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INTRODUCING THE EMPLOYABILITY CAPITAL GROWTH MODEL (ECGM)



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The case for another employability capital model

Around 2015, there was a shift away from skills-based models of graduate employability towards employability capital-based models. This recognised a more holistic approach to graduate employability. However, different groups of researchers have been operating in silos creating their own models based on different forms of capital. To date, the three most cited models come from (i) Michael Tomlinson in the UK, (ii) Marilyn Clarke in Australia, and (iii) William Donald, Yehuda Baruch and Melanie Ashleigh in the UK. However, many other capital-based models exist.

The issue is that each model has its own strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, researchers in different fields use similar terms to mean different things. This creates confusion and acts as a barrier to interdisciplinary collaboration. More importantly, it limits the real-world benefits of these models for careers and employability professionals to support their students.

Conceptualisation of the Employability Capital Growth Model (ECGM)

We conducted a systematic literature review of 42,558 manuscripts from Web of Science and Scopus databases published between 2016 and 2022 from the fields

of graduate employability and career development, incorporating applied psychology, business, education, and management. Keyword searches of the abstracts combined with manual screening for relevance gave us a final corpus of 94 manuscripts.

Qualitative content analysis of each manuscript identified nine forms of employability capital, external factors, and personal outcomes. Figure 1 shows examples of each of the nine forms of capital. Figure 2 shows the ECGM.

Operationalisation of the Employability Capital Growth Model (ECGM)

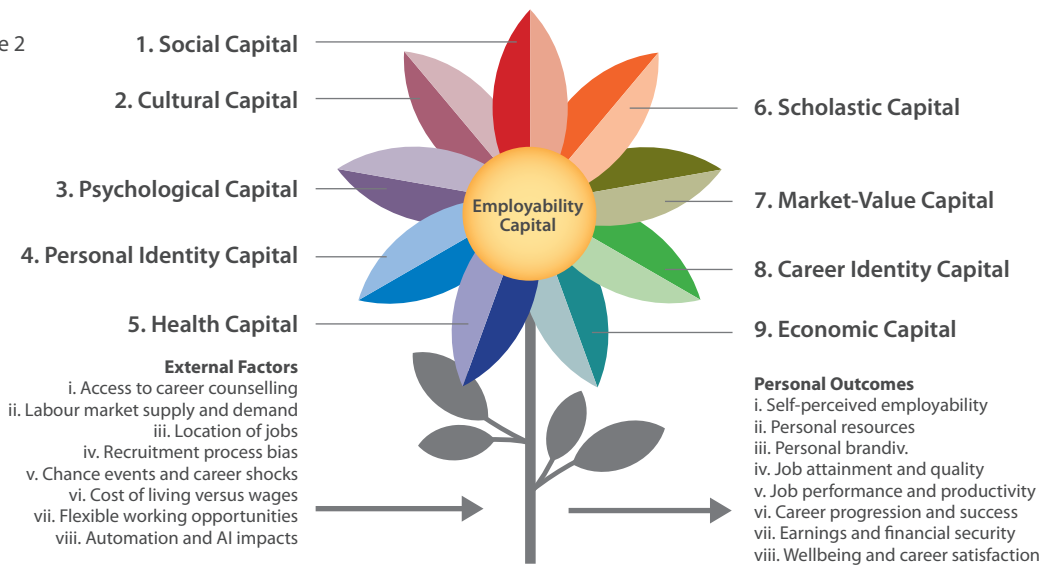
The qualitative content analysis also led to four themes and associated codes for the operationalisation of the model. These are summarised in Table 1.

From a curriculum perspective, employability capital can be developed via student-centred pedagogical practices, problem-based learning, and opportunities for personal reflection. Incorporating guest lectures from alums and employers can help bridge the links between higher education and the labour market. A focus on entrepreneurial development can also enhance the opportunities available to students following graduation by enhancing entrepreneurial intention. Embedding different forms of employability capital into the

Figure 1

<p>1. Social Capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Parents and family b) Friends c) Mentors from alums and industry d) Memberships and affiliations e) Network of contacts f) Social media presence 	<p>2. Cultural Capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Sports, clubs and societies b) Volunteering c) Travelling (including gap year and studying abroad) d) Speaking multiple languages e) Reading for enjoyment f) Secondary school reputation g) University reputation 	<p>3. Psychological Capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Hope b) Self-efficacy (including ego and confidence) c) Resilience d) Optimism (including self-esteem) e) Need for achievement (including conscientiousness) f) Attitude to risk and change (including adaptability) g) Emotional intelligence
<p>4. Personal Identity Capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Gender b) Age c) Social class d) Ethnicity e) Sexual orientation f) Dialect and attire g) Domestic or international student status 	<p>5. Health Capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Physical health (including disability) b) Mental health (including disability) c) Healthy lifestyle choices d) Access to healthcare 	<p>6. Scholastic Capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Secondary school subjects b) Secondary school grades c) University degree subject d) University degree classification e) Postgraduate study f) Professional qualifications g) Cumulative years of study
<p>7. Market-Value Capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Term-time employment whilst studying b) Summer employment (including an internship) c) Year in industry placement d) Previous labour market experience e) Technical skills (driven by industry needs) f) Personal skills (driven by industry needs) 	<p>8. Career Identity Capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Career ownership (protean career orientation) b) Goal setting and growth mindset c) Lifelong and lifewide learning d) Spirituality, meaning and purpose e) Career counselling f) Personal narrative (including signaling employability) 	<p>9. Economic Capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Parental financial support b) Student loan and interest rates c) Funding of university tuition fees d) Funding of living expenses e) Loss of wages from attending university f) Income after graduation (financial return) g) Savings and investments (financial security)

Figure 2



curriculum can also improve access to career guidance and advice for students early in their degree.

Careers and employability professionals can operationalise the ECGM by helping students and graduates to reflect on the forms of capital they need to develop via goal-directed behaviour. These individuals should be encouraged to take ownership of their careers, develop networks, commit to lifelong and lifewide learning, and understand the value of work experience.

Additionally, university career services should engage with employers to help students create personal narratives to signal employability to prospective employers. The approach can enable students to connect theory and practice via employability development opportunities. Targeting support to students who need it the most is essential since their perceived employability

is impacted by access to university initiatives.

Finally, from the employer’s perspective, a deep and meaningful discussion is needed with universities to communicate current and future needs, recognising changes over time. A holistic approach is also required to consider external factors to graduate employability, including an awareness of bias in the recruitment process to make employment outcomes more equitable. Understanding employer needs is essential since each employer will place different emphases on the different forms of capital that constitute employability capital. Employers themselves can play a greater role in shaping university education and providing work experience opportunities.

Collaborative engagement across these actors can help graduates achieve outcomes of (i) self-perceived employability, (ii) personal resources, (iii) personal brand, (iv) job attainment and quality, (v) job performance and productivity, (vi) career progression and success, (vii) earnings and financial security, and (viii) wellbeing and career satisfaction. Employers can benefit from enhancing employability capital beyond university boundaries, including sustainable outcomes of productivity, innovation and profitability. Universities benefit from employment outcomes and associated status leading to the attraction of future students and the associated revenue they bring.

Where can I learn more about the Employability Capital Growth Model (ECGM)?

You can download the full paper for free from Studies in Higher Education via this link:
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2023.2219270>

You can also contact the lead author, Will Donald, via w.e.donald@soton.ac.uk

Reference

Donald, W.E., Baruch, Y., & Ashleigh, M.J. (2023). Construction and operationalisation of an Employability Capital Growth Model (ECGM) via a systematic literature review (2016-2022). *Studies in Higher Education*, Advanced Online Publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2023.2219270>

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Table 1

Theme	Codes
Students and Graduates	(i) subject choice at secondary school, (ii) career ownership (protean career orientation), (iii) engage with employability throughout university study, (iv) access self-assessment activities, (v) gain work experience, (vi) develop a network of contacts, and (vii) build narratives to signal employability.
Educators	(i) embed employability and entrepreneurship in the curriculum, (ii) promote experiential learning (including self-reflection), (iii) provide exposure to lecturers and students from different countries, (iv) facilitate guest lectures from alums and industry, and (v) source work experience opportunities.
Careers and Employability Professionals	(i) foster partnerships with industry, lecturers, and alums, (ii) encourage networking behaviours and mentoring, (iii) promote and source internships and placements, (iv) encourage career management, ownership, and engagement, (v) offer tailored and targeted support to students, and (vi) promote extracurricular activities.
Employers	(i) communicate the value of work experience, (ii) offer internships and placements, (iii) shape higher education and develop alternative ways to upskill students, (iv) state the needs of the labour market and rules of the game, and (v) composition of hiring committees and equitable processes.

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