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Understanding resilience in graduate careers: a systematic review and agenda for future research (0616)

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Within general discourse there is an emergence of the term resilience in relation to graduates generally and graduate careers more specifically. Within the press and practitioner literature graduate resilience is presented as being a key 'attribute' for a successful career, something that can and should be developed, however surveys of employers suggest that they perceive graduates as 'lacking' in resilience when they enter employment (CBI, 2017). Despite its prevalence, the concept has received limited critical attention in the context of graduate careers and Higher Education. Although researchers have begun to examine the notion of resilience in careers generally (Lyons et al., 2015) and graduate resilience more specifically (Morgan, 2016), we maintain that as an analytical concept its application is quite broad, therefore dulling the precision that such a concept can offer empirical research.

In this paper we systematically review the literature to examine how graduate resilience is understood within the various arenas associated with graduate employment at both a macro level – including HEIs, social policy and graduate employers – and a micro level – students, graduates, higher education staff and careers practitioners. It is argued that this form of literature review provides a rigorous means for making sense of what existing bodies of work are saying about a particular issue and identifying avenues for further research (Tranfield et al., 2003). In line with the systematic review method we developed a clear review strategy and protocol that outlined keyword searches, databases to be searched and criteria for inclusion and exclusion of work (cf. Scurry and Blenkinsopp, 2011). To capture the wide-ranging multi-disciplinary perspectives of graduate resilience, we conducted an extensive search of the various literatures using a number of bibliographic databases (Web of Science, SCOPUS, EBSCO, JSTOR, ProQuest). Given the attention that resilience receives in practitioner and policy making communities, we also conducted searches on Google and Google Scholar to engage with a wide range of published material from a range of sources. This has the advantage of identifying grey literature for review (literature produced by a range of groups including government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers). Whilst some systematic reviews have excluded certain types of documents on the basis of their form (for example books and reports), or where they were published (for example using certain journal ranking lists), our protocol does not do this given the varied publishing conventions of the different disciplines and communities that explore graduate resilience and related issues.

We address the following research questions:

- How has "graduate resilience" been presented in policy and grey and academic literature?
- What does existing work tell us about the development of graduate resilience?

- Can a critical/theoretical framework be developed to provide the starting point for future research?

In doing so we seek to facilitate coherence in the direction of future research and the application of knowledge to practice and policy making. Similar to Payne's (2012) arguments, examining the significant issues which can arise from multiple interpretations of theoretically informed concepts which also present themselves in lay discourse, we contend that a clearer operationalization of "graduate resilience" is required to inform future research and ensure that there is continuity in research. Of particular significance will be the contrast between policy/grey literature and academic literature in examining how resilience is operationalised and then championed and/or critiqued.

References

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