Chapter 12
Digital Approaches to Embedding Employability

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ABSTRACT

The fourth industrial revolution has seen significant national and international workplace change, with greater emphasis on innovation and digital adaptation. In response, universities across the sector are recognizing the importance of supporting the education of work-ready graduates and the continuing professional development of the existing professional workforce. Digital technologies have the potential to facilitate the development of employability skills such as digital literacy and reflection and foster continuing links to the profession and learning community. This chapter discusses the importance of embedding authentic, digitally enabled employability curriculum across the student and professional lifecycle, and showcases practice in the context of health professional education. A matrix for the selection of technologies that support the development of employability skills is also proposed and discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

The national and international workplace landscape is in the midst of significant change (Atres, Hooley & Mellors-Bourne, 2017; Taylor, 2015). Technological advances are dramatically shaping the workplace environment, as greater emphasis is placed on innovation and adaptation within the globally connected digital frontier (Davies, Fidler & Gorbis, 2011). Within the next 15 years, up to 40% of Australian jobs have a moderate to high likelihood of disappearing; a statistic that equates to approximately 5.1 million Australian jobs (Johnson, 2015; Taylor, 2015). The reality of this rapidly evolving and economically unstable future is that millennials (individuals born between 1977 and 1997) can expect to have 17 careers across 5 industries over the course of their working lives (Owen, 2016). The impact of technological advances on the workforce is not a new construct, with exponential alterations to labour markets evident since the advent of electricity and the industrial revolution.

Despite the lasting influence of technology on the nature of work, the future industrial landscape will require graduates to adapt more readily to change than ever before and require higher-level competencies in personal reflection and strong understanding of the transferability of their skills. To this end, the quote by Sir Brian Corby, former Chairman of Prudential serves as a call to action to the higher education sector (Taylor & Morison, 1999, p29).

We may not be able to offer long-term employment but we should try to offer long-term employability. (Taylor & Morison, 1999, p29)

It is important to front-end this chapter by explicitly stating that employability is not the same as actual employment. It is a far subtler, multi-layered and essential quality than many universities would concede (Rich, 2015). Employability is the concept which enables graduates to 'hit the ground running' in their first job and is equally valuable as preparation for flexible and productive long-term careers. Employability leads to employment, and the latter back to the former, as graduates change jobs and progress throughout their working lives. So, on that basis, it is vital for universities to provide relevant experiences to all students on both an ethical and a practical level. In response, universities both nationally and internationally are explicitly embedding employability into curriculum to support graduate transitions and workplace success (Atres, Hooley & Mellors-Bourne, 2017; Dibben & Norton, 2017; Blackmore et al., 2016).

A recent report from the Australian Office of Learning and Teaching, identified five (5) key themes for developing student employability that include: development of skills and knowledge; development of self; development of career awareness; capacity to interact with others; and ability to navigate the world (Bennett, Richardson

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