

GRADUATES WHO FIND JOBS DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN

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Conference Question:

b) Do HE institutions successfully help graduates to make the transition to work (short-term) and their professional career (long-term)

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Abstract

The literature on careers offers a variety of alternative perspectives on the transition from higher education to work and the early stages of career exploration. Many of the differences between these perspectives reflect changes in labour markets and society. Over recent decades, theoretical models of career have moved away from a focus on male-dominated patterns of work with the aim of understanding more of the diversity in working patterns as well as changing concepts of career.

The paper reports the findings from exploratory interview studies of graduates in their early stage of career who experience differing degrees of success with obtaining jobs and work in an area of their choice. The focus is on graduates who are less successful in their career search. After their graduation award, they experience difficulty with commencing suitable paid employment and do not make significant progress in developing a viable career. This is a group of people who arguably most need active support from HE institutions with their job search as well as their initial and subsequent career development.

Large scale quantitative survey research and secondary document analyses presented by researchers at the first DEHEMS conference (WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, 22nd-23rd September 2011), uncovered some distinct patterns of employability in various degree subjects and occupations. Graduates who fail to find employment in their preferred areas of expertise and who undergo a succession of short-term job contracts which are comparatively poorly remunerated, present challenges for HE institutions in terms of how they should be supported. National economies, societies, employers, graduates and their families all stand to benefit from institutional initiatives which optimise graduates' chances of securing viable jobs and work experiences. These then provide major opportunities for early career development, which then require active individual participation and some degree of improvisation by new graduates.

The particular challenges faced by this group of graduates draw attention to the role of career guidance, including students' skills preparation in job search, as well as actual experience of relevant job tasks and workplaces prior to graduation. They also demonstrate the need for more accurate and responsive information on available jobs and vacancies together with advice on practical ways that individuals create their job opportunities and career growth. This all becomes particularly important in the run up to graduation and immediately afterwards. Parents, as well as other members of the family, are influential on young graduates, who often need assistance with being properly updated on the realities

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and challenges they face. Graduates and their families should be clear about practical considerations such as going rates of pay for jobs in the local region and elsewhere, so that they can use their knowledge and understanding in ways relevant to the current environment of work. HE, employers, government institutions and media organisations can all assist with providing this information.

In addition to HE institutions delivering course-related learning in job seeking skills, initial work experience, and providing graduates with dynamic information on employment trends and job opportunities, there is a need to provide more support that motivates graduates who are being unsuccessful in their early careers. Much of this work is related to career counseling and peer group facilitation for helping less successful graduates to remain focused on their job search and in maximising opportunities that they encounter by active individual participation and a degree of improvisation.

Keywords: Early Career Exploration, Work Experience, Graduate Employment.

Education-Job Mismatch

This paper concerns new graduates who fail to obtain a job in the career of their choice and considers ways that their employment prospects can be improved. It concentrates on graduate over-education for individuals who do not appear to be in a state of career transition (Plicht et al, 1994: cited in Van Loo, 2009) but seem to be experiencing a long-term education-job mismatch and hence also a skill capability mismatch (Dolton and Vignoles, 2000; Schatteman and Verhaest, 2007: cited in Van Loo, 2009).

People who are educated above or below the level of the requirements of their job may experience negative effects on their rewards, motivation and job satisfaction. Formal education-job mismatch can be distinguished from mismatch between acquired and required skills, known as skill mismatch (Allen and van der Velden, 2001, p. 436).

Educational mismatch has been found to have a more detrimental effect on wages than skill mismatch (Allen and de Weert, 2007). In addition, over-educated workers earn less than matched workers with similar education, but do earn more than matched workers in equivalent jobs (Brynin and Longhi, 2009; Di Pietro and Urwin, 2006; Galasi, 2008: cited in Van Loo, 2009). Thus, this research study is relevant to many institutions and economies, for example, it relates to approximately half the working population in Europe who are over- or under-educated for their job (Van Loo, 2009).

The Middle East region, and specifically the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) country context, is different from Europe in several ways. A research study conducted by AON Hewitt published in 2012 titled, 'Qudurat', comments on the rapidly growing population in the Arab world which is expected to increase from 145 to 278 million by 2050. It is estimated that 85 million new jobs will need to be created by 2020 to accommodate the large number of new entrants to the labour market. Youth unemployment is high amongst nationals, for example, in the 25-29 years age group, 31% Saudi and 33% Bahraini nationals are unemployed. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE) the population (nationals) under 30 is 66%, youth unemployment 23%, female workforce participation rate is 44% (15-64 years old) and the nominal GDP per capita is \$57,884 (IMF, 2011; ILO 2011). The situation is different for expatriate workers who work on 3 year-long renewable visas, and are temporarily resident for as long as they have either employment or are dependent on someone who is employed. The GCC countries remain highly dependent on expatriate labour, and the IMF estimates that over the last decade 5 million of the 7 million jobs created were filled by expatriates. These labour markets tend to be highly segmented with expatriates hired to occupy specific roles. In many organisations in GCC countries nationals are more mobile changing jobs frequently especially in the private sector which is much less popular for most nationals than are the government and semi-government sectors.

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In this paper we concentrate on Indian expatriate women (some of the largest groups of expatriates working and residing in the UAE come from India, Pakistan and the Philippines). Qudurat predicts that attracting, motivating and retaining more women in the workplace will be a growing priority for employers in the region. Currently, approximately 30% of unemployed women are university graduates and constitute a low proportion of the workforce compared with those of many other high GDP countries (Qudurat, 2012, p.14).

Early career exploration

There are a range of available theories of individual development and careers to consider for understanding individuals' early career exploration. In this study we concentrate on the subjective accounts of individuals and assume that their attempts to develop their work competences and organisational careers are blocked in ways that create difficulties with individual involvement and development as well as delimit their social and material relationships with self and others.

Our chosen area of research is relevant to stage theories of careers since it draws attention to arrested development and incapacity to transition smoothly from one stage on to another. We also view these specific individual contexts of graduate under-employment and unemployment as relational and significant for adult development perspectives on careers which 'suggest that individuals are likely to encounter characteristic concerns about self, career, and family at every life stage' (Baird and Kram, 1983, p.63).

We are not proponents however of stage models of development or career (see Dall'Alba and Sandberg, 2006 for a critique), although evidently in terms of life course the 1-3 years following graduation and young people's experiences during this time in the labour market, employment, work and leisure is a distinctive stage in their early working lives. Consistent with life stage and career stage theories, it is a period then when many people are seeking to establish themselves more firmly in the adult world. Whereas not everyone during this time in their lives will want to develop a career or for that matter take on various adult responsibilities, for those who do it is likely to be a formative and emergent process characterised by challenges, potential alternatives and a degree of uncertainty.

'During the establishment phase, at the outset of a career, people are most likely to need guidance and support to launch their careers. It is generally a period of great uncertainty about one's competence and performance potential. The person who is in the establishment phase is

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dependent on others for learning, support, and guidance, and at the same time is likely to resist dependence as attempts to establish competence are made. It is a period of building new roles both at work and in one's personal life. Questions about competence, whether to commit oneself to a particular organization, and what kind of family relationships to develop are primary concerns at this stage.' (emphasis added)

(Baird and Kram, 1983, p. 47)

As was mentioned earlier, the time in people's life we are concerned with is the period when they have left the education system to concentrate principally on engaging in remunerated work. The initial departure from full-time education on to full-time working life undeniably is an objective and structural situation in the life course of many young adults. In relation to Levinson's (1978) life stage development model (e.g., Table 1 reproduced in Ornstein, Cron and Slocum, 1989), it is a stage in one's life typically around 23-28 years old, when one is understood by others to be 'entering into the adult world'. Levinson characterised it as a life stage when tasks to be accomplished include the development of a personal identity in the world of work and non-work. A stage preceded by having already made some transition from the institutions of youth (parents, school) and followed by evaluating one's accomplishments over one's 20's and adjusting to the life structure adopted.

From the perspective of career stage models such changes represent a trial stage where the psychological activities that characterise this particular stage include identifying interests, capabilities, fit between self and work, and professional self-image. The assumption of Super's (1957) career development model is that the trial stage will be followed sequentially by an establishment stage characterised by increased commitments to career, career advancement, and growth leading to development of a supposedly 'stable work and personal life'. While the stability and sequence of progression of these stage models has often been called into question, the starting point and transition from full-time education to full-time employment is an objective labour market reality for the majority of young people.

Two well-known examples of more recent theories that question some of the normative assumptions of stage models and address the environmental uncertainty prevalent in external and internal labour markets are Hall's (1996, 2002) Protean Careerists and Arthur and Rousseau's (1996) Boundaryless Career workers. Protean Careerists are said to transfer between more objectively insecure jobs, are flexible and value freedom, believe in continuous learning, and seek intrinsic rewards. Boundaryless Career workers are understood to move between separate employers, be marketable outside of present employers, sustained by external networks and by valuable internal information, and seek

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to work across organisational boundaries. Interestingly, both theories are based on the assumption that people can and will find work, perhaps even if it is not really of their choosing. Their principal labour market dynamics assume also that these careerists and workers function from a background of jobs in the past. Our research though is interested primarily in people who have not been able to find work in their chosen calling or area of undergraduate study, and have not really got their foot on the first rung of the ladder. It is focused primarily on people who often have some form of previous work history and have found some employment that is generally low paid

The significance each individual accords to work and competence development varies and everyone has other commitments such as friends, families and perhaps other sources of paid and unpaid work and leisure activities. The development of competence at work necessitates though having access to relevant work environments, and people's understanding of work will only develop comprehensively when situated within a relational context of self and other people engaging in real work (Sandberg and Targama, 2007). Relational commitments to the community, work organisation and its people including managers, employees, suppliers and customers, therefore will only develop significantly through young graduates gaining sufficient access to workplaces.

Competence development in contexts of under-employment

A point of departure for this research on competence is the idea that managers and employees consistently face various physical, technical and social demands at work. These demands vary greatly across jobs and industries and such heterogeneity in the conditions of work is exacerbated by the relational complexity of many aspects of work and home life, meaning that individuals both encounter and enact multiple and conflicting identities, inside and outside of work.

An area of relative stability, however, within the dynamic social complexity of work we contend is that competence involves specific ways of being and understanding (Sandberg and Pinnington, 2009; Pinnington, 2011). Our theoretical perspective draws from the phenomenological tradition conceptualising competence as an ontological orientation and involved way of being that is integrated with a specific sense of self. We assume that the existential meaning of ways of being distinguish and integrate an individual's understanding of self, work, other people and tools/things into distinct forms of competence in work performance (Sandberg, 2000; Sandberg and Targama, 2007)

From a life-world perspective, Sandberg and Dall'Alba (2009: 1355) contend, '... practices are conceptualized as specific worlds in which members dwell, made up of an array of activities,

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people, knowledge, equipment, concerns and so on ..' Their holistic theoretical approach to competence is especially useful when considering competence development during the early career exploration of young graduates failing to obtain jobs in their chosen areas of work. Quite simply, young people's experience and development is arrested when they do not have access to work they value, as a result they become incapable of transition to more involved and integrated ways of working. The individual is ignored, as if suspended in a social arena of comparative irrelevance, being denied access to work and immersion in its social-material activities and mainstream communities of practice.

The graduate working in a low paid job can still make the best of the situation and learn some analogous social and technical skills, as well perhaps as engaging in yet further education study to keep in contact with the discipline and its areas of knowledge and ways of understanding. However, in several respects the individual is evidently not entwined in the relevant work practices, is unable to develop more sophisticated ways of being due to having few opportunities for the exercise of relevant agency and work practice, is unable to live the workplace reality as an engaged and absorbed self and is prevented from working with others. This presents a fairly grim reality but one that many people experience at some times in their lives: on the one hand we do not have the relevant background experience and therefore are not contracted to do the work, and on the other hand we are consequently unable to develop the requisite experience, and so we should anticipate to continue to be denied the opportunity in the future. While there may be various ways forwards in any individual situation, it is clear that as general secondary and higher education levels continue to rise at a pace much faster than occupations and jobs are readily available in the world's national economies and global labour markets, we suggest therefore that more creative thinking on the roles of the state, employers and education institutions needs to be undertaken than hitherto has been the case.

Method

The data in this study are based on the thwarted career plans of young Indian graduate women living in the UAE who embarked on undergraduate studies in a variety of chosen subject disciplines, but since graduation have felt under pressure to seek, accept and remain in employment working in a job that is definitely not their first priority. These individuals may be described as somewhat unhappy with their current job or jobless situation, and are generally de-motivated with the work they are doing. Moreover, they sense both supportiveness and disappointment from various quarters such as their families, friends, student peers and past teachers, many who expected they would be doing better than they currently are.

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The interview research methods focus on qualitative, narrative and episodic approaches (Flick, 2009; Reissman, 1993, 2008; Wengraf, 2001), seeking to characterise interviewees' life stories and emergent career narratives in contexts of disappointment and unfulfilled, early ambitions. The reported interviews consist of three face-to-face meetings held with the research assistant over a period of two and a half months (mid-May–early July 2011) as well as frequent informal communication; these meetings were supplemented by telephone and email for additional information.

All three participants have known the researcher since early childhood and are longstanding friends. This relationship has its advantages and disadvantages that have been hotly debated such as Bourdieu's qualitative approach to research interviews which relies on the interviewer being seen by the interviewee as sharing the same social circumstances and similar life-world (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008, p.24; Bourdieu et al., 1999), however, over time we argue that this methodology serves to provide a credible context for trusting, open communication and collaboration.

Narrative approaches have been used in careers research (Cochran, 1990; Cohen and Mallon, 2001) and careers counselling (e.g., Bujold, 2004; Christensen and Johnston, 2003; Cochran, 1990, 1997) for over two decades. For example, Larry Cochran (1997) articulated a counselling approach based on narrative that casts the individual as the main character in their career narrative in a way that is intended to be meaningful, productive, and fulfilling. Termed 'emplotment' this approach takes a structural approach to narrative viewing them simply as composed of a beginning, a middle and an end. Meaning and plot are key elements used to compose a life history and author a future narrative. Cochran's main contribution rests in transforming narrative research into a practical counselling technique to assist people with understanding their work and careers (Trevor-Roberts, 2004).

The research assistant asked a number of open-ended questions during several face-to-face, telephone and email conversations over a three months long period. The questions posed included such topics as their background, past and current temporary, part-time and full-time work, job position and work responsibilities, current employment and intended career path, job search in and outside of Dubai, what jobs were applied for, what job search was completed in the final year of university, what offers and rejections were received, what advice was given by family and friends, what work friends are doing now and how often do you socialise with them, and what job search and career development is currently being undertaken?

After the first set of interviews was completed during early-to-mid 2011, a second set of interviews was conducted through email and later by telephone in March 2012. The purpose of these follow-up interviews 12 months later was to analyze changes and

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developments in the careers of these young graduates up until March 2012. For the second set of interviews after email communication, a telephone conversation was held between the researcher and the interviewees.

The participants

P1 has a BSc in Biotechnology, MSc in Medical Biotechnology, Postgraduate Diploma in Patent Law and MBA (Pharmacology Business Management and Marketing). P2 has a BA Commerce and P3 holds a BSc in Engineering.

P1 does not have a Ministry of Health licence to practice in her field of specialisation and has been unable to find work in the disciplines of her qualifications. P1 earns income from an on-line academic writing job assisting students and companies with their essays and presentations.

P2 is employed as an administrator in an area of work outside of her interests in commerce and accounting. P2 works in an advertising company engaged mainly in secretarial tasks.

P3 is currently working not as an engineer but deployed on tasks within her father's company which is a software development firm. P3 works in generalist roles including seeking new business, representing the firm to clients and prospective clients and pursuing non-payment and debt issues.

Results

In 2011, all three participants confirmed that they see their qualifications as worthwhile and still hope to practice in future in the specialised area of their first degrees.

P1 perceives some benefit from her current job in developing her research skills relevant to future doctoral study. She plans to study for a PhD outside of the UAE, but has not considered employment in another country. Currently, she is looking for employed work and does not intend to continue with on-line academic writing.

P2 views her job as an administrator as having developed her skills and as a stepping stone in her career. She says that she is bound by family values not to work outside of Dubai.

P3 sees the work in her father's firm as an interim measure following failure to obtain a job in engineering. P3 wants to remain living and working in Dubai and does not want to work

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elsewhere. She is looking out for vacancies in engineering as well as contemplating studying for an MBA.

None feel under any particular pressure from their families to engage in the work they are currently doing. They consider their work situation as principally their own choice made under difficult constraints. P1 feels that there are limited vacancies in her area of work whereas P2 and P3 say they are a large number of vacancies but most require prior work experience.

For competence development related to work, P1 sees her job as developing her writing skills but it is only part-time work from home. P2 feels her current job is not challenging or developing new skills and is therefore trying to organize a transfer to the finance department of her current company of employment. By contrast, P3 believes she has learnt a lot of new things from working in her father's company.

Interestingly, all three recall they made few efforts in their final year of study at university to find employment. They focused on their academic studies during their last year at university.

P1: "I haven't really looked for a job during the last year of my university as I was under the impression that I would get a job really quickly, so was just waiting to complete my education completely to get a job."

P2: "I have not done anything during my last year of my university as I was keen in completing my under graduation and then pursue my MBA in finance and marketing. I was under the impression that my qualification will lead me to the job that I have always dreamt about."

P3: "I have not done anything to get a job during the last year of my university as I have heard from others and I have seen in classifieds regarding the job offers that is there in my field therefore I was hoping to get a job soon after my graduation."

They all assumed that their qualification would lead to readily obtaining a job in their area of specialisation.

In relation to job search, job interviews and job offers, P1 has turned down some suitable positions due to the low salary but mainly has been offered jobs without pay, primarily as an unpaid research assistant working for professors in higher education:

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“.., I have been trying my level best to get a job in my research field, but due to lack of experience and MOH license I have been unable to find one. Offers that I have received for the qualification that I have got is very limited and these limited ones were either rejected by me because of the salary or because the organization was not willing to pay me.”

P2 has received a large number of offers from banks and construction companies but she felt the low pay and working hours obligations outweighed the career benefit of accepting the positions:

“I have got a lot of offers from banks, construction companies, etc but the pay that the companies were offering was not sufficient enough to take up that job and moreover being the eldest in the family I have got certain responsibilities towards my family which I would like to fulfill that's why I have been waiting to get a better job with a good pay. ... Along with getting a lot of offers I have also been rejected by various companies some of them reject by saying that I am overqualified or most of the time its lack of an experience.”

P3 has similarly received a number of offers but in sales and some in computer engineering, but again reportedly for very low pay:

“I have got a lot of offers as sales engineer but the offers that I have received to work as computer engineer has been very limited or the pay was really bad. Rejection was numerous because of lack of experience.”

In terms of their immediate family support from families and university peer group, the influence of parents predominates. P1 describes her parents as very supportive and understanding. P2 says that her parents did not require her to work and that she does not generally take advice from friends on jobs or her career. P3 says that she considers suggestions from her family but not really her friends. The final decision all three explain is theirs and not their parents or friends.

P1 said that her friends were doing a mixture of things, studying for PhDs in other countries, and working as secretaries, administrators and recruitment consultants rather than in the area of their qualification. P2 described her friends' situations as similar to her own and P3 said that a few are still looking for a job and some have got married. P1 and P3 said that

they socialise frequently with their university friends and discussed each others careers, while P2 said that she met with her university friends only occasionally.

P1 hopes in the next 5-20 years to open her own pharmacy firm in Dubai. P2 plans to reach a middle management position during the same time frame, while P3 is uncertain what will be achieved but hopes to progress up the career ladder in engineering. In particular, P1 and P2 appear to be becoming quite concerned about the lack of development with their early career. P1 says she will now take any kind of office job with low travel time and P2 is seeking a job as an accountant payable officer or accountant:

P1: "I am still looking out for a job, at times I actually feel that I am ready to take up any job in hand that I get if the pay is good. For past 2 years now I have been searching for a job in my relevant field but I have been unsuccessful in doing so that's why I think that rather than waiting it's best for me to take up a job which is good and which is paid well."

P2: "Job search is still going on and I am really hoping for the best. I even been thinking about applying in my home country if I am not getting a job as per my qualification in Dubai."

Twelve months later the situation had not changed that much in 2012 except for some improvement for the first one of the three research participants. All three still had not been successful in establishing themselves in a career of their choice. The only major change that had happened during the course of one year is that P1 had undertaken a job to gain some work experience as a food and health inspector at a hotel in Jebel Ali, and P3 who had been in the process of pursuing her MBA was near to completing it. P2 was still employed in the same field and still looking for a job based on her principal career goal.

P1: "I have got a job as food and health officer in a four star hotel in Jebel Ali were I went through training and obviously have not let down the desire to do my PhD; still hoping to get to some university to study PhD and in the meanwhile also working as food and health officer in a hotel in UAE."

P2: "Still working in the same position nothing much changes has happened in my life still attending interviews, and trying my level best to attain a position of my choice and also looking for similar position which I am currently working with a better pay and benefits."

P3: "Nothing much changes or development in my life, still trying to expand my father's business and also is on the verge to complete my MBA degree as quickly as possible."

The telephone interviews in March 2012 led to a deeper understanding of their job search, notably, that out of these three graduates except for P1 they have not been especially engaged with searching for a job in their preferred career. Rather, they were involved in other family activities and when asked they said that they were nevertheless still highly frustrated about not finding a position of their choice and wanted to stick to pursuing the same path as before. The reasons they gave for not being especially active in seeking alternatives were that they were fearful of their current situation especially P2 who had to take a day's leave and then did not have time to attend the interview on the scheduled time and day because of her current company's "busy period". P3 said that she had not had sufficient time to give to looking for a job because she had to attend a lot of meetings and was also constantly involved in tasks and activities connected with expanding her father's business where she had an extremely uncompromising schedule.

Discussion

It is noticeable that all three participants did not undertake any job search during their final year at university and their efforts are directed mainly to reacting to advertised job vacancies. Their career planning is very ad hoc and it is evident that P2 and P3 are benefitting from their employment circumstances involving social interaction in the workplace rather than operating like P1 in the relatively more isolated context of working from home part-time on the internet. P2 is opportunistically seeking an internal job transfer to the finance and accounting department and P3 has been assigned a broad variety of sales (winning new business contracts), accounting (debt collection and payments) and promotional roles (representing the business owner at client meetings).

Possibly, they all were unrealistic about the starting pay that they could command during their first time working in a full-time job and over the initial few years of their employment. Rates of pay for different jobs range widely in the UAE although there is generally an identifiable income range typically obtained by people in specific occupations and job roles. All three participants mentioned that their parents have been very supportive and further declared that they are much more influential than their friends. While this may be somewhat of an over-simplification of the situation, it presents several problems since it is likely that their peer group of friends and past student colleagues engaging in a similar job search have access to more relevant and current information about local work prospects. Parents often have to rely upon asking others for information and may tend to generalise

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too much based on their own previous experience, which will not always be relevant to current developments in the local labour market.

Taking the research participants' viewpoint on face value that their parents continue to be highly influential, then a way of increasing their adaptation to current circumstances as well as improving their job seeking and career development activities, is also to inform and educate the parents on precise details facing their children. Up-to-date labour market and job-related information on a range of job seeking activities may well be useful to them all such as the current job vacancies in different occupations, methods of recruitment and selection and contemporary standards of self-presentation and application (e.g., styles of presenting letters and curriculum vitae), as well as advice on self-disciplined approaches to job search which sustain positive attitudes, nurture resilience and facilitate coping with rejection.

Other approaches include creation of more internet and local self-help groups composed perhaps of friends, other job-seekers, junior employees and counsellors. The accounts from these three participants suggest that they are comparatively isolated socially and possibly even might not be utilising technology tools such as phones and social media as well as the young generation are generally assumed to be readily habituated. One area of particular support that can be offered is helping the successful applicant to appraise the value of various job offers made. All three told stories of not accepting many poorly paid or unpaid offers. While a number of these offers may best be rejected some of them might have been opportunities that should not have been so readily turned down. Employment counsellors working face-to-face, on the phone and over internet can perhaps help with talking over options and assisting with processes of comparison and evaluation.

These three young adults have all, so far, failed to gain a job in their preferred area of degree specialisation although they continue to hope to do so in the future. At the time of writing, it is not known what will happen to each of them, however, it seems clear that they are socially isolated from the work context of their area of career ambition. This situation may improve either dramatically or gradually in their favour, but they do not yet appear to be doing enough to make it happen.

Expectancy theory of motivation has long proposed that individuals are only likely to increase their job search activities if they believe that their efforts will lead to rewarding outcomes in the future (Vroom, 1964). Those who have a strong perception of psychological mobility and tend to believe that viable transition opportunities are attainable, are more likely to persevere. The perceived quantity and the quality of job alternatives also will influence both the intention to search and actual job search (Griffin and Hesketh, 2005).

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Additionally, psychological mobility entails a sense of control over job transitions, which not only increases job search activity (Côté, Saks and Zikic, 2006) but also strengthens the relationship between turnover intentions and quit decisions (Allen, Weeks and Moffitt, 2005). However, since the research participants' psychological mobility was weak, they seem to be unlikely to engage in job search due to their low expectations of identifying and securing desirable employment opportunities.

From the theoretical perspectives addressed in the literature review their attempts to develop their work competences and organisational careers are blocked in ways that create difficulties with individual involvement and development. P1 experienced highly constrained social and material relationships with self and others during working from home on the internet, but since training for a job in a hotel her work situation has improved. For P2 the formative and emergent process of competence and career development at work is characterised by insufficient challenge, insufficient alternatives and some uncertainty on how the situation will change. Consistent with Baird and Kram's (1983) adult development perspective they are in need of greater guidance and support to launch their careers in their preferred direction of specialisation. Unfortunately, in relation to Levinson's (1978) life stage development model, they are in a state of limited growth and transition away from the institutions of youth (parents and school) and are making somewhat interrupted and hesitant moves towards the development of a satisfying sense of personal identity in the world of work.

From the perspective of career stage models this trial stage of work is not offering sufficient opportunities for identifying their interests, capabilities, fit between self and work, and professional self-image. Following the assumption of Super's (1957) career development model such slow progress will delay the establishment stage said to be characterised by increased commitments and stability. These first two years following graduation do not appear to be typical of Protean Careerists since only one out of the three has changed their job once over almost two years. Likewise, they do not appear to be consistent with Boundaryless Career workers since they have few marketable skills to offer employers and they are not "job hopping".

The significance each individual accords to work and competence development varies and everyone has other commitments such as friends, families and perhaps other sources of paid and unpaid work and leisure activities. The development of competence at work necessitates though having access to relevant work environments, and people's understanding of work will only develop comprehensively when situated within a relational context of self and other people engaging in real work. Relational commitments to the community, work organisation and its people including managers, employees, suppliers and

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customers, therefore will only develop significantly through young graduates gaining sufficient access to workplaces and, as it was proposed earlier, they seem to be at some disadvantage since they have fewer opportunities to develop their work competences and advance their careers. P1 appears to be deferring her career to an uncertain start date for doctoral study although the hotel position offers new career horizons, P2 is not especially active in seeking to make a job transfer into the desired area of work and P3 has been developing a number of entrepreneurial business management skills, but is unable to relate these to technical and career development in an engineering occupation.

Competence development in these contexts of relative under-employment is problematic since their competence as an ontological orientation and involved way of being is integrated with a specific sense of self that they partly want to disown. Their difficulties are compounded by the incompatibility of their limited knowledge and understanding of what they should be doing with what they are doing, leading to ways of being that are not developing a positive and motivating understanding of self, work, other people and tools/things. A consequence of this limited and dissatisfying way of being is under-developed distinctive forms of competence in work performance (Sandberg, 2000; Sandberg and Targama, 2007). In summary, P1 first settled for improving her writing abilities but now is developing new work skills in the food and hospitality industry, P2 is bored and seems less hopefully about making a job transfer, and P3 is less hopeful that the collection of entrepreneurial skills will in some way contribute to technical development as an engineer. P3's work involves slightly alienated orientations to self, work and clients, whereas P1 and P2 are predominantly focused on self and a modicum of disenchantment with their work.

Their life-worlds at work are comparatively unrewarding ones involving insufficient social-material entwinement with relevant practice worlds, consequently they can exert only very limited human agency in their job situation leading to under-developed ways of being. The implications for practice are a lack of material, technical and social development in work competences. However, the situation may change for all three. P1 may embark on successful PhD research and obtain a relevant job afterwards; P2 may make the move into accounting and finance and thrive in this new functional work environment and P3 may find a position as an engineer and develop rapidly in project teams partly by having already obtained relevant entrepreneurial and small business management skills.

Conclusion

We conclude that these three participants require more support in establishing and developing their careers. While they may not all be able to obtain work in their area of undergraduate specialisation, it is clear that they could have increased their opportunities to

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do so through a focused initial job search during their final year at university, a clearer system of appraising job opportunities and job offers, and once in their first job deploying a less ad hoc and more structured approach to finding employment of their choosing. Recommendations for future practice include provision of more systematic careers guidance, advice on relevant selection and recruitment practices and data on current local labour market opportunities should be made more available to young graduate job seekers and their families.

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