

Community Knowledge Exchange

Acknowledging and Mitigating Alternate Employment Value Structures in Industry



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Higher Education Providers (HEPs) are focused more on graduate outcomes than ever before, highlighting an urgent need to understand the diversity of hiring and work practices within and across industries. Disconnects can exist between the ideals of HE and the realities of industry when it comes to the value structures underpinning the norms and conventions of recruitment and hiring. HEPs that do not research, investigate and understand these alternate value structures place graduates from under-represented demographics at a disadvantage compared to graduates who benefit from a-priori knowledge or who fit the traditional employee mould in certain fields. Here I offer a model for mitigating the impact of alternate value structures and maximising graduate outcomes.

The Importance of Collaborative Research

There are well defined career pathways in certain industries such as primary and secondary education or the NHS and many larger companies have graduate recruitment schemes, but the graduate journey into many industries is highly variable. Collaborative research between academics and practitioners is needed to build a more complete view of the hiring and work practices of industry via dialogue with diverse employers. Research should aim to understand the norms and conventions associated with recruitment within a field, what employers seek from graduates and any socio-economic barriers to entry.

Model vs Reality

Researchers should attempt to build a “model” career pathway within fields in which employment occurs under ideal circumstances for example; employers conduct blind hiring practices, standardisation occurs, mitigations for bias exist, etc.

This “model” should subsequently be compared to the “reality” within the field, informed by the discursive research previously discussed. Investigation into divergences between the two models can then inform effective teaching and student support methodologies.

Problematic Value Structures

Problematic Value Structures (PVS) may take many forms. Examples include a prevalence of low/unpaid internships in a field, a requirement to work in geographical areas with a high level of financial inequality such as London, a reliance on social contacts for employment opportunities or a need to participate in certain social norms and conventions in order to “fit in”. This is a highly complex area to legislate or develop policy, so researchers should attempt to identify PVS where they exist in their respective fields in order to develop mitigations.





Pedagogy to Attenuate the Student Impact of Problematic Value Structures

As PVS are overwhelmingly social in nature, soft-skills training should be at the forefront of methods to combat any barriers or disadvantage students and graduates may experience; Assessed placements, integrated assessment, employer engagement in the classroom and assessment, live briefs, group work and/or industry are all methods which help to attenuate PVS.

Students from diverse backgrounds achieving employment within their fields increase interchange between HE and Industry that over time may reverse problematic value structures organically rather than via policy.

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