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A SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE AND HOLISTIC MODEL FOR THOSE TARGETED BY WELFARE REFORM

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Abstract

Title: A Socially Inclusive and Holistic Model for those targeted by welfare reform

Keywords: welfare reform, unemployment, social inclusion, career transitions, mixed methods, labour market programs

Category of paper: Research paper

Purpose of the research/paper: The purpose of this research was to develop a socially inclusive and holistic model for career and learning transition for those considered disadvantaged within the labour market and/or disengaged from formal learning.

Methodology: The research utilises a sequential mixed model research design which consists of two phases. Phase one of the research involved a Learning Survey of approximately 250 labour market program (LMP) participants in which quantitative data analysis techniques were used. Phase two involved the development of the model and its testing in the field. A formative evaluation of the model in the field was undertaken and utilised a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis.

Findings: The research developed a socially inclusive and holistic model for those targeted by welfare reform. The model has wider applications and could be tested in the future with those groups experiencing retrenchment, outplacement, post injury rehabilitation, re-skilling and major career and employment changes.

Implications for theory: The research design provides an example of the utilisation of a mixed methods research design and presents a model with an interdisciplinary theoretical framework.

I**mplications for practice:** The research is significant in terms of recent Australian welfare reform where specific groups of welfare recipients are being targeted to enter/re-enter the paid workforce. The research resulted in the development of a socially inclusive and holistic model designed to assist in the developmental processes associated with building the individual efficacy and capacity needed to navigate the welfare to work transitions expected of these target groups.

Value of the paper: The research informs welfare reform policy and practice and would be valuable to organisations and practitioners involved in the delivery of Labour Market Programs. The paper may also be of value to HRM practitioners involved in the human resource management functions related to redundancy, outplacement, rehabilitation and re-skilling. The paper also provides researchers with an example of a mixed methods research study.

Number of pages: 15

Number of tables/figures: 2 figures

Section headings: Introduction; Welfare to Work; Methodology; Theoretical underpinnings of the model; Career and learning transitional model; Conclusions and summary.

A SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE AND HOLISTIC MODEL FOR THOSE TARGETED BY WELFARE REFORM

Introduction

During 2006 two significant policy reforms were introduced in Australia after being passed through parliament in December 2005. The *Workplace Relations Amendment (WorkChoices) Act 2005* and the *Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and Other Measures*) *Act 2005*. Workchoices was aimed at major workplace and industrial relations reform whilst the Welfare to Work package is focused on assisting certain designated welfare recipients move from welfare dependency to paid employment. These two pieces of legislation have had a major impact on those considered most vulnerable in the labour market. Some argue that the combination of the Welfare to Work and WorkChoices legislation has compounded the vulnerability of those most disadvantaged in the labour market (Hartman & Darab 2006; Masterman-Smith & Chalmers 2006). The focus of this paper will be the welfare reforms and in particular more appropriate approaches to assisting those disadvantaged in the labour market navigate welfare to work transitions. As has been pointed out by Smith (2006, p. 1), 'There is a broad consensus that paid employment is the best way out of poverty…What is in dispute is the best approach to getting disadvantaged people into work'.

It must be noted here that the industrial relations landscape in Australia has been very dynamic in the past two years. WorkChoices was introduced in 2006 but with the recent change in government, this legislation has now been surpassed by the *Workplace Relations Amendment (Transition to Forward with Fairness) Act* of 2008. The new federal government is currently looking at the Welfare to Work reforms and at the time of writing, aspects of these reforms were under review. On the 13 May, 2008 the Minister for Education; Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations; and Minister for Social Inclusion, Julia Gillard issued a joint media release with senator Ursula Stephens, Parliamentary Secretary for Social inclusion and the Voluntary Sector. This media release announced the Governments Social Inclusion Agenda and 2008-09 Budget measures to advance the agenda. This included '$3.7 billion for a reformed employment services sector system focused on providing enhanced support to unemployed people, particularly those with real barriers' (Gillard & Spehens, 2008). What will follow is a discussion of the rationale and rhetoric behind the welfare reform policy initiatives and a critique of the approaches embedded in them. This paper offers an alternate, more inclusive and holistic approach to assist those transition from welfare into paid employment.

Welfare to Work

In 2005 the Australian government introduced welfare reform. The legislation was passed in December 2005, and the subsequent reforms introduced in July 2006:

> The Welfare to Work package is a $3.6 billion Australian Government initiative, designed to support and assist, those people that can, move off welfare and into work.
>
> With a balance of support through improved services, increased financial incentives and some new obligation requirements, the Welfare to Work package includes new eligibility rules for income support payments, more places in employment services, changes to participation rules and a new compliance system (Centrelink 2007).

Those targeted are people with a disability, parents and principal carers of a child or children whose youngest is aged 6-15 years, the long term unemployed, and mature-aged jobseekers. Although the focus for each of these groups is customised, the overall aim in general is to encourage part time or

full time paid work with varying degrees of assistance and with clients participating in activities and services designed to help them find a job (Centrelink 2007).

Guenther, Falk, Arnott, Borgelt, Tyrrel, Churchill, Black and Gunn (2007) view the rationale behind the Welfare to Work reforms as fourfold. The first rationale is the changing demographics associated with an ageing population and the fiscal and economic impact of this in relation to skills and employment. The second being the perception that a significant number of those classified as long-term unemployed, are non 'genuine'. The third rationale is the unsustainable long term increases in the number of recipients receiving the Parenting Payment and Disability Support Pension. Lastly, the substantial and sustained skill shortages being experienced in many occupations is the fourth rationale. Bolton, Landells and Esposto (2006) assert that the Australian Government's labour market and welfare reforms favour two policy approaches. This is epitomised by an increase in workforce participation through labour market deregulation coupled with tough welfare reform. Hartman and Darab (2006) argue that this approach is embodied in the two pieces of legislation: WorkChoices and Welfare to Work. They see these as forming a policy suite designed to 'relegate those with an inability to participate in the formal labour market to the status of long-term unemployed (with its attendant indignity and poverty), while those deemed able to participate will endure working poverty' (Hartman & Darab 2006, p. 1).

Bolton et al. (2006) view the Australian Welfare to Work reforms as aimed at increasing the supply of labour and the demand for labour. They see the reforms as being consistent with OECD advocated, active labour market policies that target particular groups disadvantaged through labour market polarisation. 'However, by focusing on demographically based characteristics of disadvantage, e.g. persons over 50, indigenous Australians, parents, youth, etc., the policies do not give adequate attention to the nature of disadvantage that being low-skilled commonly confers across disadvantaged groups' (Bolton et al. 2006, p. 3). Smith (2006) agrees and identifies several limitations to such an approach. These include the actual effectiveness of such programs, the psychological, social and economic impact of the compliance system, structural barriers in the labour market and the non suitability of such an approach for the very long term unemployed.

The Welfare to Work reforms are focused on five main elements: payments; obligations; compliance; services and assisting employers (Hartman & Darab 2006). Guenther et al. (2007, p. 3) sees a tension in the rhetoric that on one hand claims to provide 'greater assistance' but on the other includes discussions on 'obligations' and 'compliance'. The Welfare to Work package is said to be a 'work first' approach whose broad thrust is to move targeted welfare recipients off government funded income support into paid work as quickly as possible (Smith 2006). As a result of this there is a tendency for employment services to be rewarded for placement outcomes and not sustainable employment outcomes (Bolton et al. 2006). These reform initiatives do not 'recognise adequately the development needs of participants in environments characterised by 'job churn' and demand for labour market flexibility (Bolton et al. 2006, p. 1). In an address to a conference held in Melbourne in September 2007, Tony Nicholson, the Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence called for a new employment services based on social inclusion and human capital development instead of the outdated 'Work First ' approach. 'This means that instead of concentrating on getting people into existing vacancies (no matter how unsatisfactory and short-term the work may be) through job search programs backed up by quick-fix incentives and sanctions-it should aim to improve people's long-term employability through improved education, skills, health and personal development' (Nicholson 2007, p. 7).

Dean (2006) has analysed the historical context of welfare by tracing the evolving principles of welfare. He has developed a framework (heuristic taxonomy of welfare-to-work regimes) for linking different kinds of welfare-to-work regimes with competing discourses of responsibility. Dean (2006, p.1) states: 'the foundations of 'mature' welfare states in 'developed' capitalist countries, especially (but by no means exclusively) in the English speaking world, are changing'. This is seen as a result of economic imperatives related to globalisation but also to 'shifting political orthodoxies and moral assumptions' (Dean 2006, p. 16). Dean concludes that we are now in a 'workfare state era' where

social policy and welfare are characterised by responsibilisation: 'individuals are inculcated to an ethic of self responsibility and assisted to maximise their personal human capital' (Dean 2006, p. 16).

Bolton et al. (2006) and Smith (2006) offer alternate approaches to this. Bolton et al. (2006) advocate for a Business Services model approach:

> …policy makers need to consider alternative models for creating sustainable opportunities for low-skilled workers that optimise the possibilities of effective transitioning. One model for consideration is that of a dual focussed business model with the role of employment creation and support for low-skilled labour, and that of commercial sustainability through innovative partnerships with relevant industry partners. Some of these practices are exemplified in the Government's Business Services model. These organisations have the potential to create new forms of public/private/not-for-profit partnerships blending social and commercial agendas within organisations and between organisations. In Business Services there are already developments of this ilk that are worth policy research (Bolton et al. 2006, pp. 16-17).

Smith (2006, p. 2) suggests the alternate approaches of 'human capital development' and 'life first' that include the following elements: not accepting any job, but rather employment that earns a reasonable amount above the minimum wage and offers strong opportunities for progression and ongoing employment; training and skill development and opportunities for work experience; and assistance to deal with non-vocational barriers to finding employment.

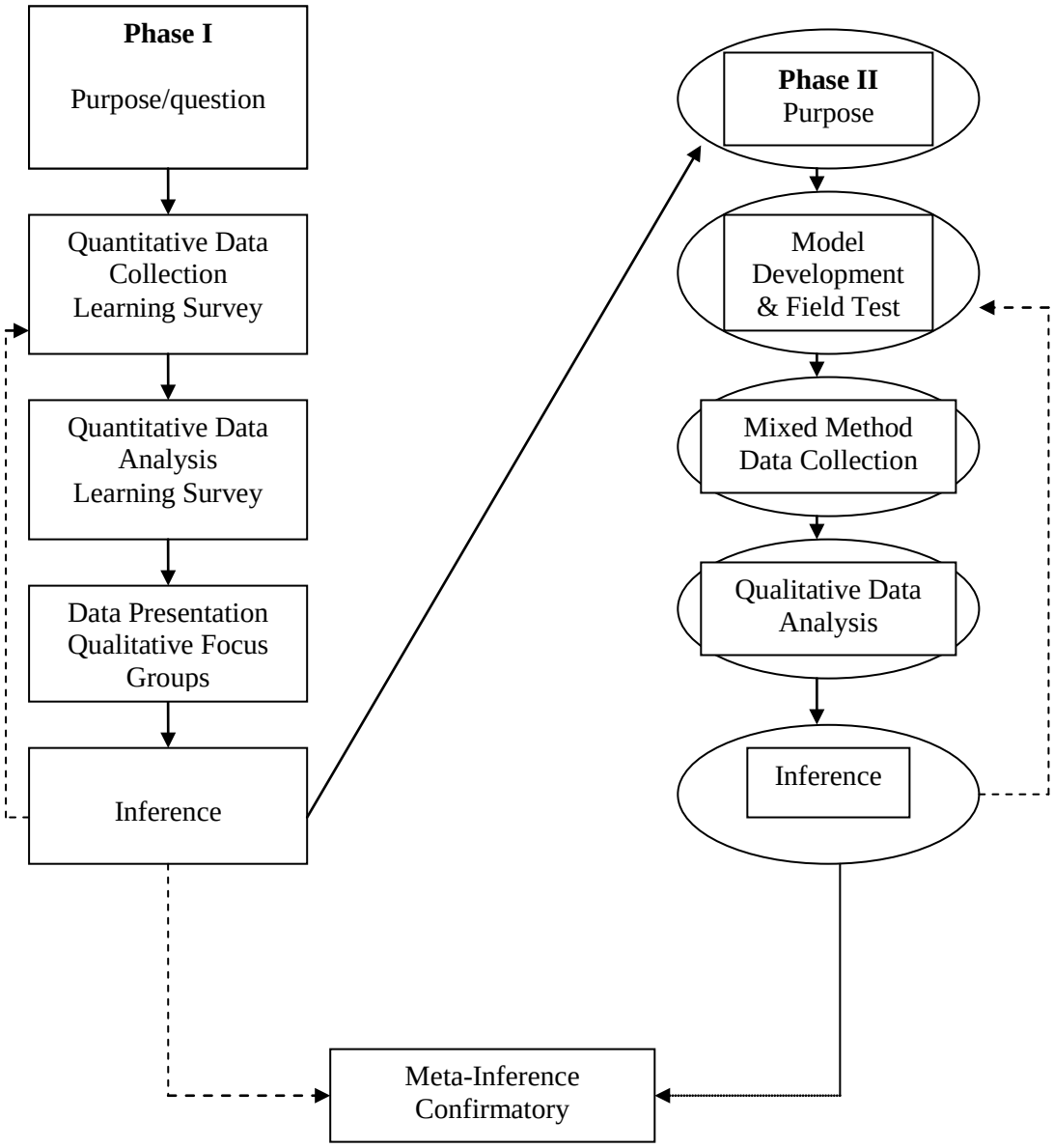
The purpose of this research was to develop a socially inclusive and holistic model for career and learning transition for those considered disadvantaged within the labour market and/or disengaged from formal learning. Research has shown disadvantaged groups continue to be excluded and marginalised from post-compulsory formal learning systems (McGivney 1993; Watson, Kearns, Grant & Cameron 2000; Bowman 2004). The research has direct implications for welfare reform practice and related social policy and the fields of adult education and training and human resource development. The study also highlights the potential for future research in the area of career transitions framed by a balance between a lifelong learning agenda and a transitional labour market policy framework. The conceptual framework developed from the research will not be addressed here in its entirety as this goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, the model for career and learning transitions will be described in terms of its structure and theoretical underpinnings.

Methodology

The research focused on the learning experiences of those disadvantaged in the labour market and was essentially a qualitative exploratory study. The research design was based on a sequential mixed model which has two phases. In Phase I of the research a quantitative Learning Survey and qualitative focus groups were conducted. The Learning Survey was administered to approximately 250 labour market program participants on various programs in south east Queensland and northern New South Wales and was followed by a seminar which presented preliminary data to representatives of the participating organisations. During this seminar focus groups were conducted. Phase I of the research resulted in the development of a model to assist those in career and learning transitions. Phase II of the research encompassed the development and formative evaluation of the model in the field and utilised a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. This research process was non linear and emergent which enabled the most appropriate method for progressing the research to be chosen.

The sequential mixed model design utilised in the research is adapted from Tashakkori and Teddlies' (2003) typology of multistrand mixed method research. Figure 1 represents the application of this design to the research described in this case study.

Figure 1: Sequential Mixed Method Design



Source: Adapted from Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003, p. 688)

The mixed model design allows for the research questions for the second strand (phase) of research to emerge from the inferences of the first strand (phase) (Tashakkori &Teddlie 2003, p. 687). The first strand is usually exploratory and data collection, analysis and inferences are in one approach, as was the case with the Learning Survey in Phase I of the research which took a quantitative approach. The second strand (phase) is often confirmatory and the new data, its analysis and inferences are in the other approach, as was the case with the qualitative approach undertaken in the model development, its testing in the field and formative evaluation in Phase II of this research. The resulting final meta-inferences are made as either confirmatory or disconfirmatory of the inferences made at the end of the two strands (phases) (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003, p. 688).

In the case of this research the meta-inferences where confirmatory and resulted in a conceptual framework that consists of a continuum of models of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), a hierarchy of recognition and a model to assist those in career and learning transitions. The continuum evolved

from the literature review whilst the hierarchy of recognition and the model were developed from the expanded literature review in Phase II and the research conducted in Phase I. The RPL continuum and hierarchy of recognition will not be addressed here as this goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, the model for career and learning transitions will be described in terms of its structure and theoretical underpinnings.

A major aim of the research in both phases was to access a sample not engaged in some form of formal learning within existing institutions of formal education, along with being disadvantaged within the labour market. Accessing participants on LMPs is an efficient means through which to capture such a demographic, as these demographic characteristics are highly likely among LMP participants due to the purpose and nature of LMPs and the correlation between the incidence of unemployment and lower levels of educational attainment.

The model was developed in Phase II of the study and involved incorporating the findings from the expanded literature review undertaken in that Phase and synthesised with the literature review from Phase I. In developing the model an interdisciplinary approach has been undertaken as advocated by Fenwick (2004). The developed model sits within a policy context that acknowledges the nature and frequency of major life transitions, particularly for those disadvantaged within the labour market and/or disengaged from formal learning.

On completion of the model development, a pilot of the model was undertaken. This involved purposeful sampling (Neuman 2006). A community-based program that received state funding to conduct LMPs was chosen for the model field test. Knowledge of the organisation came from previous research activity involving the researcher (Cameron 2004) which could also be said to be a form of snowball sampling (Neuman 2006). A collaborative arrangement was undertaken whereby the developed Model would be incorporated into a new LMP the organisation had been contracted to conduct through the Queensland Department of Employment & Training (Qld DET) under the *Breaking the Unemployment Cycle* funding program. The LMP was titled the *Mature Aged Pathways Program (MAPP),* and was aimed at eligible participants aged 45 years and over. The participants in this particular LMP involved in the field test of the model consisted of 19 women all wishing to re-enter the paid workforce after considerable time dedicated to domestic and caring roles.

Theoretical underpinnings of the model

Key findings from the literature review points to a need for lifelong learning pedagogies that focus on learners current needs and circumstances, the importance of relevancy, viewing learners from a holistic viewpoint, investigating past learning trajectories and current and possible 'learner identities'. Issues surrounding transitions and self-concept were crucial in informing the approaches, which would best suit and serve the needs of disadvantaged and disengaged learners.

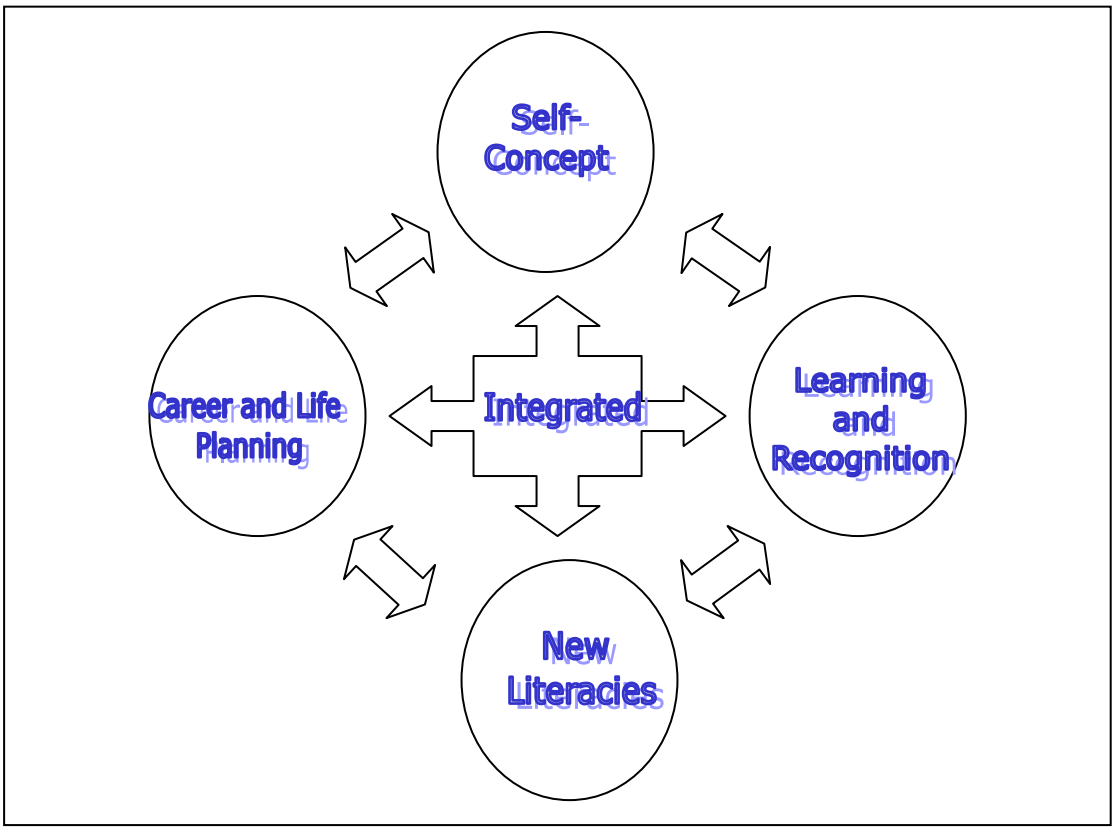
The developed model is framed by a number of adult learning theories and approaches that include humanist models of adult learning. These include transformative learning (Mezirow 1991); reflective and experiential models of learning (Kolb 1984); approaches focused on learner autonomy (Boud 1989); community-based informal learning (Brookfield 1983; McGivney 1990); and self-direction as a strategy for lifelong learning (Candy 1991; Rossi 2002). The model takes a combination of pedagogic approaches which are relatively newly developed and in a lot of respects untested. The approach of 'biographicity' (Alheit 1992) and transitional learning (Stroobants, Jams & Wildemeersch 2001; Glastra, Hake, & Schedler 2004) form the basis of the pedagogic approach along with transformational learning. The policy framework which the model is framed by is also a newly developed theoretical framework, that of Transitional Labour Market theory (TLM) (Schmid 2002, 2006). The scope of this paper does not allow for a full explanation of these pedagogies and policy framework.

Career and learning transitional model

The model views the learner and the concept of recognition in a holistic and integrated way. The learner is viewed from many perspectives and contexts, in which they interact and participate in life. These include as individuals, family members, members of communities and societies, and participants within economies. Individuals are encouraged to view themselves on many levels. The learner is also viewed from a personal, intrapersonal and interpersonal level; at a cultural level, and within historical, social and economic contexts.

The model has four integrated components: self-concept; learning and recognition; career and life planning; and new literacies. These four components are visually represented below in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The career and learning transitional model



Source: Developed for the research

The role of the facilitator/s or learning mentor is very important in this model. This is a very valuable role within the model, as the facilitator or learning mentor needs to establish explorative and formative learning relationships (Fowler & Mayes 1999) with the learners, and needs to utilise a variety of experiential learning methods to engage the learners in the four integrated components of the model. The facilitator or learning mentor allows for content negotiation with the learners, fosters critical reflection, self-direction and learner autonomy. The facilitator or learning mentor role is also one, that assists learners to explore the social, political and historical contexts associated with their self-concept and identity; past learning trajectories (Gorard, Rees, Fevre & Furlong 1997; Gorard & Rees 2002); aspects of their learner identity (Crossan, Field, Gallacher & Merrill 2003; Johnston &

Merrill, 2005) and learning careers; (Merrill, Field, Gallacher & Crossan 2001; Gallacher, Crossan & Field. 2002; Crossan et al. 2003); and the nature of their current transitional position and the risks associated with that position. A brief description of the four components will now be provided.

Self-concept component

The self-concept component of the new model is crucial. The issues surrounding aspects of the self-concept must be dealt with in this orientation phase before any development or progress can be made in the other areas. This component draws upon theoretical approaches that include theories of self and identity and social cognitive theory (Markus & Nurius 1986; Branden 1994; Dweck 1999; Mruk, 1999; Alexander 2001). Key concepts addressed include self-esteem, self-confidence and self-knowledge, and development. Techniques used include an array of reflective narrative tools that include biography and storytelling. A variety of personal development planning strategies and techniques are also present within this component.

Learning and recognition component

The learning and recognition component looks at the different types and sites of learning (non-formal, informal & formal). The language, systems and discourses of formal learning systems are addressed, as is a suite of 'Learn 2' skills. These 'Learn 2' skills include metacognitive skills such as 'learning to learn' and 'learning to be assessed', as well as 'learning to be recognised' skills. Central to the latter is the concept of self-recognition, which is the first phase of a three phase developmental approach to recognition (Cameron 2004). This was further developed into three levels of recognition, and was combined with Randall's (1998) framework for restorying. It is within this component that the learners begin to develop portfolios. Learners will be encouraged to explore innovative and non-paper based ways to present the knowledge and skills they have acquired through all three types and sites of learning, and the interconnectedness between them.

Career and life planning component

The third component, career and life planning, involves aspects of career guidance and development theories. Key concepts within this component are learning careers and trajectories and learner identities; the concept of possible selves (Cross and Markus 1991; Rossiter, 2003); and life course patterns (Merriam & Clark 1991). Career development theories are also utilised and drawn upon within this component (Jarvis 2003; Beddie, Lorey & Pamphilon 2005; Patton, 2005). Exploration of these concepts results in comprehensive career and life plans complementary to the development of the portfolio.

New literacies component

The last component, new literacies, is based on research involving the 'new world of work' (Falk 2002; Falk & Guenther 2002), the concept of the 'digital divide' and contemporary research into conceptions of literacy for the new millennium (Lonsdale & McCurry 2004). Learners are exposed to macro-level concepts associated with the 'old' and 'new' economies. This includes a 'socio-cultural' approach to literacy that values less dominant literacies, and views literacy practice as contextualised and multiple. Learners develop research and information literacy skills for the new knowledge economy. Depending on access to resources, available time and existing information literacy skills, the learners develop e-portfolios.

The career and learning transition model provides participants with contact to varied content, interactions and learning spaces to explore their own self concept and identity. The model exposes participants to the language and discourse of formal learning systems and work based competencies. It provides exploration of metacognitive skills and skills in learning to be assessed and recognised, and provides opportunities to plan for future careers and learning activities. The model values all forms of learning (formal, informal and work based), and therefore has greater relevance to those in transition and/or those disengaged from learning. The model is a developmental model based within the wider objectives of lifelong learning and consequently has greater applications and uses. The model offers a more socially inclusive approach to assisting those disadvantaged in the labour market navigate major transitions

Conclusions and summary

This research has implications for welfare reform policy and practice. The research can also inform policy and practice in certain functional areas of human resource management and development. These include retrenchment, outplacement, employee assistance programmes, rehabilitation, re-skilling, career development, skills audits, training needs analysis and competency profiling.

The career and learning transition model proposed by the research study was originally designed for a field test to meet the needs of those experiencing unemployment and transitions associated with re-entering the paid workforce after long periods of childrearing/caring, and for those experiencing unemployment and under-employment. This includes the long-term unemployed, mature-age jobseekers and those disadvantaged within the labour market. During the model's development and field test during Phase II of the research, it became clear that the model had much wider applications than its original intent. Initially, the model was designed with community-based providers of labour market programmes in mind. However, further development of the model and its multiple uses encouraged an expansion of thinking in terms of its wider applications. The fact the model is framed within the broader objectives of lifelong learning also assisted with this line of thinking. It was concluded that the model could be useful for the following groups and contexts:

- Existing workers in precarious employment
- Manual workers in 'old economy' employment
- Workers experiencing retrenchment and redundancy
- Equity group members and groups considered economically vulnerable
- Groups highly disadvantaged within the labour market: long-term unemployed, mature-age jobseekers, early school leavers, and those wishing to re-enter the paid workforce
- Ex offenders re-entering after a period of incarceration
- People facing major life transitions and/or multiple transitions due to major life incidents related to health, injury, divorce and dislocation

Practitioners and organisations that may be interested in the model's applications and uses could include:

- Employment services industry
- Career advisors
- Government rehabilitation services
- Human resource and development personnel
- Outplacement services
- Trade unions
- Government departments (and NGOs) with policy briefs that include: workforce participation, education, training and employment, industrial relations, rehabilitation, community and economic development and social inclusion

This research focused on the learning experiences of those disadvantaged in the labour market. The research was undertaken utilising a sequential mixed method design. As a result of the research, a model was developed that consists of four integrated components and draws upon a variety of academic disciplines. The model was tested in the field and found to be valid. The model is targeted to those in transition and is a highly suitable approach to enacting social inclusion and welfare reform initiatives that are not aimed at the quick placement outcome but focused more on the process of transitional pre-employment development and self efficacy.

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