



**ENHANCING BUSINESS UNDERGRADUATES'  
SKILLS AND FUTURE EMPLOYABILITY  
THROUGH  
CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT**

A Thesis submitted by

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## **Abstract**

There is currently a gap between employer expectations of the skills graduates should possess on entry to the workforce and the skills that new graduates possess. The new knowledge economy, emerging as a result of technological advancement, needs business graduates with flexible mindsets and transferable skill sets, capable of innovating and adapting to dynamic work environments. Many Australian companies are unable to attract competent and quality workers, with business leaders often citing poor business acumen, lack of relevant skills and real world experience as serious shortcomings leading to employers deeming new graduates as not work-ready.

For universities to stay relevant, they will have to be proactive rather than reactive, challenge existing pedagogies and re-examine their teaching approaches in higher education in order to add value to students' learning and the community. To achieve this, course curricula must develop learning, teaching and assessment practices to encourage employability development to take place alongside developments in discipline specialisations. The importance of developing employability skills has been acknowledged by business, government and universities. Universities are now focusing on developing employability skills in students to prepare them for work in different work contexts and dynamic business environments (Barrie 2006; Bridgstock 2009).

The objective of this thesis is to study how one Australian university used a Career Development Learning activity to facilitate future employability preparation and development in first year business students in an Accounting course as part of careers education. Through personal student journal reflections, a majority of students found the experiential activity beneficial in helping them prepare for future employability. Through this activity, they learned about the skills required for successful careers and encouraged them to identify practical ways to improve their employability prospects.

The findings will be used to extend the Systems Theory Framework in Career Development and may assist academics and career practitioners to better prepare their business students to seek suitable post-graduation employment, thereby assisting to narrow the employer-graduate expectations gap.

## **Certification of Thesis**

This thesis is entirely the work of Raymond Yew Pong LEONG except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Student and supervisors signatures of endorsement are held at USQ.

## **Publications**

During the course of the research, a number of journal articles and conference proceedings were published and presented. They were:

Leong, Raymond and Kavanagh, Marie (2013) A Work Integrated Learning (WIL) framework to develop graduate skills and attributes in an Australian university's accounting program. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 14(1), pp. 1-14.

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Leong, Raymond and Kavanagh, Marie (2010) Reflection of employability skills through Work Integrated Learning activities in a first year accounting course. In: ACEN 2010: Work Integrated Learning (WIL): Responding to Challenges, 29 Sep - 1 Oct 2010, Perth, Australia.

Leong, Raymond and Kavanagh, Marie (2010) A literature review of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) in accounting: developments in the last decade and future directions. In: ACEN 2010: Work Integrated Learning (WIL): Responding to Challenges, 29 Sep - 1 Oct 2010, Perth, Australia.

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## **1. CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Research Topic**

This thesis reports on an initiative within an Australian university to enhance business undergraduate students' employability. The objective of the thesis is to understand the role career development and management activities play in assisting students to start to prepare early in their undergraduate studies for graduate level work after graduation. The perceived benefits of these activities, which form part of the university's Work Integrated Learning program, and their impact on students, are subsequently addressed.

This chapter provides the foundation for the thesis. Firstly, it outlines the need to prepare university business undergraduate students well for future employability. Next, literature examining the role and importance of Australian universities in enhancing the future employability of business students is reviewed. The research problem and research questions are then stated and justified on theoretical and practical grounds. The next section then outlines the key terms, definitions and format used in the thesis. Delimitations are then described. The final section describes the scope of the research, justifies the boundaries of this thesis and unpacks key assumptions.

### **1.2. Background to the Research**

Prior to discussing background information about the role universities play in students' skills development in career education, the importance of graduate employability is examined.

#### **1.2.1. Changing Times and Employability**

Our way of life including the way we work has been dramatically altered by globalisation as a result of rapid advances in information technology, communications, mass media and significant demographic shifts (Miles Morgan Australia 2010). Globalisation is a multidimensional and multilateral process that crosses national borders and systems and has facilitated greater connectedness throughout the world. In the last decade, there has been an emergence of massively disrupted economies and business models are increasingly changed and shaped by technological innovations. These will accelerate the displacement of existing jobs and create future jobs which

require more sophisticated skill sets and abilities (Oliver 2015). Today, the concept of a 'job for life' is no longer relevant and competition for jobs is intense. In the past, most working adults entered the labour force at a time when jobs were abundant and full-time employment was the norm. A job-for-life was the expectation and working to achieve personal satisfaction was not a priority. Gone are the days where an individual could obtain a single qualification that would sustain them throughout their entire working lives.

Most young adults today will change jobs numerous times throughout their working lives. One possible influence is the trend away from permanent employment to contract, project or casual work (Bradley et al. 2008). Consequently, the old three-stage pattern of preparing for work, working and retiring is changing. Now, both the individual and the labour market are subject to constant variations and transitioning from one work situation to another is recurring and to be expected (Miles Morgan Australia 2010). In addition to these trends, a continued economic and financial crisis in recent years means that university graduates continue to experience increased difficulty in securing suitable employment (Kinash & Crane 2015)

The complex, unpredictable and globalised nature of the current labour market challenges the assumptions and utility of traditional career development theories with new approaches needed in order to help employees navigate their career experience (Amundson, Mills & Smith 2014). Life in current environments is dynamic, unpredictable and uncertain (Amundson, Mills & Smith 2014). The new knowledge economy, emerging as a result of technological advancement, needs graduates across disciplines with flexible mindsets and transferable skill sets, capable of innovating and adapting to a dynamic work environment.

An uncertain and changing landscape also requires a very different approach to business. An approach that values holism and systems design thinking where curiosity and questioning is natural and thinking 'outside-the-box' is a common necessity. This requires a very different form of education than what we currently have – one that places an emphasis on creativity, innovation and uniqueness (McGuigan & Kern 2015).

### **1.2.2. Employability Skills Gaps in Graduates**

The gap that exists between employer expectations of the skills graduates should possess on entry to the workforce and the skills that new graduates possess has been an issue for some time (Crebert et al. 2004; DeLange & Watty 2011; Hancock, P; et al. 2009; Kavanagh & Drennan 2008). Discipline-based knowledge in tertiary business education alone does not meet all the needs of employers and new ways are needed to deliver and assess relevant competencies and capabilities of employable graduates (Business Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council 2007; Crebert et al. 2004; International Federation of Accountants Education Committee 2003; Jackson & Hancock 2010). Employers have continued to judge new graduates as ‘not work ready’ (Business Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council 2007; Jackson, Sibson & Riebe 2013; Kavanagh & Drennan 2008; Moore & Morton 2015; Nagarajan & Edwards 2014). Therefore, there is a current need to explore what makes a well-rounded, employable graduate (DeLange & Watty 2011).

A study by Kavanagh and Drennan (2008) found that while employers still expect a base level of technical skills, they also require ‘business awareness’ and an understanding of the ‘real world’. Hancock, P; et al. (2009) report that employers seek graduates who possess a diverse range of non-technical generic skills including written and verbal communication, self-management, teamwork, initiative and enterprise, problem-solving, technological competence, planning and organising skills. These employers use such skills as discriminators when evaluating graduates. In the workplace, conscientiousness, dedication and an ability to deal with complexity, uncertainty and pressure are also highly valued. The relative importance of professional skills, which encompass intellectual, interpersonal and communication, personal and organisational skills is reflected in the 2013 Graduate Outlook survey for four of the most important selection criteria in accounting and finance (Lindsay & Edge 2014). ‘Soft skills’ or ‘twenty-first century’ skills and abilities such as communication, critical thinking, teamwork and creativity are highly sought after (Moore & Morton 2015).

Of importance for graduates seeking employment is their development of the capacity to engage with the profession over time as part of seeking a career in that profession

(Freudenberg, Brimble & Cameron 2009; Hooley et al. 2013). Consequently, developing employability skills for graduates is an issue for the higher education sector, not only in relation to the first job students start after graduation, but also in terms of employment prospects at future points of career development (Pegg et al. 2012). For example, accounting graduates need to possess well developed professional skills on their entry into the profession as well as evolving professional knowledge and a solid core of professional values, ethics and attitudes (O'Connell et al. 2015).

For this reason, it is important that students learn to position themselves in relation to future work and what they perceive to be appropriate and meaningful courses of future action (Holmes 2013; Tomlinson 2007). This can be facilitated through career building and management as part of career education (Hooley et al. 2013; Patton 2001). Indeed, employability involves far more than possession of generic skills listed by graduate employers as attractive. Rather, for optimal economic and social outcomes, graduates must be able to proactively navigate the world of work and self-manage the career building process (Birch et al. 1999; Bridgstock 2009; Hooley et al. 2013; Kennedy & Haines 2008).

However, generic skills are still valued by employers who perceive their effective development to be a continued challenge for universities. A large scale study of Accounting employers found that the majority consider skill development to be the responsibility of higher education providers (Hancock, P. et al. 2009). Employers have strong views about the employability skills required but perceive that new business graduates are not being taught adequate generic skills in their programs (Barrie 2006; Hancock, P; et al. 2009; Jackling & De Lange 2009; Jackson 2014b, 2015). Consequently, it is argued that universities must develop the transferable, generic skills required by graduates to advance their careers and contribute to the economic innovation and social development (Bunney, Sharplin & Howitt 2015).

### **1.2.3. Challenges for Universities**

Since academic efforts to teach employability skills to date are at best producing mixed results (Cranmer 2006; Jackson 2013b), some have argued that resources would be better utilised in increasing employment-based training and work experience for graduates (Jackling & De Lange 2009).

University business programs have been challenged to make their curriculum more relevant to practice (Albrecht & Sack 2000; Bunney, Sharplin & Howitt 2015; Howieson 2003). Some authors assert that for universities to stay relevant, they will have to rethink their role, be proactive rather than reactive, challenge existing pedagogies and re-examine their teaching approaches in higher education in order to add value to students' learning and the community (Albrecht & Sack 2000; Howieson 2003; Jones 2010). They argue that to achieve this, course curricula must incorporate learning, teaching and assessment practices to encourage employability development that take place alongside developments in discipline specialisations (Jackson 2015; Knight & Yorke 2002; Pegg et al. 2012). Some have also proposed that programs and degrees need to incorporate more real world experiences and academics should be expected to engage more directly with professional practice through both teaching and research (O'Connell et al. 2015). This is related to the idea that universities have an obligation to develop the transferable, generic skills that graduates will need to advance in their careers and contribute to economic innovation and social development (Bunney, Sharplin & Howitt 2015). They need to help to develop work experience programs etc. that have been shown to develop graduates' skills greatly (DeLange & Watty 2011).

In an increasingly competitive labour market, it is vital that students are equipped with all the necessary qualities to gain and retain fulfilling employment. As part of the efforts to improve the quality of graduates, universities have been urged to develop and embed appropriate knowledge and skills through teaching and scholarship to enable self-fulfilment and personal development for students. The intention is to equip graduates with critical analysis skills and independent thought to support a highly productive and professional labour force (Jackson, Sibson & Riebe 2013). This will help to prepare them to be future leaders in a diverse and dynamic global working

environment (Bradley et al. 2008; Carpenter, Dearlove & Marland 2015; De La Harpe & David 2012).

In response to calls for greater engagement, business schools in Australian universities; including the Accounting discipline, value the input of industry and professional bodies in the design of accounting degree programs. Professional bodies such as these have also been prescribing specific attributes, skills and standards for the curriculum (CPA Australia & The Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia 2005). As a result, a key focus for the professional bodies and universities is the development of a range of technical and non-technical (generic) skills. For example, the Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Statement for Accounting produced as an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) standards project (Australian Business Deans Council 2010) emphasised the need for generic skills such as professional judgement, knowledge, application, communication, teamwork and personal management skills. These educational outcomes are aimed at enhancing the ability of graduates to apply acquired technical skills in a variety of contexts and situations and equip them with life-long learning capabilities (Australian Business Deans Council 2010; Bunney, Sharplin & Howitt 2015).

#### **1.2.4. Careers Education in Universities**

Universities have applied the graduate skills and attributes framework as a means of addressing various employability skills in career education as part of the graduate skill set through curriculum redesign, course content and delivery strategy (Albrecht & Sack 2000; Australian Collaborative Education Network 2015; Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2011; UniversitiesAustralia 2008). They have sought to articulate graduate outcomes related to a university education by identifying combinations of requisite skills and attributes of their graduates (Barrie 2006). Ideally, graduate skills and attributes are developed progressively in a scaffolded manner and developed over time in an undergraduate degree program (Bridgstock et al. 2012; Kift 2009; Sharma & Hannafin 2004; Sin, Jones & Petocz 2007).

In education, scaffolding refers to various instructional techniques used to enhance students' progression toward stronger understanding and greater independence in the

learning process. The development of generic capabilities takes time. It is important to develop students' generic capabilities over the three or more years of an undergraduate degree by scaffolding students' learning of capabilities during the years of study (Ramsden 2003). With appropriate scaffolding, learners can gradually build confidence and learn the career building/management skills they need to become independently responsible for their own learning (Kift 2009; Sharma & Hannafin 2004). As they move from their first year of study to the final year, scaffolding is withdrawn and activities become less structured, but the cognitive processes developed should remain, enabling students to apply what they have learnt to new problems in new and relevant contexts (Bridgstock et al. 2012; Sharma & Hannafin 2004).

Universities are now focusing on developing employability skills in students to prepare them for work in different work contexts and dynamic business environments (Barrie 2006; Bridgstock 2009). One of the ways universities seek to address this issue is through the development of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) programs, making industry experience a pre-requisite of undergraduate business programs (Australian Collaborative Education Network 2015; Lebihan 2007).

### **1.3. Research Problem, Research Questions and Justifications**

Many Australian companies' are unable to attract competent employees, often citing poor business acumen, lack of relevant skills and attributes and real world experience as serious shortcomings (Gamble, Patrick & Peach 2010). This had led to employers deeming new graduates as unemployable and 'not work ready' (Business Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council 2007; Jackson, Sibson & Riebe 2013; Kavanagh & Drennan 2008; Moore & Morton 2015; Nagarajan & Edwards 2014). The gap between employer expectations of the skills business graduates should possess on entry to the workforce and the skills that new graduates possess has been widening in recent years (Crebert et al. 2004; Hancock, P; et al. 2009; Kavanagh & Drennan 2008).

In essence, the research problem may be phrased as follows:

***Many new university business graduates do not practise career development and are considered unemployable in the current business environment because the skill sets and attributes of these graduates do not match the expectations of potential employers.***

The main objective of this research study is to examine the effectiveness of a Career Development Learning (CDL) activity in an Australian, Business Faculty's Work Integrated Learning (WIL) program. The aim of the program was to facilitate career development learning in career education of a demographically diversified first year business student cohort in an undergraduate accounting course to enhance future employability. According to Oliver (2015), WIL includes 'a range of learning tasks that either resemble those expected of working graduates in their early careers, or are proximal to the workplaces or spaces, physical or digital, where professional work occurs'.

Data was extracted from students' personal reflection journals, which were part of a formal assessment within a first year core course in Accounting. The data analysis focused on students' perceptions of useful employability skills and attributes required in the work environment, benefits of career development presentations, recognition of personal areas for improvement and their intended courses of action as part of their intended future career development process. The data collected may assist career guidance professionals and academics in universities in helping students to identify opportunities and suitable activities to participate in during their university studies to enhance their employability skills. Through students' participation in such, they will enhance their work-readiness and in the process, enhance their future employability prospects.

To date, there has been ample research in employability from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders including government, employers, higher education institutions and graduates. However, the views of undergraduates, especially for first year students as the recipients of employability development are not well researched (Jackson 2014b; Tymon 2013). There appears to be little empirical evidence about students'

perceptions of skills development in universities despite the presence of numerous graduate employability frameworks and models to enhance work-readiness (Jackson 2013a).

This study explores business undergraduates' perceptions of their current level of work-readiness and how they intend to meet the employability needs of potential employers in future. The study was also conducted to heed a call by Jackson for more research studies on first year students to embrace the multi-dimensional nature of graduate employability (Jackson 2013b). The first research question is formulated to examine students' views on employability skills and attributes expected of a business graduate:

***RQ1: What are first year undergraduate business students' perceptions of generic skills and attributes that enhance future employability prospects?***

Integration and contextualisation of generic skills development as well as the provision of adequate student support is necessary from foundation to final years (Bridgstock et al. 2012; Bunney, Sharplin & Howitt 2015). Students should begin career development in the early stage of their degree program and progressively make use of their time in university to develop and hone relevant skills to enhance their employability prospects upon graduation (Bridgstock et al. 2012). For example, Tate et al. (2015) suggested that a first year course should include career education covering important topics such as career exploration and career choice.

The second research question is formulated to address the benefits or otherwise of Career development activities including career exploration and preparation.

***RQ2: Are Career Development Learning activities that introduce career education in an undergraduate first year core business course perceived as useful in enhancing future graduate employability?***

A careers education can prepare university students to search and apply for graduate positions by developing their knowledge, confidence and ability to apply for jobs. Career counsellors and university academic staff can work with new undergraduate

students to build a personal employability profile beginning at a very early stage in their time at university (Tate et al. 2015).

Do first year business students possess the skills and attributes required for employability upon graduation? If not, what are the skills that need developing? A self-reflection on their strengths and weaknesses is necessary for students to assess their readiness for the workforce. In particular, the views of undergraduates, especially for first year students, as the recipients of employability development, are not well researched (Jackson 2013a; Tymon 2013). Hence, the third research question is formulated to gauge the perceived, current level of preparedness of students for future employability:

***RQ3: What skills do students perceive they currently have and what skills do they perceive need to be developed during their degree studies to improve their employability prospects?***

There is evidence to show that the number of students making use of university career guidance and counselling is relatively small (Athanasou & Esbroeck 2008; Patton & McIlveen 2009; Wright, Jenkins-Guarnieri & Murdock 2012). Many students do not take advantage of careers services or do so only in their final year of study. For this reason, Thomas and Jones (2007) suggested that the provision of careers education needs to be more proactive and to target specific groups to overcome the barriers faced by students especially from under-represented groups. McCowan C. and McKenzie (1997) argued that career education should be integrated within the curriculum rather than added as an extraneous service with its delivery shared by various parties and not by specialist groups such as career development practitioners alone.

If students perceive that they do not have the necessary skills to be job-ready, what are they going to do about it? Will they make use of Career Services provided by universities? What other actions can they take to help themselves? This leads to the fourth research question that is formulated to examine the learning benefits of the career development activity and the future actions students intend to take to improve their future employability:

***RQ4: What lessons do students perceive they have learnt from the Career Development Learning activity and what actions do they believe they can take to enhance their employability prospects?***

The findings of this question may assist career practitioners and academics to better target resources to assist and support students to be more employable.

#### **1.4. Methodology**

A phenomenographic methodology was used to study undergraduate business students' reflections on the usefulness of career development learning activities and the perceived skills and attributes of graduates required for employability.

##### **1.4.1. Phenomenography**

Phenomenography is a qualitative research methodology, within the interpretivist paradigm, that investigates the different ways in which people experience something or think about something (Marton 1986). It is essentially concerned with the subjective study of human experience and is used predominantly in educational research. Its ontological assumptions are subjectivist: the world exists and different people construct it in different ways (Bowden 2000). The central aim of a phenomenographic study is to identify different ways in which individuals experience, interpret, understand, perceive or conceptualise a certain phenomenon.

These experiences, interpretations and conceptions are generalised and categorised in the form of a number of 'categories of description'. Categories are then arranged in a logically inclusive structure, which provides a picture of the collective experience of the phenomenon within the group under analysis. This yields the range of meanings attributed to an underlying concept when experienced by the group as well as the relationships between these different meanings (Forster 2015). The basis of phenomenographic pedagogy is to make learners' conceptions explicit to them recognising that students studying the same phenomenon may perceive it in very different ways.

This research study uses the developmental phenomenography approach. Developmental phenomenographic research is undertaken with the purpose of using

the outcomes to help individuals to learn. The insights from the research outcomes can assist in the individual planning of future learning experiences in university which lead participants to a more powerful understanding of the skills and attributes required to enhance graduate employability. The outcomes of these studies can also be used by academics and career counsellors to develop generalisations about the ways to organise learning activities and experiences for students in their chosen field of study (Bowden 2000).

Phenomenographic studies offer value in producing useful insights into teaching and learning (Entwistle 1997). Phenomenography is closely associated with an interest in higher education practice, particularly the student learning experience through the encouragement of deep learning and the employment of various teaching approaches (Tight 2015; Webb 1997). This methodology sees learning as relational – it takes place through an interaction between the student, the content of the learning material and the overall learning environment (Biggs 1993; Entwistle 1997). The value of phenomenographic research is linked to the idea of its pedagogy which involves teaching for conceptual change. It is founded on the premise that students have to engage with various ways of viewing a phenomenon and that educators have to engage with alternative ways of viewing the students (Bowden 2000; Lucas 2001; Marton 1986).

#### **1.4.2. Reflective Learning**

In conducting this research study, constructivist theory was applied using career storytelling and reflective learning. Reflection as a process can lead to deeper learning (Boud 1985; Gibbs 1988; Moon, J. A. 2004; Raelin 2008). Reflection can generally be defined as a cognitive process carried out in order to learn from experiences (Moon, J. A. 2004) through individual inquiry and collaboration with others (Dewey 1933). The focus of reflection can vary from a concrete technical aspect of an experience to the broader societal context of that experience. The quality of reflection can be described through successive stages of augmentation: describing, justifying, evaluating and discussion (Leijen et al. 2012).

Over the past decade, constructivism has begun to assume a more central role in career theory and career counselling (Savickas 2002). Inherent to constructivism as applied to the careers context is the recognition that individuals are active agents in the production of their careers. The lifelong process of career construction is done in story or narrative form from the perspective of constructivism (Bassot 2012; McMahon & Watson 2008, 2011; McMahon, Watson & Patton 2015). According to this viewpoint, the individual learner has a degree of control over personal destiny, with society having a lesser effect and the individual is encouraged to be an agent in control of his/her own actions. They construct their narratives, enabling individuals to find their place in the situations they encounter (Bassot 2012).

Career stories are contextually located within the lives of individuals. In the telling of stories, individuals position themselves as the primary narrator and character of their stories: in this way their identity is constructed over time. Thus, storytelling represents the recursive relationship between life experience, the identity construction, learning and the creation of meaning. By constructing these narratives, learners engage in career development, reflecting on meaning through processes of interpretation. Individual narratives consist of accounts of the past, which are then extrapolated into the future. As learners engage in career development, they can be supported in the formulation of their narratives by career professionals, enabling them to progress from their current position towards potentially brighter futures.

The career learning initiative examined in this study incorporated Career Development Learning (CDL) in the early stages of an undergraduate business degree program. Career Development Learning is used as the overarching term that describes deliberate activities that contribute to the improvement of an individual's employability prospects including the achievement of effective transitions from the university to the workplace.

Critical reflection is an important skill to master in university. It is a means for students to learn more about themselves, gain, maintain awareness of, express and explore their abilities in general and in recruitment processes and is part of lifelong learning (Boud 1985; Hayward, Blackmer & Raelin 2007; Lew & Schmidt 2011; Moon, J. A. 2004).

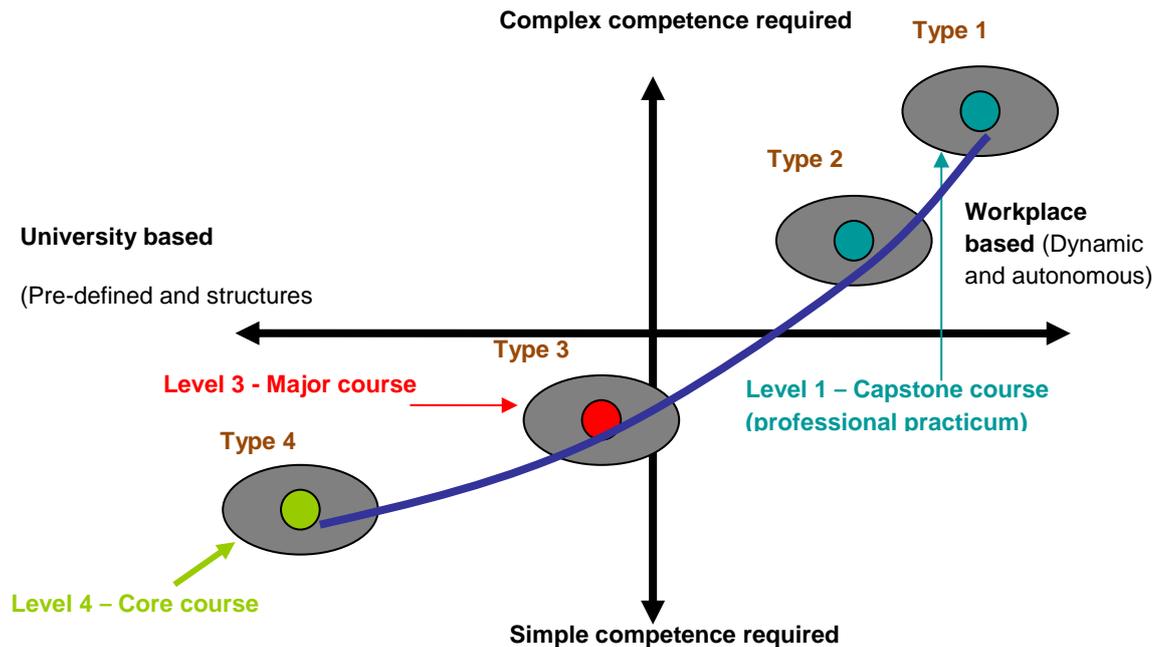
Reflective learning is at the core of CDL. McIlveen and Patton (2006) have suggested that including CDL activities in WIL can enhance its capacity for reflective learning (McIlveen & Patton 2006; Raelin et al. 2008). Career Development Learning can be used to facilitate students' preparation for WIL or to reflect upon learning during and after a work placement to make the experience personally meaningful (Coulson et al. 2010; Edgar, Francis-Coad & Connaughton 2013; Patton 2007). To enhance future employability, students need to be able to review fluently their processes of learning and their achievements in higher education that are relevant to a job and to use reflection to support further learning from experience on the job.

Within the Australian higher education context (McCowan C. & McKenzie 1997; Patton & McMahon 2001), CDL aims to assist students to develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of themselves (Fullana et al. 2014; Lucas 2001). This, in turn, will help students to develop their knowledge and understanding of the range of career opportunities available, to learn how to make choices from available options and to effectively manage the implementation of the selected choices in adult life and work life. This can be done through reflection. CDL requires students to engage in processes of self-assessment in terms of individual characteristics such as knowledge, skills and interests and perform an appraisal of the context in which the student situates learning in relation to his or her discipline or profession. As a process of self-managed learning and growth, CDL lends itself to teaching and learning approaches that use reflection in higher learning.

Providing students with the opportunities to gain the necessary skills, knowledge, understanding and attributes is obviously important, but so too is providing opportunities for reflection on and evaluation of the learning experiences that have already taken place (Raelin et al. 2008). Without these opportunities, a student is unlikely to give full consideration to how far they have come in developing their employability and what they may need to do in order to develop it further. In addition, reflection and evaluation activity is key to the development of the three Ss' namely self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem (Moon, J. 2004). The three closely-linked 'Ss' provide a crucial link between knowledge, skills, experience, personal attributes and employability (Pool & Sewell 2007).

### 1.4.3. Work Integrated Learning Framework

The Career Development Learning initiative has been implemented by applying the O’Shea Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Framework (O’Shea 2008) in the Faculty of Business at University of Southern Queensland. This Framework seeks to effectively develop essential career development and employability skills of business students at the undergraduate level in a systematic manner. The O’Shea WIL Framework is depicted in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1 O’Shea Work Integrated Learning Framework (O’Shea 2008)**

The O’Shea WIL Framework (O’Shea 2008) explicitly embeds skills development in three separate undergraduate business courses in a scaffolded manner. These are done through a Career Development Learning Type 4 activity in a compulsory business course in the first year, a service learning Type 3 activity in a major course in the second year and culminates in a Type 1/Type 2 Work Integrated Learning capstone course in the final year.

The four types of WIL are:

Type 1 – Professional practicum. This is a supervised, unpaid work-based placement providing students with the opportunity to explore their chosen industry, while developing and demonstrating the relevant professional standards, ethics and competencies and gaining course credit.

Type 2 – Work placement. This is an opportunity for students to complete unpaid work, supervised and supported in a professional role related to students' studies. Course credit is applicable.

Type 3 – Industry and Community Project. This could take the form of one off unpaid work or community focussed projects that provide students with the opportunity to put their newly acquired knowledge and skills into practice in the world of work. This activity may be completed as part of regular courses.

Type 4 – Work samples and training. This type of activity may involve projects or work-related events designed, delivered and supervised by the university as part of a course such as visiting professionals, field trips, industry based case studies and university supported participation in community and industry activities.

At USQ, Career Development Learning was introduced into a first year, core business course, Accounting for Decision Making, to raise students' awareness of employability skills and to self-manage their career development process during university and undertake extra-curricular activities to maximise their future employability (Leong 2012b). This approach was implemented through curriculum-integrated strategies in which CDL is applied as an explicit vehicle for the development of course-level learning outcomes (Smith et al. 2009). Career and work-related tasks and events were designed, delivered and supervised by the university and formed the start of a student's career management process.

#### **1.4.4. Career Development Learning at USQ**

In this research study, the student cohort enrolled in a first year business core course ACC1101 Accounting for Decision Making students in semester 1 of 2012 were asked to write an 800-word, personal, descriptive reflection journal about campus presentations on 'Career Development and Employability'. These presentations were delivered by the University's Careers and Employment staff in collaboration with the core course academic staff at the university's three campuses in Toowoomba,

Springfield and Fraser Coast. The contents delivered included the employability skills covered in the Employability for the Future Framework and were identical across all campuses. The assessment required on-campus students to attend and listen to a guest presentation on Career development and management at their campus and to write a reflection journal on their campus presentation. For External students, students had to choose one recorded presentation on which to write their reflection journal.

As part of the business undergraduate program, students are taught to tailor their study programs to meet the expectations of employers in the job market through career building and management (Hancock, P; et al. 2009). They take responsibility for reviewing or assessing their own employability skills, addressing skills gaps and then pursuing appropriate ways to report or present relevant information about their skills to prospective employers when seeking employment (BIHECC 2007; Pool & Sewell 2007). Students in the study were, therefore, expected to be aware of the key employability skills and attributes required by employers and were asked to conduct a self-assessment of the strengths and deficiencies in their current employability profile. In view of students' perceived deficiencies, they were also expected to outline their courses of action to address the issues and improve their employability prospects. Their response to the benefits or otherwise of such career presentations were also sought.

The initiative under study adopted the good practice principle of 'constructive alignment', or aligning teaching activities, and learning activities, including assessment with intended learning outcomes (Biggs, 2003). Accordingly, resources were provided to support students to develop their assessment activities. Two additional readings on career development/management and reflection practices were also provided. Finally, students were also allowed to complete a similar recording for practice and self-reflection with suggested pointers on coverage and scope.

In assessing students' work, a qualitative assessment method of reflection writing was used. On completion of the assessment, students were assessed on their ability to meet the requirements of the assessment and achieve pre-determined course objectives including: an understanding of the need for career development building/management, understanding how effective career building can improve employability, knowing the

university's graduate qualities, understanding and applying common models of reflective practice and writing reflective journals to demonstrate learning. An assessment rubric was also developed (see Table 3.2) and provided as a reference to students (Leong 2012a). An assessment rubric is an assessment or scoring tool commonly found in a matrix or grid format and is an example of a criterion-referenced assessment (Sadler 2005).

#### **1.4.5. Data Analysis Method**

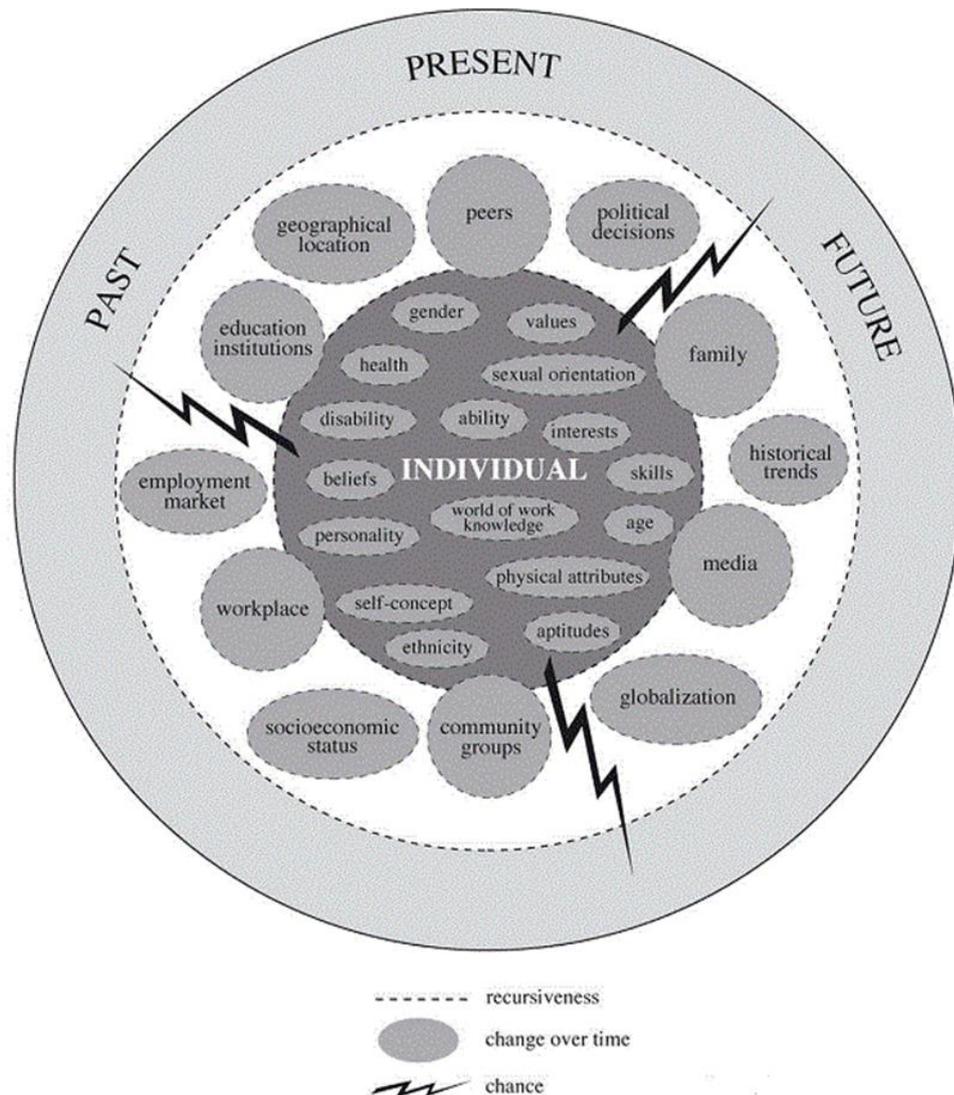
For the research study, students' reflection journals submitted in response to the Career Development Learning activity were collected and then subjected to thematic analysis. Texts from students' journals were analysed and coded. Coding is the process of examining the data and sorting it for finer-grained interpretation. The basic coding process in thematic analysis is to organise large quantities of text into much fewer content categories. Categories are patterns or themes that are directly expressed in the text or are derived from them through analysis. The goal is to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study and examine the variations in students' experiences in response to the career development activity conducted (Akerlind 2005).

This research study used the NVivo version 10 software to analyse the contents of student reflections. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software platform that is designed to facilitate common qualitative techniques for organising, analysing and sharing data (QSR International 2012). It allows users to import, sort and analyse rich text and plain text documents, audio files, spread sheets, databases, digital photos, PDFs, bibliographic data web pages and social media data (Flinders University 2014). It is a resource for researchers using qualitative research methods and approaches including in-depth interviews, focus groups, content analysis, ethnography and phenomenography (Flinders University 2014). This software helps researchers to manage, shape and make sense of unstructured information. One can also create queries to find and analyse the words or phrases in the sources, annotations and nodes.

#### **1.4.6. Career Development and Systems Theory Framework**

Reflection writing is particularly meaningful as it would ideally yield rich, comprehensive and in-depth data that could lead to theory building. The development

and extension of Patton and McMahon’s renowned Systems Theory Framework (STF) (Figure 1.2) in career development is used as the base framework to develop our understanding on factors that enhance employability of new graduates.



**Figure 1.2 Systems Theory Framework (STF)**

The individual’s skills element in this framework will be dissected and examined in more detail and their currency and relevance to employability will be analysed. A proposed Systems Theory Framework is illustrated later in Figure 1.3.

The STF is a holistic meta-theoretical framework that accommodates both the content influences and the process influences on the development of an individual’s career. Content influences include the personal qualities and characteristics intrinsic to individuals, as well as the influences of the context in which they live, such as the

individuals and organisations with whom they interact and the society and environment they live in. The influences of the intrapersonal system are also not static and a reciprocal interaction takes place between these influences as well as between them and the influences of the social environmental/societal context. Dynamic reciprocal processes occur whereby a change to one part of the system brings about change in all other parts of the system. The STF is thus a theoretical foundation that accounts for systems of influence on an individual's career development including individual, social and environmental/societal contexts (Patton & McMahon 1999, 2006, 2014).

According to existing career development literature, the individual and his or her career are constituted by personal influences such as self-concept and self-esteem, personality, ethnicity, physical attributes, aptitudes, age, skills, interests, ability, values, sexual orientation, gender health, disability beliefs and work knowledge, which recursively interact with broader contextual influences beyond them. Some of the other influences found within prominent topics in the career development literature include globalisation (Amundson, Mills & Smith 2014), rapid changes in labour markets and workplace reforms, the effects of social class (Liu & Ali 2005), race and ethnicity (Praskova, Creed & Hood 2015), family influence on career choice (Creed & Gagliardi 2015) and balancing the needs of family and work (Haratsis, Dood & Creed 2015).

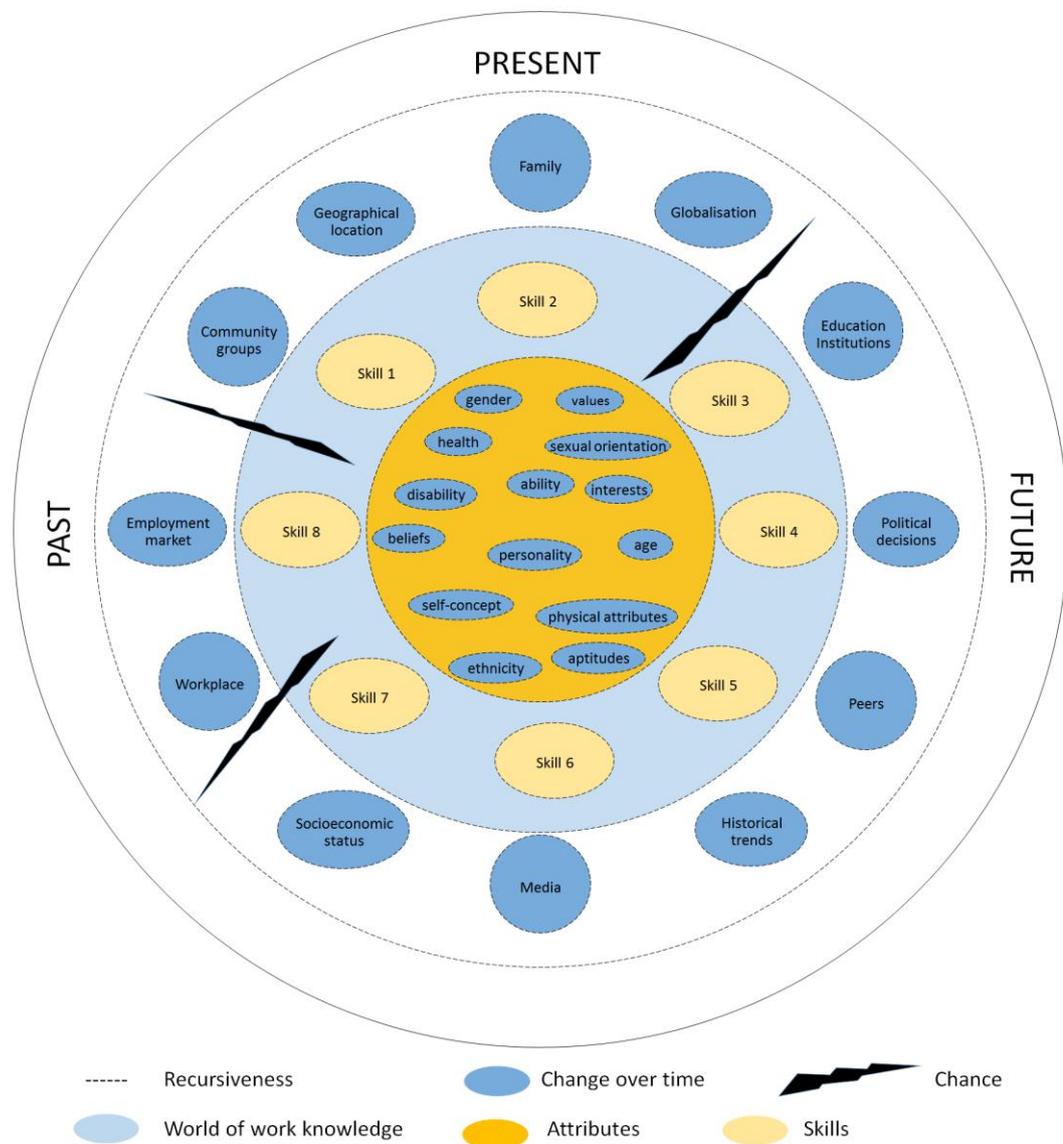
The STF is acclaimed by its proponents as a significant conceptual framework in career development (Bridgstock 2007; McIlveen 2007). It is construed as an overarching Framework within which all concepts of career development described in career theories can be usefully positioned and utilised in theory and practice (Patton & McMahon 2015). However, with the increasing impact of globalisation, societal and environmental influences will have a bigger impact on personal career choices and management. This framework has also been described as inadequate and incomplete; lacking in comprehensiveness and coherence and failing to account for diversity within the population (Beveridge et al. 2002; Patton & McMahon 2014).

Patton and McMahon's aim in creating the STF was not one of absolute comprehensiveness but to incorporate numerous influences and factors in a way that would assist personal career building and management and to assist career counsellors

in their jobs (Patton & McMahon 2015). Therefore, there is scope for the Framework structure to be improved and extended. For example, the existing Framework presupposes that the skills and attributes making up the individual are of equivalent significance and are all captured within in the inner circle entitled ‘Individual’.

This thesis will differentiate between attributes, which could reliably be said to be ‘internal’ to the individual, and skills as well as world of work knowledge elements that can be described as ‘external’ to the individual. In order to bridge the employability gap between students and employers, students are expected to develop their employability skills in addition to their technical skills during their university studies to make them employable upon graduation. These employability skills need to be developed within the realm of the world of work environment, which not only covers knowledge of the working world but also includes necessary work experience at the workplace.

Hence the proposal of this thesis at this point in time is to modify the Systems Theory Framework in career development to look like Figure 1.3.



**Figure 1.3 Proposed Systems Theory Framework (STF)**

By evaluating the career development learning initiative, which is the subject of this study, it is hoped that this Framework may be extended. The findings may also assist academics and career practitioners in better targeting their students and clients in seeking employment and thereby reduce the employer-graduate expectations gap.

## 1.5. Definitions of Key Terms

In this section, key terms are defined to establish the positions adopted in this research. For the convenience of the reader, a list of abbreviations is included in Appendix A.

**Career Development** - The lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure and transitions in order to move towards a personally determined and evolving future (Career Industry Council of Australia 2006).

**Career Development Learning** - The learning about the content and process of career development or career management: the content of career development learning in essence represents learning about self and learning and the world of work (McMahon, Patton & Tatham 2003b).

**Career Education** - The development of knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned program of learning experiences in education and training settings which will assist students to make informed decisions about their study and/or work options and enable effective participation in working life (Career Industry Council of Australia 2006).

**Employability** - Students and graduates can discern, acquire and adapt and continually enhance the skills, understandings and personal attributes that make them more likely to find and create meaningful paid and unpaid work that benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Oliver 2015).

**Reflection** - The cognitive process carried out in order to learn from experiences through individual inquiry and collaboration with others (Moon, J. 2004).

**Systems Theory** - A reciprocal interaction between elements of subsystems of the system and the changes that occur over time as a result of these interactions (McMahon & Patton 1995).

**Systems Theory Framework** - A meta-theoretical framework for integrating existing theories, both career theories and theoretical perspectives from other disciplines (Patton & McMahon 1999).

**Work Integrated Learning** - A range of learning tasks that either resemble those expected of working graduates in their early careers or are proximal to the workplaces or spaces, physical or digital, where professional work occurs (Oliver 2015).

### **1.6. Organisation of Thesis**

Chapter 1 of the thesis provides a brief background of the current employability context for business undergraduates in Australia. The role of universities in assisting students in employability skills acquisition is discussed and new teaching strategies proposed to improve graduate employability outcomes are discussed. The concepts of Career Development Learning and Work Integrated Learning are introduced. The Systems Theory Framework used as the foundation theoretical framework is elaborated. The research problem and research questions are stated, the justifications of the research presented and the methodology introduced. Delimitations of the scope of the research and key assumptions used in the study are discussed.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relating to the underlying theories of Employability, Career Development, Work Integrated Learning and Systems Theory. Various international and Australian models and frameworks developed to date are examined and critically evaluated. The current state of affairs in these areas of research is summarised and research gaps are identified. The literature under review was used to inform the research questions raised in Chapter 1.

Chapter 3 details the methodologies used, firstly describing the research paradigm, approach and method. The use of phenomenography is justified as is contextualised analysis, which is used as a method to analyse students' reflection journals. The data collection method is also described and justified.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the data collection and reports on the findings in relation to the four research questions posed. The findings are then analysed and presented.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the research study including their implications for current models and frameworks discussed in Chapter 2. A summary of the study is presented together with conclusions related to each individual research question. It also includes a brief discussion about the contribution of the research to the relevant body of knowledge in career development and employability. The implications of the research for career development and employability in theory and practice are also considered and discussed. The limitations of the research method and analysis are discussed and areas for future research suggested.

### **1.7. Delimitations**

This study was conducted based on a specific cohort of business undergraduate students in a particular semester at a particular Australian university. The data collected from the written reflections submitted and subsequent findings were drawn from a sample of On-campus and External students. Comparison with data and results from different universities particularly those using different pedagogical approaches in skills development may be difficult. Also, the adoption of different skills definitions may render comparisons with other similar studies challenging. Evidence of the effect of academic discipline on industry requirements and graduate performance means that extrapolation beyond the field of business should be undertaken with caution (Atfield & Purcell 2010).

Employability is multidimensional and there are other significant influences on graduate workplace performance and any associated skills gaps beyond the employability skills described. Employability skills form only one significant aspect of graduate employability. Disciplinary knowledge, labour market conditions (McQuaid & Lindsay 2005), learning transfer (Jackson 2014d; Jackson & Hancock 2010) and job mobility (Wittekind, Raeder & Grote 2010) each influence employability.

This study was based on self-assessment, the benefits and flaws of which has attracted significant debate (Jackson 2014a; Mackaway, Winchester-Seeto & Rowe 2012). Jackson conducted a study that examined self-assessment of capabilities in certain employability skills in undergraduate business students and found disparities between student and academic assessments. Students were found to be a poor judge of their own abilities, lacking experience and training in self-assessment, and may not be engaged with the self-assessment process (Jackson 2014a). In a recent study, undergraduates rated themselves considerably higher than their industry counterparts. This implies overconfidence in personal ability commonly associated with so-called Generation Y graduates (Jackson 2012). There could also be poor practices in the self-assessment design and implementation (Jackson 2014a).

### **1.8. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has laid the foundations for the thesis. It introduced the research problem and research questions. The research was justified, the methodology was briefly described and justified, the thesis was outlined and delimitations described. On these foundations, the thesis will now proceed to Chapter 2 with a detailed review of relevant literature on Employability, Career Development, Work Integrated Learning and the Systems Theory Framework.

## **2. CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Chapter 1 introduced the context of the Study, including the research problem: there is currently an employer-graduates expectations gap that may result in new business graduates who are unable to find suitable work as they are deemed not work-ready and unemployable. The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, the current literature relating to the underlying theories and frameworks of graduate employability and career development learning is reviewed. Second, current research on these areas is reviewed and summarised. Third, research gaps in the literature will be identified and delineated in order to provide answers and suggestions to the research questions posed in Chapter 1.

The review of employability and career development literature consists of five sections. Section 2.2 of this chapter introduces the concept of employability. It covers definitions, skills, learning and development. Next, the concept of graduate identity is introduced. Different employability models are then described, the Australian Employability Framework is explained and employability theories and frameworks are evaluated. In section 2.3, Career Development Learning is introduced. This topic covers career education and development, career guidance and career theories. An evaluation of these theories then follows. In section 2.4, the discussion then focuses on the pedagogies, models and frameworks involved. Recent developments are then discussed including the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (ABCD) and the Systems Theory Framework (STF). In section 2.5, the research model adapted and based on the Systems Theory Framework is then presented and summarised.

### **2.2. An Introduction to Employability**

Australian university graduates have generally enjoyed consistently higher levels of full-time employment than other employees (Bradley et al. 2008). These statistics may be indicative of a higher education system that has prepared graduates well for the world of work. However, with globalisation and a fast changing working environment, a significant number of graduates do not move directly into ‘graduate jobs’. There is an increasing trend for graduates to start their careers in agency, casual or temporary

work (Bradley et al. 2008). Simply possessing a degree now is not enough in itself to start a successful career.

Employers generally view a graduate's achievements in a subject discipline as necessary but insufficient for them to be employed. Possession of 'soft skills' and achievements outside the boundaries of the discipline are generally highly regarded in the recruitment of graduates (Jackson & Chapman 2012a). From this perspective, employability is not just about attaining a job. Employability is also more than the development of attributes, techniques and experience to enable a student to get a job or to progress within a specific career path. It is about learning with less emphasis on 'employ' and more on 'ability'. In essence, the emphasis is on developing critical and reflective abilities with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner (Harvey 2003; Whelan et al. 2010).

There is an expectation that higher education will foster the learning outcomes that employers' value. This has resulted in pressures on higher education institutions to improve students' employability (Knight & Yorke 2003). Developing employability skills for graduates is an issue for the higher education sector, not only in relation to the first job students gain after their studies, but also for graduate prospects at future points of career development or change (Pegg et al. 2012).

In recent times, graduate employability has taken 'centre stage' requiring universities to explore and implement effective ways of embedding and assessing employability skills (Pegg et al. 2012). It is critical in an increasingly competitive labour market that students are equipped with all the qualities necessary to gain and retain fulfilling employment. In 2015, university and business leaders announced a comprehensive national strategy to build the productive capacity of Australia's workforce, improve graduate job prospects and meet the skills needs of employers (Australian Collaborative Education Network 2015). Part of the enabling approaches listed was the need to strengthen Work Integrated Learning (WIL) capacity and practice in universities and the requirement to increase the level of accredited WIL content in course curricula (Australian Collaborative Education Network 2015).

To achieve this, program and course curricula in higher education institutions must develop learning, teaching and assessment practices to encourage employability development to take place alongside developments in discipline specialisations (Pegg et al. 2012). Universities can do so by encouraging students' career development and workplace learning, and by supporting their capacity to systematically reflect, record and articulate the acquired skills and experience systematically (Smith et al. 2009) by transferring their knowledge learnt at university and applying it in practice at work.

In addition, for the part-time and distance learners, many of whom are already working and studying for career-related reasons, developing employability through higher education study is part of a lifelong learning process. Employability enhancing activities can help them to improve their employment prospects and to achieve personal learning goals (Pegg et al. 2012). A relevant higher education curriculum, which places an emphasis on enhancing an individual's capacity to continue learning and establish linkages between academic learning practices and 'everyday' practices in the workplace, clearly supports employability (Little 2005). Employability is a lifelong issue and no one is perfectly employable all the time. There will always be aspects of an individual's employability that would benefit from enhancement (Pool & Sewell 2007). The importance of developing employability skills for all learners will be discussed in the following sections.

### **2.2.1. Employability Definitions**

Employability may be viewed from the subjective, micro perspective of the graduate in terms of his or her confidence and preparedness for the world of work such as in abilities, interests, skills and knowledge. It can also be viewed from a public and macro perspective of government and policy-makers, employers and universities, all of which are concerned with graduate career outcomes (Holmes 2013).

Employability is complex and multidimensional in nature. It is not an easy term to define and is interpreted differently by various interest groups. For example, Rae suggested that one potential problem with trying to develop employability in graduates is a lack of coherence on what is meant by the term itself and the measurement of it (Rae 2007). Hughes-Jones, Sutherland and Cross (2006) argued that part of this

complexity is because employability may be viewed from three different perspectives: the higher education institution, the employer and the student.

Nonetheless, there have been attempts to define employability in the higher education context. For Yorke, employability is taken as a set of achievements utilising skills, understandings and personal attributes that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations thereby benefitting themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Yorke 2006). Another common early interpretation of employability by external stakeholders such as the government and employers is the use of a graduate destination survey to gauge if a graduate has secured a full time job six months after leaving university (Department of Education; Science and Training 2002; Harvey 2001). However, first destination statistics do not take into account the fact that some graduates may have taken lower level jobs or part-time jobs to start their working careers. It is also highly possible to be employable, yet unemployed or underemployed (Wilton 2011). Currently, most stakeholder groups use statistics from graduate destinations surveys to measure employment and not employability but these are ill-defined and provide only a snapshot in time of employment.

A focus on graduate outcomes can result in the concept of employability being construed as an institutional achievement rather than the capacities that require development by the student to gain employment (Harvey 2001). Storen and Aamodt argued that employability should be regarded as an aspect of quality in higher education as measured by the benefit and usefulness of the study program for career preparation (Storen & Aamodt 2010). Pegg argued that there is more to employability than gaining employment. It is important that we make a distinction between employment as a graduate outcome that may be measured and published by universities and the idea of a pedagogy for employability that relates to the teaching and learning of a wide range of knowledge, skills and attributes to support continued learning and career development (Pegg et al. 2012). Oliver agreed, arguing that employment and employability are separate concepts. From her perspective, employment is about being employed and employability is about being employable regardless of the state of labour markets and the economic environment.

Employability is about enabling graduates and is a process of continuous learning and not a product (Oliver 2015).

Holmes (2013) suggested that graduate employability in its initial stages may be viewed as a temporary relationship that arises between an individual graduate and the field of employment opportunities, as the graduate engages with potential employers through recruitment processes (Holmes 2013). In presenting themselves to an employer as a prospective employee, an individual is staking his or her claim as a graduate worthy of employment (Holmes 2013). In the longer term, employability is the relationship between present and future industry demands for specific labour and the accompanying labour services an individual has to offer. Hillage and Pollard (1998) extended this view by arguing that employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market, in order to realise potential through sustainable employment. They proposed that employability consists of four main elements. The first is a graduate's 'employability assets', which consists of his or her knowledge, skills and attributes. The second is 'deployment' which refers to career management skills including job search skills. For the third, employee presentation is concerned with 'job hunting skills' such as résumé writing, work experience and interview techniques. Finally, personal circumstances including family responsibilities and external factors including labour market opportunities are important.

Some researchers have interpreted employability narrowly in terms of a graduate's ability to obtain a job. For example, Tymon defines employability as a graduate's achievements and his or her potential to obtain a 'graduate job' (Tymon 2013). However, Pool and Sewell pointed out that this is not the same as securing a 'graduate job' (Pool & Sewell 2007), which is subject to influences in the environment with a major influence being the state of the economy. They argued that questions need to be asked about whether or not the graduate is using the skills, knowledge and understanding gained from their degree studies in a full-time graduate-level job.

Other researchers define the concept of employability more broadly. Sewell defined employability as having a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make a person more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation (Pool & Sewell 2007). The most recent dimension in the definition of employability

incorporates an important additional new element of satisfaction. This arose from the recognition that from an individual's perspective, a person may be successful in their chosen occupation but not necessarily satisfied (Praskova, Creed & Hood 2015). In a rapidly changing world of work, Oliver (2015) proposed that employability should be redefined as 'students and graduates who can discern, acquire and adapt and continually enhance the skills, understandings and personal attributes that make them more likely to find and create meaningful paid and unpaid work that benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy'.

Most definitions recognise that employability requires not only the possession of 'core' or 'key' skills but also personal attributes. This latter category is aligned to personality theory (Bridgstock 2009; Holmes 2013; Oliver 2010a). That link to personality theory, along with the qualitative nature and future orientation of the definitions, presents more challenges to the measurement of employability.

### **2.2.2. Employability and Learning**

Higher education institutions have a role to play in relation to graduate employment. Various studies on graduate outcomes have resulted in large scale data collection and analysis in key areas such as gender, ethnicity, subject discipline studied, degree classification, salaries earned and institution awarding degree (Holmes 2013). However, because higher education institutions do not control the labour market, they cannot guarantee employment outcomes. What they can do is adopt teaching and learning strategies that enhance the likelihood that their graduates will gain suitable graduate employment (Holmes 2013).

Improved employability for students involves complex learning. According to Knight and Yorke, teaching that enhances employability is associated with systematic thinking about programs and learning environments (Knight & Yorke 2003). There is some consensus that employability is not an outcome of a course of a program but rather a result of a holistic learning experience. Employability as a learning outcome should result from the cumulative learning over a number of courses, with accompanying personal development through a range of formative experiences and wider contextual learning (Barrie, Hughes & Smith 2009; Ferns et al. 2010; Knight & Yorke 2003; Oliver 2010a).

Others argue that developing employability skills in university should take the form of work experience and extra-curricular activities and is a product of the whole university experience combined with exposure to the world of work (Rae 2007; Willcoxson, Wynder & Laing 2010). Employability should be aligned to effective learning (Knight & Yorke 2003). The USEM model of employability that is to be explained later in this chapter emphasises this alignment.

### **2.2.3. Employability Skills**

The term graduate employability skills refers to employability skills (the attributes, skills, knowledge and attributes required in the world of work) developed through higher education and subsumed by the higher order notion of graduate attributes (Smith et al. 2009). One of the generic skill categories of concern is ‘career skills’, which relates to knowledge of the relevant profession, the ability to interact with the profession and seek a career (Freudenberg, Brimble & Cameron 2009).

Employability Skills for the Future Framework (Department of Education; Science and Training 2002) lists the generic employability skills required by Australian industry. These include communication skills, team work skills, problem solving skills, initiative and enterprise skills, planning and organisational skills, self-management skills, learning skills and technology skills. The report also proposes personal attributes that purportedly contribute to employability, such as loyalty, reliability and adaptability.

Academics of various disciplines may not share a common theoretical view or understanding of generic attributes (Barrie 2006; De La Harpe & David 2012; Oliver 2013; Whelan et al. 2010). Indeed, research suggests that students, academics and employers can hold different conceptions of generic skills and their relative importance (Ferns 2012; Oliver 2010b, 2013). These differences notwithstanding, the prevalent approach taken by researchers is based on the assumption that employability may be defined in terms of the characteristics of students graduating from higher education. On this basis, universities have sought to develop curriculum-based approaches for improving or enhancing the employability of graduates by creating lists of skills and/or attributes that are purportedly the components of graduate

employability. There are many different lists of skills being produced with many similarities between them.

Generic Skills are referred to as core skills, key skills or transferable skills. The term generic skills represents the skills that can support study in any discipline and which can be transferred to a range of different contexts (Bennett, Dunne & Carre 1999). The generic skills debate is based on the premise that employers not only seek graduates with relevant subject specific skills, knowledge and understanding, they look for well-developed generic skills in a number of areas (Harvey, Moon & Geall 1997; Jackson & Hancock 2010). The Pedagogy for Employability Group (Brown et al. 2006) provides a list derived from research carried out over the last twenty five years. It suggested that employers expect to find that the following generic skills have been developed in graduates: imagination/creativity, adaptability/flexibility, willingness to learn, independent working/autonomy, working in a team, ability to manage others, ability to work under pressure, good oral communication, communication in writing for varied purposes/audiences, numeracy, attention to detail, time management, assumption of responsibility and for making decisions, planning, coordinating and organising ability and ability to use new technologies. In addition to these, Pool and Sewell claimed that there is the need for enterprise and entrepreneurship skills. They argued that an enterprising graduate would be valued in any organisation. Pool and Sewell defined an enterprising graduate as one who is imaginative, creative and adaptable. However, they also conceded that entrepreneurial skills though valuable, may be optional, because not everyone would want to set up their own business (Pool & Sewell 2007).

Some authors have also emphasised the importance of emotional intelligence (Cook et al. 2011; Cooper 1997; Daff, De Lange & Jackling 2012). Emotional intelligence has been defined as the capacity to reason about emotions and to use these to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge and to reflectively regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Brackett, Mayer & Warner. 2004). Goleman (1998) defined it simply as the capacity to recognise an individual's feelings and those of others, to motivate them and for managing our emotions and in relationships.

Research has shown that individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence motivate themselves and others to achieve more. They also enjoy more career success, build stronger personal relationships and enjoy better health than those with low levels of emotional intelligence (Cooper 1997). Jaeger's (2003) findings showed that emotional intelligence can be improved through teaching and learning in a higher educational setting and is positively correlated with academic achievement. He concluded that by incorporating emotional intelligence theory and exercises in teaching, academic faculty can help students become well-rounded employable graduates. Moynagh and Worsley (2005) suggested that in a future knowledge-based economy, emotional intelligence will be more important with the expansion of customer-oriented jobs requiring human interaction.

However, this focus on graduates' skills and attributes as requirements for employability may fail to fully explain employment outcomes. This is because it provides no explanation for differences in employment outcomes between graduates from particular demographic groups. For example, graduates from minority ethnic groups have been shown to have poorer employment outcomes (Connor et al. 2005; Stuart et al. 2011). This is complicated by the fact that individual competence in employability skills is not identical and shows a range of variation in level. Jackson (2014b) found a range of factors influence competence in employability skills. These include geographical origin, sex, work experience, engagement with skills agenda, stage of degree studies, scope of relationships and activities beyond education and work and the quality of skills development in the learning program.

An additional challenge is focusing solely on the development of graduate skills and attributes and its perceived conflict with traditional disciplinary learning. To develop students' employability skills, course curricula have to develop relevant learning, teaching and assessment practices to encourage employability development concurrently with developments in discipline specialisations and do so explicitly so that all stakeholders recognise where, how and why this is happening (Pegg et al. 2012). However, some stakeholders, such as teachers, perceive learning for employability is a threat to disciplinary learning (Speight, Lackovic & Cooker 2013). Others argue that this perceived conflict is a false one, and that both the development

of employability and the learning of academic disciplines can be significantly improved through the development of students' critical self-awareness and personal literacy (Rust & Froud 2011).

Whatever the relationship between employability and university curricula, employability policies are not well-served by stand-alone actions. A 'connected' and holistic approach to employability and enterprise development for students and graduates is appropriate (Rae 2007). Teaching in universities that enhances employability is associated with systemic thinking about programs and learning environments (Knight & Yorke 2003). To maximise learning for employability, it is important to have a pedagogically supported experience which includes reflection and articulation of the learning achieved.

#### **2.2.4. Employability Skills Development**

The importance of developing employability skills has been acknowledged by business, government and universities. This consensus was reflected in the 2007 Graduate Employability Skills report prepared by the Business, Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council (2007). The report submitted a number of recommendations to the Australian Government, including those directly targeting the provision of Work Integrated Learning in the higher education sector. Australian industry demands a flexible workforce with the skills to secure a viable economic future for the nation (Australian Collaborative Education Network 2015; Business Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council 2007). As such, universities are urged by professional organisations and industry to develop employability skills in their students by providing academic staff with relevant support and resources integrating these skills into curriculum and course design, providing students with work placements and exposure to professional settings and providing advice and guidance through career services (Australian Collaborative Education Network 2015; Ferns et al. 2010; Smith et al. 2009).

Researchers argued for an employability pedagogy that is holistic, developmental and experiential. Pegg et al. argue that a pedagogy for employability should inform the entire curriculum, with each program of study designed to ensure that the learning, teaching and assessment activities with which the students engage will help enable and

develop the creative, confident and articulate graduate (Pegg et al. 2012). Smith and Worsfold and Kolb also suggested that successful pedagogical approaches include experiential learning – an emphasis on exploration, learning by doing and reflection in authentic contexts (Kolb 1984; Smith & Worsfold 2015). Gibbs (1988) extended the work of Kolb by suggesting a reflection cycle. The cycle involved six steps: description, thoughts, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan. A reflective individual is expected to make sense of an experience, examine the current state of affairs, put into practice new learning and understanding, and take action. This would prompt the individual to make necessary changes in future to improve his/her deficiencies (Gibbs 1988). This study uses reflection as a means to enhance students' learning in career development and encourages them to review their state of readiness for employability and if not, propose future courses of action to improve their employability prospects (Research Questions 3 and 4).

To achieve this, employability skills are determined at the university level and identified at the discipline, program and course levels through a range of approaches including consultations with employers, students and professional bodies. There is some agreement that a highly structured approach of mapping graduate attributes across the curriculum enables identification of gaps and aligns graduate attributes with discipline-specific content (Jackson, Sibson & Riebe 2013; Willcoxson, Wynder & Laing 2010).

Higher education institutions provide a range of learning opportunities for students to develop their employability skills. These focus on the development of attributes, self-presentation skills, encouraging a love of learning and a willingness and awareness of the need for life-long learning. Some are implicit in programs of study and may not be made explicit. Others may be explicit and developed through 'add-on' modules. Yet, some are provided through activities of non-academic units such as careers services. A student may or may not take advantage of all or some of these opportunities (Ferns et al. 2010; Harvey 2001; Willcoxson, Wynder & Laing 2010). Apart from the integration of employability skills into the curriculum of university programs through top-down policies on graduate attributes, Bath et al. (2004) demonstrated learning progression from the mapping of attributes in curriculum to the

assurance of attributes developed from the learning experiences generated by the teaching of the curriculum (Ferns et al. 2010; Oliver 2013).

Not only does employability need to be systematically integrated into the student experience throughout their programs through course learning and teaching activities, there is also a need to address how it is offered to different groups of students. Layer (2004) has made recommendations that could help universities and colleges with employability and diversity. He/she argued for the introduction of the following strategies: introducing the nature of graduate employment opportunities through early engagement activities, producing simple guides to employment areas, producing at the course level learning resources for different student age groups and building career management skills into the curriculum across all university courses and tracking and monitoring the nature and type of employment gained by the graduates (Jackson 2013a; Jackson & Wilton 2016; Patton & McMahon 2006; Stuart et al. 2011). Career management encompasses career planning, being the identification of career goals and pathways to achieving them; and career development.

It is evident from debates within the higher education sector that employability is an important facet of widening participation. Alongside this cultural shift is recognition that a more generally diverse student population challenges the traditional notion of preparing a student to move into and through employment (Layer 2004). Widening participation aims to increase student diversity, not just to increase student numbers but also to involve students from diverse backgrounds gaining entry to higher education, but they need to be successful too (Layer 2004; Thomas & Jones 2007). With widening community participation at the university level comes challenges associated with accessibility issues, as well as those associated with embedding graduate capabilities into curriculum and ensuring authentic assessment practices in line with increasing class sizes and associated staff workloads (Hodges 2011; Smith & Worsfold 2015). One approach to address diverse students' employability and progression is by taking action throughout the student lifecycle, rather than just towards graduation. Integrated approaches to curriculum development have been found to be more effective than separate activities, as students from many under-represented groups find it difficult to participate in extra-curricular activities (Thomas & Jones 2007).

Students and graduates from non-traditional backgrounds can face additional hurdles in accessing higher education, succeeding within it and making the transition into the labour market and postgraduate education (Devlin 2010; Thomas & Jones 2007). The curriculum can address the employability of students from underrepresented groups in four ways: develop explicit awareness of employability; provide access to relevant work experience by engaging in reflection on what has been learnt from all employment opportunities; improve the confidence, self-esteem and aspiration of students with regards to applying for graduate employment; and improve familiarity with the labour market and develop search and application skills.

The development of generic capabilities takes time. It is important to develop students' generic capabilities over the three or more years of an undergraduate degree by scaffolding students' learning of capabilities during the years of study (Ramsden 2003). With appropriate scaffolding, learners can gradually build confidence and learn the career building/management skills they need to become independently responsible for their own learning (Kift 2009; Sharma & Hannafin 2004).

#### **2.2.5. Employability Skills Development and Student Engagement**

Many research findings to date suggest there is only limited alignment between the views of students and other stakeholder groups and there is a lack of student engagement with employability-related development (Oliver 2010a; Tymon 2013). Assurance of student buy-in is important to ensure learners engage with skill provision to enable them to articulate their capabilities to potential employers and to facilitate the transfer of acquired skills (Jackson 2013a).

In the United Kingdom, Personal Development Planning (PDP) is a tool currently used in a student's university experience to enhance employability. There has been an increasing use of Personal Development Planning (PDP) tools and careers advice to assist students in making connections between their career intentions and their learning, working and co-curricular activities. This approach connects labour market opportunities, personal development aspirations, skills development, career management and learning to support and inform students about the possibilities that exist for them (Pegg et al. 2012).

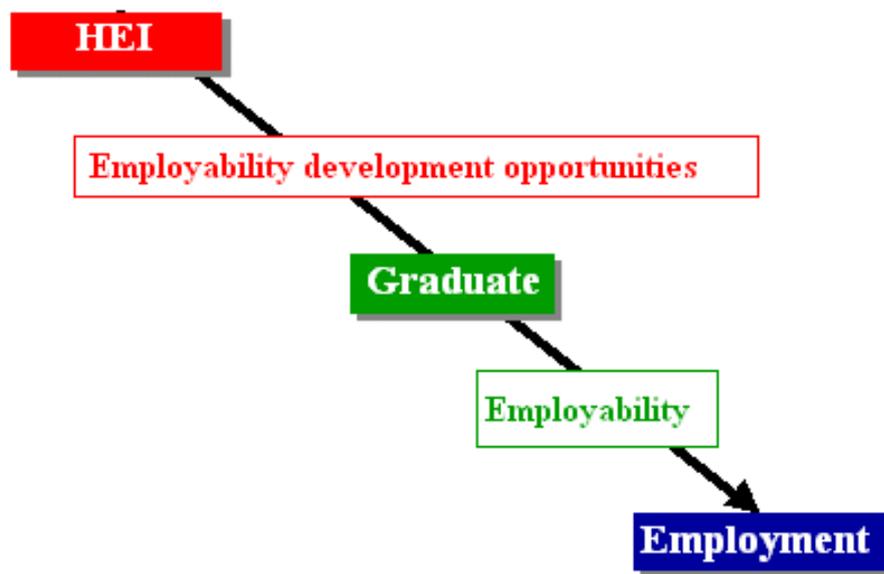
Personal Development Planning (PDP) activities aid the development of a link between reflection on personal progress and the program curriculum, encouraging greater awareness of how different aspects of learning develop and relate to each other and how learning experiences contribute to employability (McIlveen & Patton 2006; Moon, J. 2004; Pegg et al. 2012). Students tailor their study programs to meet the expectations of employers in the job market (Hancock, P; et al. 2009). They take responsibility for reviewing or assessing their own employability skills, addressing gaps and then pursuing appropriate ways to report or present relevant information about their skills to prospective employers when seeking employment (BIHECC 2007; Pool & Sewell 2007). This holistic approach places the learner at the centre of the employability development process, encompassing the value of learning in higher education as enabling and creative (Pegg et al. 2012).

The Higher Education Academy in the United Kingdom suggests that there is a strong link between PDP and employability (Ward et al. 2007). PDP can help students plan, record and reflect upon their experiences in a way that develops their employment related skills and self-awareness. It helps them to understand how their transferable skills might be applied in new settings, make realistic and suitable career plans based on self-knowledge, and demonstrate their employment potential and their ability to manage their future professional development to prospective employers. However, they argue that in order to get students to take PDP practice seriously, higher institutions need to connect related practice to core academic activity, emphasise the process, encourage students to consider the benefits of engagement with PDP and ensure that support staff understand the benefits of engagement (Ward et al. 2007). Within university settings, learning environments can be designed for personal development when academics are clear about the pre-set outcomes. In work-based settings, learners need to be clear about the outcomes and be able to recognise and monitor their own progress.

In terms of embedding PDP within the curriculum, a range of models might be adopted. These may be included as an additional component of the student experience: in conjunction with the curriculum but with some level of integration, embedded at certain times, in selected modules and embedded in the study program. These

approaches incorporate at least some aspects of students' personal development in environments created by their tutors, including the provision of feedback. The development and learning can be measured by different forms of assessment. Such assessment objectives should be made explicit for the learner, highlighting the process of development and the qualities that they are developing (Harvey 2001).

According to Harvey, there are several factors that influence the selection of opportunities by students and the consequent development of their employability skills. These factors include a student's previous experience, extra-curricular activities, career intentions, networks, quality and availability of the employability experience within the university that is integral to their program of study. Therefore, employability skills are only partially contingent on what opportunities are provided by the university (Harvey 2001).

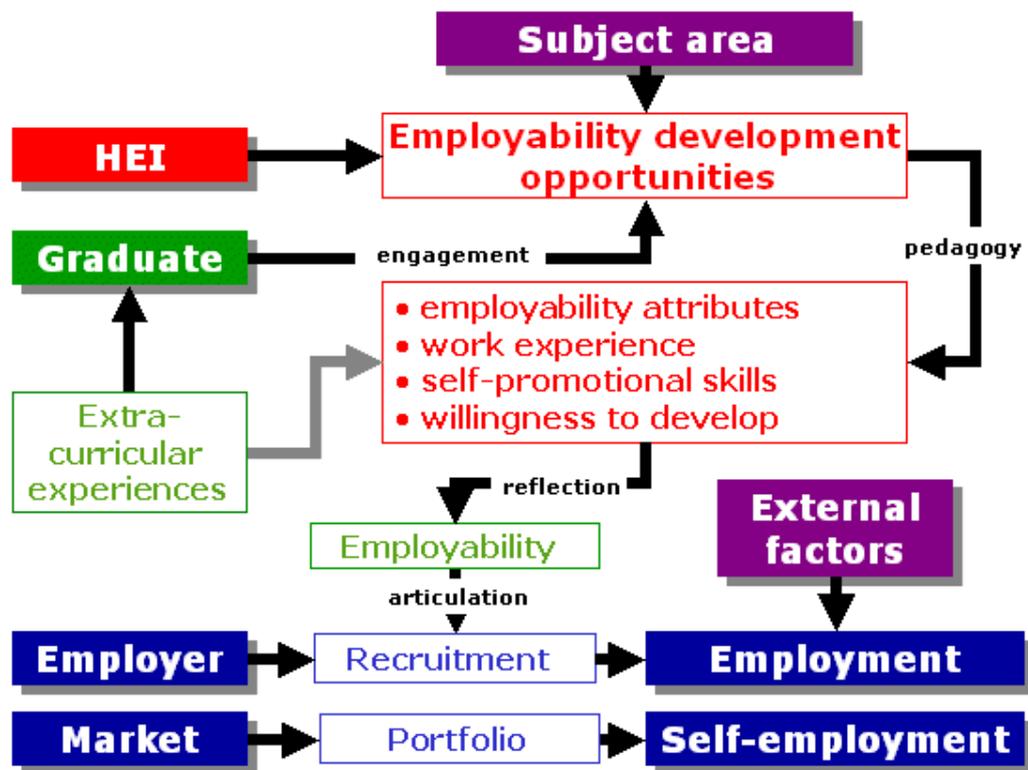


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**Figure 2.1 A 'Magic Bullet' Model of Employability Development**

The relationship between employability development opportunities provided by the higher education institution and the employment of a graduate is complicated by the role played by employers. At the end of the learning journey, it is the employers who convert the employability of graduates into employment (Harvey 2001) (Figure 2.1). Employer recruitment processes may be based on a 'rational' appraisal of appropriate attributes on a case by case basis. The employment of graduates may be seen as an

indicator of the employability of the graduate with a tenuous link to the organised employability-enhancement activities of the institution (Figure 2.2). However, there is also a range of factors such as the type of higher education institution, mode of study, student location and mobility, subject of study, previous work experience, age, ethnicity, gender and social class that mediate the employment process irrespective of the opportunities open to the students in their study program (Harvey 2001). Some of this complexity is captured in Figure 2.2.



**Figure 2.2 A Model of Employability-Development and Employment**

When employability is defined in terms of the attributes of the graduate instead of outcomes, institutional effectiveness might be indicated by an employability audit of the developmental opportunities offered by the institution by measuring the extent to which students from a particular institution or program have developed appropriate graduate attributes. Such an audit identifies the work-experience opportunities and the attribute-development opportunities explicitly embedded in the curriculum (Smith 2009). These audits would provide an indication of where and how the process can be improved (Harvey 2001). Any effective evaluation of employability needs to indicate

clearly areas of improvement and should be done by internal, longitudinal benchmarking over time that compares and evaluates the output being employment outcomes against input and process being efforts in developing employability opportunities (Harvey 2001).

In summary, there is a strong relationship between PDP and graduate employability. This relationship is central to the development of a student's ability to identify, articulate and evidence his or her learning and overall development. As PDP is long-term in nature, it supports graduate employability and emphasises the concept of sustainable employability (Harvey 2000; Hazelton & Haigh 2010; Ward et al. 2007).

### **2.2.6. The concept of Graduate Identity**

In recent times, the graduate identity perspective has emerged to challenge the traditional model of graduate employability that emphasises skills, competencies and attributes. In New Zealand, the idea of graduate identity has been explored by Holmes (2001). Holmes's starting point was his dissatisfaction with the prevailing concept of graduate employability in terms of skills acquisition. His suggestion was that graduate recruitment is an exploration of current identity, in terms of 'graduatedness', with a view to judging whether a person is capable of assuming a role in respect of practice, identity and performance. According to Holmes (2013), there are three competing perspectives on employability: Possessive, Positioning and Processual (PPP) approaches. The possessive approach is the traditional approach dominating policy and practice and is based on a notion of possession of relevant skills and attributes. The positioning approach relates to social positioning theory in accord with evidence of employment outcomes. The processual approach focuses on the concept of graduate identity (Holmes 2013).

Holmes' model is based on the premise that individuals have some control over their employment outcomes (Holmes 2013). There are factors within the undergraduate and academic practitioner's locus of control that can enhance employment prospects such as skill and identity development, engaging in effective job search strategies and providing high quality courses through effective teaching and learning (Holmes 2013). This notion engages with Holmes' processual perspective of employability where the

formation of graduate identity is predicated on interaction with the ‘gatekeepers’ to employment. This stands in contrast to his possessive perspective where employability is determined by the acquisition of necessary skills and attributes and positioning perspective where factors relating to social positioning will determine employment outcomes (Holmes 2013). From the processual perspective, the graduate identity is a transitional: once employed, the individual, embarks on a continuous learning process as the identity of a new graduate is left behind to be replaced by another employment or professional-oriented identity (Holmes 2001). Thus, the focus of graduate identity is seen through the lens of ‘capability’; what an individual is capable of and can actually do.

According to Hinchliffe and Jolly, there is a complex capability-set required by graduates that encompasses four elements: values, intellect, social engagement and performance (Hinchliffe & Jolly 2011). It enables, potentially, a range of functioning or modes of being and doing. A capability-set is a combination of functioning, with capabilities enabling a range of functioning. Capabilities enable individuals to do more with their lives in terms of potential functioning (Hinchliffe & Jolly 2011; Sen 1993, 1999). Their values component includes personal ethics, social values and contextual, organisational values including the value of entrepreneurship. Graduates need to be able to demonstrate that they have held positions of trust. Possession of social values, such as cultural and racial diversity awareness, and interest in current affairs/politics will benefit client and customer relationships. Intellectual rigour refers to the graduate’s ability to think critically, analyse and communicate information, reflect on all aspects of their work and bring challenge and ideas to an organisation. Employers value contributions from staff involving creativity, application and reflection in work. Social engagement from an employer’s perspective could be perceived as a willingness to meet personal, employment and social challenges head on and to be ‘outward looking’. Performance is defined as the application of skills and intellect in the workplace after learning quickly and effectively developing skills appropriate to a specific role. Performance is about delivery and results (Hinchliffe & Jolly 2011).

For Hinchliffe and Jolly, the concept of identity construction based on these four elements underpins the employability specifics such as writing résumés, undergoing

recruitment assessments and interview plus the need to construct an identity through combining the four elements. The precise mix and balance is assumed to depend on an individual's experience, aims and preferences. The four elements are interdependent with each other and are expected to interact producing a composite identity, with different employers emphasising different facets of this identity. This composite and complex graduate identity will depend on employer size and sector because every employer is different (Hinchliffe & Jolly 2011). The work of these authors shows that in constructing a business graduate identity, it is not just about addressing a specific employer's requirements. This narrow position would be the equivalent of a 'tick a box' exercise using a list of skills and attributes. In a later study by Jackson (2014c), it was found that graduates believe that the formation of a graduate identity or 'graduatedness' was being developed in universities, although some elements were more successfully developed than others.

### **2.2.7. Employability Models**

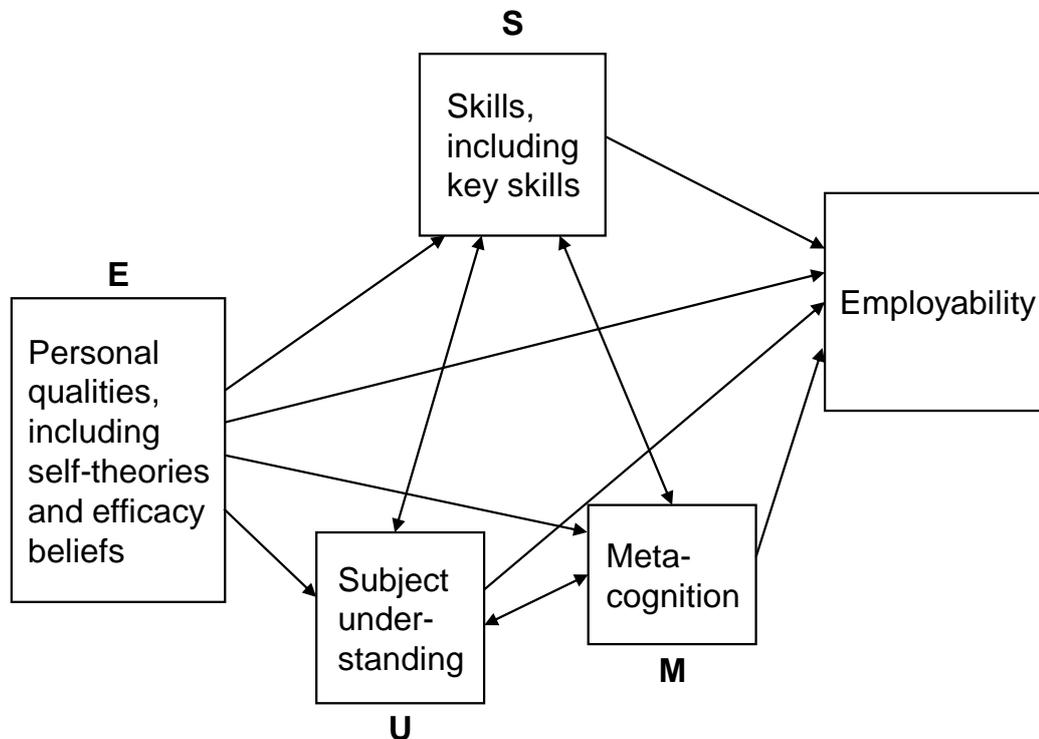
The evolution of employability theories over time has led to the development of two major Employability models namely the USEM model and the CareerEDGE model in the United Kingdom.

#### **2.2.7.1. USEM Model**

The USEM model of employability (Figure 2.3) developed by Yorke and Knight (2006) in the United Kingdom is probably the most well-known and respected in the field. USEM is an acronym for the four inter-related components of employability: Understanding; Skills; Efficacy beliefs and Metacognition.

According to Knight and Yorke (2002), there are four ways of enhancing employability. These are through: work experience, entrepreneurship modules, careers advice and portfolios, and profiles and records of achievement (Knight & Yorke 2003). Employers generally prefer to hire individuals with workplace experience, especially those who can show what they have learned from it. This can be achieved through effective enrichment strategies in the curriculum incorporating entrepreneurship modules that have an impact on learning by stimulating complex learning. In addition, Knight and Yorke argued that careers services staff should have

an input into program design and delivery to better advise students through interventions to enhance employability (Knight & Yorke 2002). Students should use portfolios to reflect on their achievements, collecting and presenting supportive evidence, identifying and then acting on priorities for development.



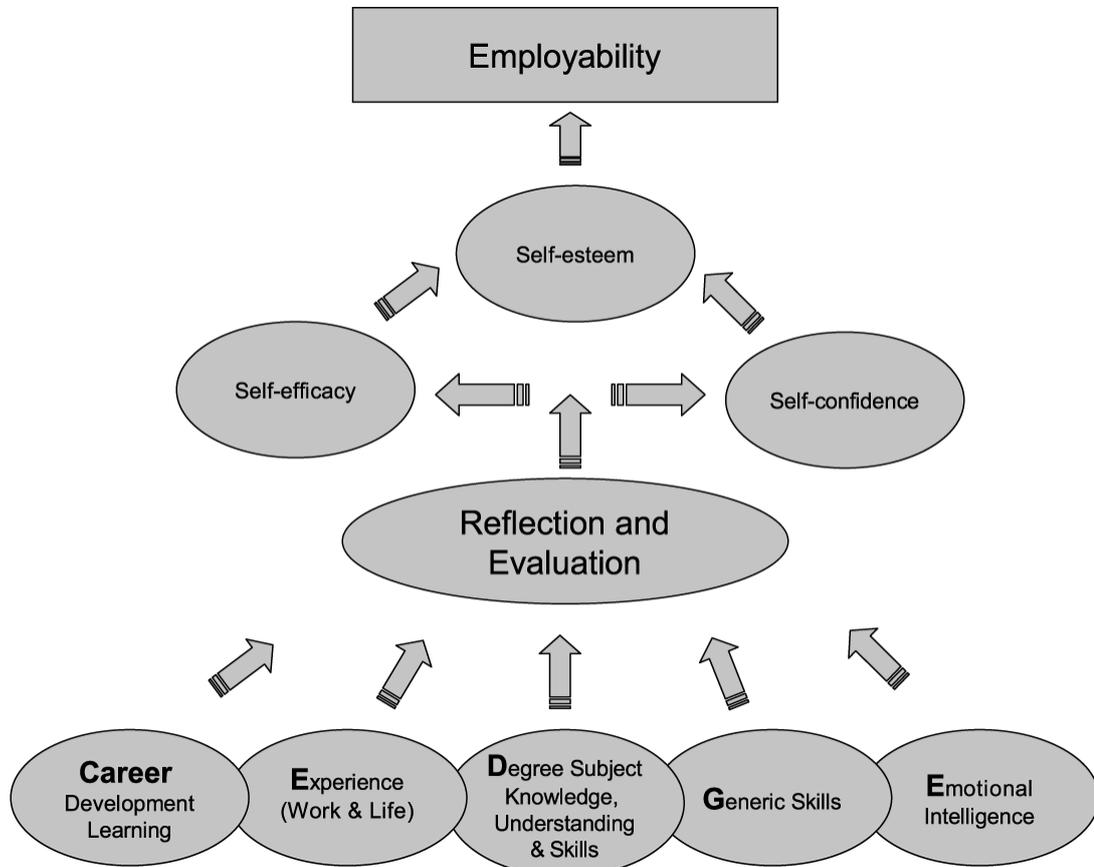
**Figure 2.3 USEM Model of Employability**

The U for Understanding refers to disciplinary material and more generally of ‘how the world works’. The S for Skills for practice may be discipline-related or generic in nature. The E for Efficacy belief comprise students’ self-theories and personal qualities’ under which may be subsumed as a range of personal qualities and attributes. The M for Meta-cognition encompasses self-awareness regarding the student’s learning and the capacity to reflect on, in and for action.

### **2.2.7.2. CareerEDGE Model**

Sewell defined employability as graduates having a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make them more likely to secure a position and be successful in their chosen occupation (Pool & Sewell 2007). This definition was used as a starting point from which to develop a new theoretical and practical framework for

employability called ‘The Key to Employability’ model (Figure 2.4). Each component of the model is absolutely essential and one missing element will considerably reduce a graduate’s employability. A degree of overlap exists amongst some of the components.

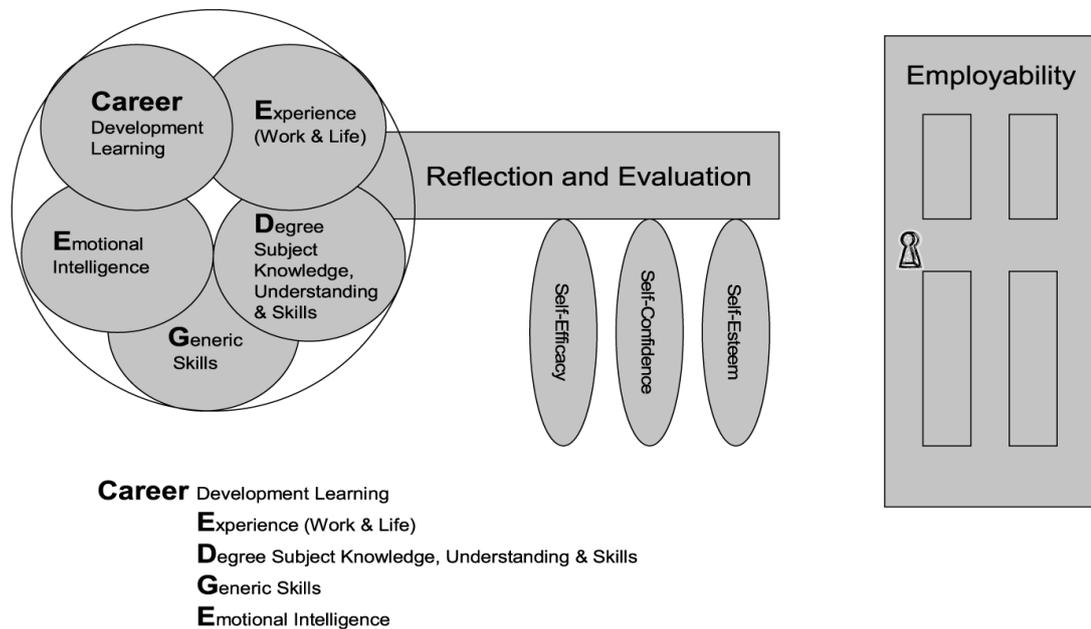


**Figure 2.4 Key to Employability Model**

The model depicted illustrates the essential components of employability and suggests the direction of interaction between the various components. The five components of the mnemonic ‘CareerEDGE’ comprise Career development learning, Experience, Degree subject knowledge, Generic skills and Emotional intelligence. In the case of higher education institutions, by providing students with opportunities for them to access and develop components at the lower tier and reflecting on and evaluating these experiences, is presumed to result in the development of the higher tier components of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem, which are critical links to employability (Pool & Sewell 2007).

A more advanced model evolved with the metaphorical image of a key (Figure 2.5). A pictorial representation of the model explains the concept of employability and

indicates that it is the aggregated model components that make the key to choosing and securing occupations in which a graduate has the opportunity to achieve satisfaction and success.



### CareerEDGE - The Key to Employability

**Figure 2.5 CareerEDGE: The Key to Employability**

For a new graduate to stand a good chance in securing graduate employment, it is critical that they receive some career education in career development learning in their university studies (Pool & Sewell 2007; Smith et al. 2009). According to Watts (2006), career development learning activities may include activities that help students to become more self-aware, to enable them to give due consideration to the activities that they are interested in and enjoy doing and suit their individual personalities. They also need to learn know how to research job markets, see what opportunities are available to them and present themselves effectively to prospective employers.

Work experience in graduates is highly valued by employers as graduates are able to reflect upon that experience and then go on to articulate and apply what they have learnt (Jackson, Sibson & Riebe 2013; Moon, J. A. 2004). With proper mentoring and guidance, students can learn from their experiences in the world of work to develop their key competences and skills and enhance their employability. Partnerships between employers and higher educational institutions are valuable in promoting

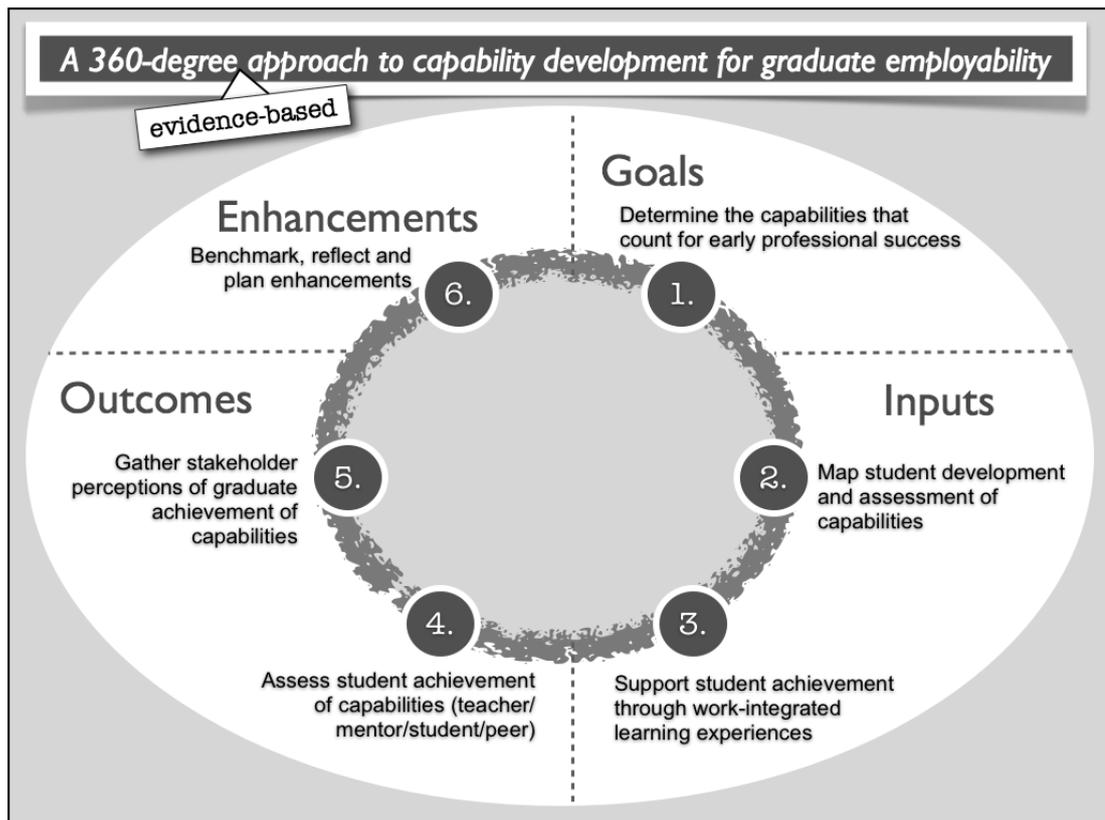
work-related learning and in improving the quality of learning experiences (Boud 1985; Smith & Worsfold 2014). It is widely accepted that graduates with work experience are more likely to secure employment than graduates without because of the wider life experiences that many mature students bring with them into university education (Pool & Sewell 2007).

### **2.2.8. The Australian Employability Framework**

Employability is an issue of great interest in the Australian higher education sector with the advent of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). Previous to this, course leaders from universities across Australia came together to form the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Fellowship. The objectives were to engage in benchmarking partnerships with a focus on employability and to disseminate curriculum tools to enhance employability (Oliver 2010a). In another project, the ALTC National Graduate Attributes Project (GAP) identified eight categories of attributes that needs to be developed in Australian universities. These are three enabling attributes of scholarship, global citizenship and lifelong learning which provides the framework for five discipline-specific translation attributes of research and inquiry, information literacy, personal and intellectual autonomy, communication and ethical, social and professional understanding (Barrie, Hughes & Smith 2009).

Following both of these, Oliver's ALTC Fellowship proposed a 360-degree evidence-based approach to capability development for graduate employability and success (Figure 2.6). The Fellowship uses one encompassing term of 'capabilities' to denote, skills, attributes and competences, and draws on the work of Stephenson. Stephenson (1998) who defined capability as an integration of knowledge, skills, personal qualities and understanding used appropriately and effectively in response to new and changing circumstances.

The process involves four elements of Goals, Inputs, Outcomes and Enhancements enabling stakeholders to explore curriculum enhancements to build collaborative networks leading to better outcomes of teaching and learning (Oliver 2010b).

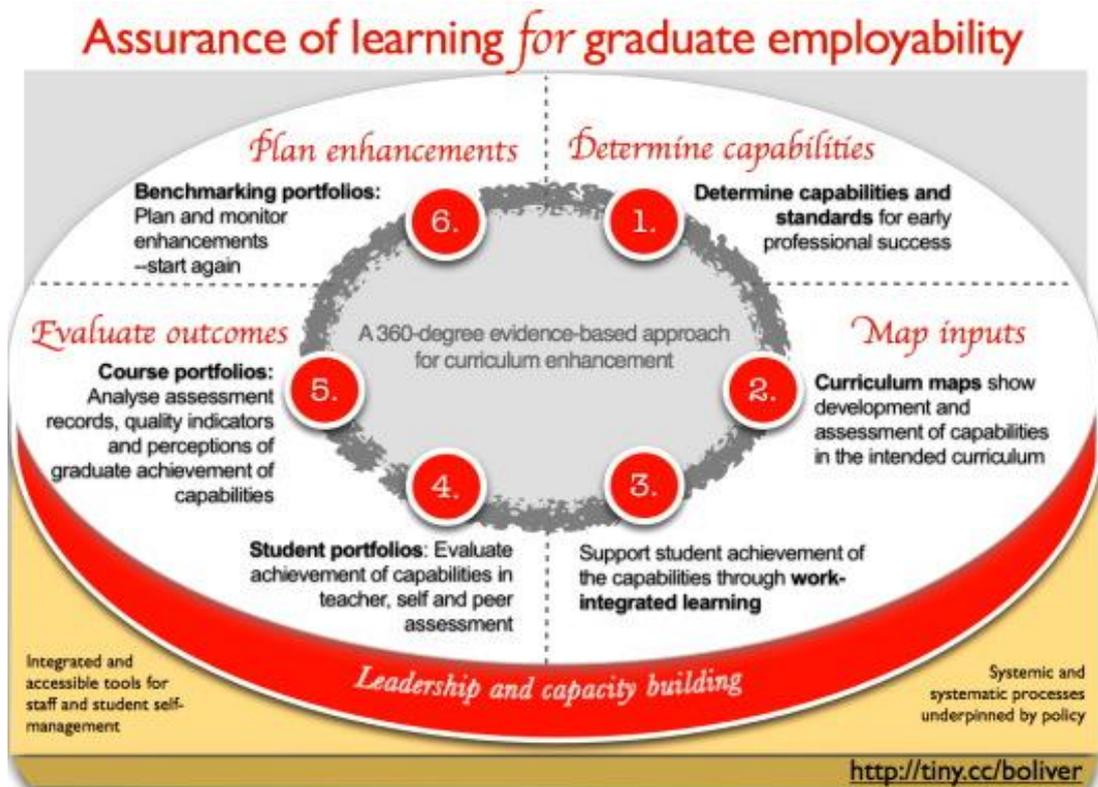


**Figure 2.6 A 360-degree Approach to Capability Development for Graduate Employability**

This framework focuses directly on the preparation of graduates for employability. Goals refer to the capabilities that count for early professional success. Inputs are those capabilities that are developed and assessed, including Work Integrated Learning (WIL) experiences. Outcomes are the evidence of achievement of the capabilities through formal assessment. Enhancement recommends the sharing of goals, inputs and outcomes and how these elements might be improved.

Using this Framework as a starting basis, Curtin University’s Curriculum (C2010) initiative was aimed at ensuring their degree programs were relevant and sustainable. C2010 focused on embedding graduate attributes through three strategies: embedding graduate attributes in degree programs and mapping for constructive alignment of outcomes and assessments (Smith & Worsfold 2015), reviewing programs based on feedback from stakeholders on the relative importance of graduate attributes and their extent of development and creating an e-portfolio system enabling students’ self and peer-assessment of graduate attributes (Oliver 2013). As a result, the Assurance Learning for Graduate Employability Framework was developed (Oliver 2010a)

(Figure 2.7). This practice is now widely implemented in the Australian university sector.



**Figure 2.7 Assurance of Learning for Graduate Employability**

### 2.2.9. Evaluation of Employability Theories and Frameworks

As explained previously, early employability definitions concentrated on the concept of employment. The measure of success of a university is on how quickly a graduate is able to secure employment. Bradley et al. have argued that this measure is problematic as it seems to be an outcome of a university's ability to produce a graduate with a job. These jobs may not be full-time and not in a graduates' area of study which results in underemployment (Bradley et al. 2008).

Subsequent employability theories and frameworks developed have focussed on the development of generic (non-technical) skills over and above the discipline skills required of students to achieve employment. These evolved into the concept of lifelong learning and the development of graduate attributes in universities. Generic skills are developed through planned work integrated learning activities, which are embedded and incorporated in university business curricula in a scaffolded approach to enhance students' employability (Bridgstock et al. 2012; Sharma & Hannafin 2004).

One example: the ‘employability as possession’ approach to graduate employability has shortcomings. This approach views graduation as an outcome of higher education, where the student should have acquired and possess the pre-requisite employability skills and graduate attributes for gaining suitable graduate employment (Holmes 2013). However, not every graduate with the same skills set will be gainfully employed in a full time graduate-level position.

The ‘social positioning’ approach does highlight potential differences between individuals. In this approach, students actively position themselves in relation to future work and what they perceive to be appropriate and meaningful courses of future action (Tomlinson 2007). However, this approach does not provide guidance on how curriculum interventions can assist in employability. On the other hand, the processual approach does focus on curriculum interventions to enhance graduate employability as well as graduate identity. In addition, it is theoretically robust and empirically supported (Holmes 2013). This approach also seeks to examine the interactions between graduates seeking suitable employment and the employers who are the gatekeepers to employment (Holmes 2013).

There has been abundant investigation into the assurance of graduate outcomes in relation to graduate capabilities but there is a lack of research into how these attributes are developed and assessed (Ferns 2012; Oliver 2010a). Oliver argues that research efforts need to be directed towards measuring educational outcomes and values, expressed in these attributes, including the way they are contextualised, embedded and addressed in degree programs (Oliver 2013).

There has also been ample research about employability from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders including government, employers, higher education institutions and graduates. However, studies examining student perceptions of employability skills development in business undergraduate programs are limited. There appears to be little empirical evidence of student perception of skills development in universities despite the presence of numerous graduate employability frameworks and models to enhance work-readiness (Jackson 2013a). In particular, the views of undergraduates, especially for first year students, as the recipients of employability development, are not well researched (Jackson 2013a; Tymon 2013). In response to these research gaps,

this study hopes to contribute to the literature on perceptions of first year business students (Research Question 2) on skills and attributes that need to be developed to enhance future employability prospects (Research Questions 1 and 3).

Whilst recognising that there is no universally accepted definition of employability, the views of most students found to date are generally narrow and short-term (Ferns 2012; Tymon 2013). Students appear to conceptualise employability as a short-term means to an end, or being able to find any job or employment. This is in contrast to many of the literature definitions, which take a much wider stance, suggesting that employability should be more concerned with longer term quality and sustainability of graduate-level employment. Many findings suggest there is only limited alignment between the views of students and other stakeholder groups, which may explain the widening of the student-employer employability expectations gap (Bui & Porter 2010; Jackling & De Lange 2009; Jackson 2015; Jackson & Chapman 2012b).

The current study adopts the processual approach by Holmes to facilitate the creation of unique graduate identities in individual students. This will be achieved through a scaffolded WIL framework designed to enhance students' employability prospects. The aim is to encourage them to start the career building process early in their undergraduate studies through curriculum intervention and career development learning activities that are integrated into the curriculum. Personal journal reflections are used to solicit the views of students on employability, as well as their proposed actions to enhance their employability. The research findings will add to the current limited literature that addresses employability from the students' perspective and offers guidance to both academics and careers specialists to better prepare students for the workplace.

### **2.3. An Introduction to Career Development Learning**

The definitions of employability discussed to date have focused on immediate employment, immediate employability or on sustainable employability (Business/Higher Education Round Table 2002; Yorke 2006). The latter refers to longer-term career development. In an environment where individuals transition

between a variety of life, learning and work roles, they need to be empowered to design and manage their careers (Bridgstock 2009).

Broadly, Career Development Learning (CDL) relates to learning about the content and process of career development of life/career management. The content of CDL represents learning about self and learning about the world of work. Process learning represents the development of the employability skills necessary to achieve a successful and satisfying life/career' (McMahon, Patton & Tatham 2003a). In this way, CDL focuses on the means by which individuals can successfully manage their lives and learning, and adapt to the world of work (Smith et al. 2009). The process of CDL may be considered as cyclical stages, with an individual moving progressively through each, generating an understanding of themselves at different points in time and finding solutions to career-related problems or challenges. It involves awareness of the many different lifespan roles and stages which require active involvement by individuals in decisions related to ongoing life transitions (Smith et al. 2009).

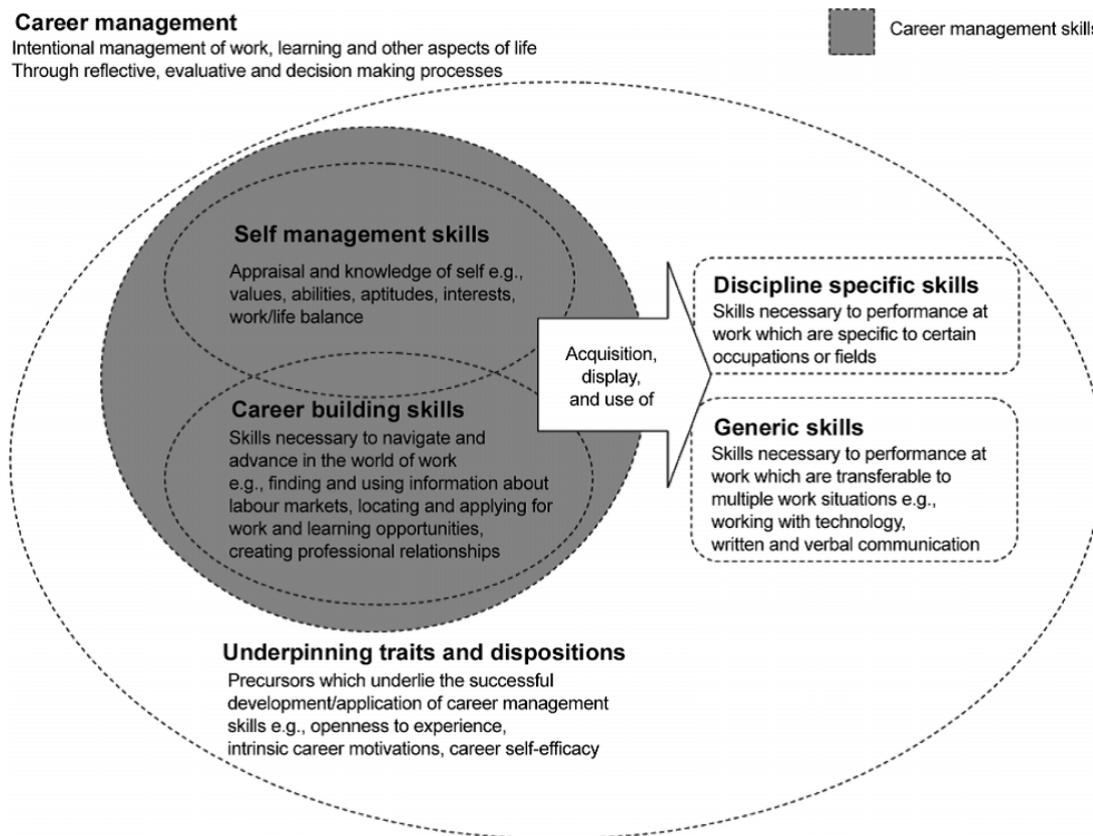
According to career development practitioners, it is the expectation and responsibility of individuals to chart their own career development path through career education and career management (Bridgstock 2009; Jackson & Wilton 2016; McIlveen et al. 2011; McMahon, Watson & Bimrose 2010; Ministerial Council for Education 2010). Yet, many current employees have not had the opportunity to develop the career management competencies through career education that they require to cope and thrive in the current dynamic working environments. They do not know how to manage their careers because there was no need to in past, stable, environments. Because career development is a lifelong process, not only do current employees need to embrace it, new graduates will also need to be aware of and develop employability skills through career education during university. New graduates need skills and a lifelong career guidance support system in life designing and building. They have to acquire skills to deal with rapid changes and developmental issues. They also have to determine which skills and knowledge they value in their lifelong development and then help to determine how, who, where and when these skills and knowledge may be acquired and utilised.

### **2.3.1. Careers Education**

The meaning of work and career in contemporary society has undergone significant revision within the career development literature (Patton & McMahon 2006; Watts 2006). In the past, career has been conceptualised in terms of personality types and their suitability to particular work environments, developmental life stages, self-efficacy for work behaviours and self-narratives of personal identity (McIlveen 2007). The word 'career' now is no longer regarded as synonymous with a job or an occupation. A career is more than a job (McMahon & Tatham 2008) and an individual's career is not simply a function of conscious, free choices and decisions pertaining to his or her interests and the work opportunities present at a point in time. A career is a multi-faceted, complex, unique personal process that extends over a lifetime and is influenced by dynamic personal, interpersonal, societal, economic and environmental factors (Career Industry Council of Australia 2006; Patton & McMahon 2006). Some of the challenges presented by this range of contextual factors are addressed by career education. Career Education refers to the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned program of learning experiences in education and training settings which will assist an individual to make informed decisions about their study and work options and enable effective participation in working life (Career Industry Council of Australia 2006).

McCowan C. and McKenzie (1997) argued that careers education should be integrated with the curriculum rather than included as a separate service. They explained that the delivery of careers education is shared between various stakeholders such as educators, employers and parents and is not just confined to specialist careers staff. Watts (2006) suggests that Career Development Learning could be delivered through various means, such as specific modules, general cross-curriculum integration; or separate from the academic curriculum. The modular approach would entail either delivery of generic content relevant to all, customisation of generic modules to suit a discipline, or modules that are specifically designed for the needs of that discipline. Furthermore, he suggested that CDL could be delivered by the university career service, either independently or in partnership with academic staff.

Career management by individuals is essential to enhance their chances of employability. Jackson and Wilton argue that the development of relevant competencies impact on wellbeing, graduate job attainment and long-term career success of graduates (Jackson & Wilton 2016). Birch suggested that career management skills should be developed early in an individual’s development (Birch et al. 1999). According to Bridgstock (2009), this involves an intentional management of work, learning and other aspects of life through reflective, evaluative and decision making processes. It incorporates career building skills and self-management skills (Figure 2.8). Career building skills refer to skills relating to finding and using information about careers, labour markets and the world of work and then locating, securing, maintaining work and seizing career opportunities to gain desired outcomes. Self- management skills relate to an individual’s perception and appraisal of themselves in terms of values, abilities, interests and goals (Bridgstock 2009; Business/Higher Education Round Table 2001; Hammer et al. 2012; Hooley et al. 2013).



**Figure 2.8 Conceptual Model of Graduate Attributes for Employability including Career Management Skills**

According to the Ministerial Council for Education, for a graduate to stand the best chance of securing satisfying jobs and be successful, it is essential that they receive some careers education in CDL. This implies a need for individuals to engage in careers education and self-management, to participate in lifelong learning including setting of career goals, locating and using effectively career information. They need to engage in and manage the career building process, make career enhancing decisions, secure work and maintain balanced work and life roles (Ministerial Council for Education 2010).

### **2.3.2. Career Development**

Within the Australian context, The Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners (Career Industry Council of Australia 2006) defines career development as ‘the lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure and transitions in order to move towards a personally determined and evolving future (p. 38)’. It is viewed as a process of managing learning and work over a person’s lifespan. In managing learning and work well, individuals are able to make productive choices and move toward building their desired futures. Career development helps people throughout their lives to plan and to make decisions about education, training and career choices. Career development may also be viewed as an overarching term pertaining to deliberate activities organised for the improvement of an individual’s career, including securing effective transitions from higher education into work life beyond university (Watson & McMahon 2012). An individual’s career often develops in unintentional ways. However, carefully planned career development programs and interventions can assist individuals to gain the knowledge, skills and attributes to manage their life, learning and work in self-determined ways (Bridgstock 2009; Nagarajan & Edwards 2014; Willcoxson, Wynder & Laing 2010).

The Business/Higher Education Round Table (BHERT) conceptualises career development as a lifelong pathway. It includes early engagement in higher education institutions, such as universities, and leads to potentially positive transitions from school to further study, training or work. Based on this premise, career development assists individuals to gain the knowledge and skills to manage learning and work

throughout their productive working life. BHERT concludes that all Australians need the knowledge and skills to manage their careers throughout life, starting with students going through school, transitioning from university into the workforce, and employees changing careers to mature-age workers looking to change their lifestyle as they transition to retirement (Business/Higher Education Round Table 2001).

The goal of career development work by career practitioners and academics is to assist individuals to develop the skills and knowledge to effectively manage their careers (McMahon & Tatham 2008). Career development academics, McMahon and Patton argued that the path of personal career development needs to be considered in relation to contextual influences emanating from the past, such as family of origin and life experience and present influences, such as stage of life and family life cycle. Future considerations, such as anticipated lifestyle and employment market trends, may also influence the career development of an individual (McMahon & Patton 1995). Supporting this, three major domains have emerged from the study by Tate et al. (2015) – external influences on the career development process, understanding of the career development process and self-concept.

Within the Australian higher education context (McCowan C. & McKenzie 1997; Patton & McMahon 2001), careers education aims to assist students to develop knowledge and understanding of themselves in areas such as strengths, abilities, skills and the range of career opportunities available. In that way, they learn how to make considered choices, plan options and effectively manage the implementation of the selected choices in adulthood and work life. There are various means of incorporating careers education into business education and the way adopted in this study is to embed a career development activity in a compulsory first year undergraduate business course (Career Education Association of Victoria 2010; McIlveen et al. 2011; Patton 2001).

The career development of individuals is complex, with each individual bringing a unique set of skills, values, interests and experiences to the process of designing and managing their career. An individual's life, learning and work opportunities may be influenced by personal characteristics such as their age, gender, ability/disability and sexual preferences. Their opportunities are also affected by family, community and

cultural values, geographic, economic and political circumstances as well as random and unpredictable events (Miles Morgan Australia 2010; Patton & McMahon 2006).

### **2.3.3. Career Development Theories**

The development of career development and guidance into an established global discipline has generated a set of theoretical frameworks, including those claiming universal validity and those applying culture-specific models that could be used to explain career development issues at a local level (Leung 2008). Consequently, the field of career development is currently characterised by the existence of a variable and complex theoretical base.

Five major career development theories have guided career guidance and counselling practice, and research in the United States and internationally (Leung 2008). These five theories are the Theory of Work-Adjustment (Dawis 2005); Holland's Theory of Vocational Personalities in Work Environment (Holland 1985); Super's Self-concept Theory of Career Development, with recent adaptations by Savickas (Savickas 1997; Savickas et al. 2009; Super 1990); Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription/Compromise (Gottfredson 1981; Gottfredson 1996); and the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown & Hackett 2002).

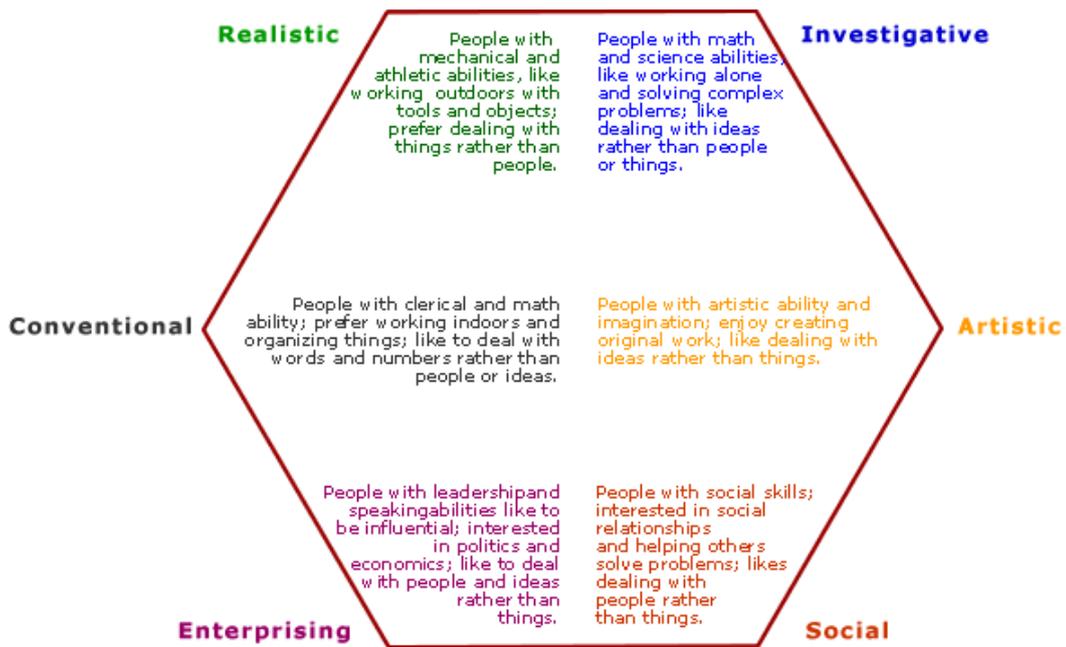
#### **2.3.3.1. Theory of Work Adjustment**

The Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) had its origins in Parson's Trait and Factor Theory of Occupational Choice developed in the early 1900s (Patton & McMahon 2006). The focus of this theory is to match an individual's aptitude, achievement, interests and values to the requirements and conditions of particular occupations. Decision-making can occur when an individual has an accurate understanding of his/her traits and a good knowledge of the labour market. According to Dawis, the TWA (Dawis 2002, 2005) focuses on individual differences and the tradition of vocational behaviour termed the 'person-environment correspondence theory'. This theory views career choice and development as continual reciprocal processes of adjustment and accommodation. The individual looks for work organisations and work environments that are perceived to be a match for his/her needs. In turn, the work environment looks for individuals who have the capabilities to meet the requirements of the organisation.

Within the TWA, career choice and development is conceptualised as a continual process or cycles of work adjustment initiated by dis-satisfaction and dis-satisfactoriness. The term satisfaction indicates the degree that the person is satisfied with the environment and satisfactoriness is used to denote the degree that the environment is satisfied with the person. Leung supports this theory by arguing that the degree of an individual's satisfaction and the state of satisfactoriness of the working environment would jointly predict the individual's tenure in that work environment (Leung 2008). Ultimately, the TWA seeks to explain career development and satisfaction in terms of person-environment correspondence theory because it offers career guidance professionals a template to locate entry points to assist individuals with career choice and adjustment concerns (Leung 2008).

#### **2.3.3.2. Theory of Vocational Personalities in Work Environment**

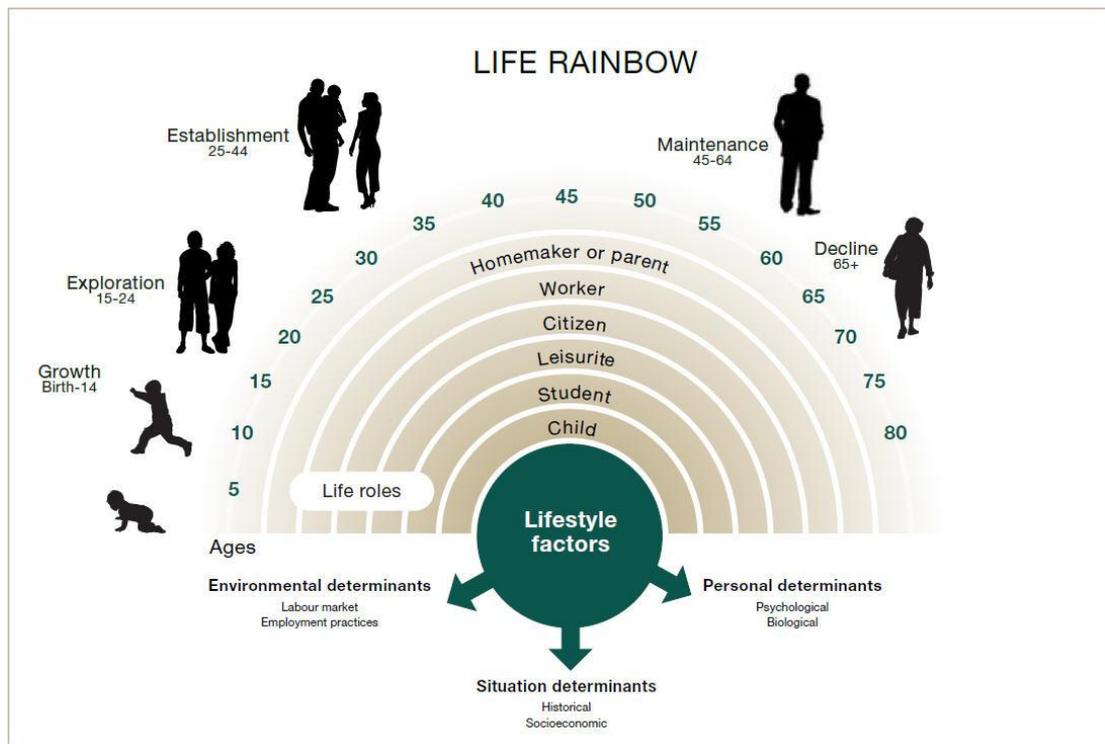
The theory proposed by Holland (1985) has guided career interest assessment both in the United States and internationally. Holland proposed that vocational interest is an expression of one's personality and these interests could be conceptualised into six typologies: Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E) and Conventional (C). A three-letter code such as SIA can be generated to denote and summarise one's vocational personality and interest type. The first letter of the code is a person's primary interest type, which might play a major role in career choice and satisfaction. The second and third letters are secondary interest themes that would likely play some role in the career choice process. The six Holland interest typologies are arranged in a hexagon (Figure 2.9) in the order of RIASEC, and the relationship between the types in terms of similarities and dissimilarities are shown by the distance between corresponding types in the hexagon (Leung 2008).



**Figure 2.9 RIASEC Hexagon**

### 2.3.3.3. Self-concept Theory of Career Development

Super's theory of career development has been widely received in the United States and internationally. Super (1990) suggested that career choice and development is a process of developing and implementing a person's self-concept. He argued that self-concept is a product of complex interactions among a number of factors including physical and mental growth, personal experiences, environmental characteristics and stimulation. Super (1990) proposed a life rainbow stage developmental framework (Figure 2.10) covering sequential stages: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and decline.



**Figure 2.10 Super's Life Rainbow Stage Developmental Framework**

In each stage, an individual has successfully to manage the vocational developmental tasks that are socially expected of the person in the given chronological age range. However, here self-concept is not a static entity and it would continue to evolve as the individual encounters new experience and progresses through the developmental stages and matures. Life and work satisfaction is a continual process of implementing the evolving self-concept through work and other life roles (Leung 2008). The term career maturity refers broadly to an individual's readiness to make informed, age-appropriate career decisions and cope with career development tasks. It includes an individual's ability to make appropriate career choices and decisions that are realistic at a point in time and over time.

Recent adaptations of Super's theory by Savickas (2002) have placed a stronger emphasis on the effects of social context and the reciprocal influence between the person and the environment. Building on Super's notion of self-concept theory, Savickas (2002) took a constructivist perspective and inferred that 'the process of career construction is essentially that of developing and implementing vocational self-concepts in work roles' (p. 155). Based on this idea, a relatively stable self-concept should emerge in late adolescence to serve as a guide to career choice and adjustments.

According to Savickas, the four segments of individual differences: development; self and context in the life-span; life-space approach to self-comprehension; and intervention in careers, constitute four perspectives on adaptation to life roles. He concluded that career adaptability should replace career maturity as the critical construct in the developmental perspective on adaptation (Savickas 1997; Savickas et al. 2009). From this perspective, career counselling includes helping a client to look ahead, look around, develop the self and in due course choose suitable opportunities to become the person they aspire to be (Savickas 1997; Savickas et al. 2009). Career development learning activities can assist and should be designed to meet the needs of individuals at all stages of life.

#### **2.3.3.4. Theory of Circumscription and Compromise**

Gottfredson's theory of career development asserts that cognitive growth and development is essential to the development of a cognitive map of occupations and conceptions of self that are used to evaluate various occupational alternatives. In contrast to previous theories that choice is a process of selection, Gottfredson (1981); (Gottfredson 1996) theorised that career choice and development could be viewed as a process of elimination or circumscription in which an individual progressively eliminates certain occupational alternatives from consideration guided by salient aspects of self-concept emerging at different developmental stages.

In recent revisions (Gottfredson 2002; Gottfredson 2005), he elaborated on the dynamic interplay between genetic makeup and the environment. Genetic characteristics play a crucial role in shaping the basic characteristics of an individual, such as interests, skills and values. Yet these expressions are moderated by the environment that one is exposed to. However, Gottfredson maintained that the person is still an active agent who could influence or mould his/her own environment. Hence, career development is viewed as a self-creation process in which individuals looked for avenues or niches to express their genetic inclinations within the boundaries of their own cultural environment (Leung 2008).

### **2.3.3.5. Social Cognitive Career Theory**

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown & Hackett 2002) is adapted from Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997), which postulated a mutually influencing relationship between people and the environment. The SCCT offers three interlocking segmental process models of career development. These seek to explain the development of academic and vocational interest, how individuals make educational/career choices and educational/career performance. The three segmental models centre on three core variables namely self-efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goals.

Self-efficacy is a central concept in social cognitive theory where it is defined as 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments' (Bandura 1997). Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the course of action required to manage situations. Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves and act (Bandura 1995). Lent (2005) defined self-efficacy as 'a dynamic set of beliefs that are linked to particular performance domains and activities' (p. 104). Self-efficacy expectations influence the initiation of specific behaviour and the maintenance of behaviour in response to interventions and obstacles. SCCT theorised that self-efficacy expectations are shaped by four primary information sources or learning experiences; namely, personal performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, social persuasion and physiological and affective states (Leung 2008).

### **2.3.3.6. Theory of Planned Happenstance**

Beyond the five major theories in the last decade, Krumboltz has developed ideas about indecisions in career decision making as a result of unplanned events. His theory addresses the need for individuals to deal with change in a volatile labour market. The premise of this theory is that unpredictable social factors, chance events and environmental factors are important influences in career decision making (Amundson, Mills & Smith 2014; Pryor & Bright 2003). Planned happenstance theory extends career counseling to include the creating and transforming of unplanned events into opportunities for learning. The goal of a planned happenstance intervention is to assist

individuals to generate, recognise and incorporate chance events into career development (Krumboltz & Levin 2004; Mitchell 1999; Rice 2014). Based on this perspective, effective career management should involve individual exploration of learning opportunities, persistence to deal with obstacles and the flexibility to address a variety of unplanned circumstances. Other factors that will be helpful in the current environment include having a sense of optimism, effective networking and financial planning in case of periods of unemployment (Krumboltz & Levin 2004).

#### **2.3.4. Career Development Learning Pedagogies**

Career development theories have evolved over time from content-focussed theories to process-focussed theories and content and process-focussed theories. Parson's Trait and Factor Theory and Dawis' Theory of Work Adjustment are content-focussed, predicting career choices from individual characteristics. Super's Self-concept Theory of Career Development is process-focussed that views career choice as part of a developmental process. Recent theories such as the Social Cognitive Career Theory are considered as both content and process-focussed theories.

What is becoming apparent in career theory development is an increasing emphasis on the importance of both the individual and context co-existing and jointly defining each other (Patton & McMahon 2006). Career development has to encompass both content and process aspects in new developments in theory building.

Career Development Learning takes a holistic approach in learning where it places the learner at the centre and focus on developing employability, which encompasses the value of learning in higher education as enabling and creative (Pegg et al. 2012). The individual takes an active role in the learning process, which is characterised by an 'active learner' who is facilitated by a career counsellor or academic. Career Development Learning supports quality student centred learning opportunities across all aspects of students' lives. CDL is intrinsically student-oriented, entailing active student engagement. It is also critical that students are involved in the process of planning their learning experiences and participate in the selection and management of their career development (Smith et al. 2009). CDL is focused upon student learning plans and needs and it involves reflection upon learning undertaken. The focus is to enable individuals to apply themselves in creating meaning from and for their lives

thereby preparing themselves for multiple career decision-making phases throughout their working lives.

Patton and Creed (2001) argued that CDL should align with Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning; a continuous process grounded in experience, which was adopted in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (ABCD). The importance of learning through experience is captured by Kolb's definition: 'learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb, 1984, p.38). The development of an applied theory is based on the seminal work of Kolb (1984), who laid the foundations for contemporary interpretations and applications of experiential learning theory.

A recent example of CDL in action was reported as part of an Australian Career Development project (Smith, M. et al. 2009). The aim of the project was to explore approaches to the delivery of Career Development Learning (CDL) within the higher education system across some thirty universities in Australia. These universities all have a career service of some kind; ordinarily operating as a discrete organisational unit on a university campus; offering numerous services to students. These include offering advice, support and delivery of CDL into the curriculum; career assessment and counselling, including selection and change of major, information services relating to occupations, employers, and educational institutions, employment placement services for casual, vacation, internship, graduate employment, conducting employment events such as career fairs and training on employment application processes such as résumés.

Australian universities also use CDL as part of different WIL strategies to prepare students for the world of work and their employability by targeting skill development (Australian Collaborative Education Network 2015; Oliver 2013; Smith et al. 2009). Relevant outcomes for these initiatives are often expressed in universities' statements, which articulate their own conceptualisation and expectations for the development of well-rounded graduates with generic attributes, qualities and skills. However, many current CDL and WIL frameworks developed to date lack structure and are delivered as a single capstone course in a program (Jervis & Hartley 2005). In order to enhance and scaffold the development of required skills, a more structured and holistic

framework is required (Kift 2009; O'Shea 2008; Oliver 2013; Sharma & Hannafin 2004).

Career Development Learning in universities can be delivered through specific modules, through more general curriculum integration, or outside the curriculum. The modular approach has been experiencing significant growth in popularity. In a number of institutions, close links have been established between CDL and the processes of Personal Development Planning (PDP). The teaching and learning methods used in CDL need to be personally engaging, and authentic by making the world of work real (Smith & Worsfold 2015; Watts 2006).

Indeed, Robley, Whittle and Murdoch-Eaton (2005) examined the alternate pedagogies of 'embedding' and 'in parallel' generic skill development. They concluded that the embedded approach with appropriate skills development mapping was the superior skill development approach. Lucas et al. (2004) claimed that generic skill development is a tacit process developed over life and as such it is best not developed through standalone modules. Patrick, Peach and Pocknee (2009) identified the importance of designing WIL and treating skill development as an integral and integrated part of the curriculum rather than as a bolt on experience.

### **2.3.5. Benefits of Career Development Learning**

The benefits of CDL may be considered from the perspectives of the individual learner, the host organisation, industry and society in general and the benefits may accrue within immediate, intermediate, and long-term time frames (Watts 2006). Research related to the application of CDL as part of students' tertiary studies provides a platform for examining such benefits. Specifically, it can provide opportunities to explore how students reflect on their higher learning experience by facilitating their construction of relationships between their personal aspirations, studies and experiences of work. CDL contextualises work related learning experiences by assisting students to develop knowledge, attributes, understanding and awareness of the world of work, with the potential for increased workplace productivity (Smith et al. 2009).

Career Development Learning contributes to students' engagement with learning and persistence with studies (Smith et al. 2009). In relation to work-related learning, engaging in course and career-related employment whilst studying has been found to have positive effects on academic performance (Derous & Ryan 2008). Career Development Learning also assists students in planning for life after university. By utilising CDL to connect workplace and academic experiences, students develop a greater understanding of themselves, understand the employment opportunities available and prepare their transition strategies to graduate employment (Smith, M. et al. 2009).

The empirical status of CDL is important for establishing an evidence-based approach to its teaching and facilitating students' learning. Studies of career development have demonstrated it to be efficacious with individualised one-on-one career intervention showing the greatest impact, followed by career education delivered in a classroom setting and then by services not delivered by personnel such as through information technology deliveries (Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff 1998). Longitudinal investigations also indicate a sustained positive impact from individual career guidance (Bimrose & Barnes 2006). Career-related self-efficacy, occupational decidedness, interests, and personality traits have been shown to have a predictive relationship with academic performance and engagement with studies (Rottinghaus et al. 2002; Scott & Ciani 2008).

Positive effects associated with career education coursework include career decision-making skills, career decidedness and vocational identity (Folsom & Reardon 2003). Such outcomes assist students to more rationally explore and choose their courses of study and relevant graduate employment options. Folsom and Reardon's 2003 review of thirty-eight empirical studies conducted over a 25-year period found positive effects on students' job satisfaction, selection of degree majors, course satisfaction, retention and graduation rates and grade-point averages. Other benefits experienced by individuals who received timely, quality career development support include more informed decisions, smoother transitions to employment, increased confidence and greater job satisfaction. Career development support and services not only benefit individuals in lifelong career planning but they can also make contributions to public policy objectives in education, the labour market, promoting equity and productivity.

These include raising educational attainment and skill levels, successful career transitions, raising labour force participation and labour market flexibility and labour mobility (Smith et al. 2009).

Career development programs may also have a positive impact on students' university experience. According to the findings of a recent ALTC report on WIL (Patrick, Peach & Pocknee 2009), career development skills can help to reduce university attrition rates by giving individuals a clearer idea of the goals that they are working toward, thus increasing their motivation to stay in university and complete their studies. According to Smith et al., young individuals who understand themselves and have a good understanding of career development education are able to plan and to make good decisions to achieve better employment outcomes, raising national productivity levels through increased labour force participation rates (Smith et al. 2009).

The findings of this report also suggest that Career Development Learning benefits industry and the professions when it is embedded within their workplace programs – realising improved outcomes for students and staff of the host organisation (Smith et al. 2009). It makes a significant contribution to workplace experiences when good practice underpins the embedding of CDL before, during and after the experience (Smith et al. 2009). It links workplace experiences with students' career aspirations, benefiting industry and the professions by providing an avenue to promote themselves as employers of choice (Smith et al. 2009). Such benefits may also apply to society at large (Smith, M. et al. 2009), with positive impacts felt at the individual and society levels, and possible improvements to student retention and progression in higher education; which can be rendered down to an economic value in terms of public investment in higher education (Smith, M. et al. 2009).

An additional finding of the ALTC report (Smith, M. et al. 2009) was that the nature of benefits experienced by learners evolves over the immediate, intermediate and longer term. Immediate benefits may be readily evident and felt by an individual who feels more confident and efficacious with regard to understanding his or her career decisions, plans and the resources required to implement those plans such as deciding to enrol in a degree program to become a professional (Smith, M. et al. 2009). With regard to the intermediate term, such as six to twelve months into a program of study, CDL may provide the benefits of reflecting upon past academic and workplace

learning and assimilating new experiences into a growing sense of professional identity. It may also facilitate an individual's accommodation of learning experiences that challenges previously held beliefs or expectations of a degree program and the profession (Smith, M. et al. 2009). In the long term, regular CDL experiences may facilitate a good decision to enter training for a particular profession or alternatively facilitate a decision to adjust career plans and take a more appropriate degree (Smith, M. et al. 2009).

### **2.3.6. Career Guidance**

Career services help individuals to match their skills, interests and qualifications to available job opportunities. These services help to improve the allocation of labour across regions, industries and occupations when labour supply and demand fluctuate as a result of technological and structural change improving labour market flexibility and labour mobility. It is important that partnerships exist between government, industry and the labour market to identify the required skills needed and the available job opportunities, and to convey this information to individuals to support appropriate career decisions.

Career guidance refers to career services and activities intended to assist individuals, at any point throughout their lives to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Such services may be found in schools, universities, training institutions, public employment services and the workplace in the community and private sectors (Athanasou & Esbroeck 2008). Career guidance activities may take place on an individual or group basis, and may be face to-face or at a distance (including help lines and web-based services). They include career information provision (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling sessions and career education programs to help individuals develop their self-awareness, opportunity awareness and career management skills.

There are eight adapted guiding principles for career services and information products (Career Industry Council of Australia 2006) that provide the platform to deliver Career Development Learning. These principles include promoting awareness of career services through career development learning and service goals; ensuring accessibility

of information; ensuring student entitlements through active promotion of their rights; entitlements and avenues of redress; providing student access to career information; and, assisting in their understanding of that information and creating communication channels for receiving and incorporating student feedback.

Other important principles (Career Industry Council of Australia 2006) include: differentiating service provision to accommodate student diversity by delivering services in multiple modes; formats and settings; engaging and actively accommodating the needs of diverse student groups; collaborating with other facilitators of career development to create greater consistency and coherence in career development activities; providing career practitioners with sufficient professional support and resources to perform their work to a quality standard; and, continuously monitoring and improving the outcomes of service provisions.

### **2.3.7. Evaluation of Career Theories and Career Development**

In recent years, the field of career development has concentrated on refocusing and repositioning itself as a relevant and sustainable discipline in the global world (McMahon & Watson 2012; Savickas 1997). Theory, research and practice from the twentieth century have served career development well but they are not sufficiently robust to position career development in a global dynamic world and ensure a sustainable and relevant future (McMahon & Watson 2012). Career development has now expanded its influence to countries and cultures beyond its western origins (McMahon & Watson 2012; Patton & McMahon 2006). Individuals are relocating between countries; large corporations are establishing businesses in developing countries. There is now an urgent need for career development to redefine itself in the field of career psychology.

The concept of career development is now being introduced to diverse countries and cultures where the nature of work and career may assume different meanings from those of Western cultures. Consequently, career development must consider its ability to meet the needs of more diverse client groups including those of lower socioeconomic status, those in low-skilled work, different cultural groups, women, immigrants and refugees (Watson & McMahon 2012). There is also an increasing

need for cultural sensitivity and specificity in a globalised world of work and to focus on multi-contextual and community frameworks.

The five major career theories discussed were all developed in the United States and these have been applied to career guidance practice and research internationally. They are conceptually and empirically based on the social and occupational contexts in the United States. They have Western origins in career development with its male, middle class emphasis (Patton & McMahon 2006; Savickas 2005; Savickas et al. 2009). Inherent to this Western thinking is the notion of individualism and the right of individuals to make choices (McMahon & Watson 2012). Therefore, care should be taken not to apply these theories to other contexts without cultural adaptation and modifications (Leung 1995).

A review of the literature in career development revealed that few career development theories have emerged outside the United States. There is a current need to indigenise and develop theories and practice to meet the unique needs of different demographic groups in diverse geographical regions. Indigenisation of career theory and practice aims to identify the universal concepts without losing the focus on unique local experiences, constructs and practice that are specific to particular culture groups (Leung 2008).

Enriquez explains that the indigenisation of the career guidance discipline could be achieved through 'indigenisation from within' or 'indigenisation from without' (Enriquez 1993). Indigenisation from within refers to the derivation of career theories, concepts and methods from within a specific culture, relying on indigenous sources of information as the primary source of knowledge. This process would result in career development concepts that have specific meanings within a culture, such as the effects of filial piety on career choice in Asian cultures (Enriquez 1993). Indigenisation from without involves modifying existing career theories and practice to maximise their degree of fit with local cultural contexts. The main objectives would be to identify aspects of current generic theories that are relevant and valid for specific cultures and to make necessary cultural adaptations to the concepts and practice (Enriquez 1993).

It has also been found that many students do not take advantage of careers services or do so only in their final year of study. Therefore, as Thomas and Jones (2007) suggested, the provision of careers education needs to be more proactive and to target specific groups to overcome the barriers faced by students, especially from under-represented groups. McCowan C. and McKenzie (1997) argued that career education should be integrated within the curriculum rather than added as an extraneous service with its delivery shared by various parties and not by specialist groups such as career development practitioners alone. A careers education can prepare university students to search and apply for graduate positions by developing their knowledge, confidence and ability to apply for jobs. Career counsellors and university academic staff can work with new undergraduate students to build a personal employability profile beginning at a very early stage in their time at university (Tate et al. 2015).

The student sample will be taken from on-campus and external students representing a diverse cross section of students, from both the domestic and international environments. It is hoped that the findings from this study will improve our understanding of career development from the perspective of first year university business students, (Research Question 2) which may assist academics and career specialists to tailor career development programs to these students.

### **2.3.8. Career Development Learning and Employability**

Career development is the lifelong process of managing progression in learning and work. It is important to consider the extent to which university graduates are prepared to sustain their employability over their lifetimes in the dynamic world of work is a crucial issue pertaining to lifelong employability (Smith et al. 2009). A successful career is not the outcome of a single decision or action made by students at a particular moment in their learning journeys.

Career Development Learning involves awareness of the many different lifespan roles and stages that require active involvement by individuals in decisions related to ongoing life transitions. Career Development Learning is also a lifelong process of managing learning, work and transitions in order to move towards a self-constructed and evolving future. Career Development Learning needs to be reconceptualised as

lifelong learning if individuals are to construct satisfying life careers for themselves within changing environments (Patton 2001). Individuals need to focus on learning and developing skills that enhance current performance and qualify them for the next job. Lifetime employment must become lifetime employability.

According to Watts (2006), CDL has not always been as strongly represented in higher education employability strategies as it should have been. However, he suggests that there is evidence that this is changing. Career Development Learning based on the DOTS (acronym for Decision Learning, Opportunity awareness, Transition learning and Self-awareness) framework (Law & Watts 1977) should include activities that help students to become more self-aware, to enable them to give consideration to the activities that they are interested in, enjoy doing and suit their personalities. Watts (2006) argued that capacities and skills targeted by such activities are important since it is undesirable to have a graduate who cannot identify a market in which to market their newly developed employability skills. They should be adept at researching the job markets to see what opportunities are available to them. Importantly, after acquiring employability skills at university, they will need assistance and guidance in how best to present to potential employers about their achievements and how they will be an asset to them in job applications, résumés and interviews.

According to Watts (2008), CDL addresses the key issues of ‘directionality’ and ‘sustainability’ in relation to employability and enterprise. Directionality is important because while some of the competencies are generic, others are linked more closely to some career pathways than to others. CDL can help students to clarify the path they want to choose, around which they can build their employability and enterprise competences. Sustainability is even more important because without it, employability tends to be narrowly defined as ‘work-readiness’.

Career Development Learning focuses not only on securing a first job but on acquiring competencies that enable graduates to remain employable throughout life (Pegg et al. 2012). It is a means used to raise students’ awareness of employability and how to self-manage their studies and extra-curricular activities to maximise their employability. This approach may be undertaken through curriculum-integrated strategies in which CDL is an explicit vehicle for degree or course-level learning

outcomes (Smith et al. 2009). Assignments or other assessable course work may require students to engage in reflective activities in relation to their past, current and lifelong learning employability. They can do this by using their particular discipline area of interest as a site of personal enquiry, using the DOTS model (Watts 2006) as a teaching tool, to frame students' conceptualisations of employability (Smith et al. 2009). The current research study will examine student perspectives on employability and career development through the use of reflection. Specifically, this deep learning task will require students to reflect deeply on their level of employability skills in response to a career development learning activity presented by career and industry professionals (Kolb 1984; Moon, J. 2004).

### **2.3.9. Career Development Learning and Work Integrated Learning**

Notions of graduate employability, employability skills, graduate attributes and students' experience of employability are important in the formulation of CDL and Work Integrated Learning (WIL) in higher education. Ensuring learning experiences take place in a variety of contexts, including authentic work-related contexts, are important pre-conditions for a positive student experience. WIL can serve as a practical vehicle for the notion of Career Development Learning. All Australian universities provide WIL in some form; to assist students to apply theory to practice, in their academic programs (Orrell 2004; Patrick, Peach & Pocknee 2009). Universities' Career Services have historically played a significant role in the delivery of WIL. However, the extent and manner in which CDL as a pedagogical framework has been embedded in the WIL experiences of students has been unclear.

In a generic sense, WIL is a range of work-related activities and experiences built into a student's study program. Reeder (2000) defined WIL as 'student learning for credit designed to occur either in the workplace or within a campus setting that emulates aspects of the workplace' (p. 205). Within Australia, WIL has been described as a range of programs that provide students with a combination of workplace experience and formal learning, integrated as part of a course of study in higher education and an umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with practice within a purposefully designed curriculum (Patrick, Peach & Pocknee 2009).

Benefits from student involvement in WIL encompass areas of self-development and skill or attribute development. For instance, Moreland (2005) explained that WIL activities can involve students learning about themselves and the world of work in order to empower them to enter and succeed in the world of work and their wider lives. It involves: learning about self; learning and practising skills and personal attributes of value in the world of work; experiencing the world of work in order to provide insights and learning into the world of work associated with one's university studies and experiencing and learning how to learn and manage oneself in a range of contexts including work situations (Moreland 2005). However, WIL is also a vehicle for developing essential graduate attributes, which are the qualities, skills and understanding that a university community agrees all its graduates should have developed as a result of successfully completing their university studies. These attributes include and extend beyond the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has been the core of most traditional university courses.

The Business Industry Higher Education Collaboration Council's Precision Consultancy 2007 report positioned WIL as an important vehicle for the development of graduate attributes and employability skills. Universities Australia (2008) has likewise highlighted the importance of WIL in its statement on establishing a National Internship scheme for Australian university students. The Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) also provides leadership on WIL in the Australian higher education sector and recently completed a major scoping study (Patrick, Peach & Pocknee 2009). These reports suggest that formalised learning within the university curricula and context and natural learning in the workplace or community contexts can be equivalently valuable and useful for students' CDL and WIL frameworks (Patrick, Peach & Pocknee 2009). There is a range of current interest in WIL, much of it being motivated by developing generic employability skills. CDL, like work-related learning more generally, occurs in a range of contexts and it can be fostered in experiences facilitated by university career practitioners and academics.

Work Integrated Learning is not simply a process of students engaging in work experience with the hope that it will result in employability (Yorke 2006). Instead, WIL is an educational process, service and experience, with foundational pedagogy and theory (Moreland 2005; Yorke 2006, 2010; Yorke & Knight 2007), and can be

aligned with the processes and outcomes of experiential learning (Kolb 1984), which seeks to maximise learning through experience, often outside of classroom learning.

Career Development Learning may be used to inform the pedagogy of WIL. Smith, M. et al. (2009) started a major national project that explored the relationship of the two in the context of the Australian higher education system. They found that CDL makes higher education meaningful for students by personalising their learning: enhancing their awareness of the relationships amongst their disciplinary studies, work-related learning and their personal aspirations. Furthermore, CDL supports students' effective decision-making and transitions into and through the worlds-of-work. Ultimately, Smith et al. (2009) concluded that CDL in higher education is a process that promotes student growth and development within the framework of lifelong learning.

According to Groenewald (2004), a good WIL framework should consist of four key characteristics: an integrated curriculum, learning derived from work experience, cultivation of a supportive client-base for the availability of quality learning opportunities, and proper coordination and organisation of the learning experience. Hunt (2000) suggested that the some key features of WIL should include stand-alone and/or bolted-on opportunities in university curricula, and accredited components of courses in university programs with links between theory and practice. The learning experience should be underpinned by professional knowledge and reflective practice, identifiable and assessable learning in the work environment, student participation in the development and design of individualised programs and the development of discipline-specific and transferable skills relevant to lifelong learning.

Career Development Learning is by its very nature student centred and should be designed to engage students actively in their workplace experience by rendering their work-related learning meaningful in terms of their own career development. Stakeholders also suggested that CDL supports quality student-centred learning opportunities across all aspects of students' lives, especially given the range of influences that affect careers (Patton & McMahon 2006). As such, a comprehensive approach to formulating and delivering CDL and WIL should take into account if and how broader life and contextual factors impinge upon a student's experience and

learning journey (Smith et al. 2009). CDL embedded in WIL frameworks can provide opportunities for students to assess their skill development and plan to grow areas needing attention while they are still in a learning environment (Jackson 2015; Smith et al. 2009).

According to the literature, work-related learning experiences can and should provide genuine CDL opportunities for all students, particularly those who may not have ready access to sources of professional networks. Multiple experiences and contexts enrich this learning, and accordingly all forms of work including casual and voluntary work should be considered as possible sites for WIL. Watts (2006) noted that CDL can significantly enhance the quality of WIL by placing the student more actively at the heart of WIL frameworks and helping students to be career ready as well as work ready (Moore & Morton 2015).

### **2.3.10. Career Development Theoretical Frameworks**

A contemporary approach to developing university graduates' careers requires a theoretical framework that captures the facets and the complexity of the current world of work (McMahon, Patton & Tatham 2003a). Sound frameworks developed to enhance meaningful career management skills in university students (Bridgstock 2009) may present a personally relevant and student-centred approach to higher learning and future employability. From the perspective of the scholarship of teaching and learning, it is critical that CDL is linked to conceptual frameworks that can inform curriculum design and evaluation.

Major career development frameworks developed internationally to date are discussed in the following sections.

#### **2.3.10.1. Life-Design Framework (US)**

At the turn of the century, with the globalisation of career counselling and continuing professional development, Savickas (1997) developed an American framework of career intervention. His motivation was to develop a framework that can be applied to various international environments with no need for adaptation. His life-designing framework endorses five presuppositions about individuals and their work lives, which include contextual possibilities, dynamic processes, non-linear progression, multiple perspectives and personal patterns. This framework utilises the theories of self-

construction that describe vocational behaviour and its development and is structured to be life-long, holistic, contextual and preventive (Savickas 1997; Savickas et al. 2009).

According to Super, a holistic approach to theorising of career development should include vocational aspects related to work with the student role at the centre of attention. Theories should also consider other important life roles such as family member, citizen and employee (Super 1990). Individuals are urged to consider all important life-roles as they engage in personal career construction. They are encouraged to explore life theatres in which the different roles may be performed and to use the results of this exploration in the self-construction process. Savickas agreed, suggesting that all roles, present and future environments relevant to the person should become interventions that constructs personal career stories and builds lives (Savickas 2002, 2005).

Career construction theory asserts that individuals must be intentional in building their careers by imposing meaning on vocational behaviour (Savickas 1997; Savickas 2005). From a constructionist viewpoint, a career denotes a dynamic perspective that gives personal meaning to past memories, present experiences and future aspirations incorporating into a life theme. These meanings will equip individuals to adapt to the social changes that will be played out in their future work lives. At the university level, the effectiveness of vocational guidance could be utilised to guide students' construction of their life stories and the acquisition of employability skills. Such interventions foster students' adaptability, narratability, activity and intentionality (Savickas 1997; Savickas et al. 2009).

Adaptability addresses change while narratability addresses continuity. Together they provide individuals with the flexibility to enable them to engage in meaningful activities and thrive in knowledge environments. This life-designing framework aims to help individuals articulate and enact a career story that supports adaptive and flexible responses to developmental tasks, vocational changes and occupational transitions. It helps them develop their capabilities to anticipate changes and their own future in changing contexts. It also helps them find ways to achieve their expectations through their involvement in different activities (Savickas 1997).

University career interventions typically involve a dialogue between students and careers specialists to assist students to construct and narrate a story that portrays their career aspirations and life journeys. The stories enable students to better understand their own life themes, vocational personality and adaptability resources (McMahon, Watson & Patton 2015; Savickas 1997). The role of the careers specialist is to help students to formulate their identity in their own words, to see themselves in a particular context as well as relating to others and at the same time identifying skills and cognitive abilities through personal reflections.

Each individual engages in diverse activities where they learn of their abilities and interests. Through activities, individuals build new dimensions of themselves, such as self-efficacy beliefs, and interact with others from whom they receive feedback. A career is built by engaging in activities and then reflecting on the outcomes. In knowledge environments, self and identity are constructs built by an individual through continual reflection and revision.

#### **2.3.10.2. DOTS Framework (UK)**

A conceptual framework developed in the United Kingdom, which integrates the world of work, self-reflection and transferability across settings, is the DOTS (acronym for Decision Learning, Opportunity awareness, Transition learning and Self-awareness) framework (Watts 2006). This framework consists of planned experiences designed to facilitate the development of Decision learning including decision making skills, Opportunity awareness such as knowing what work opportunities exist and what their requirements are, Transition learning including job searching and self-presenting skills and Self-awareness expressed in terms of interests, abilities and values. Both individually and collectively, they provide a framework for CDL.

According to Watts (2006), the capacities emphasised by the DOTS framework might be best developed by assessable course work that requires students to engage in reflective activities in relation to their past, current and lifelong employability. Students' study discipline or area of interest can be used as a site of personal enquiry and self-directed learning using DOTS (Watts 2006). By emphasising reflection through the four dimensions of DOTS, Career Development Learning engages

students and makes their learning experiences more meaningful. Smith, M. et al. (2009) contended that this provides the process for ongoing transformation and lifelong learning.

Graduate employers are increasingly using vacation work or industry experience programs as pre-recruitment strategies and Work Integrated Learning (WIL) can align with these experiences. Career Development Learning may be considered as cyclical stages, with individuals moving progressively through each stage while generating a better understanding of themselves with practical solutions to career-related problems or challenges. This may involve constructing e-portfolios, learning how to make successful transitions into placements such as formally applying for positions and securing WIL placements. Coursework learning activities might build upon relevant activities such as conducting research into the requisite skills required in the employment market, presenting the report of these research findings in class or via electronic means.

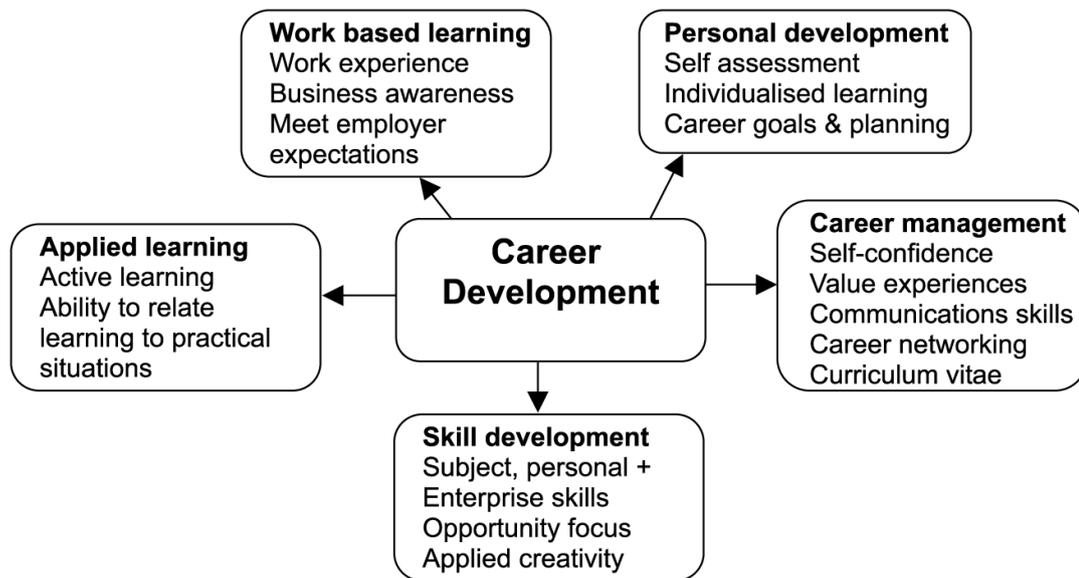
### **2.3.11. Career Development Models**

The value of the DOTS Framework lies in its simplicity, as it allows individuals to organise a great deal of the complexity of CDL into achievable manageable tasks. Using DOTS as the framework, a few recent UK CDL models have been developed.

These are:

#### **2.3.11.1. Rae's Model of Career Development**

This model (Figure 2.11) adopts a five strand approach to provide guidelines for career planning opportunities to be designed into degree programs (Rae 2007).



**Figure 2.11 Rae's Model of Career Development**

The five strands in this model encompass personal development, career management, skill development; applied learning and work based learning (WBL).

Personal development encourages students to use a personal development process to help them set personal goals for individualised learning, to self-assess and reflect on their learning and acquisition of employability skills (Ward et al. 2007). They will evidence their learning and attainment of these skills and then apply them in career plans, curriculum vitae and job applications (Rae 2007).

Career management should be an on-going process where students should have access to and are encouraged to participate in ongoing career development activities integrated within the degree program in university and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities at the workplace (Hooley et al. 2013; Rae 2007; Sultana 2013; Zuber-Skerritt 1992).

Skill development can be demonstrated where there are opportunities in several courses to practise and gain credits for the development of both discipline specific and generic skills for personal enterprise and employability (Rae 2007). Applied learning requires and encourages students to participate in activities, to make connections throughout the degree between theoretical and cognitive, subjective-based learning

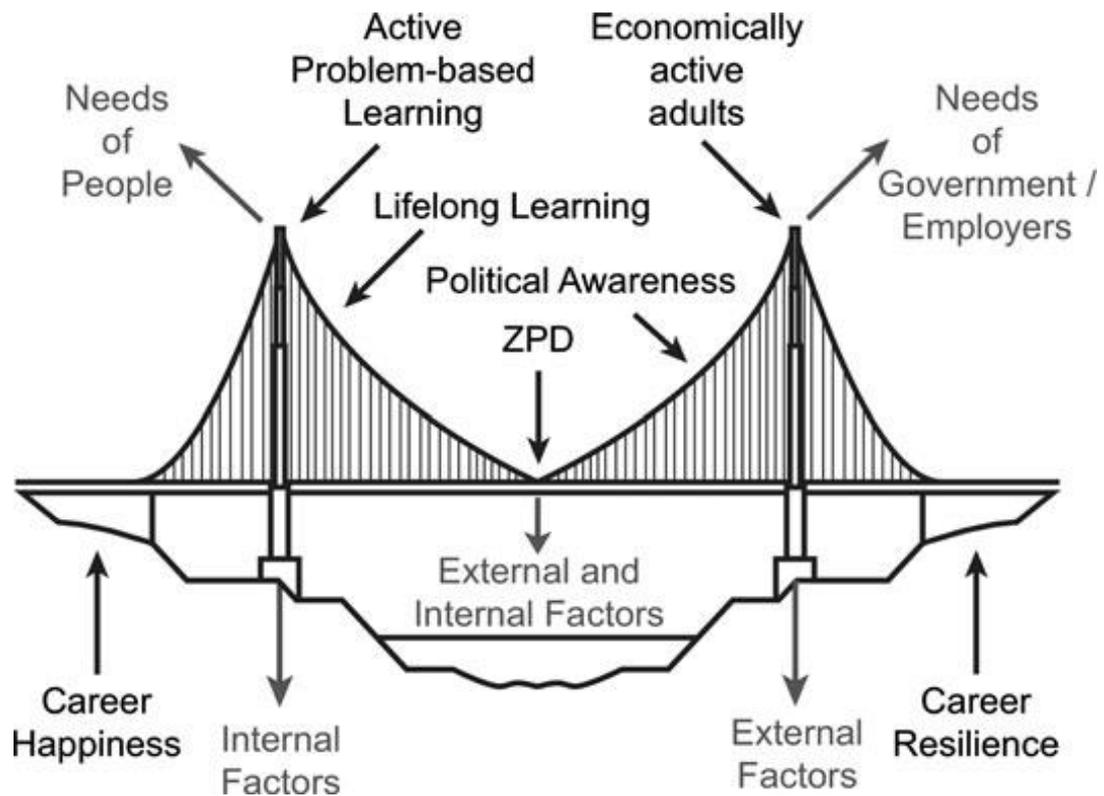
and to apply this knowledge to practise, utilising transferable skills between the university and the workplace (Rae 2007).

Work Based Learning is an educational strategy that provides students with real-life work experiences where they can apply academic and technical skills and develop employability skills. These strategies provide career awareness, career exploration opportunities, career planning activities and assist students reach competencies such as positive work attitudes and employability skills (Rae 2007).

#### **2.3.11.2. The Career Learning for Development (CLD) Bridge Model**

A newer UK model that emphasises ‘fitness for purpose’ for careers work in the twenty-first century and a model for career learning and development is Bassot’s CLD bridge model (Bassot 2012) (Figure 2.12). This model brings together recent theory regarding the ways in which individuals make career decisions throughout their lives in dynamic, fluctuating labour markets in globalised economies. The model is described as a metaphor of a suspension bridge, which explores and explains the ongoing dilemmas experienced by career practitioners and their clients in a career development relationship.

One significant aspect of the CLD Bridge is that it operates with two-way traffic, as individuals revisit education regularly through lifelong learning. The CLD Bridge is a suspension bridge that functions because of inherent tensions and forces held delicately in balance. The metaphor of a suspension bridge depicts the opposing tensions between individuals’ needs on one side and the society’s (employers’) needs on the other. The tensions though negative in nature may be seen as opportunities and possibilities for academics and career specialists to bridge the gap rather than threats.



**Figure 2.12 Career Learning for Development (CLD) Bridge Model**

The bridge spans the gap between education and work but because of the dynamic and rapid changes, the bridge operates with two-way traffic. This depicts the need for individuals to develop themselves continually through on-going education and professional development. This enables them to meet their personal needs and employers' needs families and communities, thereby constructing a successful career through life. Compression on either side of the bridge and the weight of the road in the centre represent factors that can inhibit CLD. On the left are internal factors which may include an individual's poor self-esteem and lack of motivation. On the right are external factors such as economic recession and high unemployment. The weight at the centre of the bridge is the individual who is a vital member of society.

On either side of the bridge are the anchorage blocks that prevent the bridge from breaking due to the tensions pulling in opposite directions: career happiness and career resilience. Career happiness includes maintaining a healthy work/life balance, choosing a satisfying work discipline and working in an organisation that is aligned with their personal values. Career resilience is important in a rapidly changing world because individuals need to have the capacity to deal with or bounce back from

disappointments such as job redundancies (Birch et al. 1999). Spanning the bridge is the road or the space between the individual and work. The road represents recent theoretical developments in the field, the career narrative from a constructivist perspective and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The Zone of Proximal Development refers to a concept developed by psychologist Vygotsky and refers to the difference between an individual's ability to perform a task independently and with guidance (Vygotsky 1978).

In this model, the student works in partnership with a career guidance practitioner. With the support of skilled and effective career guidance, individuals can make more progress across the CLD Bridge than they can do themselves. In order for such progress to be made, learning about career needs to be active and interactive. According to Bassot (2012), these CLD programs, designed with principles of active, problem based and experiential learning, will assist individuals to make progress within their ZPD. Emphasising what learners can do is vital in enabling individuals to move forward effectively in their career thinking and in skills development to traverse the bridge. As progress is made, support can be progressively reduced as learners move towards independence. By participating in activities that encourage problem solving and through discussion and working in partnership with career professionals, individuals will be able to construct new knowledge on careers and make progress across the CLD bridge.

#### **2.4. Australian Developments in Career Development**

At present, university career development education, information, support and services are provided by numerous higher educational institutions through various means, with varying quality and content (Patrick, Peach & Pocknee 2009). To improve the consistency in career development initiatives and improvements in graduate employability outcomes, a national career development strategy is required. This will help to promote the development of career management skills through the provision of high quality career education, information and services and equitable access could benefit the Australian working population (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2012).

### **2.4.1. Australian Career Development Strategy**

A national strategy toward a unified Framework will better address both individual needs and public policy goals (Australian Collaborative Education Network 2015). This strategy alone may not address all challenges but it could help to focus on lifelong learning across all ages. However, it may provide the coherence needed to ensure individuals can develop career development skills or access support at any time to benefit key cohorts such as young adults and mature aged workers. Such a strategy could bring together all key stakeholders and promote high-quality career development education, support and services and will bring Australia in line with recent international developments. The Network (2015) believes that this may lead to a future where all Australians at any stage of their life have the requisite skills to manage their careers, enabling them to engage more effectively in the workforce and contributing to increased national productivity.

The Australian government response to such challenges is articulated in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (ABCD). The blueprint is based on the recognition that there is a need to support individuals, throughout their lives, to make appropriate choices about education, training and work, and to manage their careers successfully. As a result, they argue that individuals should be equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to take full advantage of the opportunities that arise from ongoing changes in the labour market and in education and skill requirements. The government has produced an Australian National Career Development Strategy will help to address this (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2012).

### **2.4.2. Australian Blueprint for Career Development (ABCD)**

The ABCD represents a significant policy initiative that contributes to a national Framework for lifelong career development. The ABCD is a Framework that can be used in Australia to design, implement and evaluate career development programs for young individuals and adults. The Blueprint identifies the skills, attitudes and knowledge that individuals need to make sound choices and to manage their careers effectively (Miles Morgan Australia 2010). The Blueprint (Ministerial Council for Education 2010) identifies eleven career management competencies that all Australians need to develop in order to manage life, learning and work. These competencies promote intentional career development, lifelong learning and life/work

balance. It also specifies competencies at different developmental stages of life. These are grouped into three areas: personal management, learning work exploration and career building.

Personal Management includes building and maintaining a positive self-concept, interacting positively and effectively with others and changing and growing throughout life. Personal management activities relates to the acquisition of skills and self-knowledge of the types of work most suited to certain abilities, skills and personal attributes such as communications.

Learning and work exploration involves participating in lifelong learning activities, which are supportive of career goals, locating and effectively using career information and understanding the relationship between work, society and the economy. Learning work exploration activities include knowing how to locate, interpret, evaluate and use career information in the world of work, society, the economy and an understanding of the interplay between each of these factors (Miles Morgan Australia 2010).

Career building encompasses securing, creating and maintaining work, making career enhancing decisions, maintaining balanced life and work roles, understanding the changing nature of life and work roles and understanding, engaging in and managing the career building process. Career building activities involve being able to identify work opportunities, secure and maintain a position at work, improve future career prospects, being able to balance work and personal life and managing a career to achieve specific goals. These career management skills will be helpful to students to transition successfully to tertiary training or a job after university. They will encourage students to value learning by linking it to their hopes and dreams for the future. These skills will also help adults to transition successfully between learning and work roles that support their family and community responsibilities (Ministerial Council for Education 2010).

According to the Ministerial Council for Education (2010), the Blueprint is intended to be used in flexible ways. It is also important to understand each of the elements of the framework and how they fit together to provide a comprehensive and integrated

framework for assisting individuals to actively manage their careers as they transition between the learning, work, family and community aspects of their lives.

### **2.4.3. Systems Theory Framework STF)**

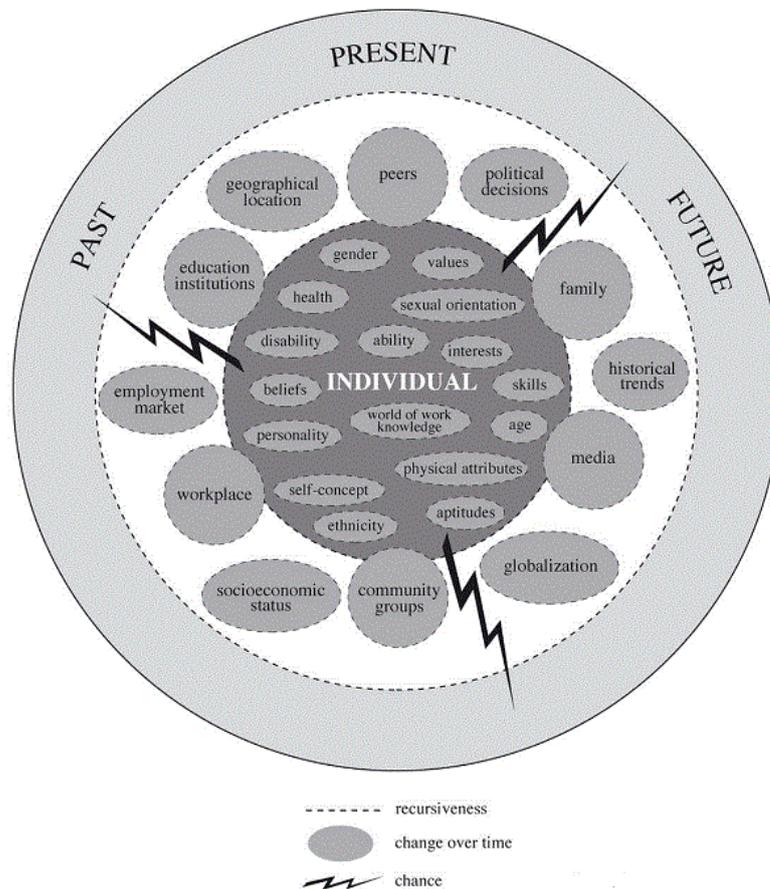
A national blueprint does not resolve all of the problems in the system but goes a long way to establishing a foundation of understanding to base intentional and purposeful career development learning programs and policy. McMahon, Patton and Tatham believe that investment in the development and refinement of the Australian Blueprint for Career Development will reap the rewards of economic growth resulting in a population well-equipped with the requisite skills and competencies to be successful life/career managers (McMahon, Patton & Tatham 2003b).

Based on the ABCD, Patton and McMahon (2006) developed the theoretical framework in career development in Australia known as the Systems Theory Framework (STF). Osipow (1983) suggested that by using the theory, the elements of an individual's social, personal and economic situation may be more explicitly analysed and the relationships of the larger systems to one another may be more clearly understood. This is in contrast to the more traditional approaches to behaviour, which tend to emphasise only one major segment of the individual or the environment (Osipow 1983). According to Kraus, a system can be defined as a whole that functions by virtue of the interdependence of its parts. In terms of career development, an individual and his or her context would be regarded as a whole and the reciprocity between an individual and his or her context would be regarded as the interdependence of its parts (Kraus 1989).

Systems Theory is broad-based and purportedly takes into account the diversity and complexity of the influences on human development (Patton 2007). The emphasis in Systems Theory is on the reciprocal interactions between the subsystems of the system and the changes that occur over time as a result of these interactions. According to the authors, Systems Theory provides an opportunity to develop a framework to represent the complex interrelationships of the many influences on career development. They argue that Systems Theory provides the breadth necessary to unite the theories while the individual theories provide the depth needed to account for specific concepts. Thus McMahon and Patton claim that Systems Theory and the extant theory are

complementary and can co-exist compatibly (McMahon & Patton 1995). The authors (Patton & McMahon 2015) explain that the proposal of a Systems Theory perspective is not meant to compete with or devalue other theories. Its significance is in its capacity to place the emphasis on the individual and to unite the various theories under one framework.

As a holistic meta-theoretical framework, the STF accommodates both the content influences and the process influences on an individual's career development. This is illustrated in Figure 2.13. Content influences include the personal qualities and characteristics intrinsic to individuals, as well as the influences of the context in which they live, such as the individuals and organisations with whom they interact and the society and environment they live in.



**Figure 2.13 Systems Theory Framework (STF)**

A feature of the STF is its capacity to represent the dynamic nature of career development within and between systems through its inclusion of the process

influences of recursiveness, chance and change over time (Patton & McMahon 1999). The influences of the intrapersonal system are also not static and a reciprocal interaction takes place between these influences as well as between them and the influences of the social environmental/societal context. Dynamic reciprocal processes occur whereby a change to one part of the system brings about change in all other parts of the system. Patton and McMahon suggested that the STF is thus a theoretical foundation that accounts for systems influences on an individual's career development including individual, social and environmental/societal contexts (Patton & McMahon 2006).

According to Systems Theory, the individual is at the centre, and his or her career is constituted by personal influences (e.g. abilities, interests, self-concept) which recursively interact with broader contextual influences beyond the individual, including change over time and chance. Some of the other prominent topics in the career development literature include globalisation (Amundson, Mills & Smith 2014), rapid changes in labour markets and workplace reforms, the effects of social class (Liu & Ali 2005), race and ethnicity (Praskova, Creed & Hood 2015), family influence on career choice (Creed & Gagliardi 2015) and balancing the needs of family and work (Haratsis, Dood & Creed 2015). In their STF, Patton and McMahon elaborated on these numerous influences that make up careers. The individual is at the centre, and his or her career is constituted by personal influences such as abilities, interest and self-concept, which recursively interact with broader contextual influences beyond the individual including change over time and chance (Patton & McMahon 2006, 2015).

These influences are organised in the STF as a series of interconnecting systems of influence on career development affecting the individual system, the social system and the environmental-societal system. The STF recognises the changing nature and interaction of these influences and is conceptualised as a dynamic open system. The process influences include recursiveness (the interaction between influences), change over time and chance. All influences are set within the context of the past, the present and the future. There is a wide spectrum of external influences that affect career decision making across the life span and, in particular, how these factors may directly or indirectly alter an individual's career path. External influences are believed to be

particularly salient constructs for individuals who are currently employed and attempting to balance work, family and life circumstances (Duffy & Dik 2009).

In this model, Career development is considered in relation to contextual influences emanating from the past such as family origins and life experiences and present influences such as current stage of life and family life cycle. However, future considerations such as anticipated lifestyle and employment market trends may also influence the career development of an individual. Also, the current rapid technological and social changes result in work skills being made redundant at faster rates. To consider career development without looking ahead to the future is deficient in approach.

#### **2.4.3.1. Individual System**

According to the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon 2006), the individual lives within a broader context than that of society or the environment. The subsystems of the environmental societal system, such as political decisions or globalization, may seem less directly related to individuals but nonetheless have influence on their career development. Consequently, the centre of the framework is a circle representing the individual. The term ‘individual’ represents the uniqueness of a person and his or her personal situation. The circle also contains a range of intrapersonal influences on career development relevant to all individuals but may be impacted differently by each.

The STF model represents the individual as an open system recursively interacting with and within multiple sub-systems. It also incorporates the complex interplay of influences through which individuals construct their careers. The dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment aligns with constructivist thinking with its emphasis on holism and the creation of personal meaning.

In the STF, the individual is both a system in its own right and a subsystem of a broader contextual system represented by the social system and the environmental-societal system. As subsystems, they do not live in isolation, but rather as part of a much larger contextual system, which comprises the social system and the environmental-societal system.

#### **2.4.3.2. Social System**

The social system refers to the other individuals systems where individuals interact with family, educational institutions, peers and the media. The individual and the social systems occur within the broader system of society and the environment: known as the 'environmental societal' system. Most individuals will belong to significantly more groups such as interest groups, service clubs and self-help groups (McMahon & Patton 1995). For example, a particular group that may influence the career development of individuals are employers. The media is also identified as a socialising influence (Jepsen 1989). The media is influential as a filter of information transmission in terms of what it reports and how it reports in the societal/environmental context. The influence of all these groups is illustrated in practice by an increasing use of career counselling and career guidance processes that reflect family Systems Theory elements (McMahon & Patton 1995; McMahon, Watson & Patton 2015).

#### **2.4.3.3. Environmental/Societal System**

The inclusion of the environmental/societal system provides an opportunity for employment to be included as part of the broader life context. For example, opportunities in the employment market have been significantly influenced by rapid advances in technology. Other examples include changes to the employment market such as award restructuring, enterprise agreements, workplace based education and training and career path planning, brought about largely by political influences are also a significant influence on career development (Patton & McMahon 2006).

In addition, geographic isolation may influence the nature of schooling received, employment opportunities, availability of role models and access to information. The decisions of governments on issues such as social security benefits, funding for schools and universities, industrial agreements and workplace restructuring also have profound effects on the individual and the members of their immediate social contexts including parents (Patton & McMahon 2006).

#### **2.4.3.4. Reciprocal Interaction**

There is reciprocal interaction between the influences in the STF. The broken lines in the STF figure represent the reciprocity. The influences of the intrapersonal system are also dynamic with influences moving within them and between them and the

environmental and societal contexts. A change in one part of the system will bring about change in the other parts of the system (McMahon & Patton 1995).

#### **2.4.3.5. Chance and Change over Time**

In the STF diagram, chance is represented by random flashes. It is defined as ‘an unplanned event that measurably alters one’s behaviour’. Indeed, an individual’s career path may not always be linear, straightforward and clear. Traditional theories and practices have assumed a linear and straightforward sequence of life and career events, however, our lives and our career situations are increasingly more complex and dynamic (Amundson, Mills & Smith 2014). In fact, it is one of constant evolution and may be cyclical (McMahon & Patton 1995). In addition, individuals' career development may not always be planned, predictable or logical. Unexpected or chance events, such as accidents, illness, organisational restructuring, or natural disasters, may profoundly influence career development (Rice 2014).

Career development is a life-span phenomenon. It is indicated in the STF diagram by shading as change over time in the contextual influences. These influences are illustrative of the dynamic nature of career development and describe the recurring interaction within and between systems. Thus, a change in one part of the system will result in a change in another part of the system. Furthermore, the nature of the influences and the degree of influence change over time.

All of the process and content influences exist, within the broader concept of time. The past influences the present, and, together, past and present influence the future (McMahon & Patton 1995; Patton & McMahon 1999, 2006). Time is represented in the STF as a circular depiction that emphasises the nonlinear nature of an individual’s career development and the integral role of past, present and future influences.

#### **2.4.4. Systems Theory Framework and Career Development Learning**

Smith et al. argued that the STF is relevant for reconceptualising Work Integrated Learning (WIL) through the lens of career development. The centre of the STF highlights the range of personal factors which make up an individual’s career and WIL is influenced by those personal factors or vice-versa. Ultimately, they concluded that WIL aligns well with the principles of the STF since it is not just about

developing skills but can be viewed as a transformative pedagogy that entails personal development and experiential learning (Smith et al. 2009).

As Smith et al. explained in STF, career is not just a matter of occupational interest and choice but is used in a broader socioeconomic construct defined by context. This framework ensures that educators revisit their notions of student learning and career decision making and how they can create learning environments that facilitate students' development of their careers over their lifetimes (Smith et al. 2009). For example, the STF diagram presents a number of social factors and these factors influence one another and also influence the personal factors in the centre. A comprehensive approach to formulating and delivering CDL and WIL should take into account if and how broader life and contextual factors impinge upon a student's experience and learning journey.

Smith et al. also concluded that there are contextual influences present in the STF that are most relevant to CDL activities in a tertiary education institution setting. These are educational institutions, workplaces, community groups, geographical location, employment market, socio-economic status and globalisation. All play key roles in the influences that constitute an individual student's world of work and learning that constitute the broader influences of his or her career. Bringing coherence to myriad influences, from the perspective of the student and the university, can be achieved through CDL (Smith et al. 2009).

Bridgstock (2007) attempted to summarise the elements in the STF using confirmatory analysis processes. She found that nineteen of the twenty eight influences included in the Systems Theory Framework of career development were included in the identification of five broad career development influence factors. Of the five identified correlated factors, three were within the framework's individual system, one was within the social system and one was within the environmental-societal system. Her paper documented the initial development, utility and validation of a brief quantitative measure of career development influences based on the Systems Theory Framework of career development (Bridgstock 2007; Patton & McMahon 1999, 2006).

Within the individual system, the three underlying factors were: interests and beliefs, skills and abilities and physical characteristics. Interests and beliefs comprise the influences of interests, beliefs, values and personality. Skills and abilities include abilities, aptitudes and skills. Physical characteristics encompass health, age, physical attributes and gender. One factor was identified in the social system: interpersonal influences comprising family and peers. One factor was identified in the environmental-societal system: environmental-societal influences comprising historical trends, political decisions, socioeconomic status, globalisation, media and geographical location (Bridgstock 2007).

The element of world of work knowledge was strongly correlated with many of the other elements providing support to the notion that it is a central and complex influence on career development (Bridgstock 2007).

#### **2.4.5. Evaluation of the Systems Theory Framework**

According to the authors, the Systems Theory perspective recognises the contribution of career development theory and practice of other disciplines (Patton & McMahon 2015). They argued that Systems Theory brings to career development congruence between theory and practice and new approaches for use in career practice. This is because it offers a perspective that underlies the philosophy reflected in the move from positivist approaches to constructivist approaches. Accordingly, its' authors claimed that the Systems Theory perspective enables practitioners to choose from the theory that is most relevant to the needs and situation of the individual (McIlveen 2007; Patton & McMahon 2006).

According to its proponents, the Systems Theory Framework (STF) places extant theories in the context of other theories so that their interconnections can be demonstrated. They claim that as an overarching framework, new or revised theoretical developments may be accommodated along with existing theories. The STF does not compete with or devalue existing theory. This Framework and extant theory are complementary and co-exist compatibly because the STF provides the breadth necessary to unite the theories while the individual theories provide the depth needed to account for specific concepts (Patton & McMahon 2015). They argue that the STF also allows for relevant constructs and meanings from other disciplines to be

incorporated or applied. The STF provides ‘cross-theoretical linkage’ (McIlveen 2007; Patton & McMahon 2015; Savickas 1994).

The STF has often been criticised for its focus on intra-individual issues to the detriment of contextual issues. For example, with continued progress of globalisation, the societal and environmental influences will likely have a bigger impact on personal career choices and management. This Framework has also been described as inadequate and incomplete and lacking in comprehensiveness and coherence. For example, some have argued that it has failed to account for diversity within the population (Beveridge et al. 2002; Patton & McMahon 2014). However, it is important to note that the motivation of the STF was not one of absolute comprehensiveness but one where numerous influences and factors are put into a Framework to assist personal career building and management and to assist career counsellors in their job (Patton & McMahon 2015). There is also recognition of overlap in conceptualisation of many elements in the Framework by Bridgstock (2007).

Indeed Patton and McMahon reminded us that the STF is not designed to be a theory for career development. Indeed, it is probable that no single theory can be comprehensive enough to deal with individuals in all circumstances (Patton & McMahon 2006). Instead, the STF is construed as an overarching Framework within which all concepts of career development described in career theories can be usefully positioned and utilised in theory and practice (Patton & McMahon 2015).

These shortcomings notwithstanding, the utility of the STF in its application to practice establishes it as a useful theoretical foundation for practice (McMahon, Watson & Patton 2015). The Framework is able to answer practical questions related to accuracy, responsibility, comprehensiveness, integration and adaptability (Krumboltz 1994). Accuracy relates to the accurate description of occupational behaviour; responsibility enables individuals to take personal responsibilities for their lives; comprehensiveness covers the holistic nature career development and the contextualisation of individuals’ concerns; integration referring to the relationship to other theories and adaptation relating to the potential of the theory to evolve with changing times and incorporating new concepts (McMahon, Watson & Patton 2015).

Consequently, this research study applies the Systems Theory Framework as the career development learning Framework to assist undergraduate business students in their career building journey to enhance their future employability prospects. It is hoped that the findings will shed light on the importance and impacts of various elements in the Framework on different student groups and help academics and career specialist to assist students in their career development process.

## **2.5. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has comprehensively delivered on its threefold purpose. Firstly, the current literature relating to the underlying theories and frameworks of graduate employability and career development learning was reviewed. Secondly, current developments in these areas were described and evaluated. Finally, the research gaps identified in the literature including the lack of research on first year university students' perspective on employability and career management were identified. This research study seeks to provide answers and suggestions to the research questions that were formulated to address these gaps.

The next chapter explains the research methodology and method used in the study to explore students' learning in career development and management.

### 3. CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, literature relating to the underlying theories of employability and career development learning was reviewed and then current, relevant research was summarised and evaluated. From the literature review, research gaps related to the inclusion of the students' perspectives on graduate employability and career management were identified. To address this, a research study was developed to investigate the perceived usefulness of career development learning activities offered to undergraduate business students early in their degree program. Through these activities students reflected on their level of preparedness for employment and how they could improve their chances of securing a graduate level position.

The aim of this chapter is to describe the research approach and the methodology used in the study. The research design enables the collection of data to investigate the research issues initially outlined in Chapter 1. This pertains to the problem of new business graduates who are deemed unemployable in the current business environment because their skill sets and attributes do not match the expectations of potential employers. This research study is conducted firstly to examine students' views on perceived graduate employability skills and attributes that employers' value. Secondly, it explores the benefits or otherwise of first year undergraduate career development and management activities. Thirdly, the study examines the current, perceived level of preparedness of students for future employability. Finally, this study will examine the perceived learning benefits of career development activities and the actions students intend to take to improve their future employability.

The first section provides an account and justification of the research approach taken in this study. This is followed by a discussion of the underlying paradigm for the research. Next, the chapter provides an overview of the research methods used. Finally, it summarises the research plan and the research process and procedures used in the study.

### **3.2. Research Approach**

A phenomenographic methodology is used in this study to analyse undergraduate business students' reflections on the usefulness of career development learning activities and the skills and attributes of graduates required for employability.

### **3.3. Phenomenography**

Phenomenography has been defined as 'the empirical study of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which various phenomena in and aspects of the world around us are experienced' (Marton 1986). It is a qualitative research methodology, within the interpretivist paradigm that investigates the different ways in which people experience something or think about something (Marton 1986). Phenomenography is essentially concerned with the subjective study of human experience and is used predominantly in education research. Its ontological assumptions are subjectivist: the world exists and different people construct it in different ways (Bowden 2000). A phenomenographic study involves the interpretation of descriptions of experiences of a phenomenon, usually in the form of semi-structured interviews and personal reflections and its descriptions are from 'second-order' rather than a 'first-order' or researcher perspective (Entwistle 1997; Leveson 2004; Marton 1986). In phenomenography, the subject (the person who is experiencing the phenomenon) and the aspects of the world (object) are not considered as separate. Hence, this method is considered to be a relational approach as this type of research focuses on exploring the relations fostered between the subjects and objects or aspects of the world (Bowden 2005; Khan 2014; Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012). The researcher gains from the subjects' experiences.

According to Marton and Booth (1997), experiences comprise of both meaning and structure. The referential aspect represents the meaning of an experience and the structural aspect represents its structure. The referential aspect of an experience is mentioning or highlighting the direct object or particular meaning of the object. It may be described as how an individual experiences a phenomenon whereas the structural aspect is defined as how individuals act towards the phenomenon (Khan 2014; Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012). The referential aspect is often referred to as the 'what' aspect of the experience whereas the structural aspect is referred to as the 'how' aspect. In an educational research context, students' learning experience can be categorised as a

referential aspect; for example, what students reflect and learn from their experience in relation to a phenomenon and a structural aspect, for example, on how students go about their learning (Khan 2014; Marton & Booth 1997). The structural aspect may be classified further into two elements: ‘external horizon’; and ‘internal horizon’; which refers to the students’ acts of learning and their intention towards the act respectively (Khan 2014; Trigwell 2000).

The central aim of a phenomenographic study is to identify different ways in which individuals experience, interpret, understand, perceive or conceptualise a certain phenomenon (Akerlind 2005; Bowden 2000). Whilst data may be collected individually, phenomenography focuses on collective awareness and variation in how a phenomenon is experienced (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012). Analysis is group oriented with the aim of identifying similar conceptions of experience related to a phenomenon under investigation. The experiences are generalised and categorised in the form of a number of ‘categories of description’ and arranged in a logically inclusive structure giving a picture of the collective experience of the phenomenon within the group under analysis. This yields the range of meanings that the underlying concept has when experienced by the group and the relationships between them (Forster 2015). The logical relationships that exist between these categories of description are called the ‘outcome space’ of the studied phenomenon.

The basis of phenomenographic pedagogy is to make learners’ conceptions explicit to them recognising that students studying the same phenomenon may perceive it in very different ways. For example, student reflections and discussions can be used to highlight different ways in which students view aspects of a phenomenon. This pedagogy also involves the observation of how students approach the solution of problems and issues (Lucas 2012). The objective is not to make statements about reality but about perceived reality. Such statements about perceived reality are the conceptions. The conceptions are regarded as being context-dependent and relational, being the product of an individual’s interaction with his/her surroundings.

Phenomenographic interests in research may be classified into two forms: pure and developmental. In the pure form, how individuals perceive various aspects of their reality are described where the concepts under study are mostly phenomena faced by

participants in everyday life rather than course materials studied in educational institutions (Marton 1986). In the developmental version, the research seeks to find out how individuals experience some aspect of their world and then to enable them to change their world, which usually takes place in a formal educational setting (Bowden 2000).

This research study uses a developmental phenomenographic approach. Developmental phenomenographic research is undertaken with the purpose of using the outcomes to help individuals to learn. The insights from the research outcomes can assist in the planning of learning experiences that lead participants to a more powerful understanding of the studied phenomena. The outcomes of these studies can also be used to develop generalisations about the ways in which to organise learning experiences in the field of study (Bowden 2000).

Phenomenographic studies can also offer value in producing useful insights into teaching and learning (Entwistle 1997). For this reason, phenomenography is closely associated with an interest in higher education practice, particularly the student learning experience through the encouragement of ‘deep learning’ and the employment of various teaching approaches (Tight 2015). This methodology sees learning as relational – it takes place through an interaction between the student, the content of the learning material and the overall learning environment (Biggs 1993; Entwistle 1997)

Phenomenographic studies need to be well-planned and executed. They should begin with a clear intention and with research planned around particular purposes; and these should provide a focus throughout the study and guide action. A typical phenomenographic process should include planning (purposes and strategy), data collection (whom, how, why), analysis (details, roles, relation to purposes) and interpretation (context of study and applications) (Bowden 2000).

As a qualitative framework, phenomenography has been used to examine three major research areas: students’ approaches to learning, students’ understandings of specific academic concepts/content and individuals’ approaches to and understandings of phenomena they experience in their day-to-day lives (Bowden 2000). The value of phenomenographic research is linked to the idea of its pedagogy, which involves

teaching for conceptual change. It is founded on the premise that students have to engage with various ways of viewing a phenomenon and that educators have to engage with alternative ways of viewing the students (Bowden 2000; Lucas 2001; Marton 1986).

Phenomenography has often been criticised for its lack of specificity and explicitness concerning its methods of data collection, its method of data analysis and its theoretical underpinnings (Richardson 1999). Richardson also claimed that phenomenographers do not sceptically examine the effects of a participant's background, culture, and environment on what is reported in the participant's output. There is a noted tendency of phenomenographers to identify hierarchical arrangements of conceptions, with the most highly developed of those identified as the 'correct' conclusion (Webb 1997).

There have also been questions about the validity, reliability and replicability of phenomenographic studies (Akerlind 2005; Sandberg 1997). Validity, in this study, may be regarded as the extent to which the research findings actually reflect the phenomenon studied. Because phenomenographic studies are interpretivist in nature and can never be fully objective, external measures of validity may not be relevant. Such studies do not 'seek the truth' but look into the varieties of human experiences of a particular phenomenon (Akerlind 2005). The focus of research quality in such studies is to ensure that the research aims are appropriately reflected in the research methods used (Akerlind 2005; Bowden 2000).

There are two types of validity checks in phenomenographic studies: communicative validity and pragmatic validity. In communicative validity, researchers have to defend the appropriateness of research and interpretation techniques applied and data accurately described in their studies. According to Akerlind (2005), they can be validated through peer reviewed journals, research seminars or conference presentations. In pragmatic validity, researchers have to convince their intended audience on the extent of research outcomes that are seen as useful and meaningful to them. The research outcomes may be judged in terms of the insight they provide into effective ways of operating in the world (Akerlind 2005; Entwistle 1997; Marton 1986).

Reliability may be seen as reflecting the use of appropriate methodological processes in ensuring quality and consistency in data interpretations. One of the ways Akerlind (2005) has suggested to establish reliability in results is to maintain and make explicit 'interpretative awareness' (Sandberg 1997), in which the researcher makes interpretive steps clear to the reader by explaining their presuppositions and conceptions about the data and phenomena in question and how the data are critically interpreted. To increase methodological rigour, researchers have a responsibility to be as explicit as possible about the subjective nature of the investigations and the measures taken to counter and/or justify the actions (Leveson 2004).

If certain standards are explicitly adopted and demonstrated, then phenomenographic research can arguably satisfy the demands of validity and reliability. This involves the careful design of interview questions/reflective tasks with minimal bias or influence, ensuring the participant is aware of the phenomenon in question (structure of awareness), controlling and checking the researcher's interpretations and presenting results that can stand up to scrutiny (Cope 2004; Tight 2015).

### **3.4. Reflection and Constructivism**

In conducting this research, constructivist theory is applied through the adoption of a career story-telling device, and a reflection approach to learning was adopted.

The concept of student approaches to learning was popularised in Australasia by Biggs (1987). This has also been associated with different student approaches to learning, which may be classified as deep learning and surface learning (Marton & Saljo 1976; Ramsden 2003). A deep approach is characterised by a desire to understand the underlying principles and favourable perceptions of the learning context and is associated with deep approaches to learning (Jackling 2005a, 2005b; Lucas 2001). The deep approach is indicative of a wider awareness that goes beyond the established parameters to find meaning by testing theories developed in range of different situations (Tempone & Martin 2003).

Reflection as a process leads to deeper learning (Moon, J. A. 2004). Reflection can generally be defined as a cognitive process carried out in order to learn from

experiences (Moon, J. A. 2004) through individual inquiry and collaboration with others (Dewey 1933). The focus of reflection can vary from a concrete technical aspect of an experience to the broader societal context of that experience. The quality of reflection can be described through successive stages of augmentation: describing, justifying, evaluating and discussion (Leijen et al. 2012).

Reflection has been used interchangeably with a number of words such as reflective thinking, reflective writing and reflective practice. It is part of learning and thinking. Reflection emphasises the intention to learn from current or past experience. Learning happens as a result of reflection or reflection occurs in order to learn something (Moon, J. 2004). Some benefits from reflection include critical review, action, problem solving, building of theory and personal and continuing professional development (Moon 1999). Reflection is also a key assessment for learning tool within the constructivist learning and teaching paradigm. Reflective writing is particularly useful in this study, as it could yield rich, comprehensive and in-depth data that could lead to theory building and the development and extension of the System Theory Framework (STF).

In recent years, constructivism has begun to assume a more central role in career theory and career counselling (Savickas 2002). Inherent to constructivism is the recognition that individuals are active agents in the production of their careers. The lifelong process of career construction is done in story or narrative form from the perspective of constructivism (Bassot 2012; McMahan & Watson 2008, 2011; McMahan, Watson & Patton 2015). The individual learner has a degree of control over personal destiny, with society having a lesser effect and is encouraged to be agents in control of their own actions. They construct their narratives, enabling them to find their place in the situations they encounter (Bassot 2012).

Career stories are contextually located within the lives of individuals. Beginning in early childhood, career stories represent a recursiveness (ongoing interaction) between life experiences and the individual's attempts to make sense of those experiences (McMahan, Watson & Patton 2015). As individuals grow, they continually seek to derive meaning from their life experiences and their construction of stories represents the way they as individuals come to learn and understand themselves better

(McMahon, Patton & Watson 2004). In the telling of stories, individuals locate themselves as the primary narrator and character of their stories and in this way identity is constructed over time. As life is complex and multifaceted, lives are constructed from multiple stories derived from the construction and telling of personal stories. No single story can represent the totality of an individual's life experience (McMahon, Patton & Watson 2004; McMahon, Watson & Patton 2015). By constructing these narratives, learners engage in career development, reflecting on meaning through processes of interpretation. Individual narratives consist of accounts of the past, which are then extrapolated into the future. As learners engage in career development, they can be supported in the formulation of their narratives by career professionals, enabling them to progress from their current position towards brighter futures.

Students' reflection can be conceptualised as three general categories related in their learning: critical review of past learning experiences, cognitive learning strategies and summaries of what was learnt (Lew & Schmidt 2011). From evidence in the literature, some outcomes of reflective processes include learning for further reflection, personal and continuing professional development, conducting a personal critical review, reflection on learning or personal functioning (metacognition) and taking action (Moon 1999; Moon, J. A. 2004; Raelin et al. 2008; Ryan & Ryan 2012).

### **3.5. Applications of Reflection to Career Development Learning and Employability**

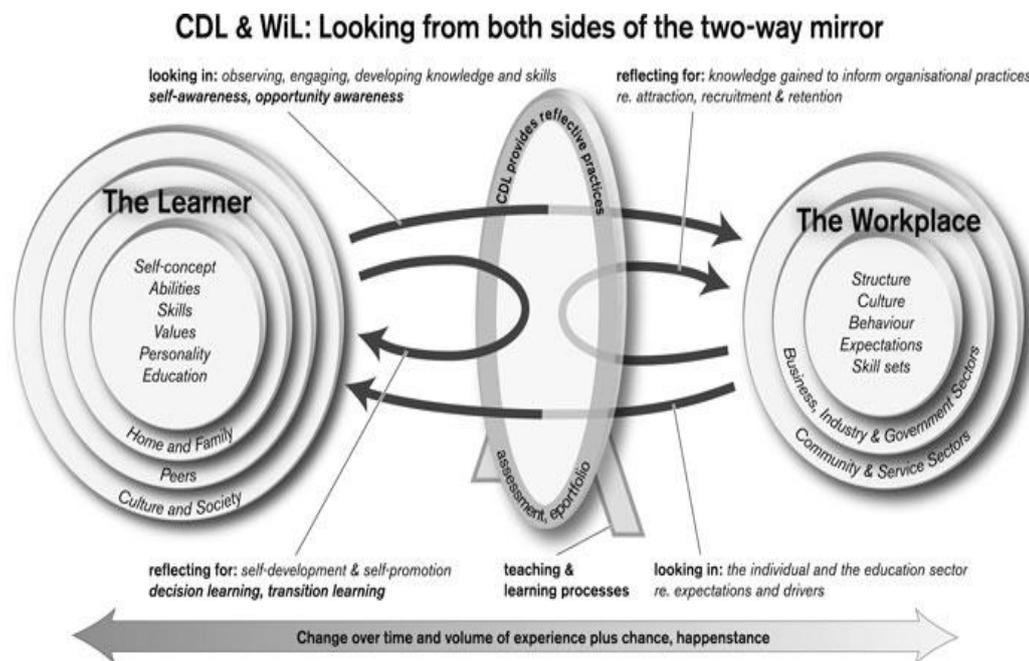
Collins and Watts (1996) recognised the need to incorporate constructivist, theoretical approaches into career development work. This is because constructivism emphasises the proactive nature of human knowing, acknowledging that individuals participate in the construction of their own reality. More emphasis is placed on subjective processes of the individual rather than objectivity. Indeed, it considers the construction of career stories of individuals across a lifespan. The stories told illustrate a range of theoretical constructs related to career development and career construction.

Career Development Learning (CDL) is focused on student learning plans and needs and entails reflection upon learning undertaken in relation to those plans and needs. Reflective learning is at the core of CDL. Including CDL activities in WIL can enhance its capacity for reflective learning (McIlveen & Patton 2006; Raelin et al.

2008). Career Development Learning can be used to facilitate students' preparation for WIL and then to reflect upon their learning during and after so as to exploit the experience as a personally meaningful one (Coulson et al. 2010; Edgar, Francis-Coad & Connaughton 2013; Patton 2007).

Within the Australian higher education context, CDL aims to assist students to develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of themselves (Fullana et al. 2014; Lucas 2001), develop knowledge and understanding of the range of career opportunities available, learn how to make choices from available options and effectively manage the implementation of the selected choices in adult life and work life (McCowan C. & McKenzie 1997; Patton & McMahon 2001). This can be done through reflection.

Career Development Learning requires students to engage in processes of self-assessment in terms of individual characteristics such as knowledge, skills and interests and perform an appraisal of the context in which the student situates learning in relation to his or her discipline or profession. As a process of self-managed learning and growth, CDL lends itself to teaching and learning approaches that use reflection in higher learning. The two-way mirror shown in Figure 3.1 depicts the notion of CDL being used as a mirror for reflection (Smith et al. 2009).



**Figure 3.1 Career Development Learning and Work Integrated Learning Mirror**

There are three core features of the depiction: the learner, the workplace or classroom simulation and the mirror. As the Systems Theory Framework of career development (Patton & McMahon 2006) suggests, CDL occurs as a result of a range of influences at the personal level and at the contextual level.

At the personal level, individuals' experiences of higher learning are influenced by: self-concept and self-esteem, personality, ethnicity, physical attributes, aptitudes, age, skills, interests, ability, values, sexual orientation, gender, health, disability beliefs and work knowledge. Personal influences also include peers, home, family and community. According to Patton and McMahon, these are inevitably influenced by the prevailing higher-order external influences such as the media, the employment market, education institutions, workplace legislation, workplace contexts, political decisions and globalisation (Patton & McMahon 2006).

Similarly, a workplace has its own internal influences: organisational structure, expectations, culture, staff skill sets and behaviour. Workplaces are also influenced by wider community, industry and government factors (Patton & McMahon 2006). However, because this study focuses on Career Development Learning in the initial stages at university and not at the workplace, a classroom simulation approach is adopted. The third feature is the mirror. The learner uses CDL to reflect upon himself/herself as outlined in the DOTS model previously and in terms of the myriad influences that constitute his/her personal perspective. In using the two-way mirror as a metaphor, it is useful to consider those two perspectives at three key stages: before, during and after a learning experience (Smith et al. 2009).

Learners looking into the 'mirror' before they embark on a workplace experience or, in this case, as part of a classroom experience, can be encouraged to critically reflect upon themselves. This helps them to make informed choices about what skills and attributes are required at the workplace and what might constitute a suitable workplace experience helps the learner to gain insights into the structure and culture of actual workplaces and its requisite skills set and expectations. This simulated workplace experience can be achieved through career development presentations by career professionals.

Following the presentation (looking into the mirror), learners are encouraged and supported to engage in reflective practices that potentially lead to the transformation of the experience into learning. This transformative experience may inform their career and academic decision-making. This learning experience can also potentially be used for self-development and articulation of experiences and skills for potential job search activities. Reflection can support the development of students' employability in a number of ways. It is the means for students to gain, maintain awareness of, express and explore their abilities in general and in recruitment processes. It is part of the process of lifelong learning (Boud 1985; Hayward, Blackmer & Raelin 2007; Lew & Schmidt 2011; Moon, J. A. 2004). Students need to be able to fluently review their processes of learning and their achievements in higher education that are relevant to a job and to use reflection to support further learning from experience on the job.

Providing students with the opportunities to gain the necessary skills, knowledge, understanding and attributes is obviously important, but so too is providing opportunities for reflection on and evaluation of the learning experiences that have already taken place (Raelin et al. 2008). Without these opportunities, a student is unlikely to give full consideration to how far they have come in developing their employability and what they may need to do in order to develop it further. In addition, reflection and evaluation activity is key to the development of the three Ss', namely, self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem (Moon, J. 2004). The three closely-linked 'Ss' provide a crucial link between knowledge, skills, experience, personal attributes and employability (Pool & Sewell 2007).

### **3.6. Reflection and Assessment**

Assessment is concerned with the reflective process as well as the examination and development of disciplinary knowledge – reflection on practice (Moon, J. 2004). Rowntree (1977) defined assessment as the process of getting to know students and the quality of their learning. Ecclestone (2003) subsequently expanded on this definition by including diagnosis, feedback, selection and recruitment, certification of achievements, quality control, motivation and life-long planning as additional purposes of assessment. Effective reflective assessment is underpinned by curriculum and course design, which makes explicit the requirements for employability skills and

describes how and what point in the course they will be addressed. Employability skills can be assessed effectively where the specific skill and its application are described in course materials and learning objectives and where it is clearly located within the context of a given discipline (Biggs & Tang 2007; Oliver et al. 2011).

Boud and Solomon (2001) suggested that current assessment practices do not prepare students for lifelong learning and that assessment practices should help to equip students for their own lifelong learning needs after graduation to be sustainable. To achieve this, good curriculum design must embed relevant generic capabilities into learning outcomes across the curriculum. Wood et al. (2009) agreed, adding that embedding generic skills means assessing them. To achieve this, there needs to be constructive alignment between learning outcomes and learning activities, assessment tasks and the criteria used to evaluate assessments (Biggs 2003). Therefore, the assessment methods used for Career Development Learning need to be fit for purpose. These methods may include reflection journals, learning logs and portfolios and direct assessments of résumés, applications and interviews (Watts 2006). Reflection as an assessment activity may be introduced in two stages. First, introductory materials may be used to encourage reflective writing, even if it is descriptive. At a later stage, suitable WIL activities may be introduced to improve students' skills in reflection and deepen learning (Moon, J. 2004).

Assessment in higher education has an important role to play in aligning assessment not only with immediate learning requirements but also with the longer-term to foster post-graduation learning, contributing to lifelong learning (Boud & Falchikov 2006). A short-term focus in assessment must be balanced against a longer-term emphasis for learning-oriented assessment to foster future learning after graduation. Consequently, assessment practices should promote skills needed for lifelong learning. According to Boud and Falchikov (2006), eight points need to be considered to make assessment practices more sustainable. Amongst these are a shift in focus of assessment to measurement of learning rather than performance, assessment to incorporate elements of self-assessment, encouragement of reflection in learning and feedback on assessment tasks are internalised for further learning.

### **3.7. Method**

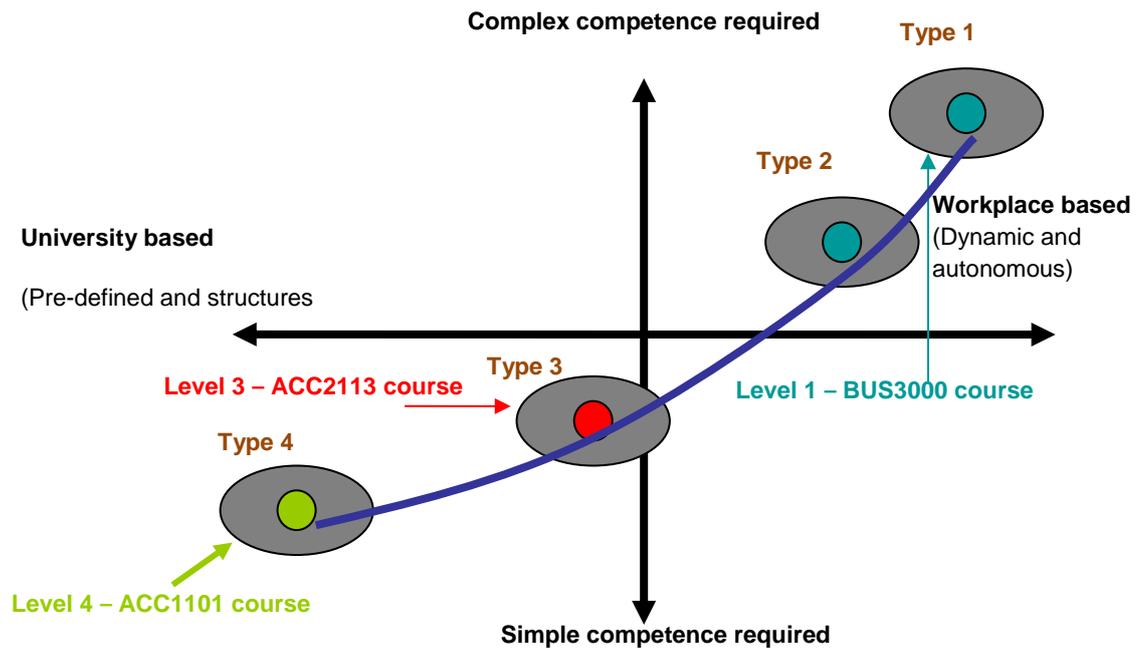
This research seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the concept of employability from the first year business undergraduate's perspective. A contemporary approach to developing university students' and graduates' careers requires a theoretical framework that captures the complexity of the current world of work (McMahon, Patton & Tatham 2003a). A comprehensive approach to formulating and delivering Career Development Learning should take into account if and how broader life and contextual factors impinge upon a student's experience and learning journey (Smith et al. 2009).

This comprehensive, developmental approach should also incorporate the teaching and learning of intended learning outcomes. For example, the integration and contextualisation of generic skills development as well as the provision of adequate student support is necessary from foundation to final years (Bunney, Sharplin & Howitt 2015). It has been suggested that a first year course should include career exploration and choice process in career education (Tate et al. 2015).

The study approach involves incorporating Career Development Learning (CDL) in the early stages of an undergraduate business degree program. Career Development Learning is used as the overarching term that describes deliberate activities that contribute to the improvement of an individual's employability prospects including the achievement of effective transitions from the university to the workplace. This initiative has been implemented by applying the Business' three-stage Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Framework (O'Shea 2008). This Framework seeks effectively to develop essential career development and employability skills of business students at the undergraduate level in a systematic manner and attempts to narrow the employer-graduate skills expectations gap.

The Business WIL Framework aims to address the relevant elements and best practices suggested in prior studies. It also incorporates aspects of the Life-Design, DOTS, ABCD and STF Frameworks by introducing Career Development Learning (CDL) into the undergraduate business curriculum. In this case, CDL is embedded in a core business undergraduate course within a business degree. A Business WIL Framework

was developed in the Faculty of Business at the University of Southern Queensland (Leong & Kavanagh 2013; O'Shea 2008). Every USQ undergraduate business student has the opportunity to experience WIL as part of their learning. There are four types of WIL available to students in the O'Shea WIL Framework. The Business WIL Framework is an adaptation of the generic WIL Framework and is depicted in Figure 3.2.



**Figure 3.2 Business Work Integrated Learning Framework**

The Business WIL Framework (O'Shea 2008) explicitly embeds skills development in three separate undergraduate business courses in a scaffolded manner. These are developed through; a Career Development Learning Type 4 activity in a compulsory business course in the first year; a service learning Type 3 activity in a major course in the second year; and, culminating in a Type 1/Type 2 WIL capstone course in the final year. Reflection is introduced in two stages in the business curriculum. In the first stage, introductory materials are used to encourage reflective writing in a first year business course, even if it is descriptive in nature. At a later stage, a final year WIL course covering work placement in industry, can be introduced to deepen reflection and learning (Moon, J. 2004).

This Framework supports the development of business students' self-efficacy through the implementation of CDL in WIL frameworks (Bandura 1997). As discussed earlier, the three closely-linked 'Ss' of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem provide a crucial link between knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and personal attributes and employability.

### **3.7.1. Research Instruments**

At USQ, Career Development Learning is introduced in a core business course, Accounting for Decision Making in the first year to raise students' awareness of employability and show them how to self-manage their studies and undertake extra-curricular activities to maximise their employability (Leong 2012b). This approach is implemented through curriculum-integrated strategies in which CDL is applied as an explicit vehicle for the development of course-level learning outcomes (Smith et al. 2009). Career and work-related tasks and events are designed, delivered and supervised by the university and form the start of a student's career management process.

In this research study, the student cohort enrolled in a first year business core course ACC1101 Accounting for Decision Making in semester 1 of 2012. As part of their assessment, they were asked to write an 800-word personal descriptive reflection journal on a campus presentation on 'Career Development and Employability'. These presentations were thirty minutes in duration and involved the university's Careers and Employment staff in collaboration with the core course academic staff at the university's three campuses in Toowoomba, Springfield and Fraser Coast. The contents delivered included the employability skills covered in the Employability for the Future Framework and are identical across all campuses (see Appendix B). All presentations were recorded and put up on the course home page for reference. The assessment required on-campus students to attend and listen to a guest presentation on Career development and management at their campus and write their reflection journal on their campus presentation. External students had to choose one of the recorded presentations to write their reflection journal.

As part of the business undergraduate program, students are taught to tailor their study programs to meet the expectations of employers in the job market through career building and management (Hancock, P; et al. 2009). They take responsibility for reviewing or assessing their own employability skills, addressing skills gaps and then pursuing appropriate ways to report or present relevant information about their skills to prospective employers when seeking employment (BIHECC 2007; Pool & Sewell 2007). Consequently, students were expected to be aware of the key employability skills and attributes required by employers and to do a self-assessment of their strengths and deficiencies in their current employability profile. In view of student's deficiencies, they were also expected to outline their courses of action to address the issues and improve their employability prospects. Their response to the benefits or otherwise of such career presentations were also sought.

Course activities addressed principles of good practice in terms of aligning teaching, practice and assessment (Biggs, 2003). Firstly, resources were provided to support students in the completion of their assessment. Two additional readings on career development/management and reflection practices were provided. Students were also given a practice recording for self-reflection with suggested pointers on coverage and scope. Secondly, expectations of student learning were expressed in course learning objectives in terms of understanding the need for career development building/management, understanding how effective career building can improve employability, knowing the university's graduate qualities, understanding and applying common models of reflective practice and writing reflective journals to demonstrate learning.

An assessment rubric was also developed (see Table 3.2) and provided as a reference to students (Leong 2012a). An assessment rubric is an assessment or scoring tool commonly found in a matrix or grid format and is an example of a criterion-referenced assessment. It is a tool that guides the assessment and evaluation of the quality of students' assessment products, processes or performance (Brookhart 1999; Pophman 1997). Criterion-referenced assessment evaluates students' assignments against explicit criteria and standards. These are defined as desirable qualities or dimensions of a student's performance (Sadler 2005). The assessment rubric used assists learning by using criteria and standards making explicit to students the disciplinary

understanding and skills they are expected to demonstrate in an assessment. Rubrics assist teachers to grade students according to explicit criteria and standards. Their use also encourages all students to strive for high standards because there is no predetermined grade distribution (Jonsson & Svingby 2007; Riebe & Jackson 2013). The compulsory and assessable skill development activities incorporated into the business program are used to help to develop the five USQ Graduate Qualities of Discipline Expertise, Professional Practice, Global Citizenship, Scholarship and Lifelong Learning in all graduates.

### **3.7.2. Research Sample**

A total of 430 student personal reflections were collected for this study. From this cohort, a sample of 210 students' reflections was analysed in the study. The sample chosen is intended to represent the diversity of demographic groups in a typical first year university business student population. This sample contained 75 student reflections from the Springfield campus, 100 students from the External cohort and 35 students from the Chinese campus cohort. Students' reflection journals were collected and then subjected to thematic analysis.

### **3.7.3. Respondents' Profiles**

An analysis of the 210 student reflection journals collected indicates a gender breakdown of 39% male and 61% female. There were more males in the Chinese cohort but the other cohorts had more females. Sixty eight per cent of all respondents were below 26 years old with 4% of students above 40 years old. All students from the China cohort were below 26 years old and studying part-time. The overall ratio of part-time to full-time students is 73% to 27% respectively. Ninety two per cent of the External cohort was studying part-time.

A snapshot of respondents' demographics is shown as follows in Table 3.1.

<b>Gender</b>	
Male	39%
Female	61%
<b>Campus</b>	
Springfield	36%
China	17%
External	47%
<b>Age</b>	
Below 26 years	68%
Between 26-40 years	28%
Above 40 years	4%
<b>Study Mode</b>	
Full-time	27%
Part-time	73%
<b>Study Program</b>	
Commerce	37%
Business	25%
<u>Other programs including double degrees</u>	<u>38%</u>

**Table 3.1 Sample Respondents' Demographics (n=210)**

#### **3.7.4. Coding of Responses**

In this research study, thematic analysis is used to create a coding scheme to guide the researcher in the coding process, and to make decisions in the analysis of content. This qualitative analytic method is widely used in educational psychology. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data set. A theme captures an important characteristic about the data in relation to a research question and represents a level of patterned response or meaning within a data set (Braun & Clarke 2006). The research data set was derived from student writing related to specific tasks required of students for their reflective journals. As such, themes were broadly aligned with topics such as the elements in the Employability Skills Framework and analysed using the research questions as a lens. Topics and specific tasks used for the assessment were also appropriate for the sample cohort of first year business students as they were very new to university studies and needed guidance and structure in their reflective writing.

Themes or patterns within data in thematic analysis may be identified in one of two primary ways: an inductive, or 'bottom up' way; or deductive, or 'top down' way (Boyatzis 1998; Braun & Clarke 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006). An inductive approach means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves. If data are collected this way, themes identified may bear little relationship to questions that were asked of participants. In the deductive approach, the analysis is driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest and is analyst-driven. This study uses the more deductive approach predicated on the theories of employability and career development.

To analyse data, they need to be coded first. Coding is the process of examining the data and sorting it to be interpreted. The basic coding process in thematic analysis is to organise large quantities of text into much fewer content categories. Categories are patterns or themes that are directly expressed in the text or are derived from them through analysis. The goal is to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study and the relationships among categories are identified (Weber 1990). Qualitative thematic analysis goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of data into efficient categories with similar meanings.

The findings from the thematic analysis may offer supporting evidence for a theory. The evidence can be presented showing codes with exemplars and by offering descriptive evidence. Because the study design and analysis of data cannot be compared meaningfully using statistical tests, rank order comparisons of frequency of codes would be used (Curtis et al. 2001). However, the author is fully aware that researchers may approach the data with a bias. They might be more likely to find evidence that is supportive rather than non-supportive of a theory. Also, in the text, participants might get cues to write the work in a certain way to please the researchers. An overemphasis on the theory could also blind researchers to contextual aspects of a phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). Trustworthiness involves establishing credibility - confidence in the perceived 'truth' of the findings, transferability - showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts, dependability - showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated, confirmability - a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not

researcher bias, motivation or interest. To counter the issues of trustworthiness and bias, a very detailed account of the coding process will be described.

The goal of the research is to identify and categorise all instances of student experiences on a Career Development learning presentation. The research study used the tenth version of NVivo software to analyse the contents of student reflections collected. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software that is designed to facilitate common qualitative techniques for organising, analysing and sharing data (Bazeley & Jackson 2013; QSR International 2012). It allows users to import, sort and analyse rich text and plain text documents, audio files, spread sheets, databases, digital photos, PDFs, bibliographic data web pages and social media data (Flinders University 2014). It is a resource for researchers using qualitative research methods and approaches including in-depth interviews, focus groups, content analysis, ethnography and phenomenography (Flinders University 2014). This software helps researchers to manage, shape and make sense of unstructured information. One can also create queries to find and analyse the words or phrases in the sources, annotations and nodes.

The reading of the personal journal reflections is necessary to highlight all text on first impressions. Although the most common sources of text in phenomenographic studies are interviews, in the current study, students' personal journal reflection are used. The students' personal journal reflections were coded into nodes using NVivo. The method of coding is guided by the categories of the Career Development Assessment Rubric in Table 3.2. Students were asked to write their reflections in the following four areas: identification and description of skills/attributes enhancing graduate employability, emotional response to the career development presentation, self-analysis through personal reflection and course of action to enhance future employability. These four areas address the issues in the four research questions respectively. All of the data collected are considered logical and valid and are treated collectively during analysis as the focus is on variations in student experiences rather than on the characteristics of individuals' responses (Tight 2015; Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012).

The first research question in this study attempts to look into students' perceptions of required employability skills and attributes of business graduates in the current work environment. To achieve the outcomes of this research question, a 4-stage systematic

thematic analysis was conducted. Although, the following processes are described as linear, the research analysis was an iterative and reflexive process.

Stage 1 was conducted to familiarise the researcher with all data collected. As the data collected were assessed and the researcher was the course leader in the course where the career development presentation was conducted, all the students' reflection journals were thoroughly read before coding commenced. This process gave the researcher an idea of the depth, breadth and scope of the content (Braun & Clarke 2006). Some students' text were organised into paragraphs aligned to the questions posed in the assessment rubric whilst others wrote their reflection journals in an essay format. Consideration was also given to the sample size and cohort stratification because of the need to demonstrate sizeable variations in experiences by students in response to the career development presentation (Braun & Clarke 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006; Khan 2014).

Stage 2 was to generate initial child nodes. The research questions in this study guided the coding and analysis of the data. For example, to address the skills aspect of research question 1, the texts in the students' reflections addressing the skills required for employability were initially coded into child nodes based on the descriptions of students' journals. The relevant parts of a student's reflections were selected, ensuring that irrelevant, redundant and unnecessary components are omitted (Khan 2014). No nodes were pre-determined before coding. Examples of skills extracted from students' work include verbal communications, written communications, teamwork, planning, initiative, honesty, ethical, leadership, organising, management and networking. Careful scrutiny of students' text was performed to code the description into root words describing the skills and attributes. Upon completion of this stage, all data and their coded nodes were reviewed thoroughly to ensure accuracy and completeness of coding (Braun & Clarke 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006; Khan 2014).

Stage 3 involved creating themes (Braun & Clarke 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006; Khan 2014). As for the skills required for enhanced employability, after examining the student data and the different codes created, the codes were 'theory-driven' and organised into themes, establishing boundaries in the process (Braun & Clarke 2006; Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002). A careful

and thorough examination of these themes resulted in the observation that were aligned to the Skills mentioned in the Employability Skills for the Future Framework (Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002), as emphasised in the career development presentations.

Stage 4 involved reviewing, organising and naming themes (Braun & Clarke 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006; Khan 2014). Child nodes belonging to a similar theme were aggregated into parent nodes. For example skills such as verbal communications and written communications were aggregated into the parent node 'communication'. The final group of skills organised into themes (nodes) were: communication, teamwork, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management, learning and technology (Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002). There were some other skills mentioned by students that were not in the list provided in the Employability Skills for the Future Framework and these were coded and aggregated into a node named 'Other Skills'. This node, together with the other eight skills nodes, was aggregated into the parent node 'Employability Skills'.

Similarly, Stages 2, 3 and 4 were applied to the attributes aspect to research question 1 of the study. Attributes mentioned by students were coded into individual child nodes. Common attributes mentioned by students include loyalty, commitment, honesty, integrity, enthusiasm, reliability, personal presentation, common sense, positive self-esteem, sense of humour, balanced attitude to work and home life, ability to deal with pressure, motivation and adaptability. These were further analysed and compared with the attributes listed in the Employability Skills for the Future Framework (Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002). A further theme was generated based on other attributes referenced by students such as career building, confidence and graduate attributes and these were aggregated into another node termed 'Other Attributes'.

The 4-stage process was also applied to texts relevant to the second, third and fourth research questions. Texts covering the second research question were coded firstly into two parent nodes 'Type of response' and 'Lessons learnt'. Based on the types of responses to the career presentation received from students, they were generalised into

positive, mixed or negative depending on the connotation of words chosen in their reflections and the overall views of students. Various themes emerged from the lessons learnt by students from the career development presentation and these were aggregated into the 'Lessons learnt' nodes. The third research question dealt with the self-analysis of an individual student's personal characteristics. The text was coded into various child nodes covering students' reflections of their current skills and attributes. The texts from students' reflections were aggregated into two parent nodes termed 'Strengths' and 'Weaknesses'. The fourth research question dealt with students' proposed courses of actions to improve their employability prospects and their text from various child nodes were aggregated into a 'Proposed Action' parent node. In the coding process, the researcher was mindful of the need to ensure that the texts coded were not too broad, containing large volumes of words, or too narrow, containing single or few words that were not meaningful. All coding completed after the first round were checked. Miscoded texts were re-coded, omitted texts were included and irrelevant texts were excluded. The process was rigorous and thorough.

In the Word Frequency Query stage, the standard stop words that came with NVivo were adopted and no additional words were added. Stop words are not found as results when a word frequency query is run or a text search is performed. Examples of English stop words include 'any', 'the' and 'you' (Bazeley & Jackson 2013). The queries also looked for the exact word search and all stem words were also captured. The minimum letter count of four was selected for each word query. The Word frequencies for each query were tabulated and relevant Word Cloud diagrams reported and analysed in chapter 4.

### **3.8. Chapter Summary**

The methodology of phenomenography used and the research approach using thematic analysis has been described. The research design and process involving the collection and coding of data using NVivo has also been elaborated. In addition, the adopted research approach has been justified. The coded data will be reported and analysed in the next chapter.

**Table 3.2: Career Development/Reflection Assessment Rubric**

<b>Criteria/Grade</b>	<b>HD</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>F+</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Brief description of event</b>	Full details of presenter, topic title, location, dates/times and other important details of event	Critical details of presenter, topic title, location, dates/times and other details of event	Important details of presenter, topic title, location, dates/times of event	Some details of presenter, topic title, location, dates/times of event	Insufficient details of presenter, topic title, location, dates/times of event	No details of presenter, topic title, location, dates/times of event
<b>Identification and description of skills/attributes enhancing graduate employability</b>	Identification with excellent description of critical skills and attributes enhancing graduate employability	Identification with very good description of critical skills and attributes enhancing graduate employability	Identification with good description of most skills and attributes enhancing graduate employability	Identification with description of some skills and attributes enhancing graduate employability	Identification with some but insufficient description of skills and attributes enhancing graduate employability	No identification and description of skills and attributes enhancing graduate employability
<b>Emotional response (personal thoughts etc.)</b>	Excellent expression of thoughts and personal feelings on the presentation content using extensive vocabulary	Very good expression of thoughts and personal feelings on the presentation content	Good expression of thoughts and personal feelings on the presentation content	Some expression of thoughts and personal feelings on the presentation content	Scant expression of thoughts and personal feelings on the presentation content	No expression of thoughts and personal feelings on the presentation content
<b>Analysis (through personal reflection and course readings)</b>	Excellent analysis and reflection of current personal skill set with good reference to the presentation contents and career development readings	Very good analysis and reflection of current personal skill set with reference to the presentation contents and career development readings	Good analysis and reflection of current personal skill set with reference to the presentation contents and career development readings	Some analysis and reflection of current personal skill set with some reference to the presentation contents and career development readings	Scant analysis and reflection of current personal skill set with little reference to the presentation contents and career development readings	No analysis and reflection of current personal skill set with no reference to the presentation contents and career development readings
<b>Learning and changed actions</b>	Excellent description of lessons learnt from the presentation with detailed personal courses of action elaborated to improve personal employability prospects	Very good description of lessons learnt from the presentation with personal courses of action elaborated to improve personal employability prospects	Good description of lessons learnt from the presentation with mention of personal courses of action to improve personal employability prospects	Some description of lessons learnt from the presentation with some mention of personal courses of action to improve personal employability prospects	Scant description of lessons learnt from the presentation with inadequate mention of personal courses of action to improve personal employability prospects	No description of lessons learnt from the presentation with no mention of personal courses of action to improve personal employability prospects

## 4. CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### 4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, the phenomenographic methodology and method using thematic analysis via NVivo software was described and justified. Phenomenographic studies offer value in producing useful insights into teaching and learning (Entwistle 1997). This methodology sees learning as relational because it takes place through interactions between the student, the content of the learning material and the overall learning environment (Biggs 1993; Entwistle 1997).

This research study uses a developmental phenomenography approach. Developmental phenomenographic research is undertaken with the purpose of learning from the outcomes. The insights from the research outcomes can assist in the planning of learning experiences that lead participants to a more powerful understanding of the studied phenomena of enhancing employability. The outcomes of these types of studies can be used to help researchers develop generalisations about the ways to organise learning experiences in this field of study (Bowden 2000).

In the current study, the students' post career development presentation personal journal reflections were coded into nodes using NVivo. The method of coding was guided by the categories of the Career Development Assessment Rubric in Table 3.2. Students were asked to write their reflections in the following four areas: identification and description of skills and attributes enhancing graduate employability, emotional response to the career development presentation, self-analysis through personal reflection and courses of action to enhance future employability. These four areas address the issues in the four research questions respectively. From the students' personal journal reflections collected, the text was coded and the data was analysed.

Thematic analysis was used to create a coding scheme to guide the researcher in coding and to make decisions in the analysis of content. This method was used for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data set. A theme captures an important characteristic about the data in relation to a research question and represents a level of patterned response or meaning within a data set (Braun & Clarke 2006). The

findings from the thematic analysis may offer supporting and on-supporting evidence for a theory.

Phenomenography, together with thematic analysis, is used in this study to understand the way participants conceive, perceive and understand a particular phenomenon; in this case, contributing factors to improving graduate employability.

The aim of this chapter is to report and analyse the data collected in response to the four research questions posed. In section 4.2, an overview of the findings is presented. The results to Research Question 1 are reported and analysed in section 4.3. This research question attempts to examine students' views on employability skills and attributes expected of a business graduate. The results and analysis to Research Question 2 are presented in section 4.4. This research question seeks to find out if there are benefits in conducting Career development activities in undergraduate business courses. Section 4.5 provides the results and analysis to Research Question 3. This research question gauges the perceived, current level of preparedness of students for future employability. The results and analysis to Research Question 4 are presented in section 4.6. This research question seeks to examine the learning benefits of career development activities and the future actions students propose to take to improve their future employability. A conclusion on the results and analysis to the four research questions follows in section 4.7.

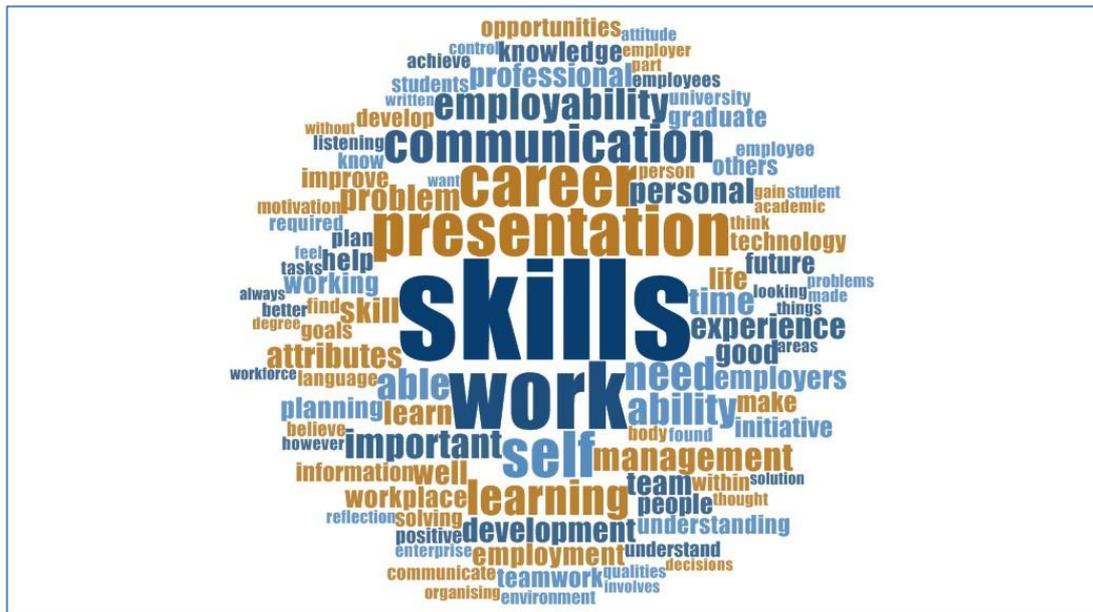
#### **4.2. Initial Results of the Reflective Journal Analysis**

The sample size of the study was 210 students from three different cohorts as explained in chapter three. From the text produced by these students, the usable text was coded into the nodes based on the four research questions that are shown in Table 4.1.

Research Question	Student Sources	References
1	200	1838
2	145	473
3	154	762
4	193	776

**Table 4.1 Usable Text from Student Journal Sources**

A Word Frequency query on the top 150 words quoted was run for the whole data set. Word frequency measures how often a word appears in the text selected. A Word Cloud is a graphical representation of word frequency. The more frequently a word is found, the larger the font becomes in a word cloud. The key words are organised into nodes and further classified into themes using thematic analysis. Themes within the data set capture important characteristics about the data in relation to the research questions posed. A Word Cloud diagram on the top 150 words is shown in Figure 4.1



**Figure 4.1 Word Cloud Overall Top 150 Words**

The results show that the words skills and work were featured prominently in the diagram. Other key words that are shown distinctly include presentation, self, career, ability, communication, learning and attributes. Key skills cited include communication, professional, teamwork and technology skills.

### 4.3. Results and Analysis Relating to Research Question 1

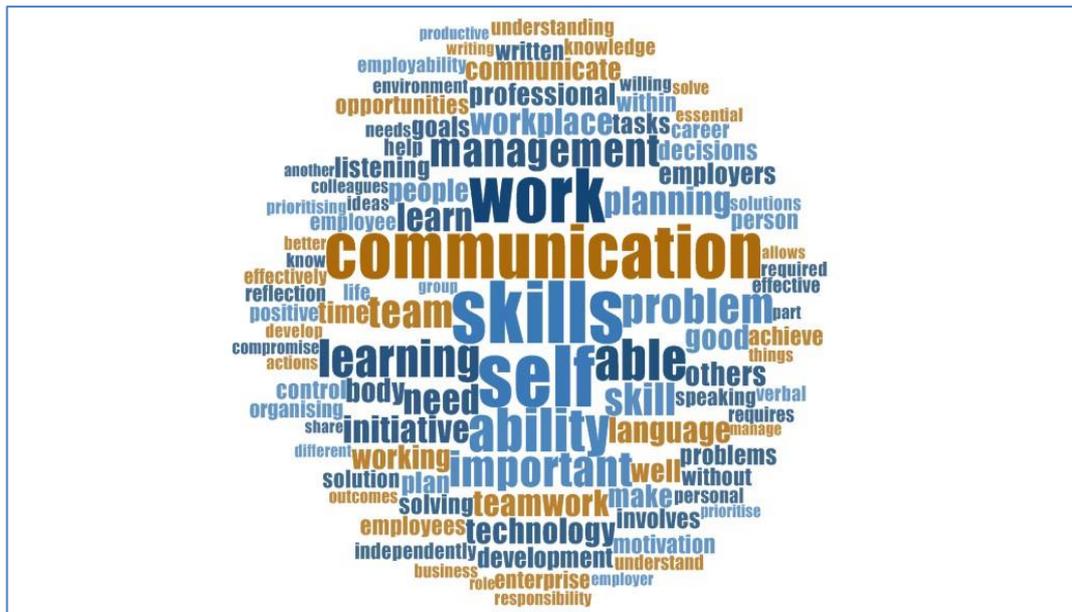
*What are first year undergraduate business students' perceptions of generic skills and attributes that enhance future employability prospects?*

Research Question 1 was designed to find out from students what skills and attributes are perceived by them to enhance their employability prospects. In the first part of this section, the analysis will focus on skills.

Eight skills from the Employability Skills Framework (Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002) were presented to the students. Not surprisingly, these eight were the most cited skills from the students' work. The breakdown of the spread of employability skills quoted is found in Table 4.2.

Employability Skill	Student Sources	References
Communication	150	175
Teamwork	130	143
Self-Management	113	130
Problem Solving	110	117
Planning and Organising	107	112
Learning	106	118
Initiative and Enterprise	97	116
Technology	78	84

**Table 4.2 Employability Skills Cited By Students**



**Figure 4.2 Word Cloud Employability Skills Top 150 Words**

As in Table 4.2, and confirmed in Figure 4.2 on the top 150 words in the Word Cloud on Employability Skills, Communication skills is at the top of the list of employability skills across both sources and references, with about three quarters of the sample or 150 students citing this skill as the most important employability skill. This was followed by Teamwork, Self-Management and Problem Solving. The least cited skill was Technology which was cited by about 40 percent of sources, possibly because the majority of students were from Generation Y who are more technologically savvy and perceived that they already possess this skill.

A further analysis of each of the eight employability skills will be shown in the following sections.

#### **4.3.1. Communication Skills**

Communication skills contribute to the productive and harmonious relations across employees and customers. Key elements of this skill include listening, speaking, writing, reading, languages, empathising and even body language (Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002).



**Figure 4.3 Word Cloud Communication Skills Top 100 Words**

As expected, the most prominent word in the top 100 words featured is communication in Figure 4.3. Other key words include language, body, listening, speaking and written. Seventy one per cent of students or 150 students perceive communication to be the most important skill required for employability. A variety of student responses are found, which can be grouped into four distinct themes. Twenty five students stressed the importance of using good verbal and written communication skills not only in the work place but also when dealing with external parties like customers and clients. Eleven students thought that communications promoted social cohesion and harmony amongst colleagues and customers. Six students perceived that good communications would reduce misunderstandings and conflicts and result in improved productivity and efficiency at work. Three students noted the importance of written communications skills in writing job applications. Examples of student quotations that represent the most common themes are as follows:

Student 9671’s work shows the link between communication and interpersonal relations at the workplace and stressed the importance of having good verbal and written communication skills.

*Student 9671:*

*Good communication leads to being able to get along with colleagues, clients, managers and directors, basically any one you will deal with in your profession. It's not only about how you can verbally communicate but also how you listen, your body language and how you communicate by emails and text messaging.*

To one student, for effective communication to occur between two parties, it is essential for an employee to learn the roles of an active speaker in delivering a message and that of a listener in receiving a message.

*Student 2742:*

*Communication skills are important in every workplace. There are always at least two people involved in communication, the person delivering the message and the person receiving the message. Therefore, it is important to know how to be both an active speaker and listener. To be an active speaker, it is important to remain in a professional context and stick to the point. To be an active listener, you wait for the person to finish talking and acknowledge what has just been said. This seems to be the most important aspect of employability.*

Other important aspects of communications for success at the workplace include using body language, adjusting the tone of voice; conquering language barriers and possessing an awareness of cultural differences were described by the following student:

*Student 1628:*

*Communication in a workplace is vital for a wide array of success. This involves key areas of communication; such as speaking, listening, body language, and written. Regardless of the workplace, employees and employers will be required to speak to each other. Therefore, things such as the tone of the person's voice; are they being to abrupt or uncouth, language barriers does the person have a strong accent or isn't fluent in the dominant language, may be of concern. The employee must also show listening skills, that when they are being spoken to they listen in a respectful manner, conscious to the cultural environment they are in. Moreover, that the employees' body language is appropriate to the work environment in social situations.*

Student 9280 recognised the relationship between effective communication skills and demonstrating professionalism at the workplace.

*Student 9280:*

*I feel communication is the most important skill one can have, as potential employees need to be able speak, listen, and demonstrate positive body language. They may be also required to use technology as another alternative to communicate with directors, colleagues and client. To effectively use these elements of communication, professionalism has to be present in all of the skills mentioned.*

### 4.3.2. Teamwork Skills

Teamwork contributes to productive working relationships and outcomes in the workplace. Elements of this skill include the capacity to work with those of different ages, irrespective of gender, race, religion or political persuasion, working as a member of a team and playing a designated role and aiming for cohesiveness and success (Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002).



Figure 4.4 Word Cloud Teamwork Skills Top 100 Words

In Figure 4.4, the words team, work and teamwork stand out. Other prominent words include communication, compromise, collaborate and understanding. Sixty two per cent or 130 students described teamwork as a critical employability skill to have at work. A variety of themes stood out from the analysis. Forty-seven students' work

showed the critical link between good verbal and written communications skills and teamwork. Individuals as team members are expected to work together to brainstorm and share ideas (6 students), work collaboratively (57 students) with understanding (10 students), empathy (30 students) and compromise (56 students) if necessary to achieve good outcomes and increase productivity and success (36 students). Some students noted that common goals can be more efficiently achieved if team members are adequately supported (11 students) and stay united in their approach to resolving problems and issues (8 students). Team members may come from diverse backgrounds (10 students) and teamwork can help to foster closer inter-personal relationships and deeper understanding (10 students). The most common referenced themes are exemplified here below:

Students' reflections highlighted themes of collaboration and compromise, as in the following example:

*Student 4828:*

*Teamwork is a useful skill that an employer looks for; it shows an employer that you have the ability to compromise, collaborate and support others as well as being responsible for your own actions and obligations.*

Others also believed that empathy was an important quality for team members to exhibit, as exemplified in this student's reflection:

*Student 9280:*

*Team work is not only an employability skill but also a skill used everyday life. Team work requires verbal & written communication, but also needs each member of the team to share the work load and be responsible for doing their part towards the team. I feel that team members need to put themselves in another team members shoes before criticising as there may be a valid reason why one team member has underperformed or hasn't filled the required expectation. In a group discussion, the team must consolidate responses and comprises ideas to come up with best possible ideas or discussion points for the team.*

Students also emphasised the link between teamwork and productivity, as in this student's example:

*Student 5059:*

*Teamwork is becoming more commonly used and widely accepted as way to increase productivity in the workplace. Teamwork Skills help to create a work environment that encourages employees to work together and participate by giving ideas into the business thus increasing productivity.*

A large number of students also noted the importance of good communications in teamwork, as in the following example:

*Student 0753:*

*Teamwork involves good communication both verbal and written, collaboration and compromise between colleagues and also being responsible for your own share of work and its quality. Working as a team can bring together everyone's ideas and produce something great as each person can contribute their experiences and expertise.*

#### **4.3.3. Self-Management Skills**

Self-Management contributes to employee satisfaction and growth (Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002). Elements of this skill include having a personal vision and goals, evaluating and monitoring one's performance and taking responsibility for oneself (Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002). From the top 100 words in the Word Cloud on Self-Management in Figure 4.5, the key words that stand out are self, motivation, control, reflection and management.



**Figure 4.5 Word Cloud Self-Management Skills Top 100 Words**

Fifty four per cent, or 113 students, highlighted the importance of self-management in enhancing employability and career building. Through self-reflection of past experiences, an individual can determine what areas of their work can be improved. Students' comments highlighted the importance of self-motivation (29 students) and self-control (25 students) to develop high level skills. Self-motivation drives an individual forward to persevere. Examples of self-control in the work environment include behaving professionally, holding high standards and exhibiting anger management during difficult times. Seventeen students stressed the importance of setting goals and critically evaluating their progress in career development. Fifteen students commented on the need for individuals to take responsibility for their actions.

Some examples of these themes are shown below:

Of those students who emphasised the concept of self-motivation, two students perceived that self-discipline is important in driving an individual forward without being told by others; to reflect on past actions and look for ways to improve future performance.

*Student 6371:*

*Self-management – the importance of self-motivation was discussed as throughout your career you're not going to have someone pushing you to do what you should be doing, it is up to you to do it because you know you should. Self-reflection was also*

*highlighted as it is always important to look back on what you did so you can see how you did it and decide how you could do it better. It is the ability to constantly improve on your performance.*

*Student 5494:*

*Self-management involves being self-motivated, this means that you do things because you have to and you need to without having someone else telling you to do it. To be the best at what you do you must be capable to self-reflect on your past experiences in order to see what areas you need to improve on.*

Others, such as student 9671 expressed the importance of self-discipline, to act professionally in difficult circumstances, as well as the need to self-reflect regularly, learn continuously during work to achieve better performances and improve efficiency.

*Student 9671:*

*Self-motivation, reflection and control are all crucial elements in self-management. Are you going to work when the boss isn't there? How well do you work independently? It is so important to stay motivated. Self-reflection will help you to do things better, by analysing past projects and evaluating how they could be improved or done differently. Self-control is having the ability to control anger, annoyance towards others in a professional manner. It is also a major part when it comes to choosing the best outcome for you based on your decision that could possibly impact work.*

#### **4.3.4. Problem Solving Skills**

Problem solving contributes to productive outcomes. This skill can develop creative and innovative solutions, practical solutions and solve problems in teams using strategies (Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002).



Of those students who perceived that sometimes problems may be too complex to solve, student 0468 emphasised the need for graduate employees to seek assistance:

*Student 0468*

*Solving problems can seem daunting to new employees, especially to new graduates. Coming up with possible solutions to a problem is an attribute that is highly valued and sort after by companies. It is easy to be stuck on a problem when in a new role, trying to find the solution may at first require assistance. If not obvious, looking for and learning from it is essential.*

Of those students who linked problem-solving to other skills, student 7360 emphasised linkages between problem-solving and other skills such as communication and creativity:

*Student 7360*

*Problem solving, being a problem solver means you can think inside and outside the box, as quoted in the presentation 'people who see problems, should also be able to solve them'. This is a great skill to have, especially when dealing with conflict and difficult situations in a working environment. You need to be able to define and identify the problem, assess the possibilities involved, and then you need to devise a plan and implement it, and lastly you need to communicate the problem and the strategies needed to solve it.*

#### **4.3.5. Planning and Organising Skills**

Planning and organising contributes to long and short term strategic planning. Elements of this skill include managing time and priorities such as setting time lines, co-ordinating tasks for self and with others, being resourceful, establishing clear project goals and deliverables and planning the use of resources (Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002).



**Figure 4.7 Word Cloud Planning & Organising Skills Top 100 Words**

Similar words were found from students’ reflections on this skill as evidenced by Figure 4.7. The top words included planning, organising, prioritising, management, tasks, goals and time. Fifty one per cent, or 107 students, stressed the importance of this skill not only on the personal level but also at the corporate level. A variety of student responses were received. It is perceived by students that an individual should exercise good time management skills (34 students), prioritise tasks and meet deadlines (61 students) and to achieve set goals (23 students). Thirty students felt that it is useful to plan and organise an individual’s time in daily or weekly blocks, and allocate resources more efficiently (13 students), which may lead to improved productivity (4 students). Twelve students felt the need to start to plan for their personal career and professional development in response to the presentation.

Some useful reflections from students on some of these themes include the following excerpts. Of those students who emphasised the importance of time management, student 1229 recognised the links between good time management, setting of priorities and the delivery of productive outcomes.

*Student 1229:*

*Time management and the ability to prioritise are key focus areas of planning and organising. Setting and prioritising goals ensures you remain focused and keep to the game plan. Continuous improvement and resourcefulness are included as attributes to planning and organising.*

Of the students who found planning and organising skills to be useful in planning daily and weekly work activities, student 0285 recognised that such skills can also be applied on a personal level to help to achieve personal goals. The student perceived that an inability to plan in advance is a recipe for failure.

*Student 0285:*

*'Plan the work, work the plan' or as Winston Churchill said, 'He who fails to plan is planning to fail'. The key to planning is prioritising. Prioritising not only applies to work tasks but also personal goals. My career and personal plans assist in identifying and focusing on tasks or goals provide a logical pathway to achievement and allows the actual outcome to be measured against the starting goal.*

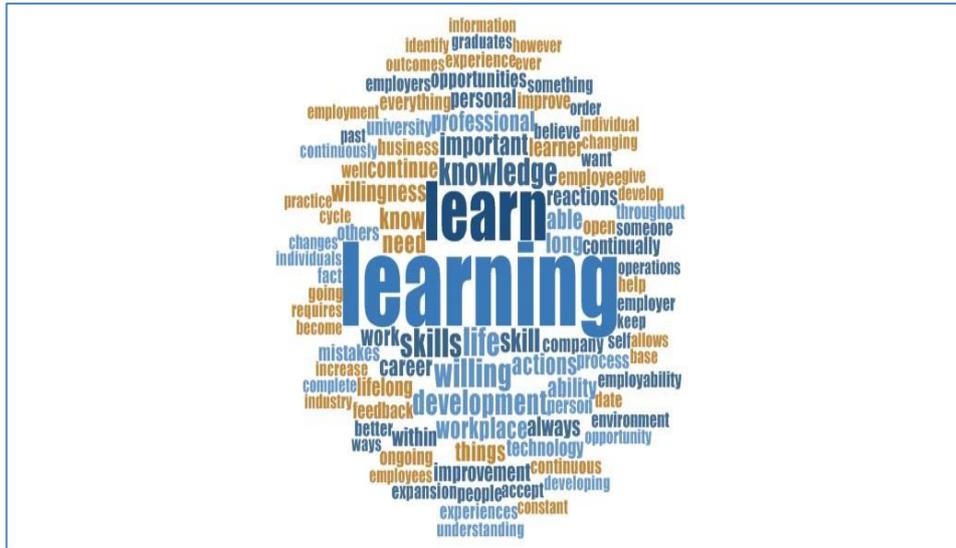
Among the students who valued prioritising work tasks, student 0330 stressed the importance of organising the personal workspace, prioritising the work to be in within a particular timeframe to meet work deadlines and to be punctual for work, appointments and meetings.

*Student 0330:*

*Plan and organise is an important skill for a possible employee to show. You need to be able to plan you day, your week and prioritise the important tasks to least important. This skill is usually hard to keep up as most people cannot keep up with organisation. However to be employable you must be able to organise your tasks and duties every day, have a clean environment and be punctual.*

#### **4.3.6. Learning Skills**

There is a general consensus that learning and lifelong learning contribute to the ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes (Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002). Key elements of this learning skill include managing own learning, using a range of mediums to learn, being open to new ideas and techniques and the need to learn in order to accommodate change.



**Figure 4.8 Word Cloud Learning Skills Top 100 Words**

The key words that feature in the Learning Word Cloud in Figure 4.8 are learning, professional, willing, knowledge, life and development. Fifty one per cent of students recognised that learning does not stop upon graduation and continues into working life. It is a lifelong endeavour as careers constantly change. Themes that emerged from students' reflections include the need to update one-self continuously and the idea that this can be done through professional development at work (61 students). This was perceived to be especially important in the current volatile and fluid business environment. According to participants, skill sets need to be reviewed regularly to ensure their currency for employability, especially in the area of technological skills. Twenty five students commented on the need to acquire new knowledge constantly. Others focused on the idea that learning can occur from past actions through reflection (19 students) and from feedback from others (11 students). Three students perceived that by engaging in lifelong learning, an individual can get ahead at the workplace and improve advancement prospects.

Of the students who stressed the learning can occur through self-reflection and from others, student 5581 recognised the need for continuous learning through a cycle of experience and feedback.

*Student 5581:*

*Continual learning is important through your entire life. People are no longer in one career anymore; most people will have four or five careers in their lifetime. You should learn to take feedback constructively. Grow and learn from the feedback that people give you. Do you believe you know it all? Can you learn from your actions and reactions? Do you have technical skills necessary to complete your role successfully? Are you interested and able to continue to develop your technological understanding should the role require it?*

Of the students who perceived lifelong learning to encompass acquiring new knowledge and updating on current knowledge, student 3662 perceived that there is a need for an individual to be technically updated with technology and lifelong learning skills that can contribute to better job security.

*Student 3662:*

*Life-long learning skills are necessary for individuals to be securely placed in the workplace. We have to be proactive in our approach to learning and need to evolve continually to maintain our skill set and remain up to date with advances in technology, new products and techniques.*

Among the students who mentioned the need to be involved in professional development, student 5494 attributes future success to the need to be involved in lifelong learning in a personal and professional way.

*Student 5494:*

*Being willing to learn is also very important to professional development because you will never stop learning throughout your life. Learning from your actions and reactions will be used throughout your personal development, the person you are now will not be who you are in ten years' time if you are willing to learn.*

#### **4.3.7. Initiative and Enterprise Skills**

Initiative and Enterprise contribute to innovative outcomes for businesses and individuals. Elements of this skill include adapting to new situations, being creative



*Student 0468:*

*Showing initiative is important to employers, not having to micro manage employee's is a big plus for companies. Staff members who can see what work needs doing and doing it are valuable to managers and are often slated for advancement ahead of others.*

Among students' reflections that emphasised the benefits of using initiative and enterprise skills in tasks completion at work, student 2785 believed that self-motivation at work empowers an individual to do work without being told by others and stimulates independence and creativity in the process.

*Student 2785:*

*This is the ability to use your self-motivation skills and take control of duties without necessarily being told to, as well as regularly coming up with new ideas. Good employees should be able to identify tasks that they are capable of, but not necessarily responsible for, and take action to complete these tasks.*

Student 1847 perceived that with initiative and enterprise skills, an individual will become more adaptable, strategic in work approaches and implement creative ideas.

*Student 1847:*

*Initiative and Enterprise involves being creative, independent, adaptive, being able to identify opportunities, having ability to develop strategic plans to implement innovative ideas.*

#### **4.3.8. Technology Skills**

Technology contributes to effective execution of tasks. Technological skill elements include having a range of basic Information Technology (IT) skills, applying these skills as a management tool, being willing to learn new IT skills and having the capacity to apply technology appropriately (Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002).



**Figure 4.10 Word Cloud Technology Skills Top 100 Words**

The key words that stand out in Figure 4.10 on Technology are technology, workplace, understanding, computer and learn. Thirty seven per cent of students rated this as a skill to have to improve employability. It is reasonable to assume that students have been exposed to the use of IT in schools and universities and encounter it in their daily lives. They perceived these skills are critical in the current technologically advanced business environments (22 students) for improved work efficiencies. Technological skills are required in today’s work environments with 23 students stressing the need to be learning of new technologies continuously (26 students) and being able to adapt quickly to current more technologically advanced work environments (12 students).

Among the students who recognised that today’s work environments are becoming more sophisticated, student 4828 noted the greater significance of having up-to-date technological skills at the workplace in current business environments.

*Student 4828:*

*Technology – nowadays it’s usual for a student to have sufficient technological skills than it was 10 years ago. This is beneficial to students as it suggests to an employer that you have an on-going understanding of technology used in the workplace and that you are interested in developing your technical skills if need be.*

Confirming the increased use of technology in the current workplace, student 5458 perceived that to be successful at work roles, an individual continuously needs to be learning in information technology to stay relevant.

*Student 5458:*

*Technology is always evolving and within the workplace today and reliable technology skills are necessary. Having the necessary technological skills to complete your role within the business is essential and if not you should be interested and able to develop your technological skills and understanding for the required role*

Student 4946 stressed the importance of having current technological skills in their skills set when seeking employment.

*Student 4946:*

*Technology is a very necessary skill when looking for employment today. Organisations today revolve around the use of technology. An understanding of technology used in the workplace makes you a more useful employee. It will also make it easier to learn new systems. Fully understanding the technology used, makes efficient employees.*

#### **4.3.9. Other Employability Skills**

Besides the eight most commonly referenced employability skills of those drawn from the Employability Skills Framework, further analysis was conducted to identify additional skills that had been mentioned by students. Within this group, the employability skills identified most frequently by 21 of the student participants were technical skills, networking, leadership skills and critical appraisal skills. Additional skills referred to by students were quite limited.

Whilst networking may, on the surface, be conceived as a communication skill, it incorporates a number of other skills (Benson, Morgan & Filippaios 2014). Networking may involve the traditional face to face interaction with business peers, but technological innovation has introduced and driven the concept and practices of social networking. Social media are great tools for contacting people within organisations, linking to groups of like-minded individuals, gaining industry

knowledge and information, making introductions and referrals and gaining business awareness.

Among the students who quoted networking as a useful skill to have in today's work environments, student 8797 recognised the importance of using networking to help gain graduate employment. The job search is made easier because of inter-personal relationships with potential employers, which are forged through social networking or professional networking.

*Student 8797:*

*Networking is another skill which can help a graduate gain employment. Networking can find jobs in the 'hidden job market'. Traditionally jobs are searched for either in the newspaper or on the internet. Networking allows a person to be thought about by a potential employer on a consistent basis because of their existing relationships. Professional networking allows for people to talk about similar items or topics in their related fields. If an employer was looking to hire two graduates with the same degree and one of the graduates knew the employer, they are more likely to get the job because they already have an existing relationship. Networking is a major factor in gaining employment after a student has completed their higher education. This is because the graduate already has an existing relationship with a potential employer.*

Another student 9530, who is already employed, valued networking because it helps him/her communicate and work better with the counterparties to foster good working relationships.

*Student 9530:*

*Whilst I am employed, I am in a position where I have to deal with corporate companies therefore I have to be able to communicate, plan and organise within the workplace and networking is very important.*

Student 2619 recognised the importance of networking in assisting in career advancement. Participation in career events and workshops aid in networking and such events help to promote social interactions amongst like-minded professionals.

*Student 2619:*

*Networking is a necessary skill for career advancement. It involves socialising, politicking and interacting with others. Workshops in networking and Career Fairs offer the opportunity for speed networking. However, networking opportunities can be found in many situations such as courses and social interaction amongst peers.*

#### **4.3.10. Attributes**

Research Question 1 was also designed to find out from students what attributes are perceived by them to enhance their employability prospects. Thirteen attributes from the Employability Skills Framework were presented to the students. The number of cited attributes from the students' work is presented in Table 4.3.

Attribute	Student Sources	References
Honesty and Integrity	42	43
Commitment	41	42
Loyalty	39	41
Reliability	38	39
Motivation	36	37
Work life balance	33	33
Adaptability	31	32
Enthusiasm	29	30
Ability to deal with pressure	28	29
Positive self-esteem	28	28
Personal presentation	27	28
Sense of humour	27	28
Common sense	22	22

**Table 4.3 Attributes Cited By Students**

Comparing Table 4.3 and Table 4.2 in section 4.3, far fewer students cited attributes as being important compared to the number that cited employability skills. Although the number of sources cited is not large, it is still significant because at least 10 per cent of students quoted the least mentioned attribute, common sense. However, care must be taken not to take this listing too literally in terms of the order of importance.

A Word Frequency search of the sources on Attributes revealed the Word Cloud in Figure 4.11.



**Figure 4.11 Word Cloud Attributes Top 150 Words**

Some attribute words that stood out include personal, loyalty, commitment, honesty, reliability, adaptability, pressure and enthusiasm. This is not unexpected as students cited the thirteen attributes mentioned in the presentation and felt that to do well in the business environment, employees need to possess relevant attributes for a position. The attributes required may be different for different jobs. Some examples of 150 instances where participants simply restate the need for suitable attributes for employability are represented as follows:

*Student 9242:*

*Personal attributes including job loyalty, commitment, integrity, reliability, motivation, adaptability etc. are all important for gaining employment and retaining good jobs.*

*Student 4022:*

*Positive self-esteem, motivation, loyalty, reliability, adaptability, work-life balance, attitude and ability to deal with pressure are the important attributes for the employers to suit the work environment quickly.*

*Student 9642:*

*Key personal attributes such as loyalty, commitment, honesty, and integrity that will also contribute to the employability of an individual*

Thirty-three students mentioned the importance of being a balanced graduate and the need for graduates to possess specific university graduate attributes. Of note is the perceived need to start on career building and the importance of gaining relevant work experience prior to gaining a graduate position. Students' excerpts to illustrate these points are shown as follows:

*Student 8333:*

*I feel that it is so important now that students try and seek some type of paid employment as it will give them an understanding what it is like to have to work for money and to understand what a work environment is like, no matter what the job.*

*Student 4954:*

*A balanced graduate has aptitude, attitude and academic performance; this helped me understand that to be a balanced graduate and achieve a successful career you must hold the right skills, have the right attitude and achieve a high level of academic performance.*

*Student 5657:*

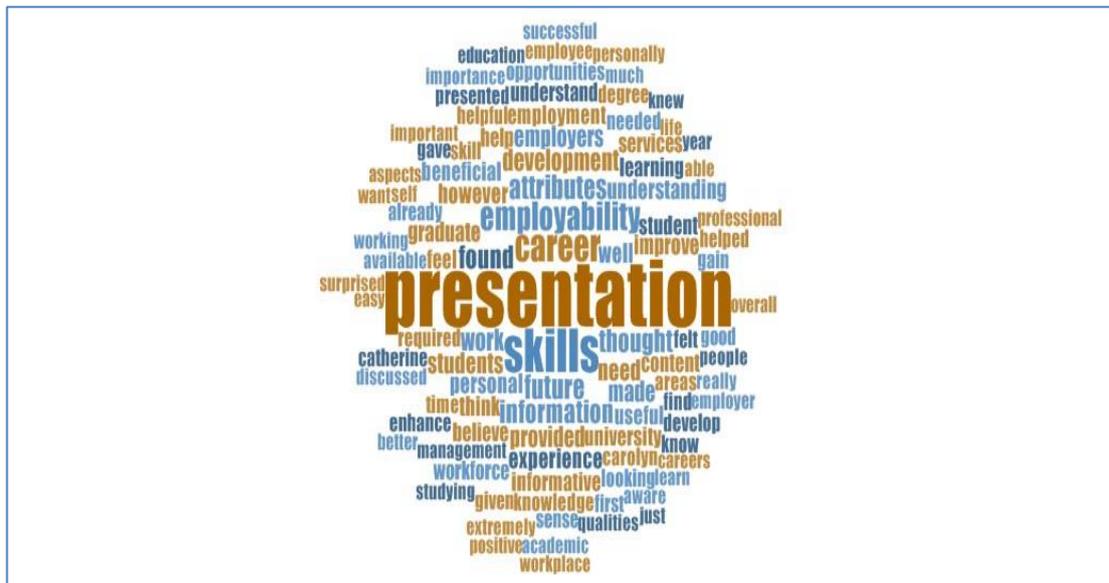
*I know that I need to career build and to finally get some much needed Graduate skills. So in my studies I am hoping to achieve not just graduate skills, but also more effective personal management, learning and work exploration skills that will enhance my confidence and to help market myself and progress for a new rewarding career.*

#### 4.4. Results and Analysis Related to Research Question 2

*Are Career Development Learning activities that introduce career education in an undergraduate first year core business course perceived as useful in enhancing future graduate employability?*

Research Question 2 was designed to obtain the views of students about the value of making career development presentations to business students early in their university studies. The presentations were developed and implemented through the co-operation and co-ordination of the Business faculty academic staff and the university's Careers and Student Services department.

A Word Frequency search of the sources on the presentations revealed the Word Cloud in Figure 4.12.



**Figure 4.12 Word Cloud Reflections on Presentation Top 150 Words**

Key words that feature in this Word Cloud include presentation, skills, career, information, employability, attributes, experience, future and development.

An analysis of the usable texts from student reflections showed the following result in Table 4.4.

Response	Student Sources	References
Positive	130	211
Mixed	11	14
Negative	5	6

**Table 4.4 Responses to Career Development Presentation**

The Career Development presentations received an overwhelmingly positive (eighty nine per cent) response from the students. They claimed to have enjoyed the presentations and found them to be entertaining and engaging. They described such presentations as useful and appropriate at the stage of university studies and that the contents delivered were highly relevant and timely. The information provided them with the basic career knowledge and tools to help them start their career building process.

From the presentations, students were able to reflect on their current skills set status and this prompted them to take necessary actions to improve their skills to better equip them for future employability. These latter developments will be explored in the sections 4.5 and 4.6 covering Research Questions 3 and 4 respectively.

One hundred and thirty positive responses were received. Seventeen students found the information presented new, insightful and useful. It broadened their concept of employability and stressed the importance of developing relevant employability skills at university. Sixteens students reflected on the presentation with some thinking about their career choices and others assessing their current employability skills sets. Thirteen students valued the information provided to them in the presentation, which inspired them to start their career management process and engage in activities such as résumé writing. Eight students learnt of the various career services that are provided by the university and felt that they could start to access the resources provided to help them develop their skills and aid them in their job search in future. One student was so impressed with the presentation that the student shared the contents and the knowledge gained with his/her work colleagues.

An example of a student who found the information and resources presented useful for future employment, which prompted the student to start to develop the skills in his/her profession is shown here:

*Student 3662:*

*I found the presentation to be very in depth and informative. The presenter drew insightful comparisons between the topic being discussed and everyday situations that we could relate to. I found the topics on résumés, work experience and networking to be very enlightening and has provided me with the tools to improve how I market myself to potential employers. As well as how to build on the skills to develop myself into the ideal candidate for my chosen profession, once I graduate.*

Of the students who found that career development presentations help to clarify career choices, student 3426 recommended career development programs to young adults at university:

*Student 3426:*

*Career development programs are strongly recommended to young people especially to those still unsure of what career they want to have after university. It will help immediate career and learning choices and also lay the foundations for life-long learning and career development.*

Of the students who mentioned that they intend to start their personal career management process, the presentation motivated student 6644 to be involved in extra-curricular activities and value the opportunity to engage in self-reflection of employability skills and attributes:

*Student 6644:*

*This seminar was absolutely fantastic, not only did it create a great motivation to work really hard and become involved in further extra-curricular activities. It provided ample opportunities to 'take a step back' and reflect on one self's own attributes and skills and how to improve them. I have gain so much insight from this seminar and believe that taking on board such information presented, I can now create better*

*opportunities in creating and maintaining a résumé that will be very beneficial once graduated.*

Of the 8 students who acquired new knowledge of the services and resources a university's Career services department provide, student 9242 found the presentation during orientation to be timely and appreciate the opportunity to access such resources to improve future employability.

*Student 9242:*

*I found the presentation informative and was excited to learn of the extensive range of services available with USQ, that can be utilised early on in your degree to ensure not only that you are prepared with work experience prior to graduation, but also for you to evaluate your chosen career path and re direct your studies if necessary.*

The presentation benefitted 4 students with the introduction of the skills framework and their relevance and application to future employability. An example is found in the work of student 8422:

*Student 8422:*

*I found the skills framework that was presented, provided me with an idea of what will be expected by employers to gain entry into my chosen field of employment. I also found the information on support services and programs to be extensive and accessible. After reviewing the information provided within the presentation, my overall feelings remain positive; as I believe I have an adequate grasp on all the skills required and am willing to improve upon all facets of the framework.*

Eleven, or eight per cent of students, had a mixed reaction to the presentations. Although they generally found the presentations to be useful, they perceived that most of the information delivered to them was not new. As some of these students were working adults and more mature, it is reasonable to infer that they would have been exposed to this type of information before. However, they agreed that the presentation was a good refresher and prompted them to reflect on their personal skill sets and their relevance for future employability. An excerpt of this type of student response is from student 7511 shown here:

*Student 7511:*

*Personally I find little information presented to be new or educational. As a student studying part time for the past 6 years while holding a full time job I feel the information covered in the brief half an hour presentation holds little new beneficial information for people in similar situations to me. However, it does help in bringing these ideas back to the surface for self-evaluation and criticism.*

Another student who has been in the workforce for a long time, found the presentation not very useful as the student had accumulated a wealth of experience. However, the student noted the value of the opportunity to reflect on his/her current skills set and the relevance of these to gaining employment.

*Student 9779:*

*I have been in my field of occupation now for a decade or so therefore I felt this exercise was a little obsolete (for lack of a better word). If I was doing this course fifteen years ago and had no experience in the workforce, then it would be a completely different emotional response. I would be stating that I found the course informative and I could use it to further increase my chances of gaining employment after completing my education. However if I alter the pointed direction of the presentation to a broader, what skills have you developed and used to gain employment? Then I find that I can directly relate to this exercise.*

Only five, or three per cent, of students did not find the presentations beneficial and perceived it to be more like an exercise in common sense, as shown in this example:.

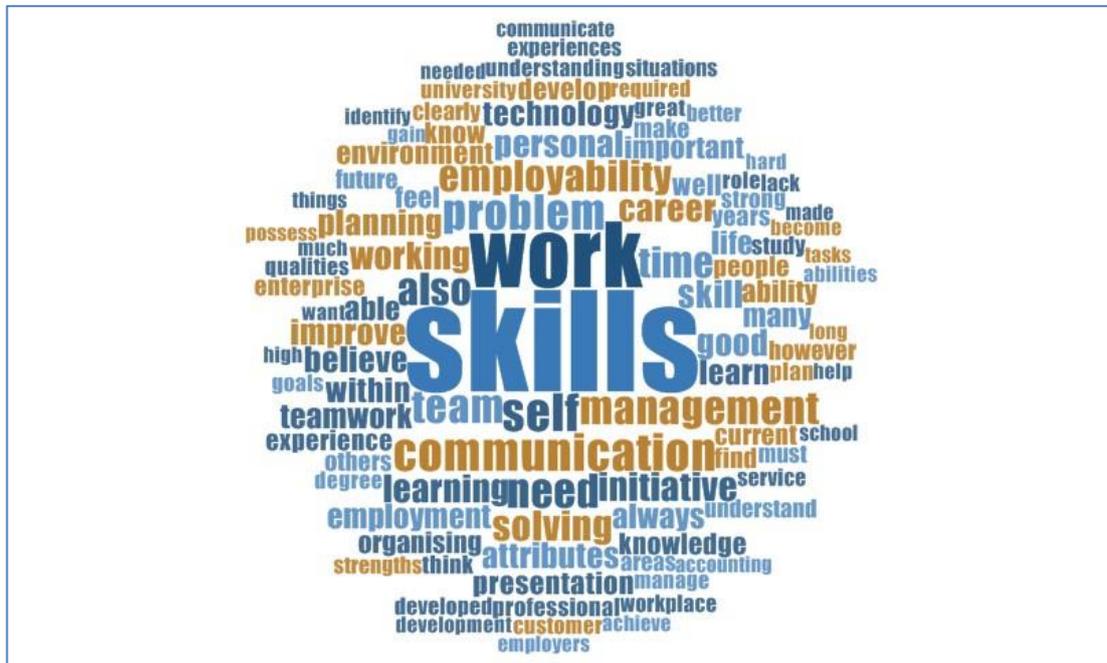
*Student 0303:*

*I thought it would be a waste of time working through the subject matter as I felt it was an area I was already familiar with and I considered it to be mostly 'common sense'.*

#### 4.5. Results and Analysis Related to Research Question 3

*What skills do students perceive they currently have and what skills do they perceive need to be developed during their degree studies to improve their employability prospects?*

Responses to Research Question 3 were developed by analysing text from students' reflection journals on perceptions of their current skills and attributes set, strengths and weaknesses in view of required employability skills.



**Figure 4.13 Word Cloud Self Analysis Strengths Top 150 Words**

The key words that emerged most clearly from the Word Cloud in Figure 4.13 on strengths include skills, work, problem, management, teamwork, self, communication, solving and technology. As these texts were drawn from various students in the cohort, different strengths should be expected. One hundred and fifty four students wrote reflections on their strengths and weaknesses. Fifty seven students cited strengths only, forty seven students wrote on weaknesses only and forty students described their strengths and weaknesses. The three most cited strengths are communication skills cited by 8 students, teamwork cited by 8 students and self-management cited by 8 students.

Student 6466's good communication and teamwork skills were helpful in fostering positive interactions and relationships with clients and sustaining existing employment.

*Student 6466:*

*My communication and team works skills are very good in my eyes which I believe has always resulted in me providing great customer service and great interaction with clients. By having these skills it has always provided me with excellent end results and employability which is what is stated in the presentation, these two skills are required to gain graduate employability*

The presentation prompted another student to reflect and write down a list of his/her current skills set gained from work and university studies.

*Student 2968:*

*I wrote out a list of what I believed to be my current skill set, this is taken from my current employment and my university studies to date. The list included; communication (various forms and to all types of stakeholders), conflict management, listening, organisation, the ability to work in a team and my professional personal presentation.*

Student 9642's felt that work experience in customer service contributed to his/her current skills set.

*Student 9642:*

*I feel my years of employment in customer service have contributed greatly to some of the core skills and personal traits which were previously discussed, in particular communication, teamwork, problem solving, and technology that was appropriate for the role.*

Another student valued his/her strengths in time management and self-discipline. These skills helped motivate the student to prioritise tasks and meet set deadlines.



Communication skills and problem solving are the most cited weaknesses from students. Fifteen students perceived that their communication skills in general need improvement and another 13 students cited improvements are required in verbal communications. Eight students felt they needed assistance in improving their written communications. Six students mentioned problem solving as one of their weaknesses.

One student recognised that good communications is a skill to have because it is related to other skills.

*Student 5259:*

*A desire to improve upon my communication skill set as this seemed most crucial to all other elements.*

Another student felt the need to improve writing skills so that communications can be improved in financial reporting.

*Student 0045:*

*I need to improve my writing skills so that I can record each transaction clearly, and I should good at communicating, so I will be able to explain the account statements to the company*

Another student related communications to the self-concept, confessing to weaknesses in public speaking and the need to learn how to use body language better in effective communications.

*Student 0085:*

*I have a little bit shy. I don't want to talk too much with people. I fear Speaking in public and also don't know how to use body language when I speaking.*

One student felt the need to improve on problem solving and initiative and enterprise skills as these were key performance indicators in the accounting environment. The student felt the need to strengthen his/her initiation skills, to gain confidence and put forward personal ideas and initiatives.



students), the need to take action to improve employability (20 students), accessing Career Services to assist students (15 students), networking (6 students) and the need to acquire professional knowledge (5 students).

Student 0555 recognised the need to develop generic skills together with discipline skills in a formal education setting to increase an individual's chances of employability.

*Student 0555:*

*Presentation provided an insight on the importance of career development and the skills which enhance employability, other than the academic skills learnt within a chosen discipline. Whilst a formal education is integral to be able to work within a chosen industry, personal attributes and soft skills are critical to employability.*

One student, 2058, felt the need to exercise spontaneity in problem solving and establishing good interpersonal relationships with peers.

*Student 2058:*

*I have learned that problem solving is important and my changed actions will be to think on my feet of strategies of how to resolve a situation, get along with everyone and also by showing initiative.*

Another student hoped to apply employability skills in practice. The student recognised that by developing employability skills, it gives him/her a better chance in gain employment and advancing in his/her career.

*Student 2621:*

*Show not only understanding the theory of employability but also the practical application of these skills within the workplace. By providing constant examples of the outcomes of attaining these skills, I am now able to apprehend that acquiring the skills not only will gain employment but also allow me to progress within the enterprise.*

Fifteen students found learning about the university's Career services resources to be very useful in helping to develop balanced graduates. Student 8315's statement exemplifies this theme:

*Student 8315:*

*Services from USQ's Careers and Employment department and our very own study programs which we can develop useful characteristics to assist us in becoming skilled, knowledgeable and employable graduates on completion of our studies. Services including Career Hub, Career Library, Career Counselling, Career Fairs and Showcases are examples of what USQ's Careers and Employment department provide to us university students. These services alongside our study program contribute to developing a balanced graduate.*

Six students perceived that joining professional associations to network and managing their personal career journey would be useful in enhancing their future employability. Examples of students' work are shown as follows:

*Student 3600:*

*Being involved with professional associations is something I had also never considered before and which I think would provide good networking opportunities to help further my career.*

*Student 0073:*

*Your degree will give you greater knowledge but it won't guarantee a job!! You need to be more proactive in managing your career. Then you need to build up a résumé of relevant experiences. Accept that you need to build professional networks!*

The students were also asked in their reflection journals to write on proposed actions that they intend to take in future to enhance their employability prospects. The top 100 words students cited in their work in this area are shown in Figure 4.16.



*learning by continuing through my current studies and selecting elective subjects closely aligned to my chosen career path and problem solving skills focusing on becoming solution orientated in my day to day work.*

*I plan to access the Career Mentoring Program and Career Counselling programs as referenced in order to gain expert advice about how to achieve my career goals. I believe this action plan will lead to a clearly outlined and achievable career development plan which will ultimately assist me to reach my goals.*

Thirty-six students, planned to access the university's careers and student services to assist in résumé preparation and interviews. The following student, 2968, also felt the need to research graduate positions on offer to gain an understanding of employer needs and selection criteria.

*Student 2968:*

*I explored the University of Southern Queensland's Student Services website, specifically under the heading of 'Careers & Employment'. I found this page to be a great source of information, not just for networking but resources to help with résumés, selection criteria and interviews. I definitely wished I had come across this information a lot sooner in my working life.*

*Not only did I get to view resources about being more employable, but I also was able to view resources about improving résumés and selection criteria, and also more about networking.*

*I am going to start looking for graduate positions that are on offer, not necessarily to apply for them now as I am only at the beginning of my degree, but to get an understanding of what companies require of you as a graduate, so I then know how to further improve my skills base.*

Another student felt comforted and assured that his/her résumé and address to selection criteria document could be vetted by career professionals before submission.

*Student 9298:*

*Having a source to search for jobs, where the organisations advertising those jobs are aware that respondents are university students looking for casual or graduate work will personally give me more confidence in applying for those jobs. The ability to have trained professionals peruse my /selection criteria before I submit them is invaluable.*

*I need to seize as many of the multitude of opportunities available as I can, to increase my employability and obtain the most desirable employment available.*

As for Work Experience, 17 students perceived that part-time work and volunteering would be useful activities in enhancing graduate employability. Some of the reasons for doing so include giving them a head start in their job search and also applying their theoretical knowledge learnt at university in the practical working environment.

One student felt that gaining work experience will help in fostering good relationships with colleagues and bosses. The work experience could also help to clarify potential career goals and aspirations.

*Student 0088:*

*Obtain work experience is important for every students. They can learn how to get on well with colleagues and bosses. They will know how to use the best way to solving problem when they get a job. Students can identify their career goal and direction. They can find a suitable job depend on their work experience in the future. They can know their weakness that they can improve these skills through training.*

*I should use my free time to find a part-time job to obtain more work experience. I will study hard to get a good grade on every course. Secondly, I will take action to practices these skills on those ways in my free time.*

Twenty one students perceived that participating in internship programs, part-time work and volunteering will help in enhancing employability. Student 9298 felt that work experience programs help to secure future employability and create good contacts.

*Student 9298:*

*The idea of completing a 30 day Industrial Experience Program and having the opportunity to do so multiple times is hugely appealing, giving me not only the opportunity to assume a role in my chosen field but to create invaluable contacts whilst doing so.*

Another student expected work experience to provide opportunities to foster friendships and exercise leadership skills. The student was also motivated to look for employability resources from libraries.

*Student 0071:*

*Also need to do some practical experience and in part of time I will make more friends and improving my leadership through communication. In weekend will go to library to reading kinds of book. After all, I will start from the experience of others to learn and prevent our mistakes. On the vacation, it is get a part-time job or work as a volunteer I think this is the best way to exercise self.*

Sixteen students also perceived that, in this technologically advanced age, it is vital to create social and professional networks to enhance employability prospects. These may be done through extracurricular activities and interest groups. Examples include:

*Student 0085:*

*I'll attempt to join the interest groups to improve my ability about teamwork, problem solving, initiative and enterprise.*

*Student 2968:*

*I recognised that I have the availability to be able to network with a large range of people from my current employment. I am in contact with judicial officers, lawyers, barristers and fellow students on a daily basis, and have formed work relationships with a number of people. I didn't completely realise that this was in fact a form of networking, and not just about making my interactions with these people easier.*

One student perceived that participating in internal working committees would improve employability skills such as teamwork, communications and problems solving and demonstrate relevant attributes such as reliability, adaptability and motivation:

*Student 5313:*

*Take a more active role in workplace committees such as Workplace Health and Safety. This would further develop not only my team work skills, but also communication, problem solving, planning and initiative. This involvement will also allow me to present my personal attributes such as reliability, the ability to work under pressure, resourcefulness, adaptability and motivation.*

#### **4.7. Chapter Summary**

The results and analysis of the findings to the four research questions have been addressed in this chapter.

To answer Research Question 1, this study found that students rated communications and teamwork as the two most important skills to future careers but all employability skills aligned to the Employability Skills Framework were acknowledged and represented in students' works. Attributes were also mentioned and acknowledged as important in enhancing graduate employability but were cited on a much lesser scale.

In response to Research Question 2, an overwhelming majority of students found that the Career Development activity was an appropriate tool in career education in their first year of university study to help students understand the importance of employability skills development but the need to do so early in their university studies.

This study through Research Question 3, has contributed to the preparation of students for future employability through an experiential career development activity. The assessment tasks prompted students to reflect on their current skills set in order to identify strengths and weaknesses in view of employability skills sought after by employers. They have spent time reflecting on their capabilities in response to the activity, learnt more deeply about themselves in the process and strengthened reflective practice.

As to Research Question 4, undergraduate business students in this study identified some practical ways they can improve their employability prospects. These strategies fall into three major categories: career building, work experience and networking. As

first year students, many of them saw the need to start to assess their strengths and weaknesses, prepare their résumés, look for appropriate work experience and start to engage in social networking.

A discussion and summary of the findings in this research study, the contributions to theory, implications for practice, limitations, future directions in research and the conclusion of this study will be covered in the next chapter.

## **5. CHAPTER FIVE – CONCLUSION**

### **5.1. Discussion of Research Study**

In this section, a discussion and summary of the findings in this research study is presented.

#### **5.1.1. Introduction**

To date, there has been ample research on employability from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders including employers, higher education institutions and graduates (Cranmer 2006; Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2002; Knight & Yorke 2002; Pegg et al. 2012). However, studies examining student perceptions of employability skill development in business undergraduate programs are limited (Jackson & Chapman 2012b; Jackson, Sibson & Riebe 2013; Tymon 2013).

This study was conducted in response to calls for research studies on first year students to embrace the multi-dimensional nature of graduate employability and add to the literature on students' perceptions of skills development in universities (Jackson 2013a; Tymon 2013). Students are a key stakeholder group when it comes to examining views on developing skills and attributes to equip them for a career in business. The likelihood of graduate employment is no longer a product of qualification alone but requires self-development of employability skills.

#### **5.1.2. Employability Skills and Attributes**

First year business students in the research study learned that employability involved the possession of skills and attributes that meet the needs of employers. In line with the literature, communication skills and teamwork were commonly cited. Self-management, problem solving and planning and organising were also commonly mentioned as students viewed these skills to be more critical to enhanced employability than others and are sought after by employers (Tymon 2013).

Recent literature and policy relating to graduate employability have been dominated by the development of a range of generic skills perceived by employers as important in new graduates. These skills include communication, critical thinking, and self-management (Australian Association of Graduate Employers 2014; Jackson & Chapman 2012b). Another study of professional work experiences of recent

Australian Information Technology graduates identified that communication, time management, teamwork, and business skills were some of the major professional skills required for their work (Nagarajan & Edwards 2014).

The findings of this research study revealed that first year business students rated communication and teamwork as the two most important skills to future careers. Communications skills were linked to improved interpersonal relationships amongst colleagues at the workplace and increased professionalism and social cohesion through good verbal communication skills. Teamwork was valued as this skill leads to improved outcomes and promotes harmony and social cohesion at the workplace that leads to improved productivity. These results are in line with the findings of Jackson who found that undergraduates value skill development, most particularly communication and teamwork (Jackson 2013a). Communications has been consistently ranked as the primary skill sought by employers (Tymon 2013). Their emphasis is placed on internal as well as external communications. Good verbal communication skills such as giving and receiving feedback, making effective presentations and participation in meetings are highly valued (Jackson 2009b). Employers look for staff that can communicate across cultures, generations and nationalities and be sensitive to others at work (Jackson 2013b; Tymon 2013).

With globalisation, the notions of communications and teamwork are evolving with dynamic technological, societal and political environments (Archer & Davison 2008; Tymon 2013). To ensure students develop relevant skills sets for the workplace, career development presentations and WIL activities in universities in the future should also involve external professional presenters from recruitment agencies and representatives from employer groups. This initiative will give students a more balanced and macro perspective on the applications of the types of communications and teamwork skills that are valued at the workplace.

Employers of new graduates increasingly consider social skills, particularly communication and teamwork, and personality as more important than degree qualification (Archer & Davison 2008). High importance is attached to working effectively with others and communicating effectively aligns with previous studies examining stakeholder perception of the relative importance of industry relevant

employability skills (Jackson 2013a; Kavanagh & Drennan 2008). This study lends strong support for employability skills provision in undergraduate business degree programs with teamwork and communication acting as pivotal components of any graduate employability toolkit created (Jackson & Chapman 2012b).

As part of their ongoing development of personal skills, the first year business students included in this study were also focused on improving their professional attitude and networking skills. Students recognised the importance of using networking to help them gain graduate employment through inter-personal relationships with potential employers, peers and external parties. This could be achieved through participation in career events and workshops that promote social interactions amongst working professionals. Information technology and social media skills are viewed as increasingly important networking platforms, with employers expecting graduates to be well-versed in the use of online social media (Benson, Morgan & Filippaios 2014). Ensuring that students are fully aware of and skilled in the various uses of such networks will be important (Benson, Morgan & Filippaios 2014). The importance and significance of networking skills in enhancing employability will be discussed later in this section.

This research study's participants support and value lifelong learning. Lifelong learning may be viewed from the dimensions of self-awareness, self-management and judgement, self-efficacy and motivation; and relevant graduate attributes (Hammer et al. 2012). In the study, fifty-one per cent of students recognised that learning extended beyond the classroom and into the workplace. Some students felt that there was a need to self-manage and be technically updated with technological skills and continuing professional development to give them better job security. This is especially so where job redundancies are common and individuals may have several careers in their lifetime. These skills need to be acquired early in an individual's development and the role of the university career practitioners and academics should include the facilitation of these skills for their clients and students. From a career development standpoint, students should be encouraged to participate in employability skills seminars and workshops organised by careers departments during their university studies. Students should be motivated to continue this learning process when they enter the workforce and participate in relevant professional development activities.

Personal attributes are an inherent part of employability with the most commonly mentioned in Tymon's study being flexibility, adaptability, hardworking, commitment and dedication (Tymon 2013). In Kavanagh and Drennan's study, the researchers found that employers at the workplace valued attributes such as conscientiousness, dedication and the ability to deal with complexity, uncertainty and pressure (Kavanagh & Drennan 2008). The common attributes mentioned by students in this research study were honesty and integrity, commitment, loyalty, reliability and motivation. The least mentioned were personal presentation, sense of humour and common sense.

The attributes perceived by students to be the most important tended to be traditional core attributes emphasising honesty, integrity and loyalty at workplaces. In contrast, the attributes valued by employers in other studies are flexibility and adaptability. These differences are not surprising, possibly due to the lack of exposure of students to actual, current workplace environments and employer requirements. In view of the current fast moving business environment, employers expect potential employees to be dynamic, flexible and adaptable to react positively to changes and take advantage of opportunities that come their way.

Attributes form personality traits. Attributes and personality traits are complex and planned and explicit development of these is possibly outside the capability and ambit of universities (Tymon 2013) due to the difficulty of clearly defining personality traits and the uniqueness of each individual. To what extent personality traits are inherited, or can be developed, is still a contentious subject (Rutter et al. 1997; Tymon 2013). Even if they can be developed, it is recognised that these traits may be very individualised and deep-rooted and may have been formed at an early age. These may help to determine success, performance and career choices and any development of them may be incrementally slow (Woods & West 2010).

From a practical and career development viewpoint, first year business students should be encouraged to join student organisations and participate in activities and events. This gives them opportunities to experience working in an organisation, recognise the attributes and qualities required in tasks completion. Student leaders in such organisations are also expected to have and exhibit quality attributes such as

leadership, motivation and dedication. Employers value graduates who possess such attributes; many of which are very relevant to current workplaces (Bridgstock 2009; Jackson 2009a).

Student-centred activities such as the career development learning presentation in the research study may be a way to help students to develop a proactive personality. The way forward could be to focus on raising awareness of employers' needs in terms of personal attributes, and for them to participate more actively in their education and investing in their own social capital (Villar & Albertin 2010). Some studies have showed links between proactive personality and career success from two perspectives. Firstly, a proactive personality has been shown to make adjustment to work a quicker and smoother process, resulting in higher productivity (Seibert, Kraimer & Liden 2001). Secondly, there is a link to the process of job search, with individuals high on proactive personality more likely to succeed in self-driven activities (Brown et al. 2006). Those students who are more proactive are more likely to take the initiative to develop employability skills.

First year business undergraduates place significant value on employability skills development in degree programs (Jackson 2013a). Employability mattered a great deal to students, with their focus on securing a job (Tymon 2013). However, there is little empirical evidence of students' perceptions of skills development in higher education (Jackson 2013a). This study provides evidence of first year business students' perceptions of employability skills that need to be developed for enhanced employability prospects.

### **5.1.3. Career Development Learning and Management**

This study provides strong support for the role of career development learning and career management in enhancing graduate employability. It also affirms the contribution of Work Integrated Learning in the process through carefully planned work-like experiences for first year undergraduate business students in the classroom. Career development learning is used as a vehicle for maximising the contribution of work related learning to the student experience.

Employers are concerned with graduate career management competencies (Bridgstock 2009) with evidence that students are not taking a proactive approach to their careers (McKeown & Lindorff 2011), and not adequately engaging with career management activities (Brown & Hesketh 2004), particularly students from lower-socio-economic backgrounds (Greenbank & Hepworth 2008). This may lead to an increased likelihood of poorer graduate employment outcomes (Ayranci & Oge 2011). This inactivity and lack of engagement by students could be attributed to ignorance, with students expecting a good job upon graduation and being unprepared to participate in on-going career enhancement activities (Perrone & Vickers 2003).

An overwhelming majority of the first year business students agreed that the Career Development activity was an appropriate tool in career education in their first year of university study. Some students found the careers information and resources shared useful in helping them make career choices. Others perceived that there was value in the careers and employability information gathered to assist them to kick start their career development process and engage in activities such as attending career fairs and writing résumés. Another group felt that the skills sought after by prospective employers assisted them in better targeting their skills for development to enhance their chances of employment upon graduation. Participants generally perceived that the activity helped them to understand the importance of employability skills development and management as well as the need to do so early in their university studies. For undergraduates, proficiency in career management enhances self-efficacy (Wright, Jenkins-Guarnieri & Murdock 2012), encouraging individuals to be aware of the expectations of their chosen profession and to identify possible employment pathways early in their studies (Watts 2006).

Career management competencies are an important aspect of individual employability and impact on well-being, graduate job attainment and long-term career success. Enhanced competencies can assist universities to achieve strong employment outcomes and produce graduates who are able to self-manage their career pathways effectively (Jackson & Wilton 2016). Universities are mindful of the importance of engaging students with the employability agenda and the need to develop a broad range of employability skills, together with disciplinary expertise, to add value and give students a well-rounded and holistic learning experience (Albrecht & Sack 2000;

Howieson 2003; Jackson 2014b; Jones 2010). This is done by ensuring that course curricula incorporate current learning, teaching and assessment practices to encourage employability development. There is also a need for assurance of student buy-in, as seen in the study, which is important to ensure learners engage with skill development and to enable them to articulate their capabilities to potential employers (Jackson 2013a).

Developing career management competencies in a campus setting should place an emphasis on fostering effective opportunity search strategies. One way of doing so would be through regular employment seminars where external stakeholders, such as representatives from employer bodies and guest speakers, who can inform students in local and national economic trends and how these impact on the labour market. Graduate recruiters can also be invited to introduce students to industry requirements and the latest techniques and strategies used by employers to assess graduates against established selection criteria (Jackson 2016).

#### **5.1.4. Experiential Learning and Reflection**

Evidence to date suggests that successful pedagogical approaches to skills development include experiential learning with an emphasis on exploration, learning by doing and reflection in authentic contexts (Pegg et al. 2012). Key areas in which WIL can promote career development learning include the ability to self-assess work-related capabilities, insights into the realities of a profession, exposure to guidance and mentoring by professionals, enhanced confidence and career planning and networking (Jackson 2016).

This study has made a contribution to first year business students' preparation for their future employability through student participation in an experiential career development activity. The assessment tasks prompted students to reflect on their current skills set in order to identify strengths and weaknesses in view of employability skills sought after by employers. They have spent time reflecting on their capabilities in response to the activity, through which they have developed their reflective capabilities and were given the opportunity to learn about themselves in more depth.

Incorporating career development tasks within the formal curriculum lends both authority and rigour to the process. It has been shown that assigning credit for career development learning in embedded courses could act to encourage student engagement with initiatives by which to develop career management competencies (Jackson 2016). In addition, because the career development tasks were part of the formal assessment in the first year accounting course, it was possible to assist students in their tasks by incorporating an assessment rubric to aid students in their reflections. A practice reflection was also provided for guidance and the practice of reflection discussed in a tutorial. For self-assessment to be integrated into the employability skills program in a meaningful way, training and development in the process is important (Jackson 2014a).

#### **5.1.5. Strategies to Enhance Graduate Employability**

Undergraduate first year business students in this study have identified a range of practical strategies they could use to improve their employability prospects. These strategies can be grouped into three major themes: career building, work experience and networking. These themes reflect the perception of participants that, as first year students, they should start to assess their strengths and weaknesses, prepare their résumés, look for appropriate work experience and start to engage in social networking.

Students participating in this study perceived networking to be a key strategy to improve their employability. For example, some argued that networking is more important today than ever before and the old adage ‘it’s not what you know but who you know’ could not be more relevant (Benson, Morgan & Tennakoon 2013; Coughlan et al. 2012). The value of networking (Bourner & Millican 2011) and participating in social groups (Stuart et al. 2011) are widely acknowledged as enhancing graduate employability. In recent years, there has been an infiltration of online social networking into the everyday life of the younger generation. The use of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter is prevalent. With the majority of job roles being advertised online, belonging to a professional network is the best way to keep abreast of developments in industry practice.

Indeed, social networking has broader implications than that of employability. For example, it has recently been found that online networking has been positively linked to building and reinforcing social capital. However, better connected people are thought to enjoy an advantage in career management (Benson, Morgan & Filippaios 2014). For example, Facebook usage was found to interact with measures of self-perceived employability, which suggests that, in addition, the use of social network sites can positively impact upon perceptions of future employability (Coughlan et al. 2012).

However, recent research indicates that new graduates coming into the corporate world are not equipped with an updated skills set, including the capacity for networking (Benson, Morgan & Filippaios 2014). While professionals acknowledge that social networking is essential for business and development, new graduates coming into the corporate world are not equipped with these skills (Benson, Morgan & Filippaios 2014). These authors recommended the provision of more information to students during their studies regarding the various uses of online social networking and include high level skills in social networking as learning outcomes (Benson, Morgan & Filippaios 2014). They recognised that it is important to explicitly employability needs explicitly into the curriculum and develop such skills across each year of study.

Participants in this study also recognised the need to develop résumé writing skills etcetera. This is affirmed by Benson, Morgan and Filippaios who recommended that university programs include learning about employability skills such as résumé writing and presentation skills including the creation of a positive online profile in the first year of study (Benson, Morgan & Filippaios 2014). The students should gain an understanding of how employers using social networking to assess job applicants. Students should also be aware of privacy and security issues along with email and online discussion etiquette. In the second year, networking and negotiation skills can be taught for them to gain an understanding of how to assess and update profiles and the use of social networking skills in employment related networking such as in areas of internships, work placements and volunteering (Benson, Morgan & Filippaios 2014). In the final year, students should have developed these skills to a high level so that they have a much deeper understanding of how to research organisations and job

roles online and use social networking to aid in their job search (Benson, Morgan & Filippaios 2014).

## **5.2. Contributions to Theory**

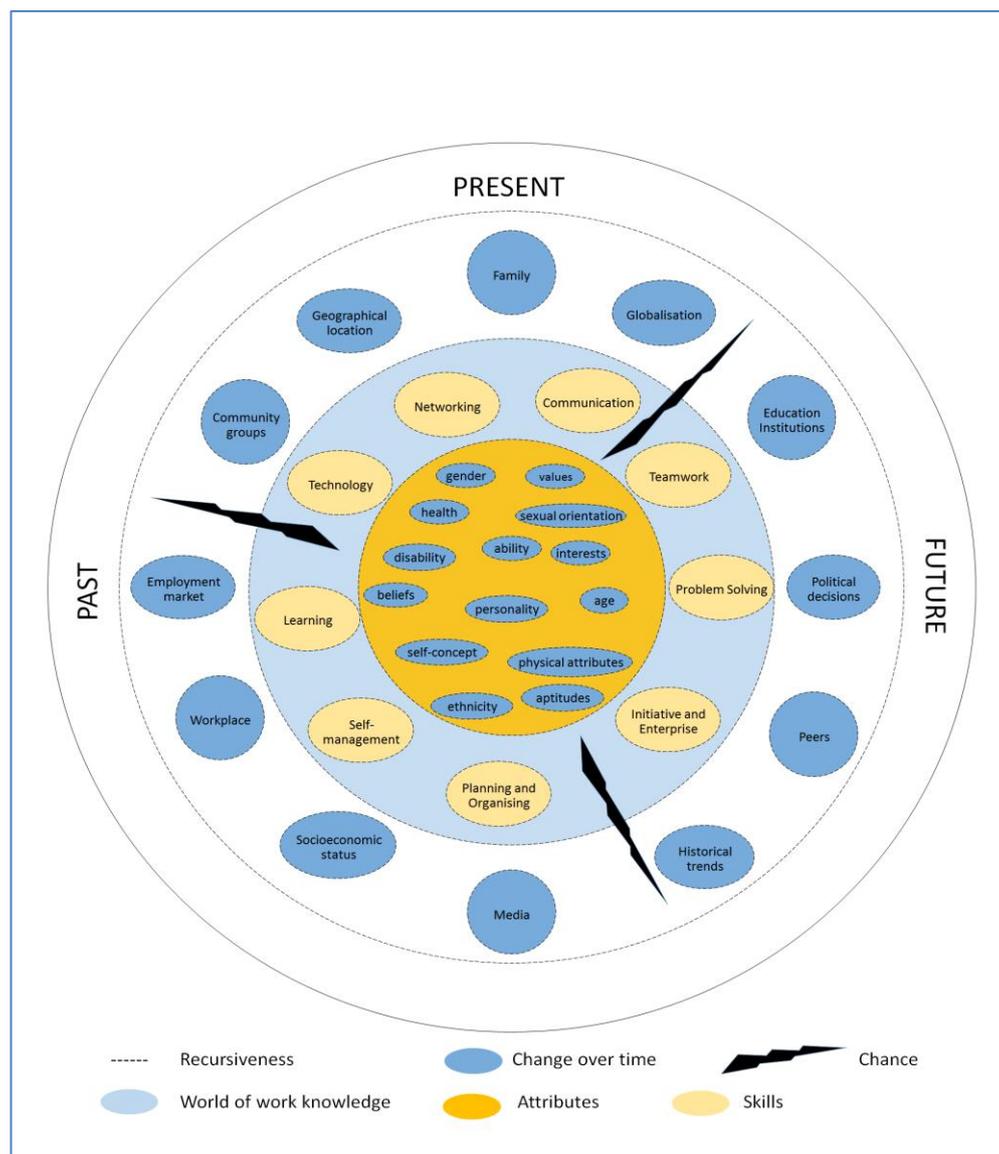
Definitions of employability to date have been broadly classified into three categories: immediate employment, immediate employability and sustainable employability (Watts 2006). This study has focussed on the latter two categories; not only in assisting students to be work ready by possessing the skills and attributes to obtain their first graduate level job but also to remain employable throughout life.

Individuals have a degree of control over their employability outcomes. They can enhance their graduate identity through skills and identity development, engaging in effective employability strategies throughout their learning in university and beyond. This notion engages with Holmes' processual perspective of employability where the formation of graduate identity interacts with the 'gatekeepers to employment'. This contrasts to the 'possessive' perspective where employability is determined by the necessary skills and attributes and 'positional' perspective where factors relating to societal positioning will determine employment outcomes (Holmes 2013).

The Systems Theory Framework in career development places extant theories in the context of other theories and interconnections and brings congruence between theory and career practice. As acknowledged in chapter 2, the motivation of authors of this Framework was not to achieve comprehensiveness but to acknowledge various influences and factors that assist in personal career building and management. This research study has focussed on the intra-individual issue of personal career development. The proposal for students to review their current employability skills set definitely requires a working knowledge of the current business world, including work experience if available. The element of world of work knowledge was also found to be strongly correlated with many of the other elements providing support to the notion that it is a central and complex influence on career development (Bridgstock 2007). Hence from the generic Systems Theory Framework in Figure 1.2, the world of work knowledge attribute is extracted to form the area surrounding the individual

and the employability skills required in career development are shown as elements within this realm as shown in Figure 1.3.

Based on the discussion previously on attributes and the perceived difficulties in developing them in this study, the innermost circle of the Systems Theory Framework is now representing the core attributes of an individual. The ring surrounding the core is now representing the world of work knowledge and employability skills that can be developed are now situated within this ring. Based on this proposal, the Systems Theory Framework may be represented in Figure 5.1.



**Figure 5.1 Suggested Systems Theory Framework**

The innermost Individual circle still contains the other original fourteen attributes. The eight skills identified in the study within the world of work knowledge realm correspond to the skills mentioned in the 2002 Employability Skills Framework adopted in the Career Development Learning presentations to the students. The number of skills depicted in the diagram may be amended as necessary because there is recognition that there are overlaps in definitions of various elements by different scholars. First year business students participating in this study perceived networking to be a key strategy to improve their employability. This finding affirms the existing literature on the importance of this skill in the current business environment. The value of networking (Bourner & Millican 2011) and participating in social groups (Stuart et al. 2011) are widely acknowledged as enhancing graduate employability. Benson, Morgan and Filippaios suggested that better connected individuals are thought to enjoy an advantage in career management (Benson, Morgan & Filippaios 2014). Also, Coughlan et al. found that Facebook usage had interactions with measures of self-perceived employability, which suggests that the use of social network sites can positively impact upon perceptions of future employability (Coughlan et al. 2012). However, recent research indicates that new graduates entering the workforce are not equipped with updated skills sets, including the capacity for networking (Benson, Morgan & Filippaios 2014). Hence, this researcher proposes that networking should be included as an additional skill in the employability skills list.

There have been numerous questions raised about the adequacy of the graduate attributes approach in the development of professional skills (Nagarajan & Edwards 2014). There is currently an emerging view that employability should encompass the formation of a pre-professional graduate identity (Glover, Law & Youngman 2002; Hinchliffe & Jolly 2011; Holmes 2001; Jackson 2014c, 2016). Mastery of certain generic skills and the successful formation of pre-professional identity are widely considered to influence graduate work-readiness (Holmes 2001; Jackson 2014c). Prior to taking on a graduate identity, a student has an identity primarily formed through subject discipline and different student experiences. This identity is then developed through student participation in various courses in their degree program embodying employability skills development and graduate attributes culminating in the pre-professional graduate identity (Hinchliffe & Jolly 2011; Jackson 2016). This formed graduate identity is not static but one where the graduate once employed must then

embark on a lifelong learning process to be replaced by a professional-oriented identity to ensure sustainable employability (Hinchliffe & Jolly 2011).

The initiative under study has focussed on the creation of a graduate identity unique to each first year business student through personal career development. Through a process of self-reflection, students assessed their current levels of skills and attributes and proposed courses of action to improve their employability prospects. They are also expected to manage their career development to ensure that their employability is sustainable and goes beyond their first job after graduation (Hillage & Pollard 1998; Yorke 2006).

The skills based approach is too narrow and does not fully capture the complexity of graduate work-readiness (Clarke, Zukas & Lent 2011; Jackson 2016). In the light of challenges associated with new technologies and disrupted economies, Oliver (2015) proposed that employability should be redefined as 'students and graduates who can discern, acquire and adapt and continually enhance the skills, understandings and personal attributes that make them more likely to find and create meaningful paid and unpaid work that benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy'.

This researcher agrees with Jackson that there is a need to redefine graduate employability by embracing the pre-professional identity formation. Identity formation relates to an understanding of a connection with the skills, qualities, conduct, culture and ideology of a student's intended profession (Jackson 2016). This identity can be developed during university years where a student makes sense of his/her intended profession through multiple memberships and differing levels of engagement with various business communities and groups, such as professional associations, student societies, careers services and employer networks (Jackson 2016). The identity developed will assist the graduate in to demonstrate preparedness for employment and the successful application of their acquired skills and knowledge in the work environment (Jackson 2016).

The career development and management approach in enhancing employability adopted in this research study is aligned with the 'transition pedagogy' work completed

by Kift, with planned first year curriculum design and support that carefully scaffolds and mediates the first year university learning experience for contemporary heterogeneous cohorts (Kift 2009). This transition pedagogy is framed around the identification of six first-year interconnecting curriculum principles of transition, diversity, design, engagement, assessment and evaluation and monitoring that are supportive of first year learning engagement, success and retention (Kift 2009).

The findings of this research study are also aligned with and supportive of four of the seventeen recommendations made in the 'Shaping the future of accounting in business education in Australia' by O'Connell et al. (2015). Those recommendations were designed to provide proactive strategies to meet the challenges presented to university business educators. They were also built around the need to develop and broaden accounting graduates' skills base, especially in the professional skills area of critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork and communication and to inculcate professional values, ethics and attitudes so that they are well equipped to succeed in the workplace of today and the future (O'Connell et al. 2015). The four recommendations were:

Recommendation 1 encourages business schools to create and expand learning strategies and assessments that develop students' professional skills and explicitly ensure that such skills are embraced and assessed in accounting curricula (O'Connell et al. 2015). That was affirmed by the extent of positive first year business students' responses to the initiative, which is the subject of this study. The initiative developed students' professional skills early in their tertiary studies through the use of carefully planned scaffolded career development activities as part of a wider strategy to progressively develop professional skills across a degree program.

Recommendation 4 suggests exposing students to the world of professional practice in accounting to assist in inculcating professional values, ethics and attitudes of accounting graduates across a degree (O'Connell et al. 2015). The career development activities in the research study dedicated valuable resources and focus on students' skills development, introducing career counselling services to first year business students and conducted by invited speakers, orientation and assessments encouraged students to take a greater personal accountability for development of their professional knowledge, skills, values, ethics and attitudes.

Recommendation 9 encourages students to, individually and collectively, foster greater awareness of the importance of developing professional skills for life-long career and personal success and their personal accountability (O'Connell et al. 2015). Through the career development activities organised in the research study, first year business students participated in their personal development, introduced to career counselling and were made more aware of their strengths and limitations and the actions that may be taken to address their weaknesses. Students also had the opportunity to participate in career seminars held by professional industry bodies.

Recommendation 16 encourages students to take a stronger interest in understanding the dynamics of the accounting profession and business (O'Connell et al. 2015). Through the career development activities organised for first year business students, students were given the opportunity to explore the evolving environment of the profession and the industries in which they may work in the future. Students were also encouraged to network and join professional industry bodies as student members and participate in engagement activities and initiatives.

### **5.3. Implications for Practice**

Because first year business students' motivation to learn and acquire skills is often driven by perceptions about the relevance of employability skills to their careers at this particular point in time, the findings of the study have important implications for business educators.

In a recent study, work tasks in Work Integrated Learning can be mapped along two axes: degrees of authenticity - how closely a task resembles professional level challenges; and proximity - how closely the context resembles a professional environment (Oliver 2015). Whilst, the researcher recognises that tasks in a university setting should be as authentic as possible, the issue of 'pre-professional' identity formation and the context of that identity formation in the first year should be accounted for. As seen in this research, appropriate employability tasks could be set to account for 'pre-professional' identity formation and the contexts of those tasks as the student transitions into the first year.

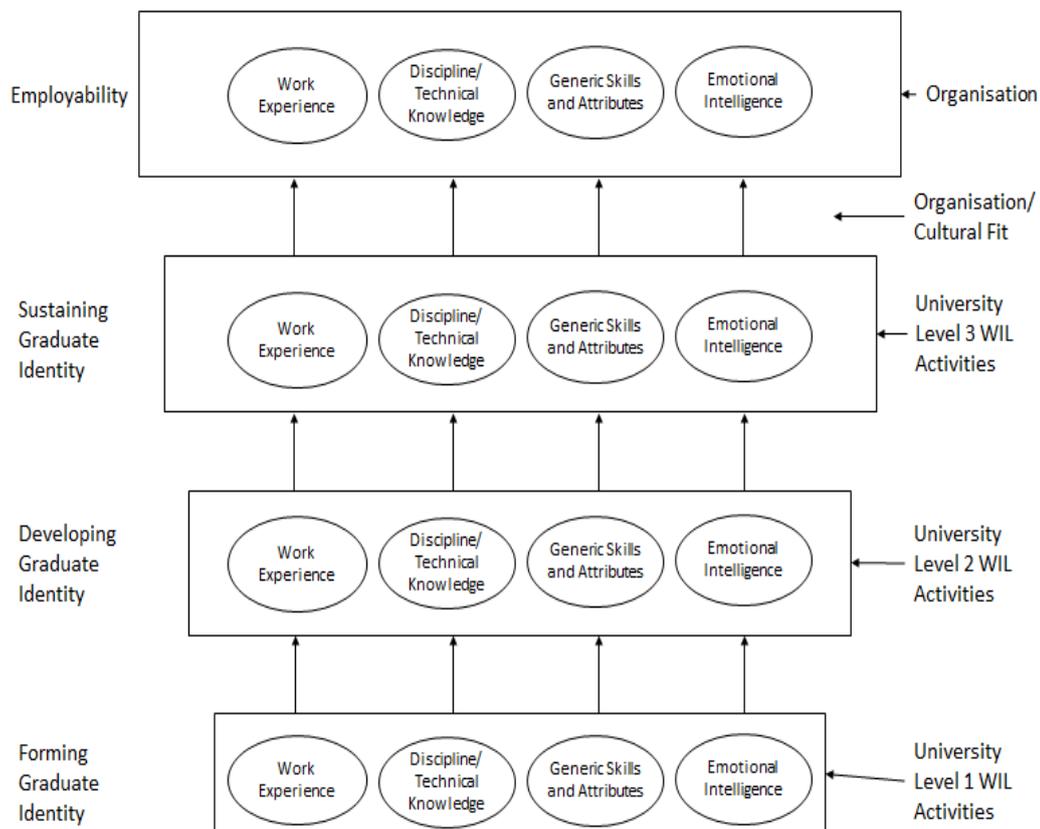
The Career Development Learning presentations that were introduced to the first year business students, even though less authentic and proximal to the tasks expected at a working environment, were appropriate WIL activities for first year, where students are making the transition into university (Kift 2009; Oliver 2010a). Presentations made by experienced industry professionals on necessary skills and attributes sought after by recruiters are also appropriate and recommended. This is because students are expected to gain knowledge about the working environment and work experience where appropriate, write and update their résumé well before applying for graduate positions.

From a developmental, student learning journey perspective, a careers education can prepare university students to search and apply for graduate positions by developing their knowledge, confidence and ability to apply for positions. Career counsellors and university academic staff can work with new undergraduate students to build a personal employability profile beginning at an early stage in their time at university. Many students have indicated in their reflections that they intend to contact the university's Careers department and make use of relevant resources to assist them in enhancing their employability. The joint collaboration between the university's Careers Services department and the Business faculty in delivering the Career Development Learning presentations is also an application of the integration of career education within the business curriculum rather than added as an extraneous service by only the career development practitioners alone as suggested by McCowan C. and McKenzie (1997).

The findings of this thesis also affirm the value of reflection and suggest that reflection tasks should be introduced more frequently and purposefully into the business curriculum. This is because reflection is a means for students to gain, maintain awareness of, express and explore their abilities in general and in recruitment processes (Moon, J. 2004; Ryan & Ryan 2012). The focus of the Career Development Learning presentation provided the trigger for students to develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of themselves, develop knowledge and understanding of the range of career opportunities available, and learn how to make choices from available options and effectively manage their career (Fullana et al. 2014; Lucas 2012).

It is important that in an increasingly competitive labour market, business students' graduate with all the skills and graduate attributes necessary to gain and sustain graduate-level employment (Pegg et al. 2012). To achieve this outcome, program curricula must develop learning and teaching strategies to encourage career development and management.

A conceptual framework should enable all employability stakeholders, including academics, to think beyond skills and attributes for employment to explore perceived factors that enhance employability (Reid 2016). In view of contributions from relevant literature and the findings of this research study, an Employability Conceptual Framework integrated from Pool and Sewell (2007) and O'Shea's WIL Framework (2008) for university business students is proposed, with a focus on level 1 WIL activities. This is illustrated in Figure 5.2.



**Figure 5.2: Employability Conceptual Framework**

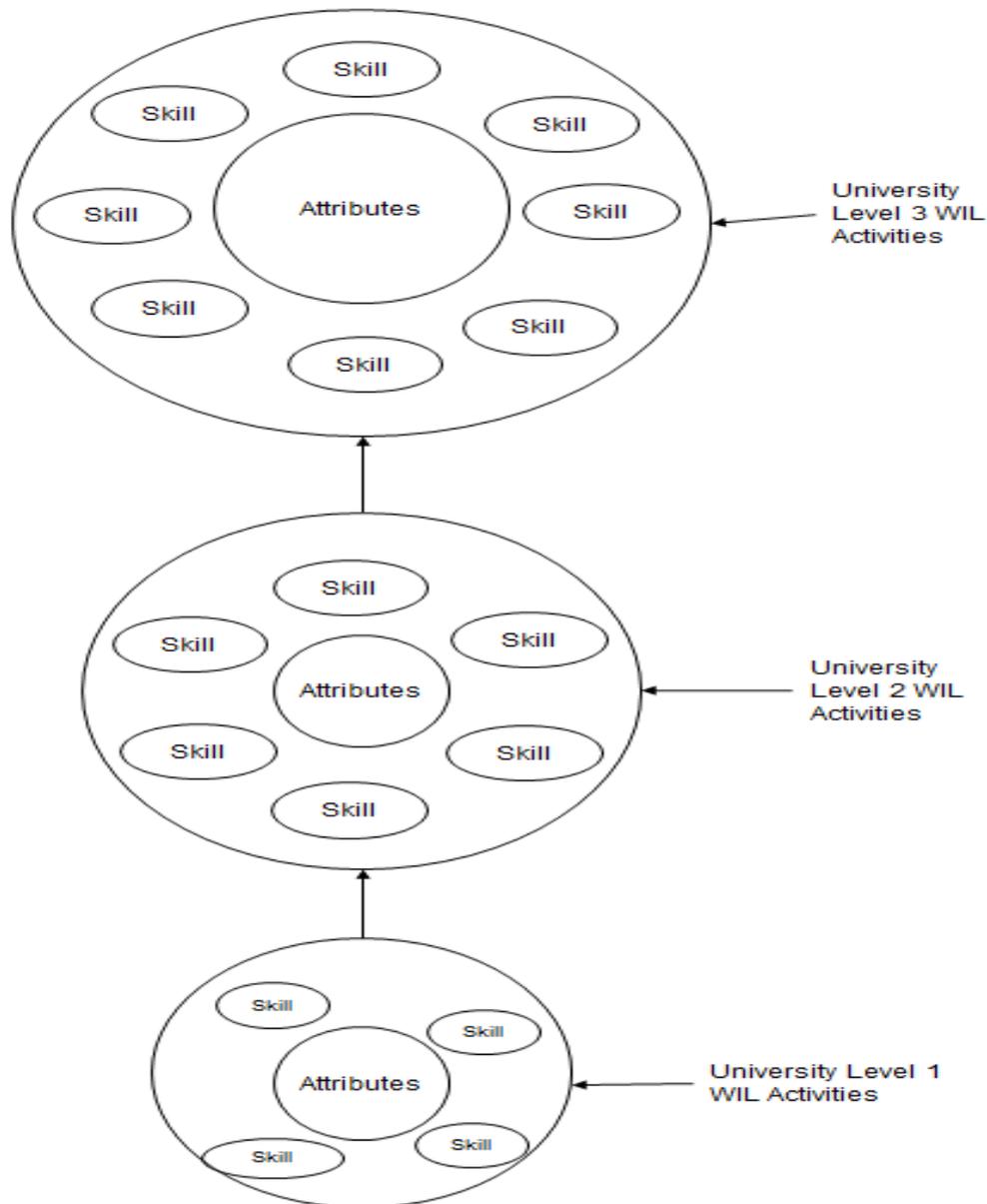
A graduate employability framework developed by Oliver (2010a) is based on the contention that the capabilities that count for early professional success are most likely to be achieved through a 360-degree evidence-based approach to curriculum. The approach focuses on assuring achievement determining the capabilities that count for early professional success and the appropriate standards of achievement expressed as composites of employability skills, graduate attributes, professional competencies and threshold learning outcomes. The approach also requires a curriculum to ensure those capabilities are progressively developed and assessed and enhanced through positive WIL experiences (Oliver 2010a).

A sound conceptual framework should provide for the integration and contextualisation of generic skills development as well as the provision of adequate student support, which is necessary from the foundation to the final year of study. This calls for the scaffolding of teaching and learning tasks in a way that fosters generic skills development throughout an entire program (Bunney, Sharplin & Howitt 2015; Willcoxson, Wynder & Laing 2010). The university's business program enables students to develop sequentially and scaffold their learning in a co-ordinated manner guided by a Work Integrated Learning framework (Jackson 2014b).

This proposed conceptual framework incorporates technical and generic skills as well as emotional intelligence, as these are essential for successful business people (Daff, De Lange & Jackling 2012; Jaeger 2003). There is a growing demand for graduates to have a well-rounded tertiary education that enables them to be effective leaders, team members, good communicators, personable, flexible and emotionally aware (Daff, De Lange & Jackling 2012). Work experience in graduates is highly valued by employers as graduates are able to reflect upon that experience and then go on to articulate and apply what they have learnt. With proper mentoring and guidance, students can learn from their experiences in the world of work to develop their key competences and skills to enhance their employability.

Looking at Figure 5.3 on the Scaffolded Employability Skills Development diagram, the research study has applied the development of employability skills in a scaffolded manner across the entire business curriculum to assist in the forming of a pre-professional identity of business students to prepare them for future employability.

Figure 5.3 is then superimposed onto Figure 5.2 in the third column to reflect the scaffolded approach taken to develop students' graduate skills and attributes across the three levels of undergraduate studies through various WIL activities. The contribution of this study is the use of career development presentations in a level 1 WIL activity to assist first year business students to form their initial graduate identity as shown in the lower section of Figure 5.2.



**Figure 5.3 Scaffolded Employability Skills Development**

This conceptual framework explicitly embeds three levels of WIL activities covering generic skills development in a scaffolded manner. University Level 1 WIL activities may include career exploration, career preparation activities such as résumé writing,

portfolio creation and basic social networking. Level 2 WIL activities may include service learning and community based activities where employability skills such as communication and team work skills may be practiced and enhanced. Level 3 WIL activities may cover participation in career expos and fairs for advanced networking and even participating paid or unpaid internships.

The concept of immediate employability is commonly defined in terms of students' possession of the attributes to obtain a graduate-level job (Watts 2006). This tends to include a focus on students' work readiness. However in sustainable employability, the focus is on the ability to not only secure a first graduate job but also to remain employable throughout life. This definition not only encompasses the range of skills and attributes required to be successful in jobs but also the skills and attributes required to manage an individual's career development in ways that sustain the individual's employability (Watts 2006).

#### **5.4. Limitations of the Research**

This study focussed on students' journal reflections obtained in semester one of 2012 from one specific university and hence the findings may not be generalisable to students from other higher educational institutions in other time periods. Because the contents of the presentations were drawn from the Employability for the Future Framework, the students' responses on key skills for improved employability may be influenced by the presentation and provision of the required expectations from the academic's perspective on the assessment. Some aspects of the students' work may not be a true representation of their feelings and thoughts.

For higher education, inflated first year business students' perceptions of their own capabilities may create a barrier to effective employability skill development. This is because students do not comprehend the gap between their own mastery of certain skills and the expected standards of performance in industry (Jackson 2012). The concept of a skills gap frames the challenge of curriculum design as one of seeking to bridge the gap between the university and workplace domains to find similarities in tasks and content in learning and application settings (Jackson 2013b) although there is conceptual difficulty in establishing the points that need to be bridged (Jackson 2013b).

A number of problems have been cited relating to students' perceived inability to accurately self-assess. A recent international survey found that less than half, or forty-two per cent, of employers believed that new graduates are not adequately prepared for entry-level positions (Mourshed, Farrell & Barton 2013). By comparison, in the same report, 72% of graduates deemed themselves to be work ready. High achieving students tend to underrate compared to low achievers (Jackson 2014a; Leach 2012). Undergraduates rate themselves considerably higher than their industry counterparts implying overconfidence in personal ability commonly associated with Generation Y graduates and persistence in graduate skills gaps (Jackson 2012). This mismatch in perceptions seems to indicate that these stakeholders continue to live in parallel universes. Ultimately this will result in poor outcomes and widening of the graduate skills gap. Students' self-assessment skills could be enhanced if quantitative scales such as Likert scales can be used by students to assess their skills levels prior to enrolling in university and also upon graduation.

The skills gap idea has the conceptual difficulty of establishing the points that need to be bridged between the university and workplaces (Le Maistre & Pare 2004). Most workplaces are unique and it is not possible to generalise the specific types of workplaces and roles that graduates will face. If these points are not fixed, then narrowing the skills gap may not be achievable as these points like goalposts, are moving all the time.

### **5.5. Future Directions in Research**

This study has examined the reflections of a cohort of first year business students and revealed a variety of responses on their perception of employability factors. It may be useful to conduct longitudinal studies of this nature to gauge if students' perceptions of these factors differ over time. The current research study also examined a single first year business student cohort's proposed actions to enhance their future employability. A longitudinal study would be useful to conduct to gauge if students carried through with their proposed courses of actions in their later years of study and if any of them were perceived to be beneficial. There is definitely scope to explore

whether employability enhancing activities pay off in the long-term for those who work on improving their employability in the longitudinal analysis studies.

Not all employability skills carry equal weight in the labour market. Some skills might be considered as more critical in the competition for graduate employment, such as communication, while Information Technology skills carry a high premium in current jobs and potentially superior employment outcomes. The value placed on possession of specific skills by employers in graduate recruitment and how these were attained are areas for future research to inform the effective targeting of skills development in higher education (Wilton 2011). This study has also focused on student perceptions of discreet employability skills. However, it has been suggested that connections between skills also require examination in order to understand the drivers that create an employable graduate (Collet, Hine & du Plessis 2015).

Increasingly, employers view graduate skills from the perspective of organisational fit (Collet, Hine & du Plessis 2015). An added dimension that requires further study is the relationships between skills, organisational fit and individual performance in terms of the individual and the firm in a competitive marketplace. Fit is dependent on the knowledge and personal skills of a graduate that support the competitiveness and market advantage of a business. At the same time, organisational fit promotes the success of the individual and the organisation. Therefore, employability should extend beyond just developing a list of skills to enabling graduates to perform competently and effectively in different workplace contexts (Collet, Hine & du Plessis 2015). Each individual is different and at different stages of their skills development process as illustrated in this study.

There is also scope for further research on the value of networking. There is evidence that social networking awareness is missing in the higher education curriculum (Benson, Morgan & Filippaios 2014). Further research is needed to assess the links between actual usage, belonging to professional groups, work experience and the skills required to build job related skills and develop online capital. It is important for researchers to address networking issues through further research studies into social media and its business applications. It will be good to explore capabilities of social

networking for lifelong learning and its role in the entire student lifecycle (Benson, Morgan & Tennakoon 2013).

In this research study, the Systems Theory Framework was used as a foundation to look into employability and career development of first year undergraduate business students. The focus of the study was to investigate the employability skills sets of individual students and their level of preparedness for graduate work. The STF incorporates social and cultural dimensions as well. Future research studies may look into the interactions between individual factors and social and cultural influences.

The current study may also be extended to explore concepts of career development and underpinning theories from the perspective of a diverse student population such as investigations into patterns or relationships between demographic groups and career development learning characteristics. Cultural dimensions such as ethnicity and gender and correlations between various dimensions may be studied to gain a deeper understanding of career development perspectives of groups.

Employability skills form only one aspect of graduate employability. Other factors include disciplinary knowledge, labour market conditions (McQuaid & Lindsay 2005) and job mobility (Wittekind, Raeder & Grote 2010) should be considered. Future in-depth studies encompassing the multi-dimensional nature of graduate employability in different demographic groups and geographical regions would add value to efforts to enhance graduate employability and job mobility. One aspect of employability that merits further research in its own right is identity formation which includes exploring interactions among communities, academic interventions through teaching courses and demographic characteristics would also benefit our understanding of graduate employability (Jackson 2016).

## **5.6. Conclusion**

Enhanced graduate employability benefits all stakeholders: governments from a greater economic return on public investment; industry through added value, innovation and enhance competitiveness; universities through improved industry engagement and enhance corporate profile; and graduates through an easier transition

into the workplace, broader career advancement opportunities and the satisfaction of personal development (Jackson 2009).

The future business environment is one of uncertainty. Traditional models and operations of business are currently being disrupted *en mass* and this is set to continue into the foreseeable future (McGuigan & Kern 2015). Technological developments mean changes to career types, trends, roles, responsibilities and expectations. In such a context, graduates can only learn to be job-ready in the particular job they undertake after study (Moore & Morton 2015). To prepare individuals for a unique future in an age of information, there is an urgent need for universities to help in building intellectual capacity. Learning in the future is likely to take on non-formal characteristics where discovery and exploration become key, curiosity and reflection are a mainstay and inquiry-based contextual appreciation common practice (McGuigan & Kern 2015). Students can be free from all prior conventions and assumptions so that they could discover their creative potential.

Employability has been investigated as a factor related to individual characteristics and the ability to get a graduate job and contextual demands (Groot & Van den Brink 2000; Harvey 2001) . It is a labour market driven instrument that gauges the chances of securing a job but it does not necessarily guarantee employment. The chances of securing a job are influenced by many different factors affecting individuals, organisations and society. Each of these stakeholders can either promote or inhibit the likelihood that university graduates gain employment (Ren, Zhu & Warner 2015).

The development of employability skills in higher education may not solve all problems in the current uneven labour market. Evidence suggests that the entrenched preference for particular types of graduates, not based on merit alone, appears to be a sizeable obstacle for the fresh graduate labour supply, even where graduates possess the skills and attributes required by employers (Jackson 2014b; Wilton 2011). This finding was most marked in cases involving female and minority ethnic graduates and those who graduated from a newer university (Wilton 2011). Employers favour graduates from prestigious universities and part-time students whose study incorporated elements of on-campus learning (Jackson 2014b). Consequently, traditional labour market disadvantage still appears to be an impediment to

achievement, regardless of the extent to which graduates develop employability skills during their undergraduate studies. This raises concerns about the current emphasis in policy on the explicit development of employability skills as an effective means to address the skills expectations gap (Wilton 2011).

Notwithstanding discrimination in the current recruitment environment, the best way to future proof our graduates and ensure their employability is still to encourage them to develop employability skills and attributes and to participate in lifelong career and professional development. If done well, would-be graduates should be able to identify suitable opportunities, understand employer expectations and demonstrate awareness of graduate and career-specific employment trends. Universities can assist in producing confident graduates who are more aware of their career aspirations and opportunities available and better able to pursue their goals in order to transition smoothly from university to the graduate labour market. To achieve this outcome, there needs to be continued conversations and involvement between universities and industry about employability skills development to help them identify more precisely which skills and at the level industry expects of graduates.

Alvin Toffler, an American futurist once said ‘The illiterate of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn’. This lifelong learning educational philosophy is based upon a need to unlearn what one currently knows in order to relearn in a different way to enhance future employability.

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## Appendix A - Abbreviations

<b>ABCD</b>	Australian Blueprint for Career Development
<b>ACEN</b>	Australian Cooperative Education Network
<b>ALTC</b>	Australian Learning and Teaching Council
<b>AQF</b>	Australian Qualifications Framework
<b>AUQA</b>	Australian University Quality Agency
<b>BIHECC</b>	Business, Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council
<b>CDL</b>	Career Development Learning
<b>CLD</b>	Career Learning and Development
<b>DOTS</b>	Decision learning, Opportunity awareness, Transition learning, Self-awareness
<b>NAGCAS</b>	National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
<b>PDP</b>	Personal Development Planning
<b>RIASEC</b>	Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprise, Conventional
<b>SCCT</b>	Social Cognitive Career Theory
<b>TEQSA</b>	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
<b>TWA</b>	Theory of Work Adjustment
<b>USQ</b>	University of Southern Queensland
<b>WIL</b>	Work Integrated Learning
<b>ZPD</b>	Zone of Proximal Development

## Appendix B – Career Development Presentation



**USQ**  
AUSTRALIA



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# Employability

Careers & Employment, Student Services



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## Overview



**USQ**  
AUSTRALIA

- Employability Skills Framework
  - Employability skills
  - Personal attributes
- Careers & Employment

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## Employability skills



According to the Employability Skills Framework, employers are looking for these 8 skills:

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Problem solving
- Initiative and enterprise
- Planning and organising
- Self-management
- Life-long learning
- Technology

## Personal Attributes



- Loyalty
- Commitment
- Honesty & integrity
- Enthusiasm
- Reliability
- Personal presentation
- Ability to deal with pressure
- Positive self-esteem
- Sense of humour
- Work-life balance attitude
- Motivation
- Adaptability
- Commonsense

## Communication



- Speaking
- Listening
- Writing
- Reading
- Body language
- Customer service
- Example: [The Two Ronnies](#)

## Teamwork

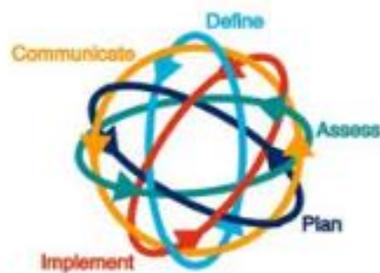


- [The usefulness of teamwork](#)
- Workplace diversity
- Sum of the whole
- Communication/feedback
- Put yourself in the other persons shoes
- Identifying strengths
- Sharing, collaborating and compromising

## Problem Solving



- Do you fix things?
- Are you solutions oriented?
- Do you use your initiative?



## Initiative and Enterprise



- Can you make reasoned decisions?
- Can you work independently?
- Do you notice opportunities?
- Can you adapt?
- [Video: Being enterprising](#)

## Planning and organising



- Managing time and prioritising
- Setting goals
- Adapting and predicting
- Continuous improvement
- Resourcefulness



## Self-management



- Self-motivation - having your own goals
- Self-reflection - evaluating yourself
- Self-confidence - believing in yourself
- Self-control - taking responsibility

## Learning



- Are you willing to learn?
- Do you think you know it all?
- Can you learn from your actions and reactions?

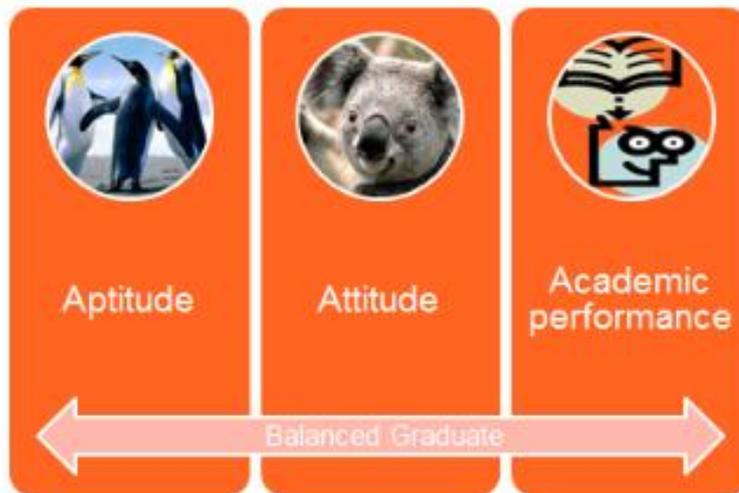


## Technology



- Do you have the IT skills to perform in your role?
- Are you interested and able to continue to develop your technological understanding should the role require it?

## What is a balanced graduate?



## How do I get these skills?



- Study
- Employment
- Volunteer work
- Sports or community groups
- Work experience
- Extra-curricular activities

## How C&E can support you



**USQ**  
AUSTRALIA

STUDENT SERVICES

**USQ**

### Careers & Employment

- CareerHub
- Career Library
- Industry Experience Program
- Career Mentoring
- Career Counselling
- Resume Service
- Mock Interviews
- Employer Presentations
- Job Readiness Workshops
- Speed Networking
- Career Fair – 21 March

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## USQ CareerHub



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- Search for jobs e.g. casual, graduate, work experience
- Upcoming events
- Careers resources e.g. sample resumes, tip sheets, FAQs
- Register for C&E programs
- Useful websites
- Careers news

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## Career Library



- Available at each USQ campus
- 'The Work Shop' Level 2, G Block
- Employer profiles
- Job search resources
- Resume and job application service
- [Online Career Library](#)

## Industry Experience Program



- 30 days unpaid work placement
- Designed to assist students to develop and enhance their skills and knowledge and broaden their understanding of the world of work and career opportunities.

## Career Mentoring Program



- Gives you the opportunity to be matched with an industry professional who will act as your mentor for a period of 6 months
- Career guidance and goal setting
- Learning about employment opportunities within your field

## Career Counselling



### Career Counselling

Our Career Counsellors can assist you in deciding on the career you want to pursue, selecting your study program or majors and assist in job searching and application techniques.

### Drop-ins (no appointment necessary)

Toowoomba 10am-11am & 2pm-3pm

Fraser Coast 10am-11am

Springfield 11am-12noon

## Job application information



- Resumes
- Cover letters
- Job applications
- Selection criteria
- Interviews

## Presentations & Workshops



- Employer presentations
- Job readiness workshops including:
  - Resumes and selection criteria
  - Interview skills
  - Networking
  - Pre-employment testing
  - Workplace etiquette

## Appendix C – ACC1101 Assignment

### ACC1101 Accounting for Decision Making Career Development/Reflection Assessment

**Due Date:** Friday , 20 April 2012

**Value:** 10%

#### Important Information

For a student who has undertaken the required study, this assessment should take several hours to complete.

The course specification requires that your submission is your own individual work. You are strongly urged to complete this assessment yourself to receive clear feedback about your level of understanding of the course material. You will find information regarding **plagiarism and academic misconduct**, such as collusion and cheating in the course specification and on the USQ website.

Please ensure that any ideas or data that you provide in your answer, other than your own original thoughts are properly referenced using the Harvard referencing style. A link to the university's Harvard referencing style page is provided here.

<http://www.usq.edu.au/library/help/referencing/harvard.htm>

You might also find the following book useful:

Summers, J. & Smith, B. (2010), Communication Skills handbook, John Wiley & Sons, Third Edition, Milton Queensland

The course specification also contains information about:

- Assignment late policy
- Assignment extension policy

Please refer to the following information in relation to assessment lodgement.

#### Assessment Preparation and Submission

Please read the following points carefully.

- This assessment must be lodged using USQ's online submission system **EASE**. EASE is available from the course homepage (via the Study Desk).
- You are required to lodge **one Microsoft Word file**, using the correct file naming protocol – see next page.
- Your submission must have a header on every page, which includes your student name and student number.
- The assessment is due at **11.59pm on Friday, 20 April 2012** (USQ time – please refer to the USQ Time icon on the course homepage).

### **How do I name the Word file I have to lodge?**

When naming the Word file to be submitted as your assessment, the file name should use the following naming convention: course code and career development assessment number (e.g. **acc1101cda1.docx**). There is no need to include your name or full student number in the file name as these are added to the file name by the EASE system on lodgement.

### **What is the comment field for?**

There is no need to insert your student name and number in the *Comment* field to confirm you have lodged the assignment. Only use the comment field if there is a special matter you wish to draw to the attention of the course leader.

### **Do I need to include the electronic version of the USQ assignment folder / cover sheet?**

You do not need to include a USQ coversheet in your assessment; you will complete the Student Declaration as part of the online submission process in EASE.

### **Do I have to send in a hard copy / lodgement issues?**

No hard copy is required. The EASE system is easy to use, reliable and pretty much error free; I am comfortable that you can rely on the EASE system to submit your assessment online.

### **Technical problems with online submission**

If you need help with your online submission, please email the assessment co-ordinator [raymond.leong@usq.edu.au](mailto:raymond.leong@usq.edu.au) and if necessary, an EASE expert may contact you to provide assistance. If you leave it until after 5pm on the due date, you might have to bear any undesirable consequences (late penalties will not be applied in genuine cases of technical malady but failure to read instructions will be no excuse). In the rare circumstance that the server is down (e.g. due to a storm) email the assessment file.

### **Keep your confirmation email**

You need to keep the email you receive confirming the lodgement of your files (it contains a unique submission code which might be required later to authenticate your submission).

### **Extensions**

Extensions **WILL NOT** be granted after the due date and time for the assessment has passed. All requests for extension must be addressed to [raymond.leong@usq.edu.au](mailto:raymond.leong@usq.edu.au) and copied to the Course Leader [christina.james-overheu@usq.edu.au](mailto:christina.james-overheu@usq.edu.au) at least 3 days before the due date with supporting documentation (e.g. doctor's certificate) and a copy of your Word file (even if incomplete) to show that you have attempted the assessment to a reasonable level. Extensions will only be granted in extenuating circumstances. Crashing of computers, too busy with other assignments, heavy

workload, and such reasons are not considered extenuating circumstances. Requests for extensions due to work commitments will NOT be granted. You must organise your study time around these other commitments.

## **Career Development Learning**

Career development learning in its broadest form relates to learning about the content and process of career development or life/career management. The content of career development learning represents learning about self and learning about the world of work. Process learning represents the development of the skills necessary to navigate a successful and satisfying life/career (McMahon, Patton & Tatham, 2003, p.6).

Career development learning activities may be organized to raise students' awareness of employability and how to self-manage their studies and extra-curricular activities to optimize employability.

The Career Development campus guest presentations organized in this course are part of the efforts of the USQ Careers & Employment and the Faculty of Business and Law to promote Work Integrated Learning (WIL) to new students. Through this initiative, students are placed at the centre of their learning process by being actively involved in planning/enriching their learning experiences and enhancing student engagement.

### **References**

McMahon, M., Patton, W. & Tatham, P. (2003) *Managing life learning and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Subiaco: Miles Morgan

Smith, P. et al (2009), *Career Development Learning: Maximising the contribution of work-integrated learning to the student experience*, National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services and Australian Learning & Teaching Council

### Assessment Task

**Write a personal reflection journal in essay form on one of the recorded Career development/management campus presentation provided on the course homepage.**

This Assessment requires on-campus students to attend and listen to a guest presentation on Career development/management at the Fraser Coast, Springfield or Toowoomba campuses and write their reflection journal on their campus presentation. For External students, students can listen to any or all of the recordings and choose one presentation to write their journal.

All assessments should begin with the statement identifying the source as follows:

**“This reflection journal is written based on the guest presentation at (location) campus.”**

Additional readings CD1 and CD2 and other resources in the Career Development section of the course homepage will be helpful to you in completing your assessment.

### Career Development/Reflection Assessment objectives

On the completion of this assessment, students should be able to:

- understand the need for career development building/management
- understand how effective career building can improve employability
- know the USQ graduate qualities
- understand what is reflective practice
- apply common models of reflective practice
- write reflective journals to demonstrate learning

### Marking Guide

The purpose of this assessment is to test your ability to meet the objectives of this assessment outlined. **This assessment contributes 10% to your final grade.** Marks will be awarded for:

	%
Brief description of event	1.0
Identification and description of skills/attributes enhancing graduate employability	2.5
Emotional response (personal thoughts etc.)	1.5
Analysis (through personal reflection and course readings)	2.0
Learning and changed actions	2.5
References	0.5
Total	10.0

A marking rubric is provided to assist you in writing your journal. Please review this rubric carefully and note the expectations of the different grade levels for each category to maximise your chances of gaining a good score in this assessment.

**You should limit your reflection journal to a MAXIMUM of 800 words. CONTENT IN EXCESS OF THE PRESCRIBED WORD COUNT WILL NOT BE MARKED.** The % weight assigned to each criterion may be used as a guide to assist you in allocating the effort required in each section of your journal. In terms of word count, the general rule of thumb is that everything in the body of your assessment counts. This includes headings, tables, quotes and in-text references. The word count does not include the List of References.

**Please provide the word count for your journal.** You can use the Word Count function under Tools in Microsoft Word to assist you. **Please also list your references used in an attached Reference page.**

-----  
Marking of this assessment is expected to take about 3 weeks. You can expect feedback from this assessment in the week beginning 14 May 2012.

Feedback will be provided in the form of a template like the marking rubric on page 6 indicating levels of achievement in each of the marking categories. Brief comments on your individual effort will also be provided.

It is not possible to give detailed individual feedback to students in this assessment due to the very large numbers of students enrolled. General feedback on the performance of all students in this assessment will also be put up for students' review after all marking is completed.

The due date for this assessment is **11.59 pm on Friday, 20 April 2012.** You may start to submit your assessments using EASE from Sunday, 1 April 2012.

If students submit this assessment after the due date without the prior approval of the assessment co-ordinator, then a penalty of 5% of the total marks gained by the student for the assessment may apply for each working day late up to ten working days at which time a mark of zero may be recorded.