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Career readiness: developing graduate employability capitals in aspiring media workers

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ABSTRACT

Teaching students aspiring to media work presents the educator with a fundamental dilemma. On the one hand, students require the knowledge and skills necessary to find and sustain employment within existing industry practices, systems and structures. On the other hand, students need to be prepared for the uncertain and shifting nature of media work, and highly problematic aspects of some of those selfsame practices, systems and structures. How do you ensure the former without condoning or under-playing the latter? An overly theoretical and critical education risks producing graduates unprepared for the practicalities of media employment. An overly instrumental education risks graduates lacking the necessary responsiveness and resilience required to drive a media career over time, or the ability to recognise, navigate or challenge systemic problems within these industries. This article approaches the dilemma from the UK perspective, through a consideration of the notion of employability, interpreted as *career readiness*. It advocates five inter-related forms of graduate capital: human capital; social capital; cultural capital; psychological capital and identity capital. The article argues that their application to aspiring media workers, in particular, provides a valuable conceptual framework for educators concerned with finding an approach to employability that is both instrumental and critical.

Introduction

Preparing students aspiring to media careers raises serious challenges for those teaching within Higher Education. How should we understand and foster *graduate employability* within the shape-shifting context of the contemporary media landscape, where work is often unstable, short term and offers little by way of structured career progression? More than many other areas of employment within the UK, media work has long been subject to the combined disruptive forces of technological invention, unpredictable change and (de)regulatory interventions by governments. The best-equipped university today teaches students using software, hardware and processes that may be considered passé within months. At the same time, converging technologies, the rapid rise of streaming services since 2015 and the new dominance of the technology giants recasting themselves as the big players in entertainment are irreversibly altering the media ecosystem and the kind of media work available. New content providers, for example, have recently had a significant impact on the volume of 'high end' television being produced outside the USA, boosting new work opportunities particularly in the UK and Japan. Furthermore, lines have become blurred between previously discrete media industry subsectors, signified, for example, by the emergence of new

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terminologies such as 'the screen industries' (a collective reference usually to some combination of television, film, VFX, animation and games). Long-established roles are becoming extinct, whilst previously unimagined ones are born. Such forces, and the disruption they bring, raise broader social questions and present new ethical dilemmas, for which future media workers also need to be forearmed. Significant too has been the expansion in media production work opportunities that are now embedded within the broader economy (recognised in the concept of 'the creative trident', Higgs, Cunningham, and Bakhshi 2008). In most countries today, 'creative employment disproportionately occurs outside the creative industries' (Cunningham 2011, 37), the subject of a special edition of this journal (Volume 28, Issue 4). We can no longer assume that graduates aiming to work in media production are looking only for careers within media industries.

Whilst media work has never been so plentiful, neither has it ever been so insecure. The rapid and devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the media workforce has dramatically exposed some of the vulnerabilities that accompany creative work. In the context of UK television, for example, regulatory interventions during the 1990s resulted in major structural changes (Born 2004) which formed the vanguard of the broader social shifts borne of neoliberalism. The decline of large TV producer-publisher employers, the downward drive on production budgets and the proliferation of independent programme-makers resulted in a dramatic slimming down of full-time permanent workforces across the sector. Demand for a flexible workforce more attuned to the logic of the market and a new focus on the 'responsibilised' individual worker (Rose 1996) has meant that media graduates aspiring to work in television can expect unstructured and individualised portfolio or protean careers (Hall 2004); short-term and project-based contract work acquired through their own entrepreneurship and social networks and once employed, little prospect of employer-initiated continuing professional development. Employment relationships are increasingly defined by 'less loyalty, greater mobility and less certainty' (Briscoe and Hall 2006, 5). This is also a workforce characterised by long-term inequalities (often styled as 'under-representation'), particularly related to class, ethnicity, gender, disability and their intersection (O'Brien et al. 2016). Given this state of industry flux, widespread instability and enormous variation, the media educator has a challenging task, and a fundamental dilemma: students need the knowledge and skills necessary to find and sustain employment within established industry practices, systems and structures; and at the same time, need a clear understanding of the uncertain and shifting nature of media employment, and its many systemic (and sometimes hidden) problems. In preparing students for industry, how do you avoid simply condoning a problematic status quo? If the notion of employability is to be meaningful within this context, graduates must be equipped to play the game, whilst possessing the wherewithal to challenge and negotiate the rules of that game where they can.

Employability and Higher Education

The ascendancy of the notion of employability is one of the features of the changing policy rhetoric within Higher Education of the past three decades. Although it has come to dominate much of the policy discussion about the value of a university degree, it is a notion originally conceived as a remedy for *non*-graduate unemployment, and arose from the political, economic and societal upheaval of the 1970s and 1980s. The term began to be applied consistently within Higher Education only during the 1990s in the context of the growing importance attributed to 'lifelong learning'. Success in the new internationalised post-industrial age, dominated by information technology and the provision of services (dubbed the 'global knowledge-based economy'), would require the individual to take responsibility for their ongoing upskilling, education and readiness for work. In setting out his agenda for the presidency of the European Union in 1997, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair described the focus of his vision for this economic reform as being a social model based on improving the *employability* of the European workforce (BBC 1997). The new labour market required individuals 'to acquire new skills and competences, over and above those acquired in initial education and training, to maintain their employability' (OECD 1997, 23). Lifelong learning, therefore, was

necessary for lifelong employability. This was 'a long-term, preventative strategy' that required 'high-quality initial education and training' but with a focus on 'opportunities for upgrading the skills and knowledge needed to maintain employability and earnings growth potential' over time (OECD 1997, 14): 'Productive work habits, personal confidence, decision-making skills and a commitment to learning are as important as specific vocational skills' (OECD 1997, 14–15).

In the same year as Blair's speech, the UK Government also published a major review of Higher Education undertaken by Sir Ron Dearing, which set out the 'broad purposes' of a university. Although the word 'employability' is used only once in his report, Dearing signals a significant shift towards the idea that universities have an important role to play in explicitly preparing their students for employment, highlighting the need for individuals to be 'well-equipped for work' (Dearing 1997, 72) and positioning employers as stakeholders within Higher Education.

By the turn of the century, the notion of graduate employability was increasingly being prioritised over alternative ways of understanding graduate value. Prior to this time, 'graduateness' was a term used to encapsulate the essential qualities associated with a degree. Indeed, the UK's Higher Education Quality Council had noted that terms such as 'employment-related skills' had 'originated largely from outside HE as ways of expressing the needs of employers, or of society more generally', which whilst acknowledged as valuable: 'their purpose is not the same as that of the work of "graduateness"' (HEQC 1996: 6). Nevertheless, it was *employability* rather than graduateness that gained currency in the longer term, despite persistent difficulties in defining it.

The Bologna Process, a 1999 initiative to bring more coherence to Higher Education systems across Europe, describes employability as 'broad profession-related knowledge' that encompassed 'social skills', 'analytical skills', 'the ability to communicate' and 'problem solving' (EHEA, 2016). By 2006, the UK's Higher Education Academy (HEA) was producing a series of publications on this theme, intended to encourage engagement and discussion within the sector. The HEA's 'working definition' was: 'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy' (Yorke 2006, 8).

A range of generalist or transferrable skills thought to be essential requirements for graduate employment have surfaced at regular intervals, often extrapolated from employer surveys of various kinds. These are frequently expressed negatively, as absences of particular skills, although seldom with any consensus about where skill deficiencies lie (Dearing 1997). Employability 'wish lists' usually constructed by interested parties (Yorke 2006) typically might include interpersonal skills; team working; willingness to learn; self-motivation and self-management; critical thinking; problem solving and general awareness.

Notwithstanding its slippery quality, what the notion of graduate employability is meant to imply, and how it should be taught, learned or assessed, continues to be a preoccupation within Higher Education. Universities now spend considerable sums of money on their 'employability and career services'. In England, employment six months after graduation has been one of the key measures of the Government's Teaching Excellence Framework ('the TEF') determining University funding (Office for Students 2019). Employment statistics are also used for marketing, increasingly as an 'evidence' of employability. This, despite it clearly being the case that a job is no more evidence of a graduate's ability to navigate, sustain and progress in appropriate employment over time, than unemployment is evidence of an individual's lack of the ability to do so. As the Covid-19 pandemic dramatically illustrated, highly employable individuals with extensive experience can find themselves without employment through no fault of their own.

From a position in the 1990s, then, in which employability began to be thought of as integral to the 'broad purposes' of Higher Education, there has been a rapid shift towards its prioritisation. Increasingly, this converges with in-parallel debate about the *value* of a degree, in some contexts explicitly in terms of 'return on investment' within five years of graduation (DfE 2019). Yet despite the urgent tone of much of this rhetoric, a notable plasticity has persisted as to its precise meaning and application within Higher Education. Much of this discourse continues to be dominated by an

individualised, acontextual and entirely 'supply-side' conception of what employability is supposed to consist of: a 'hollowed out' (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005) notion that effectively side-steps any need for the understanding of contextual and systemic factors that determine the availability and conditions of work. Within the context of media employment in particular, then, it is necessary to assert a more substantial and contextualised understanding if the notion of graduate employability is to have any practical value for students.

Learning how to traverse the uncertain terrain of contemporary media work clearly requires more than simply the ability to transition into a job within six months. The question to educators, as articulated by Bennett (2019) is as follows: how do we prepare students 'to navigate an increasingly complex world and labour market in which they will need to think for a living'? (31). Indeed, framing employability merely in terms of being 'work-ready', 'job-ready' or even more problematically 'set-ready' (Carey et al. 2017, 30) is to insufficiently recognise the meta-cognitive aspect of this process. In the spirit of Dearing's emphasis on 'lifelong learning', graduate employability must essentially include the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate career-life uncertainty. It requires the equipping of students with resources that they can draw upon and continue to develop after graduation that will help them to manage their careers over time. Graduate employability, therefore, is quintessentially about being '*career* ready': 'the ability to manage the transition into the labour market and make proactive and purposive decisions towards the goals of sustaining a meaningful career pathway(s)' (Tomlinson and Nghia 2020, 8). This calls for a broad skillset that requires 'a metacognitive orientation which is mindful of self, profession and society' (Bennett, 2019, 49). Bridgstock (2009) has called these 'career *management* skills' [emphasis added] involving a process of reflective, evaluative and decision-making processes based upon 'higher-order, "meta " work skills – the abilities required to continuously recognise and capitalise on employment and training-related opportunities and integrate these with other aspects of the individual's life' (34). By referencing 'other aspects of the individual's life' Bridgstock points to the self-evident (but frequently overlooked) reality that career management is but one strand within the knotwork of life: like other strands, it is situated and transacted; it is subject to changing circumstances, shifting priorities and competing life-choices. Graduate employability within the context of media work, therefore, is most usefully understood as *career readiness* in this broadest of senses; and should be as much a staple feature of a Higher Education media production curriculum as would be teaching of craft skills, industry studies, or the more general disciplines of research, criticality and reflection. As a framework for exploring how this may be worked out in practice, a constructive starting point may be found in the notion of *capital*.

Graduate employability capitals and media work

The notion of capital provides a useful metaphor for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the wide range of resources needed by graduates to help them to develop their own career readiness. It also provides a means of developing an approach to employability that takes us beyond the merely instrumental. Capital denotes a *store of value* that can be drawn upon in a way similar to an investor drawing upon financial resources to secure an investment. It is an approach that has been invoked by a number of authors recently (Lehmann 2019; Williams et al. 2016; and others). One notable and highly practical articulation and development of this metaphor within the context of graduate employment has been propounded by Tomlinson (2017, and elsewhere) who has used capital as a conceptual framework (and vocabulary) to understand the accumulation and deployment of graduate value. Tomlinson's approach borrows from both the human capital theory of labour economics (particularly identified in its modern form with the work of Gary Becker) and a sociological critique of labour economics (most influentially exposited by Pierre Bourdieu). Both are significant for different reasons.

Human capital theory has informed much labour economic analysis of the past three decades, and as a result, has a currency within contemporary employment policy, heavily featured in the kind of career literature that circulates in careers and employability services within universities. Human

capital has been defined by the OECD as 'the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being' (OECD 2007, 29). There is a certain pragmatism, therefore, in appropriating an established metaphor, and extending its use beyond the limited and instrumental purpose to which it has sometimes been limited.

In contrast (and as a corrective) to too narrow an application of the idea of capital, Bourdieu uses the metaphor to expose the way power operates, and in particular, how class imposes structural constraints on an individual's real-world choices. Bourdieu (1986) argues that capital – 'or power, which amounts to the same thing' (242) – mainly presents itself in three guises: economic capital, directly convertible into money; cultural capital, such as forms of behaviour (expressed through dress, accent and more subtle signals of contextual understanding) which, under certain conditions, is also convertible into economic capital (e.g. through educational qualifications) and social capital, in the form of connections (mutual acquaintances and recognition by others) which is also convertible into economic capital, in certain conditions. Bourdieu, therefore, invites a more critical stance in the understanding of capital, and a wariness of assuming too credulous an idea that the acquisition of these capitals is similarly accessible to all. Students are best equipped to succeed in the game of work when they understand the ways in which the playing field is not a level one.

In what follows, five *interrelated* 'graduate capitals' advocated by Tomlinson (2017) are discussed in turn: human; social; cultural; psychological; and identity capital. These offer a potentially valuable framework for educators faced with the challenge of preparing aspiring media workers for their future careers.

Human capital

Human capital is the oldest and simplest application of the idea of capital in the context of employment: a 'common sense' supply-focused interpretation of what employability requires. Human capital refers to the skills, the knowledge and the experience that an individual possesses at the point at which they are recognised as having value to an employer. It is the basis of the employment contract as an economic exchange: the capabilities of an individual traded for financial reward. Human capital is usually assumed to incorporate both hard and soft skills and includes deploying subject knowledge, technical competencies and the broader abilities frequently identified by employers as being necessary generic skills. In this way, it is the principal means by which graduates signal to, and connect with, job market opportunities, and to a significant extent, is acquired through formal education credentialised in the award of qualifications, such as a degree.

In the context of media work, guiding students in the development of human capital requires helping them to connect the knowledge and skills that they are acquiring in their day-to-day studies, with the demands of employers, and to signal their 'economic utility'. As Tomlinson has pointed out: 'Working out which skills matter and how these align to targeted industries is clearly of significance, as is the capacity to demonstrate the productive value of generic knowledge' (Tomlinson 2017, 341). Done properly, this requires educators to articulate what might seem to be obvious: the ability to connect the *whole* of a student's curriculum (not just the 'practicals') with their career value. It necessarily incorporates many of the basic, first-job-readiness skills so necessary for their transition into the world of work, with an understanding of how to highlight the skills an individual employer is asking for at the moment of a specific opportunity. Students can simultaneously overestimate and underestimate aspects of their learning in relation to employment opportunities, and entirely miss what the employer is actually looking for. Typically, at industry entry-level, they may exaggerate the significance of more precocious skills assumed to convey 'talent', whilst overlooking seemingly elementary knowledge and experience that is actually being sought. A student applying for entry-level work in film, for example, may be prone to foreground their student-film director credits, and entirely fail to highlight evidence of organisational capabilities, or their (albeit humble) real-world

work experience, or even their clean driving licence: attributes far more likely to result in an entry-level hire.

The development of human capital, then, requires a knowledge of the industry, and a meta-cognitive understanding of the whole of their curriculum as it may be related to work and its utility. It implies the ability to systematically draw on each aspect of their degree programme (and related work experiences), to identify actual and potential applications within an employment context. Furthermore, it requires them to articulate and illustrate these applications in such a way that their value and economic utility become explicit.

Social capital

Social capital is 'the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual . . . ' (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998, 243). Within the context of the five capitals discussed here, it can usefully be thought of as providing a platform on which *human* capital is mobilised. These points of human interaction, mutual recognition, acquaintance and friendship are not acquired instantaneously, but are accumulated (and often carefully nurtured) over time. Of particular significance is the extent to which 'meaningful and gainful interactions between graduates and employers' are developed, which is of benefit 'not only through accessing valuable employer knowledge but also making graduates more directly visible to employers' (Tomlinson 2017, 343).

In the context of media work, the foremost expression of social capital is the well-established practice of networking. Getting in and 'getting on' in this freelance-dominated work environment requires establishing and maintaining a network of contacts: 'a process which involves presenting one's self as flexible, enthusiastic and mobile' (Lee 2011, 552). In this context, an up-to-date contact book, and being connected to people (and people who know other people), becomes essential for finding and sustaining work. Grugulis and Stoyanova (2012) have argued that networking in media industries plays three significant roles: first, connecting those seeking work with those who are looking to identify and recruit 'suitable people' beyond a recruiter's immediate contacts, through recommendation; second, providing a 'personalized form of quality control' (1315), since the reputation of the prospective worker is usually based on the recommendation of someone already known; and third, ensuring cohesive and easy-to-manage teamworking, since workers are 'actively hired for their good attitudes, willingness to work and ability to get on with their colleagues' (1315). For those students able to acquire it, work experience provides a powerful platform from which to begin this process.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the shortcomings of this kind of over-reliance on social capital for getting in, and getting on in these industries (Olusoga 2020). Its particular role in reinforcing the status quo needs not only to be understood, but also critiqued. Bourdieu has long since shown how social capital aligns with class. Developing awareness of the social structures that determine differential status between individuals, and learning how to manage (and even challenge) them, is an essential part of helping students to survive and thrive in these industries. Students need to understand its *raison d'être*, as well as to acquire practical skills and the confidence to navigate a problematic process.

Educating for social capital, then, needs to include an understanding of how this capital operates within a media context. The campus can provide a protected environment in which networking can be rehearsed and developed, reinforcing the important message that these immediate relationships can extend into future working lives (Wallis, Van Raalte, and Allegrini 2020). Students need to be able to identify and judge the appropriateness of networking opportunities open to them, and to begin to make meaningful connections. They also need to be encouraged to reflect upon, and critique the process.

Whilst in-the-room networking events are likely to continue to play an important role, online social networks are becoming increasingly significant, particularly since Covid-19. The ubiquity of

social media, and its role in networking within the television industry, was noted by Lee (2018) who discusses how Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, in particular, are used for 'catching up', as well as 'for instrumental reasons related to gaining employment or competitive advantage in the labour market' (147). Social media is now an essential tool for any graduate. At the same time, broader ethical concerns related to its application are also important for students to understand, including the implications of the commercial uses of their personal data (Komljenovic 2019).

Cultural capital

Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, disposition and behaviour that are recognised and valued within the particular work culture that the individual aspires to be part of. Bourdieu (1977) employed the idea of cultural capital as a way of explaining the unequal educational achievement of children that consistently reflected their particular social class. The more successful children demonstrated an easy familiarity with the cultural expectations of the school, expressed through their language, their manners, their preferences and their general orientation. Cultural capital, then, allows the graduate to demonstrate their awareness of 'the rules of engagement and modes of behaviour' and enables them to 'signal their desirability and likely "social fit" within organisations' (Tomlinson 2017, 349). Though highly consequential, the process is often a barely perceptible one.

Students need to understand the way in which certain forms of cultural capital have governed behaviour within media-related industries. Only a generation ago in the UK, public school culture and Oxbridge dominated (particularly at the BBC). As Bourdieu (1984) has demonstrated in his masterful French study of the subject, *distinction* is a highly subtle process. Whilst cultural references and their relative value change, both from workplace to workplace and over time ('old school ties' may count for less today than in the past) they are replaced by other (often subtler) forms of distinction that are every bit as potent.

The interdependence and combined significance of social and cultural capital in relation to employability cannot be overestimated in a context in which non-standard, informal recruitment practices remain the norm. Knowing the right people, speaking the same language and being a 'known quantity' is assumed to be common sense in short term, project-based work such as those of film and television. A lack of formal process in recruiting also reinforces systemic biases embedded in what may be considered to be the 'normal' demands of the job. One of the foremost reasons given by women for having to leave television, for example, is their exclusion from 'an almost exclusive informal recruitment system' (O'Brien 2014). Similar structural obstacles to finding and keeping work in the film and television industries also include class, ethnicity and disability (CAMEo 2018).

In order to effectively navigate their careers, students have to understand this terrain, not to promote the cultural behaviours and practices of others, but to help them to develop their own form of cultural confidence. Indeed, as is now widely recognised, the future health of these industries depends on media workers who will challenge deficit views of the cultural norms of those who happen not to be part of a dominant monoculture (Yosso 2005). The point is that whether adapting to, adopting or contesting the cultural norms of a particular work environment, graduates need to be equipped to recognise them and to identify where they have (and where they do not have) agency.

Identity capital

Identity capital refers to the individual's ability and readiness to position and present a version of themselves that encapsulates a distinctive quality ideally suited to the work opportunity that they seek. In the market-place of employment, the way in which a graduate is able to signal aspects of their personality, their interests and their enthusiasms, as well as their attitude and approach to work, will determine the extent to which they are able to 'stand out'. It is more than two decades since US business management consultant, Tom Peters, famously exhorted his readers to imagine themselves

to be CEOs of their own companies: 'the brand called You' (Peters 1997). For many educators, self-branding as part of the necessary capital of a graduate, flies in the face of the belief that merit alone should be the appropriate basis of recognition and reward. Yet, in a reputation economy, identity matters, and nowhere more so than media work. As with other capitals, the point here is not to condone prevailing employment practices, but to expose and explain them to our students, to ensure that, as graduates, they are equipped to navigate them:

> If marketability is now a significant component of employability then graduates need to be primed in the ability to present a compelling employability narrative that conveys their identities. The accumulation of work-related achievements and experiences in turn become markers of potential organisational value. (Tomlinson 2017, 347)

Many students are already engaged in sophisticated forms of online personal branding and impression management (Mendelson and Papacharissi 2010), and are quick to understand the concept of the presentation of self (borrowing from Goffman) through multiple forms of self-performance and exhibition (Hogan 2010). However, what is not always immediately understood (to persist with Goffman's metaphor) is the implication of the employer as audience. The mistaken belief that a student's personality, skills and abilities will be recognised if only they can be clearly communicated, often has to be challenged. In particular, students have to learn that it is the employer's needs and priorities, rather than the skills they believe that they have to offer the employer, that are the primary determining criteria in effective self-presentation; and that this kind of self-presentation is necessarily bespoke, not generic. Students are often surprised by the suggestion that they should assume that their online profile, their showreel, their 'elevator pitch' or even their CV will need to be tailored to a particular prospective employer in precisely the same way as they would expect a covering letter to. Such is the curatorial process of identity management. At the same time, teaching about the significance of self-branding and identity positioning necessitates a broader understanding of the online economy, and the nature of the marketplace in which such platforms operate. Career readiness must mean being able to make judgements that reflect a critical understanding of how these platforms work, not just their monopolising tendencies, but the inevitable *quid pro quo* involved in using them in exchange for personal data.

Psychological capital

The fifth set of resources that work readiness requires is mental preparedness, or *psychological* capital. Within the field of positive psychology, psychological capital (or 'PsyCap') is defined as:

> . . . an individual's positive psychological state of development [. . .] characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resiliency) to attain success. (Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio 2007, 3)

Confidence, optimism, hope and resilience are often assumed to be personality traits, with the implication that these are not attributes that can be taught or learned. Yet to accept this is to accept the counsel of despair. Media work, more than most, can be beset with disappointment, setbacks and the need for adaptability. Learning to manage uncertainty, unpredictability and adversity, and coping with disappointment and rejection in often highly competitive working environments, as well as the considerable emotional demands that come with the intensity that media work can involve, is as important an element of work readiness as the other capitals considered here.

Recent research into the well-being of those working in the UK's film and television industries has identified significantly poorer levels of mental health when compared to the national average: 87% of those surveyed reported having experienced a mental health problem at some point in their lives (compared with 65%) (Wilkes, Carey, and Florisson 2020). Statistics such as these were attributed to conditions of work, an unhealthy work culture, and a lack of industry support. Respondents

described intense working conditions consisting of often extremely long working hours; a feeling of a lack of control over their working lives and a consequent lack of work–life balance (missing out on opportunities for relaxation, exercise and spending time with friends and family). Managing the expectation and resilience of students must play an important role in career readiness.

Resilience is a 'dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity' (Suniya et al. 2000, 543). Two critical conditions are implicit: an individual's exposure to severe adversity and the achievement of positive adaptation despite such adversity. Education can play a role both in preparing graduates to manage aspects of their individual exposure to it, and their positive adaptation when adversity cannot be avoided. Tomlinson (2017) suggests that there are two key practical concerns that arise in consideration of career adaptability: the necessity of flexible contingency planning in early career management and guidance; and the need for expectation management and learning coping mechanisms for stresses and setbacks.

> If graduates are primed to believe that, after a relatively smooth (and, in many cases, successful) experience through prior education they will fall seamlessly into chosen pathways this may intensify the level of challenge and apprehension when faced with experiences discordant with these expectations. A key issue here is expectation management and the promotion of related mindsets around flexibility and career malleability. (Tomlinson 2017, 348)

This kind of priming, based on the principle that to be forewarned is to be forearmed, is essential if graduates are to have the psychological capacity to respond proactively to these kinds of adversities. As well as being able to recognise systemic causal features, coping strategies and premeditated responses can also be taught and learned, along with knowledge about relevant and appropriate support mechanisms on which to draw when required.

Conclusion

The dilemma faced by those teaching students aspiring to media work is to simultaneously provide the best possible foundation on which graduates can build meaningful careers, without condoning the problematic issues and uncertainties that remain pervasive. In this article it has been argued that whilst employability has not always been assumed to be the main purpose of a university education (Collini 2012), the notion of graduate employability may be usefully adopted when interpreted broadly, and thought of in terms of career readiness. In order to survive and thrive in media careers over time, a balance has to be struck between idealism and pragmatism. For those teaching aspiring media workers, the graduate capitals advocated by Tomlinson (2017) provide a valuable conceptual framework. These five different forms of capital are interrelated, and feed off and into each other. Human capital, with its 'hard' and its 'soft skills' (be they general or job-specific) are not on their own, sufficient for career readiness. Giving too much credence to what employers consider to be their 'needs' is a dangerous strategy. Indeed, as Hesketh has argued, 'it may be the very aspects of higher education that the world of business rejects that furnishes the development of a more highly effective graduate labour force' (Hesketh 2000, 269). Human capital skills are deployed and developed in the context of social interaction with those who can facilitate access to work, and over time, progression opportunities. This is made possible through a developed cultural familiarity, and with a deep-rooted understanding of, and sensitivity to work behaviours and expectations. All the while, the graduate is needing to manage this process strategically with a well-developed sense of their own identity and how to communicate about themselves, equipped with the psychological resources to cope with the inevitable challenges and setbacks that will occur along the way. It is a framework that provides the structure for an employability curriculum that is both instrumental and critical. Such a curriculum is necessary, if not sufficient. This store-of-value notion of capital is not a useful framework to help students gain insight into the serendipitous nor the essentially transacted (or 'process-relational') nature of an individual's career journey (Dépelteau 2018). Neither is the idea of career readiness as set out here a panacea, and the dilemma involved in teaching students how to

establish and maintain suitable media careers over time will always be difficult to reconcile with the need for systemic reforms. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a broad-based employability education of this kind must be in the interest of the individual graduate; the employer and industry more broadly, needing responsive and proactive workers who can contribute to industry-wide improvements and developments; and society more widely, which needs sustainable industries that can develop and survive the collective challenges of a fast-changing world.

Conflicts of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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