, development and education, which are subtly different in meaning and outcomes. Leaders are individuals, whereas leadership concerns the collective and involves processes, systems, followers and environment (Day 2001). Training and development is focused on outputs, addressing identified gaps in knowledge and skills and as such is more short-term and contextual. Whereas education is concerned with inputs and focuses on concepts, ideas and theories with broad unspecific outcomes that are assimilated and adapted over the longer term and becomes more transferable (Mackay 2015). Employers are naturally concerned with enhanced capability that can deliver improved productivity and organisational performance in the short-term (Mabey 2013; Russon and Reinelt 2004) and so may want trained and developed leaders. Realistically, however, a university business school is best suited to providing broad education and not specific skills training. Warhurst (2012) argues that leader training and development are feasible and do happen in university teaching, but others suggest this is more effectively achieved within organisations through experiential learning (McCall 2010; Grint 2005; Raelin 2011; Yukl 2013). Similarly, although business schools can and do teach leadership, the collective and contextual nature of this concept, means the development of skills to enact leadership limit the transferability of such learning.

Simultaneously, the perceived commodification (Gold and Bratton 2014; Sinclair 2007) and the spiralling fees of higher education positions students as consumers with accompanying customer demands (Alajoutsijarvi, Juusola, and Siltaoja 2015). As such, students' instrumental priorities mean they may find it hard to embrace the broad unspecific outcomes of education and deeper philosophical approaches, such as ethical leadership or global citizenship. This increases the pressure on business schools to demonstrate vocational relevance through leadership development that clearly meets employers' needs. However, educators have a responsibility to students to encourage thinking beyond short-term employment and provide professional education for sustainable career development (Mackay and Tymon 2014). Where a business school has strength comes in providing students with choices about what they learn (Ortenblad et al. 2013), presenting leader and leadership concepts, ideas and theories, to stimulate individual thought and reflection. Such education can hone qualities to shape a leader identity, which in turn can guide behaviour and actions (Carden and Callahan 2007). Developing critical reflection and leader identity through education may also help meet societal expectations of higher education.

Societal expectations of education

There are societal expectations of education oriented towards moral values and ethics, so that business schools produce responsible leaders with high levels of moral reasoning (Ortenblad et al. 2013), a view embodied in the concept of a global citizen. Durden (2007)

defines a theoretical profile of a 'Global Citizen': as a person able to engage effectively and productively with international academic, business, civic and cultural environments. Although the UK business school landscape is influenced by Anglo-American perceptions of leadership, research suggests there is similarity across diverse countries and cultures in how effective leaders are viewed (Patel and Hamlin 2012). Hamlin (2005, 22) even suggests leadership 'competencies are more universalistic than contingent', which reinforces the notion of competencies set out for the education of a global citizen. The bridge between theory and practice is created through the application of leadership qualities and demonstrated skills and competencies in context. The Global Graduates into Global Leaders Report (Diamond et al. 2011, 11) concludes: 'Equipped with these competencies, graduates can become the future leaders of global businesses.' These core competencies are summarised in Table 1.

These skills and competencies are affirmed by the Chartered Management Institute research (June 2014) of 1,065 employers from small, medium and larger businesses across diverse sectors. The report highlights the need for business schools to emphasise not only 'cross-cultural working' but also 'more inclusive, transparent leadership models...the importance of ethics' (p 9). A liberal arts education includes broad and adaptive learning and the critical importance of personal and social responsibility. This research appears to demonstrate agreement on the need for ethical and sustainable practices embedded in professional standards. However, the provenance of this research starts from an enthusiasm for industry–university partnership, which is not universally endorsed. A traditional university education emphasises a more liberal arts approach with the need to learn and re-learn technical skills and knowledge, a sophisticated skill set of continuous learning through critical thinking and reflective practice (Mackay and Tymon 2014). As educators, the university role is to nurture and refine this skill set in constantly working with, and adapting to, business needs and demands for a supply of talent.

In summary, the literature raises tensions for educators about employers' voiced beliefs in the 'right' qualities, competencies and skills required for successful leadership. Educators face numerous challenges in attempting to satisfy multiple stakeholders: first, in providing graduates with learning that will support a sustainable career (Mackay and Tymon 2014); second, in balancing academic integrity with a fundamental responsibility: 'to guide the development of the next generation of capable and ethical leaders' (Connaughton, Lawrence, and Ruben 2003, 46); third, in nurturing effective graduate leaders who can facilitate connections between business, government and society (Ferlie, McGivern, and De Moraes 2010; Ortenblad et al. 2013). These tasks demand that business schools understand what employers regard as effective leadership qualities—an issue that guides this research study.

Table 1.   Adapted from global graduates into global leaders' report 2011.

Global mindset competencies
Ability to communicate and manage people of different cultures and backgrounds
Leading teams
Multi-lingualism
An adaptability and flexibility that extends to being open to global assignments
A knowledge of global affairs that shape their work and life
Social etiquette
Learning agility
Empathy

Methodology

To reiterate the study aims to explore employers' expectations of graduate recruits with the potential to become future leaders of an organisation. Specifically, the research seeks to discover: What do employers look for in recruiting graduates with leadership potential? How do employer expectations align with a university education oriented towards the development of socially responsible citizens? This study employs a pragmatic and mixed-methods approach (Coulson-Thomas 2013) based on an inductive research philosophy. A phenomenological research dimension privileges a subjective view of reality, exploring employers' situated view of requirements from a practice context (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2011). Figure 1 summarises the data collection methods.

The sampling strategy for interviews was purposive to select line managers and human resource (HR) specialists who have an informed work-practice view of graduate qualities. First, volunteers were sought from graduate recruiters of private and public sector organisations attending a regional graduate recruitment fair. Other volunteer interviewees included senior managers attending university public seminars and professional members attending CIPD branch meetings, who were interested in recruiting graduates. The semi-structured interviews lasted from 12 to 35 minutes and followed a protocol of questions about desired competencies and skills:

- Do you look for leadership or leader potential in graduate recruits?
- What skills, knowledge, traits and/or behaviours do you look for?
- How do you measure these?
- If you had to select only *three* key competencies and skills, which *three* would be essential and why?

The parallel focus groups were purposively selected through direct invitations to business school alumni of the accredited professional qualification programme. The 30- to 45-minute focus groups met in the local business school and included 36 human resource specialists and business partners. Each group of five or six participants discussed employer requirements and recorded their thoughts using the same guiding protocol questions as above; two researchers as facilitators made additional notes. The analysis of the interview and focus group data was used to shape the design of an online employer survey to further explore and verify employer expectations. Employers sampled through
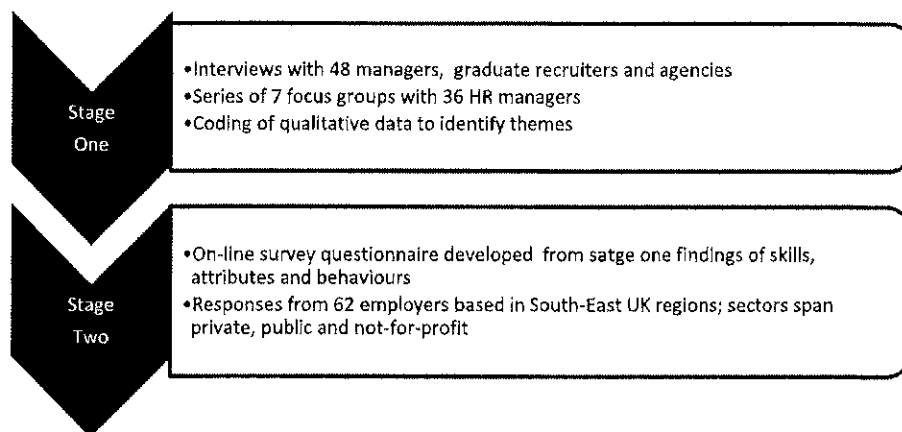
Figure 1. Data collection methods.

the business school–industry relationship database were invited via email to complete an online questionnaire and 58 usable responses were obtained. The survey questionnaire included 15 closed-questions based on a competency framework, with participant employers asked to rank importance now and in the future. The final survey section invited participants to add open comments about their specific priorities in seeking graduate recruits with leadership potential. Confidentiality remained at the forefront in the research design, data collection and subsequent analysis of the anonymous survey responses. The justification for a framework to support work practice analysis draws on the literature that attests to the use of competencies which ground leadership development by providing 'clarity, consistency and connectivity' (Conger and Ready 2004, 43). We acknowledge the critique that generic competencies may appear to be of less pragmatic value than context-specific models (Boak and Coolican 2001; Povah and Sobczak 2010). However, for this research, generic competencies enable comparisons between different organisations across diverse sector employers. Moreover, competency frameworks applied to survey instruments serve as a mechanism to guide thinking around the articulation of required skills, behaviours and attributes.

For the data analysis, the research team clustered the 85 data items by iterative content coding of responses to identify pattern associations and through re-reading to form 12 categories of competence that capture overlapping qualities. The coding was developed and checked for consistency by three independent researchers drawing on the relevant literature for data interpretation and consensus. Within each category, a coding distinction was made between skills and traits. Skills are defined as what an individual can do, demonstrated by behaviour and can be more easily taught, developed and assessed (Mabey 2013). Skills tend to be the subject of leader training, whereas traits are more innate leadership qualities and therefore more difficult to train (Tymon 2013). See exemplar (Table 2).

Data presentation and findings

What employers seek

From the aggregated data collected in semi-structured interviews, focus groups and survey, 93% of employers look for leadership potential in graduates. This significant majority identified 85 distinct skills, behaviours and characteristics. There was limited

Table 2. Example of coding categories.

| Competency cluster | Skills
Skills that can be developed in higher education | Traits
Innate traits that facilitate skill application |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Leading Others* | Developing others | Authority/credibility |
| | Lead from the front | Charisma |
| | Mentor others | Inspirational |
| | People management skills | Presence |
| *Team work* | Influencing skills | Adaptable |
| | Networking | Likeable/approachable |
| | Social skills | Personable |
| *Drive* | Independent thinking | Can do attitude |
| | Personal initiative | Enthusiasm |
| | Problem solving | Tenacity |

convergence among employers in key competencies identified, with 65% of employers only mentioning the same descriptive word, once or twice. Three specific items were mentioned by more than 50% of respondents, namely, communication skills, team work and work experience, which echoes research on wider employability skills (Jackson 2010) not being leader specific. In presenting the data we look, first, at the interviews with employers and graduate recruiters, second, the focus groups of human resource managers and, third, the survey responses.

Interview data

Two-thirds of employers interviewed look for 'well-rounded candidates' who were performance oriented as well as self-motivated, enthusiastic team players. However, the definition of a 'well-rounded' individual varies in different organisations. One-third identified critical thinking as important:

> Any graduate degree is good for analytical reasoning ... Other businesses need to see the power of critical thinking for a graduate to be able to persuade others and influence people to follow their direction.

Other interviewees acknowledged the strong influence of specific organisational frameworks:

> We select through competency-based assessment and they have to fit with our twelve core competencies.

Thus, employer variation in specifying graduate qualities and leadership skills is affected by respondent interpretations as well as by particular organisational discourses.

One-third of interviewees identified 'entrepreneurial' qualities and 'commercial awareness' as key to future success. Employers want graduates to demonstrate leadership potential through greater awareness of the dynamics of the business environment and a sharper perspective on business issues that require an orientation to change and flux (Thune 2011). A mindset of learning and personal drive is seen as critical for leadership success (Mumford et al. 2009). An interviewee noted:

> Fresh ideas come from a learning mind set and this is how we look for future leadership.

From an educators' stance, these leadership skills can be developed within a business school programme and affect future career sustainability as well as business relevance.

A fifth of interviewees acknowledged the increased competition for jobs internationally and remarked on the high volume of graduate applications. A competitive labour pool strengthens employers' ability to scrutinise graduates and select those with 'the right mindset and commitment to get on with it'. Two-thirds of interviewees stressed the need for graduates 'to articulate their knowledge and learning for use in the work environment', and 'to be able to talk with confidence about their experience and competence'. A few commented that European students often possessed greater fluency in conveying relevant work-related experience, which supports the literature (Durden 2007; CMI 2014). Interestingly, although some employers discussed the importance of a more international perspective and cultural awareness, global citizen competencies were rarely mentioned.

Perhaps more concerning was the sparse consideration of responsible leader qualities, ethical behaviour, moral vision or personal and social responsibility, associated with a liberal arts approach to higher education.

Focus group data

Focus groups provided more opportunity for discussion over graduate requirements and the weight of distinct competencies, but, again, there was little consensus on qualities sought. As with the interviews, the more generic skills were mentioned, but greater focus was given to soft skills.

> Communication is key to be able to communicate with all levels and be able to interact with service users and colleagues alike. Problem solving matters for graduates to be able to think for themselves and reach sensible, well-thought out conclusions [F2].
>   We want interpersonal skills, team interaction and people skills. A graduate with an enquiring mind, practical skills and a readiness to learn on the job [F3].

The above quotes also highlight an interest in thinking skills and learning agility. Warhurst (2012) asserts that such transferable leadership skills are an achievable outcome of a well-designed higher education curriculum. But some employers doubt that a business school can achieve a practice-informed education. For example, three of the seven groups underlined that graduates need to have realism and be ready to learn on the job:

> Above all graduates really need to understand they may not be the finished article and accept they may need to work up to a level. We call this *humility* [F2]...They have to realise a university degree isn't the finish line [F3]... In simple terms, graduates have to be prepared to start at the bottom [F5].

Many employers viewed attitudinal traits which support enhanced job performance as more important than functional skills. As one example:

> We want personality rather than leadership – the potential to articulate and be interested in the technical function is much more important. Leaders come later, when they reach their late 20 s and early 30 s;...so we have a policy of growing our own. It takes two to four years for people to start showing potential [F6]

This comment summarises how some employers prefer to shape leadership skills through company-relevant situations.

Survey responses

The survey asked employers to rank competencies in order of importance to business needs. The top-rated competencies were team work, drive, analytical thinking, communication skills and professionalism, reflecting most generic graduate employability frameworks (Jackson and Chapman 2012; Tymon 2013), with little tailoring to leadership needs. When asked to look ahead to anticipated business changes over the next 5 years, more than 60% of employers stressed the need for graduates to demonstrate an agile and proactive approach to applying skills and knowledge in the workplace, and the following competencies were ranked as vital:

- Flexibility
- Adaptability
- Critical thinking
- Resilience
- Change Orientation

Regional employers' interest in flexibility, adaptability and proactivity aligns with the CMI's report on 21st century leaders (2014) on the need for graduates to accept and initiate change. Certainly, an individual's capacity to be innovative and creative stems from a deep resource of critical thinking and analysis, and higher education can build the transferable skills for evaluating alternative options to deal with complex situations.

Data summary

Overall, employers echo habitual responses of generic competency listings. Skills identified lean somewhat towards newer paradigm leadership theories such as distributed, in the prioritisation of team work, and social skills, which are follower-centric (Gronn 2000; Kellerman 2008). These skills can be developed within an educational setting where there is opportunity to build collaborative relationships through social interaction. Contrastingly, many traits identified are associated with traditional leader-centric theories, for example, 'Authority/credibility; Charisma; Inspirational; Presence', which are aligned with the romance of leadership (Bligh and Schyns 2007).

Notably, the data reveal limited concern for global citizens and ethical or responsible leadership. Rather, employers' interests in leadership qualities for the foreseeable future appear dynamic and entrepreneurial. The language that employers use creates ambiguity in their reference to flexibility, adaptability and critical thinking. There is apparent tension around employers wishing to see new recruits challenge the corporate system rather than conform to organisational norms. Some employers overtly describe risk takers, innovators and rule-breakers; for example:

> *We need individuals with more courage, innovators and risk-takers who are able to change the bureaucracy especially in the public sector. To break the rules but with care and creativity.*

This was an intriguing finding, with several employers emphasising the need for emergent leaders to be able to creatively navigate organisational norms. Employers identified a need for graduates to have:

> *More courage and be able to break the rules...Think outside of the box...Graduates need to demonstrate agility and be adaptable... They have to be capable of dealing with the unexpected...And willing to take risks*

These views appear to reflect the romance of leadership with organisations perhaps wishing for emergent leaders willing and able to take command in uncertain and unpredictable futures (Bligh and Schyns 2007). Certainly the quest for creative, market-responsive thinking increases the risk of rule-breaking. For educational providers based in a UK business school, these opinions are difficult to interpret. What is the operational value of 'breaking the rules' and the meaning of these applied qualities in the workplace? If educators focus on risk-taking characteristics, then business schools may further

encourage a buccaneering approach, which panders to unethical practice. These employer comments resonate with corporate language that speaks of business piracy and contemporary buccaneering. For example, Lush cosmetics accuse Amazon of a business practice that is representative of 'piracy capitalism' (*Observer* 1 Dec 2013), while the business media regards the same organization as a highly successful operating model. Buccaneer was the name given to early 17th-century pirates, and as Parker (2009, 170) points out, most maritime heroes spent time as 'state-licenced pirates' in Elizabethan England. The rise of buccaneers in cut-throat business development is at odds with societal expectations of graduate leaders.

Discussion

This study offers empirical evidence of the educational complexity of a practice-informed view of developing future leaders. We add to the literature in providing empirical evidence of the multiple lenses of employer expectations that blur academic understandings of industry needs. The data demonstrate the challenge for business schools in meeting employers' demands and raises two fundamental questions: How do these collected views of business practice inform leadership education; and to what extent can one regional business school address such differing expectations?

Business school curriculum

Employers' expectations of graduates are multi-layered and affected by different practice contexts. The sheer range of competencies evidenced in 85 different items identified by employers as key to leadership potential present a challenge. Findings also reveal many employers' tendency to perceive effective leadership as an innate quality (Day 2001; Mabey 2013). To attempt to address this variance and range in employer interpretations of competence and practice-based priorities within a curriculum blunts the focus of a leadership programme. Core leader skills such as communications, team work and critical thinking can be developed within a business school where there is time and space for immersive reflective practice (Mackay and Tymon 2014), but the list of skills, by necessity, must be limited to those things a university education can do well. University education can support the development of a leader identity, but leadership skills such as organisational citizenship and stakeholder awareness may be better animated through experiential work-based initiatives (McCall 2010; Grint 2005: Raelin 2011; Yukl 2013).

This study also highlights the challenge for business schools in teaching responsible leadership when there is limited mention of these qualities by employers. Funding crises, economic recession and public scandals over deficiencies in leadership behaviour have triggered a re-evaluation of the business school curriculum and the need to critically question the relevance of the educational offering (Currie, Knights, and Starkey 2010). At one extreme, an exclusive focus on employer market-led demands has the potential to produce buccaneer qualities in future leaders with a dubious moral compass. By contrast, educators are focused on a universal education that improves the quality of graduates' moral vision and leadership capability. This is not to deny the commercial dynamism of a market-led economy, but this sometimes thrives on operating at the margins of what constitutes effective leadership and ethically responsible behaviour. A more subtle interpretation may be that the business school aspires, or should aspire, to educate not necessarily rule-breakers but graduates who are capable of challenging those rules, navigating the institutional bureaucracy and possessing a sophisticated skill set to be

able to critically question practice (Hamlin 2005; Povah and Sobczak 2010). Therefore, educators need to counter a limited view of education as work-readiness and promote the development of graduates' independent thinking, responsibility and accountability to a code of ethics that can contribute to societal interests (Mackay 2015). This represents a political response to the instrumental prevalence of employability in higher education curricula which overlooks the value of education for life (Durden 2007). In rethinking a pedagogical emphasis on ethical leadership behaviour, Padilla and Mulvey (2008) argue that business schools can restore the societal responsibility dimensions of work-readiness. Thus, educators have a role to play in managing employer and societal expectations, taking employers' opinions as a starting point, and not a blueprint for providing education and mentoring for responsible leadership.

The data also highlight the need for creating realistic expectations in students. Employers want graduates to clearly communicate the critical skills and learning agility acquired from higher education study. To facilitate this, educators should better articulate that a profound engagement in a broad and adaptive degree programme has vocational value. Simultaneously, educators need to raise student awareness that their degree is not the end point, rather they still have much to learn when entering an organisation to develop their leadership potential.

The nature of collaboration between industry and university

Research findings also express dissonance between the qualitative and quantitative data demonstrating the complexity of a mixed-method research approach. For example, in interviews, some employers exclaimed a need for independent thinkers, courageous rule-breakers and mavericks. By contrast, the majority of survey responses listed a desire for generic competencies that conform to hierarchical organizations. As researchers we wrestle with the apparent contradictions in the data. An industry–university partnership does not necessarily share mutual aims and intended outcomes and collaboration can operate on multiple levels.

The UK government advocates industry–university collaboration to stimulate economic growth and innovation which heralds more frequent partnerships between employers and academics (Thune 2011). Concurrently, criticism of woeful moral leadership during the 2008 financial crisis has prompted calls internationally for educators to re-examine the curriculum in order 'to reflect more deeply and critically on the purpose and content of management education' (Gold and Bratton 2014, 2). Arguably, a functional view of education as serving the needs of business can create bias in framing leadership development as packaged, short-term outcomes. The societal responsibility to educate global citizens and responsible leaders can be put at risk by a business school with a corporate funding dependence. Business schools need to expand views of educational development beyond narrowly focused employer demands and nurture longer-term capacities for collective practice and greater self-knowledge to contribute to societal interests (Mackay 2015). A government agenda for industry–university collaboration places emphasis on practice-informed education to better support graduate employability. Business school–industry cooperation is important (Wilson Report 2012; Witty 2013), but so too is recognition of employer investment in further training and a shared responsibility to develop graduate leaders. As Ortenblad and Koris (2014, 205) sagely observe, business schools 'should listen more to other stakeholders, but not necessarily always act on their suggestions'. Still, this overarching critical perspective to retain

academic independence and resist intimate partnerships with industry may detract from the needs of institutional growth.

Limitations and future research

We acknowledge that the research is constrained by the limitations of self-reports from employers, a regional UK business sample, and prevailing economic conditions. Moreover, the use of a competency framework can appear to impose a standard template on employers to agree to an academic view of desired competencies. Therefore, our aim is not to take employers' opinions as definitive but to see these as a baseline survey of viewpoints as we continue with this longitudinal research. In particular, employer interview studies show promise in illuminating a more in-depth perspective of leadership practice that can guide understanding of industry-espoused ideals. So, a future avenue for research is to continue to map employer requirements against the educational curriculum.

Conclusion

This research contributes to current debates on the renewed importance of industry–university collaboration. The questions remain: What do employers expect of graduate recruits? What should be the emphasis of industry-informed leadership education? To answer these, we adopt an inductive research philosophy to gather practice-informed data from a UK regional sample of 146 managers, recruiting agencies and human resource specialists. The study found employer expectations of graduates' leadership potential are not clear-cut. Contradictory results indicate ambiguity in views, which restricts how these data can be used to inform the direction and relevance of pedagogical practice.

Findings reveal that employers' demands are wide ranging, including 85 skills and traits, some associated with newer paradigm leadership theories and others grounded in more traditional views. Such breadth and diversity presents challenges for educators in deciding what and how to teach leadership. Second, data show scarce employer orientation towards the characteristics of global citizens capable of responsible leadership. Third, discrepancies emerge in employers' voiced beliefs about future needs for bold, almost buccaneer, approaches and responses that indicate a required 'humility' expected of new recruits. Differences between employers-stated needs raise questions about the assessment and selection of leaders in practice. Do employers want graduates who are adaptable, can think outside the box, and take risks, or do they want graduates with generic skills who will follow company norms? Should universities remain with the traditional principles of higher education that assume the societal primacy of the common good, or should they teach what matters in industry? (Dries and Pepermans 2012; Pfeffer and Fong 2004). Finally, employers seek graduates who are better able to present their skills and characteristics. We posit that educators should facilitate this by being more articulate in demonstrating the importance of a liberal arts education that improves individual leadership capability and enhances the quality of graduates' moral vision.

To conclude, this empirical research demonstrates that industry–university collaboration is not a straightforward proposition. This study casts doubt on implicit assumptions that practice-informed, industry–university, collaboration will deliver better leaders. The interface between employers and business school educators is vital for dynamic exchange of knowledge, research and experience through industry–university partnerships. However, stakeholder expectations are diverse and specific elements of technical knowledge and expertise are better learned by practice experimentation in context. Thus, universities need

to remind stakeholders that education resembles a conscious process rather than a product (Alajoutsijarvi, Juusola, and Siltaoja 2015). The challenge for educators is that employers and graduates may not fully appreciate the relevance of a longer-term developmental perspective. Leadership education at its best can focus on transferable qualities that can add real value to organisations and society. Educators can encourage students to question managerial interests and analyse their own values, morals and ethics. By maintaining academic independence, this critically reflective education may help form a robust leader identity, to provide strength in the face of organizational resistance. This may contribute positively to a sustainable future for an organisation and the leader, rather than just a buccaneer leader scooping up the spoils for personal gain. Such leadership education and development may allow responsible and ethical leaders to challenge the status quo with a buccaneering spirit that aims to strengthen the organization.

Disclosure statement

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ORCID

Margaret Mackay ✆ http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6325-5789

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Networking behaviour, graduate employability: a social capital perspective

Saša Batistic
Department of Human Resource Studies,
Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands, and
Alex Tymon
Portsmouth Business School, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, UK

Abstract

Purpose – Drawing on the overarching framework of social capital theory, the purpose of this paper is to develop and empirically examine networking behaviour and employability within the higher education context.
Design/methodology/approach – In a sample of 376 full-time business students the authors measured perceived employability, networking behaviour, access to information and resources and job-search learning goal orientation (JSLGO).
Findings – The authors found networking is related to increased internal and external perceived employability by boosting access to information and resources. The results also demonstrate that networking is positively related to access to information and resources for low and high JSLGO, the relationship being stronger for those with higher levels.
Research limitations/implications – The results provide an enriched view of individual networking behaviour by offering an indirect model of networking outcomes and to the graduate employability and social capital literatures.
Practical implications – The findings may provide focus for individuals concerned with enhancing their employability and those involved in supporting career guidance.
Originality/value – Obvious beneficiaries are students, for whom employment is a key concern, and universities who face increasing pressure to enhance graduate employability whilst resources to do so are diminishing. To this end the authors highlight activities that may develop networking behaviours and JSLGO.
Keywords Employability, Social capital, Networking, Job-search learning goal orientation
Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Networking is the age-old practice of building and nurturing personal and professional links with a variety of people to create a bank of resources, including contacts, information and support. Academic and practitioner literatures assert that networking provides numerous beneficial career-related outcomes for both individuals and organizations (e.g. Fugate *et al*, 2004; Seibert *et al*, 2001; Wolff and Moser, 2009). One specific desirable outcome of networking is enhanced employability, through the building and maintenance of contacts that can provide relevant resources (Burt, 1997; Granovetter, 1973; Kanfer *et al*, 2001; Van Hoye *et al*, 2009). Most research assumes a direct link between networking and employability, although Wanberg *et al* (2000) found that up to 36 per cent of jobs are secured via networking, the results were inconsistent. They concur with others (Van Hoye *et al*, 2009) that networking might be indirectly related to job search success and thus question possible antecedents. We assert that access to resources might be relevant, based on social and network capital theories.

Networking creates many forms of valuable social capital including advocacy, introductions and mentoring that would otherwise require the use of human or financial capital (Simon, 2013). Specifically, social relationships can provide access to career management resources that enhance employability (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973). However, having a social network does not guarantee that these effects or benefits will materialize

(Adler and Kwon, 2002). Research tends to treat access to resources as self-assumed (see Anderson, 2008; Seibert *et al*, 2001 for some exceptions), yet network capital theory suggests that resources embedded in relationships actually need to be accessed and not just acquired in order to be valuable (Huggins, 2010). This implies a role for strategic networking behaviour, or what Huggins *et al* (2012, p. 204) call "Calculative ties" in order to boost employability. The lack of research into indirect relationships may be one explanation for inconsistencies in findings that link networking and enhanced employability (Van Hoye *et al*, 2009; Wanberg *et al*, 2000).

In response, this study empirically examines an indirect-based model that depicts resources as a central mechanism through which networking behaviour is related to perceived employability. Wanberg *et al* (2000) chose unemployed job seekers to obtain a sample of those focussed on employability when studying networking intensity. In a similar vein we too have chosen a sample for whom employability is highly relevant, namely, university business school students (Tymon and Batistic, 2016). This use of a student sample also justifies the exploration of an individual characteristic and its links to networking behaviour – job-search learning goal orientation (JSLGO). All students have access to, and most students participate in, some form of career management learning at university. We assert that increased JSLGO may provide the motivation and focus needed to enhance the outcome of such learning opportunities (Barber *et al*, 1994; Noordzij *et al*, 2013). Importantly, research suggests that JSLGO is a characteristic that universities could enhance in their efforts to develop graduate employability (Dweck, 2006; Kozlowski *et al*, 2001).

Our theoretical contributions include, first, an indirect explanation of how networking behaviour can be capitalized into employability by identifying access to resources as a central mechanism. Second, we advance social capital and networking literatures by identifying JSLGO as an individual intensifying characteristic. Third, we add to the graduate employability literature by exploring these constructs in the university context, where such studies are scarce and empirical findings inconsistent.

Practically, identifying intervening mechanisms could help students and staff concerned with employability to capitalize on networking behaviour. This research is timely as expansion of the higher education sector has devalued the degree qualification as a differentiator (Tomlinson, 2008). Universities are, thus, under increasing pressure to enhance graduate employability at the same time as their resources are being squeezed (Avramenko, 2012; Finch *et al*, 2013; McMurray *et al*, 2016) and there are calls for more research into how this can be achieved (Bell, 2016; Finch *et al*, 2016). The focus on business students recognizes that employability concerns might be higher for this group because expansion in graduate numbers is attributed mainly to vocationally oriented degrees such as those offered by business schools. Our chosen sample also accords with a renewed interest in the relevance of social capital to business (Simon, 2013). However, the findings may also be valuable to others with a concern for employability.

We start by reviewing the relevant literature, presenting our hypotheses and explaining our methodology. We then present results, conclusions, contributions to theory and practice and recommendations for further study to address our limitations.

Theory and hypothesis

Networking behaviour, social capital and access to resources

Measures of networking typically assess the frequency of interrelated behaviours such as using contacts to get advice or discussing business matters outside of work (Wolff and Moser, 2009). Theory suggests these behaviours lead to informal, voluntary and reciprocal relationships that in turn facilitate access to more resources, such as information- and task-related support (Podolny and Baron, 1997; Wolff *et al*, 2008). With the help of

networking behaviour, individuals build relationships to form personal networks, these become embedded in bigger social networks such as classes and communities. These networks then provide access to various resources (Burt, 1997).

The concept, potential benefits and risks of social capital continue to be debated, but there is recognition that it has two important characteristics, the structure and content of relationships (Adler and Kwon, 2002). The structural dimension or pattern of connections includes the size and spread of the network, whereas the content or relational dimension incorporates the nature or strength of connections (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Networking is an individual behaviour that contributes to both characteristics and thus helps shape social capital (Wolff and Moser, 2009). Networking reaches out to new contacts and enhances the size of a personal network and so builds the structural dimension of social capital. Bigger and wider networks tend to increase the number of what are termed weak ties (Granovetter, 1973; Hansen, 1999), which are particularly important in materializing access to information as a benefit of social capital (Adler and Kwon, 2002). Networking can also affect the relational dimension of social capital. Increased frequency of interactions makes people more comfortable with each other and enhances cooperation (Levin et al., 2016). If relationships are nurtured it boosts trust and identity formation, with people more likely to share resources and help others in need (Pillai et al., 2017). This focus on quality of networking may create what are termed strong ties (Granovetter, 1973; Hansen, 1999) which can lead to social capital benefits of increased influence and solidarity (Adler and Kwon, 2002). In this study we explore the potential social capital benefit of enhanced employability for students, an outcome that is very relevant for university graduates (Flap and Boxman, 2001). In doing so we concentrate on networking in the university context leading to benefits through the mediating mechanism of access to resources (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Burt, 1992) and we offer three explanations for our choice.

Networking behaviour promotes a system of "interconnected and cooperating individuals" (Luthans et al., 1998, p. 120) with a key benefit of access to information (Adler and Kwon, 2002). The wider the social network the higher the potential value, as distant contacts, accessed less frequently, are more likely to have exclusive information (Brown and Konrad, 2001; Van Hoye et al., 2009). Access to potentially exclusive career-related information, enables targeted applications, reduced competition and enhanced chances of success (Brown and Konrad, 2001; Zottoli and Wanous, 2000). Wider network relationships, or weak ties, may also have higher employability benefits as job seekers are more comfortable seeking employment information and support from more distant and less personal contacts (Granovetter, 1973). In the context of our study this may mean networking with a wide range of staff beyond the faculty such as central careers advisers or students from other courses.

Second, social relationships can influence third parties involved in recruitment through "putting in a good word", which can be decisive in selection situations (Stiff and Vugt, 2008). Similarly, strong social networks can elevate a job seeker's credentials by suggesting that they bring resources beyond their own set of skills, abilities and knowledge (Lin, 2001). Importantly, some social contacts exercise greater influencing power than others (Van Hoye et al., 2009). Thus, instrumental and targeted networking could be productive in enhancing employability through the use of "Calculative ties" (Huggins et al., 2012, p. 204).

Lastly, being a member of a network reinforces self-identity, status and provides emotional and social support, resulting in more robust mental health (Lin, 1999). For these reasons, we expect networking behaviour to be linked to access to resources:

H1. Networking behaviour is positively related to access to resources.

Perceived employability and access to resources
The literature indicates that perceived employability has both internal and external components (Rothwell et al., 2008; van der Heijden, 2002). Internal relates to perceptions of

abilities, ambition, career attributes and skills, whereas the external component includes items considered as outside the control of individuals such as labour market factors and demographics. The two dimensions are, however, intrinsically linked, in that internal dimensions impact how the external environment is viewed and vice versa (Fugate *et al.*, 2004). We predict that access to resources derived from networking will be related to both components of perceived employability based on the underlying mechanisms of uncertainty management and affective adaptation.

Kramer (2004) suggests that individuals seek information to enhance a sense of control that reduces uncertainty to comfortable levels, and employment-related activities are fraught with such daunting feelings. Information can make the future seem more predictable whilst the action of seeking it provides a sense of control (Seibert *et al.*, 2001). Insecurity and uncertainty in the labour market affects all employees regardless of level or skill (Direnzo and Greenhaus, 2011), however it is more acute for the young (CIPD, 2015). In particular students may be concerned about their future employability as many have invested time and money in their studies in order to advance their careers (Perrone and Vickers, 2003; Tomlinson, 2008).

Affective adaptation is the willingness and ability to change in response to the environment (Fugate *et al.*, 2004; McArdle *et al.*, 2007). Ashford and Taylor (1990) identified affective adaptation requires flexibility to make changes and willingness to persevere with new behaviours. However, in order to identify the need for change, information and feedback are required accompanied by attributes to process this, such as optimism (Ashford and Taylor, 1990). For graduates, concerned with their employability, constant access to career-related resources may enable them to identify changing employer needs, recognize how they might match these, and package and promote their strengths in response (Finch *et al.*, 2016).

Taken together, these arguments suggest that access to resources should increase both dimensions of perceived employability. Furthermore, we propose that access to resources mediates the relationship between networking and both dimensions of perceived employability:

H2. Access to resources is positively related to internal perceived employability.

H3. Networking behaviour is positively and indirectly related to internal perceived employability through access to resources in individuals' social networks.

H4. Access to resources is positively related to external perceived employability.

H5. Networking behaviour is positively and indirectly related to external perceived employability through access to resources in individuals' social networks.

The moderating role of JSLGO

Finally, because our study is situated within the university context, with its focus on learning, we also consider the possible moderating role of JSLGO. Our decision is based on the network capital literature. We argue that networking behaviour is a more general behaviour, which may have serendipitous employability outcomes. However, network capital theory posits that some individuals might be more calculating in their nature and thus behave more strategically when networking, actively working to create social ties and exploiting relationships for greater benefit (Bensaou *et al.*, 2014; Huggins *et al.*, 2012). We suggest that in the university context students can learn the skills of such purposeful networking with staff and peers. Further, we posit that JSLGO might drive this narrower and more exploitative behaviour aimed at the specific goal of gaining employability-related resources (Noordzij *et al.*, 2013).

Defined as a dynamic, self-regulatory and goal-orientated process, JSLGO occurs as a response to a discrepancy between an individual's employment goal and their current situation (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001). JSLGO emphasizes developing competences, learning new things and tackling challenges in order to master job search, and can reduce preoccupation with failures and rejections (Barber *et al.*, 1994; Noordzij *et al.*, 2013). Thus, JSLGO provides focus and rationale for learning about career management strategies and techniques, which could include networking behaviours. Learning goal orientation is especially effective in complex tasks and where perseverance is an asset (Seijts *et al.*, 2004) which aptly describes graduate job search and career management. Importantly in our context recent research suggests that situational goal orientations such as JSLGO can be developed (Dweck, 2006; Kozlowski *et al.*, 2001).

Research shows that people may network strategically (Bensaou *et al.*, 2014; Villar and Albertín, 2010), based on the notion that they want to exploit their social capital and in effect create network capital (Huggins *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, it may be the case that increased JSLGO leads to more overt and strategic networking behaviour. Accordingly, those higher in JSLGO may use social contacts instrumentally, to receive relevant resources, rather than just network to socialize and build relationships *per se*. In that case individuals with high JSLGO are likely to have more access to career-related resources. Therefore, we posit that JSLGO may intensify the relationship between networking behaviours and perceived employability that are mediated by access to resources:

H6. JSLGO moderates the relationship between networking behaviour and access to resources, with a stronger relationship for higher levels of JSLGO.

Method
Sample and procedure
Employability is highly relevant in the university context and, due to the vocational orientation of most business school degrees, is a high priority for these students. We, therefore, tested our hypotheses, by recruiting 376 full-time undergraduate students (10 per cent of the sample population) from a UK university business school. To minimize self-selection bias, participants were approached in taught sessions to complete a questionnaire (typically 15-20 min). Core units were used so that students from a range of degree courses were included.

Previous research shows variation in employability perception by academic level (Qenani *et al.*, 2014), therefore participants came from different undergraduate years: 36.7 per cent first year students; 47.6 per cent second year; and 15.7 per cent third year. Our focus on first and second year students accords with McMurray *et al.* (2016) who urge universities to promote employability throughout the degree programme, rather than just in the final year, as the skills and attributes required take time to develop and hone. Formal career management teaching for this sample begins part way through their second year, therefore it is only the final year students who will have benefitted from this input. The average age was 20.5 years, with an average 20.8 months of work experience and 57 per cent were female. The university does not run any formal networking training although it is possible that some students may have participated in extra-curricular activities to develop networking behaviour.

Measures
All measures used a five-point scale: 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

Perceived employability. Consistent with the concept having both external and internal factors we used the Rothwell *et al.* (2008) questionnaire which has shown good reliability as well as construct and criterion validity in undergraduate contexts. Perceived external

employability has eight items, e.g., "employers are eager to employ graduates from my university". Perceived internal employability comprises five items, e.g., "I feel I could get any job so long as my skills and experience are reasonably relevant".

In response to the two theorized dimensions, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to verify the nature of the construct. We used the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) to assess fit (cf. Hu and Bentler, 1999). We first examined a model in which all 13 items were loaded onto one latent construct. Results showed a satisfactory fit ($\chi^2_{(56)} = 127.88$, $p < 0.01$, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.05). We then examined a two-factor model in which the five and eight items loaded into separate latent constructs ($\chi^2_{(55)} = 121.12$, $p < 0.01$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.05). The two-factor model showed a better data fit ($\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} = 6.19$, $p < 0.05$), and was, thus, retained. The Cronbach's α's were 0.75 (external) and 0.68 (internal).

Networking behaviour. It was measured using a six-item scale from Ferris *et al.* (2005) adapted for the university context. An example item is: "I spend a lot of time at university developing connections with others", the Cronbach's α was 0.87.

JSLGO. A Cronbach's α of 0.90 was obtained using the four-item scale of Noordzij *et al.* (2013). An indicative item is "I want to try to understand all procedures and activities in searching and applying for jobs".

Access to resources. It was measured using a scale adapted from Spreitzer (1996). Three items for access to information (e.g. "I have access to the information and support I need to make myself more employable") and three items for access to resources (e.g. "I understand the employability activities the university provides"). The two-factor latent structure provided a better fit with the data ($\chi^2_{(6)} = 10.05$, $p < 0.01$, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.01), compared to the one factor solution ($\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} = 9.83$, $p < 0.001$). However, as the correlation between the two latent variables was high ($r = 0.89$) a one factor structure was retained ($\chi^2_{(7)} = 19.88$, $p < 0.01$, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.02). The Cronbach's α was 0.87.

Control variables. Control variables were gender, previous work experience and year of study.

Analytical strategy

We employed structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the theoretical model using MPLUS 7.2 (Muthén and Muthén, 1998-2012). SEM allows simultaneous estimation of multiple associations and yields an overall fit index of the hypothesized model (James *et al.*, 2006). We adopted the two-step SEM strategy outlined by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). First, we used a measurement model fit to the observed data, then we compared nested structural models to find one that best accounts for covariances among the exogenous and endogenous constructs in the analysis. After this, we assessed the significance of the path estimates to test the hypotheses.

We used a bootstrapping approach suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2008) to examine the significance of indirect effects when testing the mediation hypotheses, namely, the indirect effect of JSLGO on outcome variables via access to resources. Bootstrapping is considered a better approach for testing indirect effects than the traditional Sobel test because it imposes no assumptions about the distribution of indirect effects (Cheung and Lau, 2008; MacKinnon *et al.*, 2002). In our analysis we followed the statistical routines developed by Preacher *et al.* (2007), estimating the indirect effects, and their confidence intervals, of JSLGO on outcome variables at different values of access to resources.

Results

Table I presents descriptive statistics and correlations for the measured variables, these are further explained and expanded in the following sections.

Measurement model

The measurement model comprises the six latent constructs: networking behaviour, JSLGO, access to information, access to resources, perceived external employability, and perceived internal employability. The CFA (Chin, 1998) produced index values indicating a good overall fit ($\chi^2_{(354)} = 622.46$, $p < 0.05$, CFI $= 0.94$, TLI $= 0.93$, RMSEA $= 0.04$, SRMR $= 0.05$) (Hu and Bentler, 1999). All indicators loaded on their respective constructs significantly at the 0.05 level and all standardized paths were above 0.30. Thus, further examination of our hypothesized model was warranted.

Structural model analysis

We started by assessing our hypothesized model and found it achieved a satisfactory fit ($\chi^2_{(463)} = 811.47$, $p < 0.01$, CFI $= 0.92$, TLI $= 0.91$, RMSEA $= 0.04$, SRMR $= 0.07$), before comparing it with an alternative. Social capital theory suggests the importance of using the information and resources received from one's network (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Anderson, 2008). Therefore, we explored the possibility of a double moderation model. Thus, JSLGO moderates the relationship between network behaviour and access to resources and then later both dimensions of perceived employability. Thus, access to resources is more exploited by individuals with higher JSLGO increasing their perception of employability. This alternative model achieved an acceptable fit ($\chi^2_{(490)} = 885.96$, $p < 0.01$, CFI $= 0.91$, TLI $= 0.90$, RMSEA $= 0.05$, SRMR $= 0.07$). However, we retained the first hypothesized model as the fit with the data was significantly better ($\Delta\chi^2_{(27)} = 74.49$, $p < 0.01$). For reasons of clarity the graphs generated by MPLUS software have been combined to create a simple representation of the hypothesized model (Figure 1) which shows the standardized path estimates. To maintain focus on the hypotheses, control variables are excluded from this figure, as only one appears to be significant, and this is discussed at the end of this section. Standardized coefficients are reported to enable assessment of relationship importance.

H1, that networking is positively related to access to resources is supported ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$). H2 and H4 are also supported with access to resources positively related to external perceived employability ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$) and internal perceived employability ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$).

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	0.43	0.50	–							
2. Year of study	1.79	0.69	−0.04	–						
3. Previous work experience	21.80	35.08	−0.07	0.09	–					
4. External self-perceived employability	3.38	0.51	0.00	−0.13*	0.03	(0.75)				
5. Internal self-perceived employability	3.53	0.59	−0.03	0.05	0.13*	0.46**	(0.68)			
6. Networking behaviour	3.19	0.74	−0.12*	−0.05	0.06	0.32**	0.32**	(0.87)		
7. Job-search learning goal orientation	4.17	0.79	0.13*	0.08	−0.01	0.27**	0.26**	0.09	(0.90)	
8. Access to resources	3.80	0.65	0.16**	−0.01	0.08	0.38**	0.36**	0.26**	0.34**	(0.87)

Notes: $n = 376$. Coefficient α's are on the diagonal in parentheses. Previous work experience is in months. $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$

Table I.
Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables
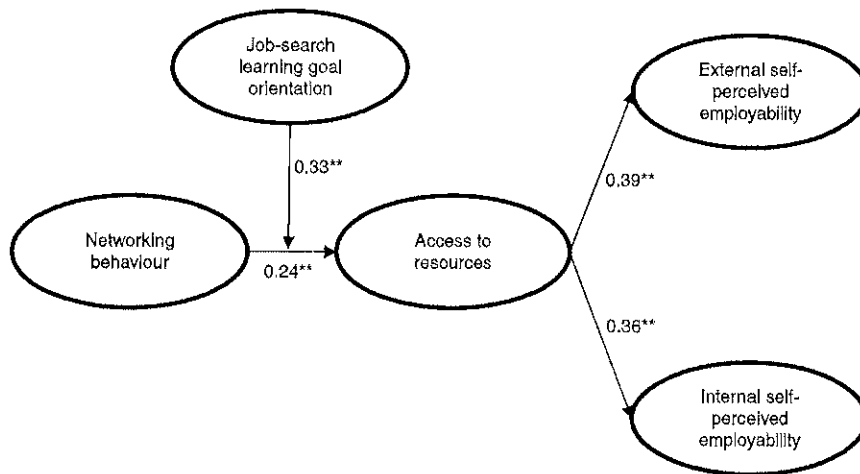
Notes: **$p<0.01$

Figure 1.
Standardized path
estimates of the
hypothesized model

H3 and *H5*, that access to resources mediates the relationship between networking
behaviour and employability, were also supported. Using bootstrapping we resampled
1,000 times and showed a significant positive indirect effect of networking behaviour
on both internal perceived employability mediated by access to resources ($b = 0.06$,
$CI = 0.01$, 0.11 $\alpha = 0.05$) and external perceived employability ($b = 0.06$, $CI = 0.01$,
0.12, $\alpha = 0.05$).

H6 predicts that JSLGO moderates the relationship between networking behaviour and
access to resources. The interaction of JSLGO and networking behaviour is significant
($\beta = 0.33, p < 0.01$). Following Aiken *et al.* (1991), we plotted the relationship between JSLGO
and networking behaviours at 1 SD above (high networking behaviour) and 1 SD below (low
networking behaviour) the mean graphically (Figure 2). This shows networking behaviour
provides less access to resources for individuals with lower JSLGO. However, the simple
slope test confirms our findings that networking behaviour is still positively and
significantly related to access to resources for both low ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.01$) and high JSLGO
($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.05$). We further checked for slope differences between high and low JSLGO
(Cohen *et al.*, 2003) as our interactions seem to be ordinal rather than disordinal. The test
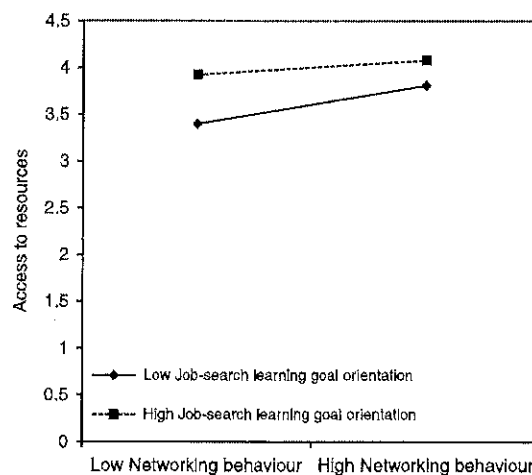

Figure 2.
Interaction of
networking behaviour
and job-search
learning goal
orientation on access
to resources

suggested that the two slopes were significantly different ($t = 17.66$, $p < 0.01$), showing a variation between high and low JSLGO individuals.

The only proposed control variable (not shown in the Figure 1 for parsimonious reasons) with a significant relationship on the two dimensions of employability is the year of study. This showed a negative relationship between students' year of study and external perceived employability ($\beta = -0.13$, $p < 0.05$). This supports literature suggesting that heightened awareness of the labour market caused by temporal proximity for final year students increases concerns about their employability (Tomlinson, 2008; Tymon, 2013).

Discussion

Drawing on social capital theory, this study examines access to resources through networking and the individual outcome of perceived employability, alongside the intensifying role of JSLGO. In line with our hypotheses we found both networking and access to resources can directly increase internal and external perceptions of employability. Moreover, our results also show an indirect effect with access to resources being a mediator between networking behaviour and both dimensions of perceived employability. Furthermore, we found that JSLGO plays an important role in these complex processes by intervening in one particular mechanism. Both low and high JSLGO is related to networking behaviour and linked to greater access to resources. However, individuals with high JSLGO gain greater access to resources.

Theoretical implications

First, this study enriches our understanding of the complex process of networking by going beyond direct models. Based on social capital theory (Lin, 1999), we offer an indirect-based model in which access to resources serves as a mediating mechanism linking networking and perceptions of employability. We argue and find empirical support that, networking provides individuals with opportunities to use their social contacts to access information and resources that are relevant to their outcomes. This adds to the literature on networking within the university context (Hwang et al., 2004) and demonstrates that both characteristics of social capital, structure and content (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998) are important for graduate employability. This finding complements previous work in this domain, reinforcing the notion, that structural views provide just one side of the story. We show that behaviour that individuals use in social networks is equally important (Kilduff and Brass, 2010) to both build relationship and access resources. And furthers the argument in general that social capital needs to be utilized and capitalized upon in order to be beneficial (Anderson, 2008).

Second, we expand the social network literature (Kalish and Robins, 2006), by identifying that one intensifying individual-level attribute, namely, JSLGO, enhances access to resources acquired via networking and thus perceived employability. This builds upon network capital theory (Huggins, 2010). Our results suggest that networking behaviour can be a general antecedent of access to resources, but this relationship is strengthened by more focussed behaviours such as our proposed JSLGO. So, individuals that are more focussed on job-search related issues will get more relevant resources out of their networks. Thus, we propose that JSLGO can and does drive more focussed goal directed behaviour that enhances network capital to provide individuals with career supporting resources. This suggests that students like other individuals may develop relationships strategically as a means to an end (Bensaou et al., 2014; Huggins et al., 2012). Overall, we show that individuals tend to get the best results when there is a combination of both strategic exploitative and general networking behaviour.

Third, this study broadens understanding of networking in the higher education environment answering calls for more research into how graduate employability can be enhanced (Bell, 2016; Finch *et al.*, 2016). Networking is known to be valuable for career management in general (Seibert *et al.*, 2001; Wolff and Moser, 2009) and securing employment in particular (Burt, 1997; Granovetter, 1973; Wanberg *et al.*, 2000). However, in the university context much less is known. Our results not only show that networking, access to resources and JSLGO are all valuable in enhancing graduate employability, but how they interact and can therefore complement each other.

Practical implications

These results have implications for both individuals interested in career planning and those who support them. First, individuals have much to gain by developing networking behaviours as this facilitates access to resources related to employability. Importantly, networking behaviours can be developed (de Janasz and Forret, 2008) and therefore we suggest providers of career guidance should offer training and individuals should seek this out.

Obvious beneficiaries are students, many of whom have invested in higher education in order to enhance their careers, and universities who face increasing pressure to enhance graduate employability, with diminishing resources (Bridgstock, 2009; Qenani *et al.*, 2014). There is evidence that networking is developed through work-based learning and placements, thus encouragement of these is recommended (Cranmer, 2006). Additionally, networking behaviours can be overtly taught via stand-alone, extra-curricular activities, such as professional skills workshops, or be more subtly nurtured through activities embedded in the curriculum, by, for example, collaborative assignments. Both can and should be considered.

Our second practical implication concerns the value of JSLGO. Higher levels are associated with greater access to relevant resources, leading to enhanced employability and indicating a more strategic approach (Bensaou *et al.*, 2014; Villar and Albertin, 2010). Some assert that JSLGO can be developed (DeShon and Gillespie, 2005; Dweck, 2006). Example methods include: demonstrating the relevance of employability, developing strategic networking skills, and teaching the importance of both accessing and utilizing resources embedded in networks. In the university context, this can again be done via both stand-alone events or embedded activities. Using both methods would appeal to students both low and high on JSLGO. Those high on JSLGO are more likely to have the motivation to embrace extra-curricular activities, whereas those with lower levels may be less likely to do so but would benefit from embedded learning.

Limitations and future research directions

Like most, this study has limitations such as the cross-sectional design precluding verification of a causal relationship. For example, it may be that low perceived employability will motivate individuals to network more, resulting in greater access to resources. Longitudinal studies examining sequences in the relationships among networking behaviour, access to resources and employability are therefore suggested. These could also potentially explore the relationship between employability and career paths (Direnzo *et al.*, 2015) and provide interesting insights into individual decisions on how social networks are used. A further limitation that could be addressed in future studies is to collect data on exposure to additional formal or informal career management and networking initiatives which could potentially influence outcomes.

We also suggest future research could take a more nuanced approach to explore the quality of networking or strategies individuals use and the social costs of such behaviour

(Bensaou *et al.*, 2014; Villar and Albertín, 2010). Another potential enhancement would be to build upon the direct and indirect relationships that are tested in our model. For example, further exploring other relationships, using more complex approaches and alternative theoretical underpinning. One such possibility is to test a moderated mediation model with a PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) or use the Preacher *et al.* (2007) MPLUS code.

Finally, moderators other than JSLGO should be considered. For example, proactivity because individuals with high levels tend to challenge the status quo in looking for change (Crant, 2000).

Conclusion

Using the overarching framework of social capital theory this study contributes to the literature by suggesting that access to resources is a mediating mechanism between networking and employability perceptions. We also found that JSLGO strengthens networking behaviours and provides individuals with more resources. This enriched perspective highlights potential benefits of developing networking ability and JSLGO for individuals concerned about their careers and those charged with supporting them. Practically, we suggest methods for developing networking behaviours and enhancing JSLGO particularly in the higher education context, where employability is becoming increasingly important to students and universities.

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Corresponding author
Saša Batistic can be contacted at: s.batistic@uvt.nl

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