

## RESEARCH PAPER: CABS LTSE 2021 (Stream 3)

### Using LinkedIn in the curriculum: how pre-professional identity development and celebrating success enhances graduates' work-readiness

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#### **AIM (outline focus of work and how to contribute to selected theme – what will participants learn – max. 150 words)**

Through the lens of pre-professional identity development (Jackson, 2016), we will argue that the use of LinkedIn enhances students' employability as it encourages career preparation beyond the typical focus on skills (Fowlie and Forder, 2019). By discussing how this has been embedded in two final year core Business modules, we will also highlight how assessment of students' use of LinkedIn has produced required outcomes (e.g. creation of a professional profile, completion of micro-credentials) but also some unintended consequences (Merton, 1936). These are often small in nature – a reaction to a post or an encouraging comment – but can also be more significant, such as a recommendation from a tutor, endorsements by colleagues, recognition from industry professionals, requests to share results of research projects. Supported by self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1994), we argue that these outcomes, positioned via LinkedIn as celebrating success, increase students' work readiness as they encourage further engagement with those in their intended industry or career.

#### **METHODOLOGY (practice underpinning work – critically reflect on and evaluate scope and significance of research – max. 450 words)**

The ever-pressing need for universities to produce work-ready graduates (Barton et al, 2019; Pegg et al, 2012) means that measures to achieve this must move with the times. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, increasing numbers of graduates and a subsequently saturated jobs market had already seen a need for graduates' 'positional advantage' (Roulin and Bangerter, 2013). One way of doing this is to go beyond typical skills-based approaches to developing students' employability. This broader view encourages students to consider the qualities, culture, conduct and ideology of their intended career (Jackson, 2016, p.926) and is one that has underpinned our approach here. We argue that using LinkedIn sustains these considerations that more traditional focuses on employability preclude, thereby producing students who are more confident in their work-readiness. Now, mid-Covid-19 pandemic, where physical opportunities to maintain career development have contracted (Holt-White and Montacute, 2020), using LinkedIn has provided the virtual environment in which students can continue exploring and enhancing their employability (self-efficacy). In addition, it has the added twofold benefit of some interesting unintended results: the small wins and specifically the celebration and acknowledgement that influence progress (Amabile and Kramer, 2011) and the conversational intelligence (seen here through interactions on LinkedIn) that strengthens success (Glaser, 2016).

With large numbers of students undertaking each of the modules in question per year, it was determined that a questionnaire would be the most appropriate means of collecting primary data to inform the study. Qualitative and quantitative questions were devised for this purpose, using module-specific secondary data (task completion, official module feedback gathered through the university's module evaluation system), publicly available LinkedIn data, and concepts derived from our research on pre-professional identity, self-efficacy and celebrating success. Participants were provided with a definition of self-efficacy and a combination of open-ended and Likert-scale questions was used.

With Covid-19 potentially impacting recent and imminent graduates' employment status and thereby related responses to our research, we decided that it would be beneficial to issue the questionnaire to not only students currently studying the modules but also to those who had undertaken them in the two preceding academic years. This would also ensure a wider pool of participants who could talk about the unintended consequences of using LinkedIn, given that this may not have been immediately obvious during their studies, or may have occurred after graduation. Consequently, following ethical approval, the questionnaire was sent out to approximately 700 students and recent graduates.

It is hoped that a wide-scale project such as this will provide further understanding from pedagogic and student perspectives on the value and impact of embedding the use of LinkedIn into the curriculum and using the resulting celebration of small wins this invites to help enhance students' work readiness.

**CONTRIBUTION (explain concrete outcomes that have come out of the practice/research. Outline impact (benefits) both direct and indirect. Be precise, use lists not paragraphs – max. 250 words)**

While a work in progress, results from our study suggest the following concrete outcomes:

- The pedagogical benefits of using LinkedIn to support students' pre-professional identity development;
- The subsequent value of using the celebration of 'small wins' to further students' pre-professional identity and integration into their intended career or profession;
- The value of using LinkedIn Learning courses to provide students with micro credentials;

**KEY TAKEAWAYS (how does work contribute to theory, practice or policy – max 150 words)**

This study demonstrates that pre-professional identity development through the use of LinkedIn not only helps embed employability into the Business curriculum but also allows for the celebration of 'small wins' (Amabile and Kramer, 2011), which sees the value of the process extend far beyond the summative requirements of the course. In sharing their successes and achievements via LinkedIn, students discover the initial unintended consequences of their action, which are, at the very least, the resulting acknowledgements and support from their networks, if not something more enriching. While it may be argued that this is, of course, the whole point of developing students' employability, from a module perspective, these are far greater impacts than fulfilling assessment requirements. Consequently, we suggest this is a simple but powerful practice that helps to produce the confident, work-ready graduates employers are demanding.

**REFERENCES**

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### **Abstract from the programme**

Mid-Covid-19 pandemic, where physical opportunities to maintain career development have contracted, using LinkedIn has provided the virtual environment in which students can continue exploring and enhancing their employability (self-efficacy). In addition, it has the added twofold benefit of some interesting unintended results: the small wins and specifically the celebration and acknowledgement that influence progress and the conversational intelligence, seen here through interactions on LinkedIn, that strengthens success.

### **40 characters**

LinkedIn: celebrating students' success

### **Bi line 140 characters**

A virtual environment: students' can enhance their employability, celebrate & acknowledge small wins all to strengthen success