
GiLE Journal of Skills Development

Direct Outcomes and Win-Win Relationships Between University Careers Advisors and Graduate Recruiters

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Abstract

The purpose of our paper is to apply the state progress checklist from direct outcomes theory to a new domain of the university-to-work transition to mediate a dyadic win-win relationship between university careers advisors and graduate recruiters. The state progress checklist incorporates three endeavour elements - (i) potential, (ii) agendas, and (iii) effects; and nine themes - (i) resources, (ii) motivations, (iii) interactions, (iv) assumptions, (v) scenarios, (vi) plans, (vii) actions, (viii) outcomes, and (ix) reuses. The endeavour elements and themes are systematically applied to help envision, pursue, and achieve mutually beneficial relationships between both parties. The application of direct outcomes theory as a mediator of the relationship between university careers services and graduate recruiters offers synergy effects for both parties and helps overcome pre-existing barriers to collaboration and communication. Our paper applies the state progress checklist from direct outcomes theory to a new domain of the university-to-work transition to bridge research agendas across the education, vocational behaviour, and human resource management literature. We identify opportunities for university careers services and graduate recruiters to foster a win-win relationship by aligning their objectives and through the provision and receiving of support. These benefits subsequently transcend additional stakeholders, including university students, universities, and organisations. Moreover, Appendix 1 provides a summary sheet offering some potential questions for each of the nine themes across the three endeavour elements. These example questions are not meant to be an exhaustive list. Their purpose is to act as a starting point for discussion and action. The university careers advisors and graduate recruiters could initially work through this sheet separately before working through the sheet a second time collaboratively.

Keywords: Direct Outcomes Theory, State Progress Checklist, University Careers Advisors, Graduate Recruiters, Careers

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic as a global chance event means that university students and graduates need to manage increased levels of uncertainty as they seek to enter a highly competitive global labour market (Mok et al., 2021). Graduate Recruiters (GRs) representing organisations continue to face challenges as the increased volume of applicants makes it difficult to identify quality candidates and promote social mobility and diversity agendas (Tomlinson, 2021). The pandemic has also led to challenges for University Careers Advisors (UCAs), who often lack the personnel and resources to meet the increased demand for their services (Donald et al., 2021). This presents an opportunity for collaboration between GRs and UCAs as actors operating within a career ecosystem to enhance the competitiveness and performance of both parties (Gribling & Duberley, 2021).

Yet, traditional partnerships between GRs and UCAs have not always focused on win-win outcomes. Collaborative approaches have tended to be ad-hoc, temporary and focused on short-term gains within the current academic year or recruitment cycle making it difficult to establish sustainable relationships (Vick & Robertson, 2018). Communication can also be challenging as the same terminology is used by GRs and UCAs inconsistently (Craps et al., 2021). This has often led to universities and organisations attempting to ‘do their own thing’ despite sharing broadly the same objectives of securing employment for their graduates and securing early careers talent for their organisation, respectively (Donald et al., 2021). In response, the purpose of this paper is to apply the state progress checklist from direct outcomes theory (Buckholtz, 1995; 1996; 2011a) to a new domain of the university-to-work transition to mediate the dyadic win-win relationship between UCAs and GRs. We also respond to calls to capture and explore the relationship between universities and organisations as part of a reconceptualisation of the transition from education into the labour market (Dougherty, 2022).

The strategic benefits from the two parties working together can translate to all actors within the career ecosystem, including students, graduates, universities, and organisations. Students and graduates benefit from increased levels of career guidance, and support can help them acquire personal resources and the associated outcomes of employability and sustainable life wellbeing (Kirves, 2014; Nimmi et al., 2022). Increased perceptions of employability can offer a sustainable alternative to job security during one’s career and increase the chances of securing ‘graduate level’ employment (Bernstrøm et al., 2019; Nimmi et al., 2021).

Universities benefit because neoliberalism views education as a private rather than a public good, with students positioned as customers who take on education costs via student debt (Busch, 2017). This has led to the marketisation of higher education, whereby universities need to attract prospective students to secure tuition fees as part of the funding for the institution (Mintz, 2021). A principal method of attracting prospective students and associated revenue streams is via league table rankings, despite concerns of over-simplification and obfuscation of the data involved in calculating such rankings (Christie, 2017). Moreover, performance metrics continue to be skewed towards extrinsic graduate outcomes (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2018) despite empirical evidence of the complementary value of intrinsic graduate outcomes (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2019). This places a greater emphasis on the role of UCAs operating within a university careers service to improve the career outcomes of their students and graduates (Praskova et al., 2015). This is particularly crucial since the perceived gap between the benefits and the costs of participation in higher education continues to narrow (Donald et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the benefits of collaboration between UCAs and GRs transcend to organisations that rely on talent management strategies for competitive advantage, performance, and sustainability (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020; Illes et al., 2010).

Our focus now moves to the theoretical framework of direct outcomes theory before systematically introducing and applying the state progress checklist to the UCA-GR relationship. The paper concludes with implications and directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework: Direct Outcomes Theory

Direct outcomes theory was popularised a decade ago via a book titled ‘Create Crucial Insight: Use Direct Outcomes Checklists. Think Well. Do Great’ (Buckholtz, 2011a). However, aspects of what would become direct outcomes theory were published before this (Buckholtz, 1995; 1996). Direct outcomes theory offers a tool to help individuals develop insights, make decisions, and implement these decisions effectively. Checklists facilitate the development of goals and plans, the identification and acquisition of relevant resources, and the ability to ‘think well’ and ‘do great’. The notion of ‘thinking well’ refers to the use – by resources, such as people and systems - of data, assumptions, and intuition to develop and evaluate possible goals, scenarios, and plans. The notion of ‘doing great’ refers to using resources and plans to achieve fruitful results and the potential for application to broader purposes.

Direct outcomes can be used in various business and non-business contexts ranging from the personal to societal levels. This is because, unlike some checklists (e.g. prescriptive airline pilot checklists), the direct outcomes checklists are open-ended and invite creative thinking specific to a given situation. Direct outcomes can therefore help to answer questions such as ‘have we considered an adequately diverse set of options?’, ‘have we considered an adequately diverse set of information?’ and ‘are we ready to make an informed decision?’. The outcomes include opportunities to improve effectiveness (e.g., gain impact), to improve efficiency (e.g., save time), and to habituate patterns of effective thinking and action (e.g. think well, do great). These outcomes can be highly beneficial in contexts where work or collaboration happens in a haphazard and unstructured way since direct outcomes do not stifle thought or discussion. Instead, direct outcomes offer a shared space for haphazard and procedural thinking whereby people can develop new frameworks or optimise existing ones. This can help to facilitate discussion, build mutual understanding, secure buy-in from various stakeholders, and establish criteria for identifying successful outcomes.

In this paper, direct outcomes theory is applied to a new context of the university-to-work transition. The approach responds to calls for a critical exploration of the relationship between school and work (Dougherty, 2022). We specifically focus on the dyadic relationship between UCAs and GRs and the opportunity for direct outcomes to create and disseminate value for students and graduates, leading to benefits for universities, organisations, and broader society. Our paper responds to calls by Donald et al. (2021) to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a global chance event to foster new opportunities for collaboration between UCAs and GRs. Direct outcomes can offer a framework to characterise, analyse, and envision changes (Buckholtz, 2011a). This can help UCAs and GRs achieve shared goals and adopt broader perspectives.

For example, the UCAs approach to graduate employability often encompasses three aims: (i) securing short-term graduate outcomes, (ii) fostering professional readiness, and (iii) facilitating graduates to carry out productive and meaningful work across their lifespans (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019). The GRs aim to attract, hire, and retain early careers talent focusing on diversity, social mobility, and quality (Tomlinson, 2021). Therefore, direct outcomes can mediate the dyadic UCA-GR relationship leading to increased league table rankings for universities (Spence, 2019) and enabling organisations to differentiate themselves via early career talent management strategies (D'Armagnac et al., 2021). Moreover, UCAs and GRs often operate with limited resources and a high turnover of personnel which makes it difficult to establish meaningful relationships and work towards long term strategic goals (Donald et al. 2018; 2021). Direct outcomes can address these challenges by offering synergy effects via enhancing mutual understanding, sharing resources, and providing an audit trail to facilitate the continuity of a shared strategic vision over time.

3. Method: The State Progress Checklist

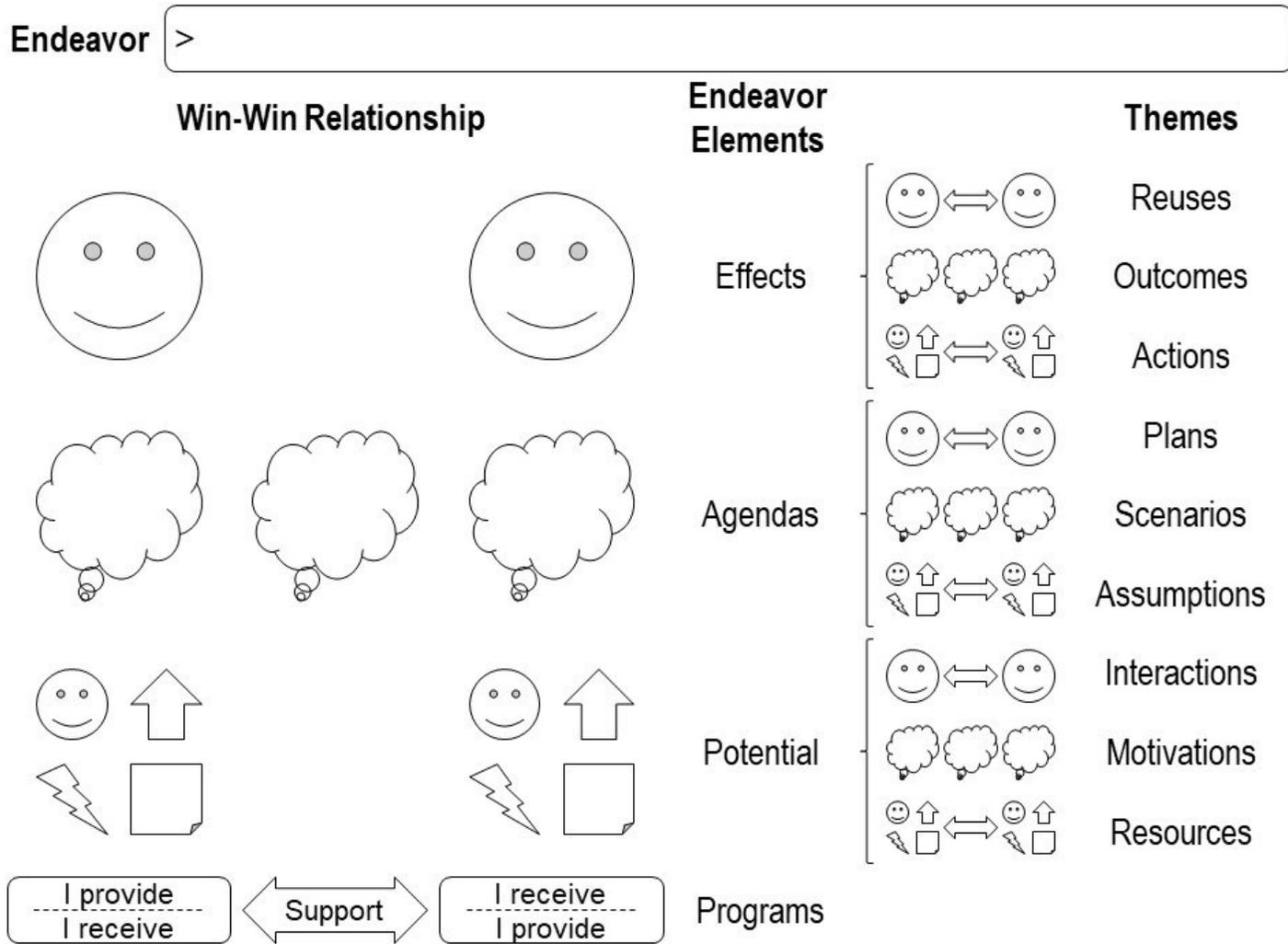
Figure 1 (next page) evidences the state progress checklist, which is applied systematically as the method for this paper (Buckholtz, 2011, p. 98).

We propose that the state progress checklist can help envision, pursue, and achieve working relationships between UCAs and GRs. The flexibility of the checklist enables one to work systematically either from a 'bottom-up' approach or from a 'top-down approach'. This paper focuses on the 'bottom-up' approach for endeavour elements moving from 'potential' to 'agendas' to 'effects'. However, when pragmatically applying the state progress checklist, an iterative process may likely be employed whereby as one works up through the endeavour elements and themes, new insights emerge that help to reframe earlier endeavour elements and themes.

The UCAs and GRs can initially work through the state progress checklist independently of one another to frame their respective notions of success, desired outcomes, and associated metrics for their programs (Buckholtz, 2011b). Once this phase is completed, the UCAs and GRs can work collaboratively to connect their endeavour elements and themes. This helps identify areas where support can be provided and received to foster a win-win relationship via process improvement and synergy effects.

For each of the three endeavour elements and the associated nine themes, we offer insights into the challenges that UCAs and GRs currently face and the opportunities for collaboration to lead to enhanced outcomes for both parties. Furthermore, we suggest questions that UCAs and GRs may wish to consider when using the state progress checklist. A summary of these questions is presented in Appendix 1 as a stand-alone resource for practitioners.

FIGURE 1. STATE PROGRESS CHECKLIST



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4. Endeavour Element I: Potential

When adopting the ‘bottom-up’ approach to the state progress checklist, the first endeavour element is ‘potential’. This consists of three themes termed ‘resources’, ‘motivations’ and ‘interactions’.

4.1. Theme I: Resources

Donald et al. (2021) explain how UCAs and GRs often lack the resources that they need to support individuals to prepare for and subsequently undertake the university-to-work transition. Their paper describes how the problem has been exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic as increasing numbers of students and recent graduates seek careers support. High Fliers (2021) agrees with these findings and reports that half of the leading graduate recruitment companies cut their graduate recruitment budget during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These challenges offer UCAs and GRs an opportunity to work collaboratively to see if sharing their resources can lead to synergy effects, augment luck, and lead to successful outcomes, as suggested by direct outcomes theory (Buckholtz, 2011a). However, both parties should recognise that during their collaborative efforts, there will be occasions where one party uses their resources to provide a service whilst the other party uses their resources to give the action (e.g. a university careers fair whereby the UCA offers the service, and the GR provides the action). Moreover, direct outcomes theory suggests that UCAs and GRs should also consider opportunities to develop a network of resources beyond their dyadic relationship (Buckholtz, 1995). For example, can managers from the organisation provide support during the attraction and selection process? Can lecturers support their students by utilising their networks of industry contacts?

Therefore, UCAs and GRs may wish to consider what resources do we currently have? What resources do we currently lack? What resources does the other party have that could improve our situation? What resources do we have to help the other party improve their situation? What resources exist beyond the dyadic relationship? How can both parties make the best use of the available resources?

4.2. Theme II: Motivations

The UCAs are motivated to help their students and recent graduates secure employment after graduation since this reflects positively on the careers service and the university (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; Spence, 2019). Providing career counselling services to students is crucial since those who interact with UCAs have increased perceived employability compared to those students who do not, and the perceived gap between the benefits and costs of participation in higher education continues to narrow (Donald et al. 2018; 2019). Therefore, the UCAs seek to produce students who are prepared for the university-to-work transition (Nimmi et al., 2022) and capable of signalling their abilities to prospective employers during the application and selection process (Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021).

The GRs seek high-quality applicants since talent acquisition can offer a sustainable competitive advantage (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020; D’Armagnac et al., 2021). However, the UK’s top graduate employers received an average of 41% more job applications from graduates in 2020-2021 compared to 2019-2020, the highest year-on-year increase recorded to date (High Fliers, 2021). An increased volume of applicants makes it challenging to identify high-quality

talent and risks exacerbating existing diversity and mobility issues (Tomlinson, 2021). This is problematic since three critical priorities for GRs are achieving their ethnic diversity targets, gender diversity targets, and social mobility targets (High Fliers, 2021).

The UCAs and GRs should consider what the motivations for collaboration are? What are the issues that need to be addressed? What help is required from the other party? What support can be provided to the other party? How do their respective motivations align?

4.3. Theme III: Interactions

Fostering collaboration between UCAs and GRs within a career ecosystem can increase both parties' competitiveness and performance (Gribbling & Duberley, 2021). Yet, UCAs and GRs often use the same terminology to mean different things leading to confusion and sub-optimal interactions (Craps et al., 2021). This is compounded by the perception of slow response times often driven by a lack of personnel and high levels of turnover within the careers service or HR teams (Donald et al., 2021). Direct outcomes theory can address these aspects by helping both parties to agree on clearly defined terminology, roles, and responsibilities. The interaction between UCAs and GRs can be enhanced by acknowledging that whilst the motivations for the outcome may differ, the desired outcome is broadly the same. Both parties want to produce employable graduates capable of signalling their employability to secure graduate employment (Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021). Documentation can also help by providing an audit trail of the interactions that underpin decisions and metrics to offer continuity despite turnover in personnel (Buckholtz, 1996; 2011b).

The UCAs and GRs need to consider how regularly interaction should occur between the two parties? What are feasible and reasonable response times? What are the preferred methods for communication? Who is responsible for scheduling meetings and writing minutes? How can existing levels of interaction be optimised or enhanced? How can documentation help manage the challenges of high personnel turnover rates?

5. Endeavour Element II: Agendas (Think Well)

The second endeavour element when adopting the 'bottom-up' approach to the state progress checklist is 'agendas'. This consists of three themes termed 'assumptions', 'scenarios' and 'plans' and captures the 'Think Well' dimension of direct outcomes theory.

5.1. Theme IV: Assumptions

The theme of assumptions builds on the resources, motivations, and interaction themes to ensure that both parties are aligned in their thinking (Buckholtz, 1995). Specifically, this theme captures the notion of providing insights to overcome the risks associated with assumptions to reduce the chances of sub-optimal outcomes for both parties (Buckholtz, 2011a). For example, UCAs may incorrectly assume that GRs know the benefits that employing graduates from a specific university or course can offer the organisation. This leaves UCAs confused when employers focus their resources on other universities, leading to sub-optimal outcomes for the university, their graduates, and the organisation. Similarly, GRs may incorrectly assume that students and recent graduates clearly understand their application and selection process. Yet, students and recent graduates may be telling their UCAs the opposite and asking for more guidance from GRs to facilitate their transition from university into the workplace. These examples suggest that information sharing between UCAs and GRs can help identify, challenge,

and overcome assumptions increasing the likelihood of successful outcomes (Craps et al., 2021).

The UCAs and GRs may wish to ask themselves, what are the existing issues in the dyadic relationship? Have these issues been communicated to the other party? Is the other party aware of the challenges being experienced? Have working assumptions been clearly articulated? What actions can address untoward or unstated pre-existing assumptions or capitalise on valid mutual assumptions?

5.2. Theme V: Scenarios

When both parties consider possible scenarios and share their findings with the other party, this can lead to proactive and strategic planning whilst reducing reactive behaviours (Buckholtz, 1995). In the context of the UCA and GR relationship, this means considering what current challenges exist and what future challenges may occur in preparing and supporting individuals to undertake the university-to-work transition. However, UCAs and GRs should remain vigilant to unpredictable and unplanned chance events and how these might impact themselves, university students and graduates (Bright et al., 2005; Rice, 2014). For example, the COVID-19 pandemic as a global chance event showed that not all possible scenarios could be considered ahead of time. Attraction and selection activities had to move online, the volume of applicants and demand for jobs dramatically increased, students and graduates sought additional careers guidance putting pressure on UCAs, and challenges with assessment and onboarding saw GRs having to withdraw offers of employment (Donald et al., 2021).

Moreover, two-fifths of employers who participated in virtual careers fairs described the events as not very successful (High Fliers, 2021). The UCAs and GRs thus need to consider the various scenarios of in-person, online, or hybrid interactions with students and applicants to identify the benefits and limitations of each approach. However, scenario planning needs to be an iterative process, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, due to external factors such as evolving government policies, guidelines, and regulations.

The UCAs and GRs may wish to consider what are the current challenges faced? What are possible future challenges that may occur? What steps can be taken to minimise the negative impacts of these challenges? What opportunities exist for proactive and strategic planning to reduce the reliance on reactive behaviours? Has an adequately diverse set of options been considered? Has a sufficiently diverse set of information been considered? Can an informed decision now be made?

5.3. Theme VI: Plans

The next theme involves developing plans for innovation and optimisation underpinned by the outcomes from themes I-V (Buckholtz, 2011a). The UCAs and GRs can focus on the motivations to encourage interactions, driven by different scenarios and underpinned by clearly articulated assumptions to use resources effectively (Buckholtz, 1995). The plans should address short-term goals that can be achieved quickly and relatively easily as well as medium-term goals for the next one to two recruitment cycles and academic years. Additionally, plans for long-term goals should look for opportunities to be proactive and strategic to pre-empt and navigate future challenges. Together, these plans can offer a strong vision, create an

environment that fosters success, and facilitate UCAs and GRs to achieve their potential for the benefit of universities, organisations, students, and graduates.

Themes I-VI can help UCAs and GRs to understand the existing context of their relationship and identify opportunities to act and strive for innovative and sustainable outcomes (Buckholtz, 2011a). Short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans should be documented, underpinned by a clear rationale, and accompanied by metrics for determining success (Buckholtz, 1996; 2011b). These documents should be re-visited and updated regularly, perhaps after each academic year and recruitment cycle. The choice of how regularly documents are updated should be agreed upon between both parties, and the process of updating the documents can serve as an opportunity to develop and foster working relationships between UCAs and GRs.

The UCAs and GRs should consider what documentation is required? How often should this documentation be updated? Who is responsible for updating each section of the document? What is the process for agreeing on metrics to measure successful outcomes? Who is accountable for signing off the plans? Who is responsible for monitoring the plans? How can continuity of the plans be maintained? What events should automatically trigger all parties to re-visit the plans at the earliest opportunity?

6. Endeavour Element III: Effects (Do Great)

When adopting the ‘bottom-up’ approach to the state progress checklist, the final endeavour element is ‘effects’. This consists of three themes termed ‘actions’, ‘outcomes’ and ‘reuses’ and captures the ‘Do Great’ dimension of direct outcomes theory.

6.1. Theme VII: Actions

The theme of actions addresses implementing the plans identified in theme VI (Buckholtz, 2011a). The UCAs and GRs each take ownership of their respective parts of the plans whilst monitoring progress and sharing updates with the other party (Buckholtz, 2011b). This step allows practical and proactive action to facilitate UCAs and GRs to achieve their individual and collaborative goals. Issues that occur during the action phase should be recorded and discussed between the two parties. This should happen immediately if the problem is time-sensitive and requires immediate action or at the next scheduled review point if the issue can offer a learning outcome for the future. The action phase should improve the lives of UCAs, GRs, students, and graduates by implementing innovative strategies to accomplish activities and desired outcomes that would be less feasible without UCA and GR collaboration (Buckholtz, 2011a). This recognises the interconnected and interdependent nature of UCAs and GRs operating within a career ecosystem (Gribling & Duberley 2021).

The UCAs and GRs may wish to ask themselves what resources are needed to operationalise the plan? Who is accountable for implementing each part of the plan? When does each of the actions need to be taken? How will progress be communicated between the two parties? Who has overall accountability for the operationalisation of the plan?

6.2. Theme VIII: Outcomes

The outcomes of the actions should link back to the motivations for undertaking a collaborative approach. The UCAs are seeking to prepare their students and recent graduates for the university-to-work transition (Nimmi et al., 2022) by supporting them to enhance their employability and be capable of signalling their abilities to prospective employers (Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021). The desired outcome for UCAs is increased numbers of graduates from the university securing graduate employment, reflecting positively on the careers service and leading to increased league table rankings for their university (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; Spence, 2019). The GRs seek innovative ways to manage a high volume of applicants whilst simultaneously meeting their ethnic diversity targets, gender diversity targets, and social mobility targets (High Fliers, 2021; Tomlinson, 2021). The desired outcome for GRs is to secure high-quality applicants from diverse backgrounds since talent acquisition offers a sustainable competitive advantage (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020; D'Armagnac et al., 2021). Theme VIII considers to what extent the outcomes of the collaborative actions have facilitated the UCAs and GRs to realise results that reflect their goals. Ideally, both parties benefit through synergy effects leading to win-win outcomes (Buckholtz, 2011a).

The UCAs and GRs should ask themselves, have the results been realised? What benefits have occurred? Has there been a win-win focus for both parties? Were the methods for recognising and measuring outcomes appropriate? What learning opportunities exist for future process improvement? Where would funding and time be best invested in the future?

6.3. Theme IX: Reuses

The final theme addresses the actions that individuals took and the outcomes that they achieved, coupled with the opportunities for the reuse of direct outcomes theory in alternative contexts to create new insights and foster additional win-win outcomes (Buckholtz, 2011a). For example, the operationalisation of direct outcomes theory via the state progress checklist between UCAs and GRs could offer knowledge-sharing opportunities via success stories and lessons learned. This may include webinars, workshops, conference sessions, or articles in specialist magazines or journals. However, the desire for UCAs to knowledge share with other UCAs at different universities or for GRs to knowledge share with other GRs at various organisations may be limited due to competition for league table positions and the war for early careers talent (Donald et al., 2021). Instead, it is more likely that UCAs from the specific institution reuse this approach with GRs from different organisations, and GRs from specific organisations reuse this approach with UCAs from various universities. However, the high personnel turnover within the UCA and GR roles would suggest that the benefits would be disseminated as individuals move to different universities and organisations and offer their experiences and ideas for enhancing best practices. Additionally, direct outcomes and the state progress checklist could be extended to other dyadic relationships (e.g. UCAs and students, UCAs and their managers, GRs and students, GRs and their managers, graduates and their managers or mentors).

The UCAs and GRs may wish to consider what actions were taken and what outcomes were achieved by using the state progress checklist? What other opportunities exist to create new insights using direct outcomes to foster win-win scenarios?

7. Discussion

7.1. Theoretical, Policy, and Practical Implications

This paper systematically applied the state progress checklist from direct outcomes theory (Buckholtz, 2011a) to a new domain of the university-to-work transition, offering opportunities for a dyadic win-win relationship between UCAs and GRs. The state progress checklist incorporated three endeavour elements (i) potential, (ii) agendas, and (iii) effects; and nine themes (i) resources, (ii) motivations, (iii) interactions, (iv) assumptions, (v) scenarios, (vi) plans, (vii) actions, (viii) outcomes, and (ix) reuses. This offers a straightforward and clear framework for developing meaningful and sustainable relationships and is summarised in Figure 1.

Our paper responds to calls by Donald et al. (2021) to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a global chance event to foster new opportunities for collaboration between UCAs and GRs. We also respond to calls by Dougherty (2022) to critically explore how universities and organisations can best prepare graduates for entry into the labour market. The application of direct outcomes theory as a mediator between UCAs and GRs also overcomes the challenges of the conflicting use of terminology (Craps et al., 2021). This can help to bridge research agendas across the education, vocational behaviour, and HRM literature that have often tended to develop in parallel. For example, strategic and shared approaches between universities and organisations can offer innovative ways to educate university students and prepare them for the world of work (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2018). These approaches can encompass the three aims of UCAs: (i) securing short-term graduate outcomes, (ii) fostering professional readiness, and (iii) facilitating graduates to carry out productive and meaningful work across their lifespans (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019). Engagement is crucial because students who access career counselling support during their university studies have higher perceived employability levels than their peers who do not (Donald et al., 2019). Higher levels of perceived employability have been linked to enhanced employment outcomes (Bernstrøm et al., 2019), offering opportunities to address the narrowing gap between benefits and costs of participation in higher education (Donald et al., 2018). The process of career support can also equip students and graduates to navigate the evolving workplace context across their careers, capturing the ‘person’, ‘context’, and ‘time’ dimensions of career sustainability (De Vos et al., 2020).

Subsequently, HRM policy can focus on differentiation from competitors via talent management strategies (D’Armagnac et al., 2021). Direct outcomes can facilitate the defining and achieving of goals concerning diversity, social mobility, and quality agendas (Tomlinson, 2021) as predictors of organisational sustainability (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020; Illes et al., 2010). The graduate and organisational benefits also transcend to universities via higher league table rankings, leading to increased revenue streams from the attraction of future talent and benefiting wider society via innovation and increased tax revenues for investment in public services and infrastructure (Mintz, 2021; Spence, 2019). This captures how direct outcomes can facilitate win-win scenarios for all actors operating within a career ecosystem (Baruch & Rousseau, 2019), which has not always been the case.

The UCAs and GRs can also use direct outcomes individually and collectively to underpin policy agendas with clearly defined terminology that focuses on developing early careers talent capable of undertaking the university-to-work transition (Craps et al., 2021). Direct outcomes offer a shared space for haphazard and procedural thinking, which can help to facilitate

discussion, build mutual understanding, and identify success criteria for the benefit of all stakeholders (Buckholtz, 2011a). The initial focus on resources, motivations, and interactions helps UCAs and GRs to collaborate and identify the potential benefits of adopting the state progress checklist. These include optimising limited resources and proactive strategic approaches to address pre-existing and future challenges with the desire for win-win outcomes. Subsequently, an awareness of assumptions, scenarios, and plans can help both parties to establish clear agendas and think well. The final endeavour element operationalises the agendas through actions, outcomes, and reuses to capture the notion of doing great. Direct outcomes theory and the state progress checklist thus offer a pragmatic and flexible approach that can help UCAs and GRs to enhance their value to students, universities, organisations, and broader society.

7.2. Directions for Future Research

This paper discusses some of the many possible uses of the state progress checklist as a facet of direct outcomes theory. The fifty questions in Appendix 1 offer a stand-alone guide for practitioners as a catalyst for initial discussion when adopting the state progress checklist underpinned by direct outcomes theory. Future research may consider asking UCAs and GRs to adopt the approach proposed in this paper and subsequently provide their feedback via focus groups or interviews. This could help refine the process, develop additional questions to complement those offered in Appendix 1, and respond to calls by Vick and Robertson (2018) to foster collaboration for knowledge transfer between universities and industry.

Additionally, longitudinal research could track individuals through the university-to-work transition. One cohort of students could be compared whereby UCAs and GRs use this paper's application of direct outcomes theory to prepare them for entry into the labour market, with another cohort of students acting as a control group. However, it should be noted that employability as being capable of undertaking a job is distinct from employment whereby one has a job (Holmes, 2013; Vanhercke et al., 2014). This distinction is often missed when compiling university league table rankings, whereby employability outcomes are predominantly determined via employment metrics (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; Christie, 2017; Donald et al., 2019; Jackson & Bridgstock, 2018; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2019). Moreover, the competition between universities for league table positions can act as a barrier to collaboration and knowledge sharing between universities (Donald et al., 2021). Future research needs to look at this issue and propose alternative ways to report data whereby prospective students can understand how their degree at a specific university can enhance their employability whilst removing knowledge-sharing barriers between universities.

Additionally, by departing from league table rankings to determine target universities for talent identification and acquisition, GRs can increase their chances of meeting diversity and social mobility targets rather than accessing and hiring the same demographic of graduates from the same core universities each recruitment cycle. Graduates would gain more equal access to opportunities in the workplace and organisations because diverse early careers talent can offer a competitive advantage and organisational sustainability (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020; Illes et al., 2010; Tomlinson, 2021). An investigation of the impact of GR targets such as 'performance of hires', 'retention rates of hires', or 'the potential contribution to the organisation's success by graduate hires' could also be considered in the context of relationship dynamics between GRs and other stakeholders.

Finally, future research could consider other applications of direct outcomes theory within the university-to-work space in keeping with theme IX of reuses. For example, the state progress checklist could be used to foster the dyadic relationship between UCAs and their students or recent graduates. This could respond to calls by Donald et al. (2018; 2019; 2021) for students to take ownership of their careers and actively seek career guidance during their university studies, particularly in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic as a global chance event. Alternatively, direct outcomes could be applied in the workplace in the relationship between early career talent and their manager or mentor or between UCAs or GRs and their managers. This could respond to calls by Veld, Semeijn and van Vuuren (2015) to adopt an interactionist perspective when considering the responsibilities of organisations and employees in determining accountability for an individual's career progression and sustainability. Other possibilities for the future application of direct outcomes theory include managing the relationship between UCAs from different universities and GRs from various organisations.

8. Conclusion

Our paper has applied the state progress checklist from direct outcomes theory to a new domain of the university-to-work transition to mediate a dyadic win-win relationship between UCAs and GRs. We believe that our paper offers a framework for bridging research agendas across the education, vocational behaviour, and human resource management literature. We also believe that our paper has pragmatic and practical applications offering benefits to UCAs, GRs, students, graduates, universities, organisations, and broader society.

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Appendix 1: State Progress Checklist Example Questions

Appendix 1 provides a summary sheet offering some potential questions for each of the nine themes across the three endeavour elements identified in Figure 1. These example questions are not meant to be an exhaustive list. Their purpose is to act as a starting point for discussion and action. The University Careers Advisors and Graduate Recruiters could initially work through this sheet separately before working through the sheet a second time collaboratively. Please note that whilst the nine themes are presented linearly, they can be applied iteratively as subsequent questions and ideas emerge.

Endeavour Element I: Potential

Theme I: Resources

1. What resources do we currently have?
2. What resources do we currently lack?
3. What resources does the other party have that could improve our situation?
4. What resources do we have to help the other party improve their situation?
5. What resources exist beyond the dyadic relationship?
6. How can both parties make the best use of the available resources?

Theme II: Motivations

7. What are the motivations for collaboration?
8. What are the motivational issues that need to be addressed?
9. What help is required from the other party?
10. What support can be provided to the other party?
11. How do their respective motivations align?

Theme III: Interactions

12. How regularly should interaction take place between the two parties?
13. What are feasible and reasonable response times?
14. What are the preferred methods for communication?
15. Who is responsible for scheduling meetings and writing minutes?
16. How can existing levels of interaction be optimised or enhanced?
17. How can documentation help manage the challenges of high personnel turnover rates?

Endeavour Element II: Agendas (Think Well)

Theme IV: Assumptions

18. What are the existing issues in the dyadic relationship?
19. Have these issues been communicated to the other party?
20. Is the other party aware of the challenges being experienced?
21. Have working assumptions been clearly articulated?
22. What actions can be taken to address untoward pre-existing assumptions or to capitalise on applicable mutual assumptions?

Theme V: Scenarios

23. What are the current challenges faced?
24. What are possible future challenges that may occur?
25. What steps can be taken to minimise the negative impacts of these challenges?
26. What opportunities exist for proactive and strategic planning to reduce the reliance on reactive behaviours?
27. Has an adequately diverse set of options been considered?
28. Has an adequately diverse set of information been considered?
29. Can an informed decision now be made?

Theme VI: Plans

30. What documentation is required?
31. How often should this documentation be updated?
32. Who is responsible for updating each section of the document?
33. What is the process for agreeing on metrics to measure successful outcomes?
34. Who is accountable for signing off the plans?
35. Who is accountable for monitoring the plans?
36. How can continuity of the plans be maintained?
37. What events should automatically trigger all parties to re-visit the plans at the earliest opportunity?

Endeavour Element III: Effects (Do Great)

Theme VII: Actions

38. What resources are needed to operationalise the plan?
39. Who is accountable for implementing each part of the plan?
40. When does each of the actions need to be taken?
41. How will progress be communicated between the two parties?
42. Who has overall accountability for the operationalisation of the plan?

Theme VIII: Outcomes

43. Have the results been realised?
44. What benefits have occurred?
45. Has there been a win-win focus for both parties?
46. Were the methods for recognising and measuring outcomes appropriate?
47. What learning opportunities exist for future process improvement?
48. Where would funding and time be best invested in the future?

Theme IX: Reuses

49. What actions were taken, and what outcomes were achieved using the state progress checklist?
50. What other opportunities exist to create new insights using direct outcomes to foster win-win scenarios?