

Me in a Minute: A simple strategy for developing and showcasing personal employability

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Graduates require evidence of employability beyond marks and grades to differentiate themselves in the highly competitive labour market. Universities cannot guarantee employment, but they can engage students in learning and recognise achievement that is relevant to employment. Here, we share preliminary insights from interviews investigating student perceptions of an extra-curricular video strategy designed to develop and showcase graduate employability. The *Me in a Minute* video strategy provides students with support to film a one minute video pitch aimed at potential employers. Student perceptions of the strategy suggest that in addition to providing an individualised artefact that can be used to showcase achievement, the strategy engages students in reflection that helps them to better understand and articulate evidence of their achievements relevant to employment. Furthermore, students value the learning associated with pitching, more than the video itself.

Introduction

Universities are producing more graduates than ever before, and whereas attainment of a degree once assured a job, conferral of a degree is no longer the differentiator it once was (Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2003; Burning Glass Technologies, 2014; Tomlinson, 2008). Increasingly employers are seeking graduates who have transferable skills, can adapt to change, and can provide evidence beyond the academic environment (Shah, Grebennikov, & Nair, 2015). To stand out in a competitive employment market, graduates must understand how to identify and articulate their capabilities, and be able to provide evidence of achievement that differentiates them from other graduates (Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, & Watts, 2000; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

Most universities articulate the broad categories of generic attributes or capabilities that their graduates should acquire over the duration of their degree (Oliver, 2011; Su, 2014), and processes for embedding these into the curriculum have improved. For example, coordinated degree-wide approaches for enhancing curriculum have become more common and often focus on the development of generic attributes (Bath, Smith, Stein, & Swann, 2004; Oliver, 2013, 2015; Spencer, Riddle, & Knewstubb, 2012). However, universities often fail to effectively communicate the intention of that curriculum to students or to engage them in their own conscious skills development (Jorre de St Jorre & Oliver, 2017). Furthermore, universities commonly assess students on the same tasks, against the same criteria: so assessment

neither celebrates individuality nor provides students with opportunities to differentiate themselves from other graduates.

Effective strategies for prompting student engagement with employability are needed, and should be informed by the experience of students themselves. In this paper we share preliminary insights from student perceptions of a strategy, *Me in a Minute*, designed to develop and showcase personal graduate employability.

The strategy: Me in a Minute

Me in a Minute is a video strategy developed at Deakin University to emphasise graduate employability to students and employers. Students are provided with support to produce a one-minute video pitching their knowledge, capabilities and experience to prospective employers. The video strategy is offered to all students across the university, regardless of discipline or course. In their video, students select three of Deakin's eight graduate learning outcomes to focus on and must provide evidence of their achievement. Deakin's graduate learning outcomes are described as follows:

1. Discipline-specific knowledge and capabilities: demonstrating systematic understanding of their discipline or profession, relative to the level of study.
2. Communication: using oral, written and interpersonal communication to inform, motivate and effect change



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3. Digital literacy: using technologies to find, use and disseminate information
4. Critical thinking: evaluating information using critical and analytical thinking and judgment
5. Problem solving: creating solutions to authentic, real world and ill-defined problems
6. Self-management: working and learning independently, and taking responsibility for personal actions
7. Teamwork: working and learning with others from different disciplines and backgrounds
8. Global citizenship: engaging ethically and productively in the professional context and with diverse communities and cultures in a global context.

The video was initially offered as an extra-curricular opportunity, and creative and digital arts students were employed to assist their peers in the production of the videos. More recently, the activity has also been embedded in assessment. To support adoption at scale, resources have been developed to assist students to produce their own videos. Participants are encouraged to disseminate their video through digital networks such as LinkedIn and digital resumes, to market themselves to prospective employers. To facilitate this, videos are uploaded to the Me in a Minute YouTube channel and the final screen of each video closes with 'Connect with [Student name] on LinkedIn'. In addition to giving graduates an opportunity to promote themselves to employers, it was hoped that the initiative would promote Deakin's graduate learning outcomes, and encourage students to reflect on those capabilities and how to articulate and evidence their employability. Me in a Minute is one of a suite of strategies developed at Deakin University to enhance graduate employability through engaging students with the graduate learning outcomes described above.

Data collection

To understand how students were sharing the videos, we investigated the LinkedIn profiles of all 114 students who had participated in Me in a Minute strategy at the time of data collection, recording whether they had a profile and if the video appeared on it. We then used semi-structured interviews to explore the experience of thirteen students who had filmed a Me in a Minute, making sure to include participants who were and were not sharing their video through LinkedIn. Student responses were recorded and subject to qualitative analysis to identify commonly recurring themes (Miles et al., 2014).

Interviewed students had all used the initial fully-supported production service (i.e., had access to videographers and editing). Of those interviewed, eight (62%) were sharing the video through their LinkedIn profile at the time of the interview, four were not and one

did not have a LinkedIn profile at all. Eleven of the interview participants had graduated from the course they were enrolled in when they filmed the video: eight of these were employed, two were enrolled in further study, and one was unemployed. The other two participants were still studying the same course as when they filmed the video. Participants had been enrolled in a wide range of postgraduate and undergraduate courses and included domestic and international students when they filmed their video. The disciplines represented included: education, commerce, accounting, finance, financial planning, international studies, media and communications, health, human nutrition, and science.

This research was carried out in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007) and was approved by the Deakin Faculty of Arts & Education Human Ethics Advisory Group (HAE-15-158).

Preliminary findings

At the time of data collection, 87% of 114 students who participated in Me in a Minute had a LinkedIn profile, but only 43% had shared their Me in a Minute on LinkedIn. However, interview participants were overwhelmingly positive about the video strategy. Of course, we acknowledge that students who participate in research of this kind are more likely to participate if they have an extremely positive or negative experience to share. For this reason, we ensured that we spoke to students who were and were not sharing the video at the time of data collection. Interestingly, students who were not sharing the video still spoke highly of the experience. These students reported they had either removed the video from their profile because it did not reflect their more recent experience, or had never shared it because they were not actively seeking work or engaging with LinkedIn as a professional platform.

Here we share two themes that emerged from preliminary analysis of the interview data:

1. Students value short videos as a medium for promoting their employability
2. The process of pitching was more valuable than the video itself

The video as an artefact

Participants thought that the use of a short video was an effective strategy for promoting their employability and most indicated that they, had, would or should, create another video. Participants thought the video was a good way to showcase relevant experiences such as study tours, internships and volunteer work, and to make a more personal connection with employers than could be achieved on paper:

You're just a piece of paper and a name, so being able to click on the Me in a Minute link, if they choose to do so, they see just a minute of you talking and you get that ultimate or immediate kind of personal connection.

However, few were able to actually report on reactions from potential employers, and the influence of the videos on strengthening professional networks was not clear or prominent. Reported reactions to the video were predominantly in the form of comments from friends and family. Some participants had not applied for any employment opportunities yet, and others admitted that they were unable to differentiate between the impact of a range of strategies they had used to promote their employability. However, where feedback was provided, the videos had been perceived as a novel and effective strategy for self-promotion:

I've definitely had a lot of attention drawn to the video, because yeah, employers have just been like, "Oh, no we've never seen that before, it's a really good idea."

The process of pitching

Participants reported finding more value in the process of creating the video than in the use of the video itself. Students explained that the exercise of recording the video had provided a valuable opportunity for them to reflect on their experiences, skills and capabilities, and had helped them learn how to articulate these clearly and succinctly.

I'm quite a confident speaker, but there's a lot of people who aren't, and I think if it puts them in the deep end to make them reflect on, "Wait, am I actually employable? What do I actually offer an employer? What are the gaps I need to fill between now and when I graduate?" Because a lot of people just don't think about these things... So I think Me in a Minute makes people reflect and think about okay, this is actually me, this is what I'm selling, this is what employers are going to buy, in theory.

Students also reported having gained confidence – in themselves, their employability and in their ability to articulate themselves to employers.

I found it a great mechanism just for building up my own self-worth and allowing me to look at myself from an external perspective.

I would say it gave me more of a confidence boost to be honest. Because I realised wow, I'm more than just some other graduate, when you just highlight my best areas... I did tick all the boxes of what graduate employers wanted.

Numerous students felt that the strategy helped them to prepare for interviews and improved their understanding of how to articulate their skills and capabilities to prospective employers. For example, one student spoke about Me in a Minute having improved his "career game face". Another student referred to nervousness associated with public speaking and the benefits of employers being able to see him communicate in a setting in which he was less nervous than in an interview setting.

Discussion

Preliminary analysis of student and graduate perceptions suggest that the video strategy described provides much more than just an artefact for promoting employability. Perhaps more importantly, the video strategy engages students in reflection on their achievements relevant to employment, and appropriate language for articulating evidence to employers. The strategy offers a simple, adaptable vehicle that can be personalized for each student. The product is portable and can be readily replaced to incorporate subsequent learning and experience.

A shortcoming of the initial introduction of the strategy is that, like all extra-curricular initiatives, it was most likely to attract students who are already proactive in seeking opportunities. We suggest that all students need to be engaged in learning related to skills and career development. However, in other research we have shown that even students who want more guidance on course and employer expectations often do not seek it out (Jorre de St Jorre & Oliver, 2017). In reality, only a small proportion of students access career services provided outside the curriculum, and students who need these services most are least likely to seek them out (Doyle, 2011).

For this reason, Deakin has started to embed the video strategy into the taught curriculum as an assessment task. Adoption in a large, first year commerce unit is designed to develop self-reflection and orient students to career education from the outset of their degree. It is yet to be seen if the strategy is perceived as positively and effectively by students who are required to participate, or whether these students continue to produce videos to document their achievements as they approach graduation.

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