TRANSITION: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN STUDY AND WORK


ABSTRACT
This paper focuses on the transitional period between and overlapping university study and a graduate’s entry into the professional workforce. Important distinctions in the way transition is conceptualised here and how it may be applied in other contexts or described in other sources include that it (a) is dynamic and variable, (b) encompasses university and workplace learning as well as any interval that may occur between them, (c) addresses specifically the learning tasks of transition in terms of the individual, and (d) presents opportunities for universities and employing organisations to work together to more directly influence learning during transition. The greatest departure in and contribution of this paper is the expanded role for universities in workplace learning, at least through the mechanism of transition. The paper provides guidance on establishing productive collaborations between university and organisation, with specifics on stakeholder roles and relationships and mechanisms to structure and support learning during transition. It contrasts academic with workplace learning, and presents a brief discussion of the implications of differences—or the gap between university study and workplace learning—with respect to the graduate / new recruit, the university, and the employing organisation. While these differences have been identified in the literature, little has been done to use the differences to develop robust transition programs and improve associated curricula. Finally, the paper concludes with a set of recommendations for transition program enhancement and directions for further research.

Introduction
This paper contextualises Industry Engaged Learning\(^1\) as extended and on-going learning spanning the entirety of a student’s university study, including related learning activity that may occur prior and subsequent to formal years of study. This is represented by Figure 1, the potential university span of influence. The focus of the paper, however, is on the transition period between university study and the graduate’s career, specifically and most relevantly to his

\[\text{Potential University Span of Influence} \]
\[\text{Formal Years of Study} \]

\[T\]

Figure 1. Proposed university span of influence showing transition (T), a period overlapping final year of study and covering induction into the professional workforce.

\(^1\) Industry Engaged Learning is the encompassing term for cooperative education, work integrated learning, and other programs, units, and experiences that involve active student engagement in the workplace or community, where learning from the engagement is emphasised. To be IEL, the engagement must meet stipulated criteria as outlined in Clements and Hays (2011 and 2012).
or her first professional employment and its associated learning.

The term “between”, however, is misleading, as the lines between formal study and full-time work in our conceptualisation are intentionally blurred. The transition period, as suggested by area T encompassed by the dotted-line, reaches into at least later parts of a student’s final year of study and extends into at least his or her induction period on the job. As we will discuss, the greater the reach in both directions, the more potent the transition period and learning that occurs during it, and the greater the role of the university in preparing graduates for fulfilling careers, meaningful contribution to society, and lifelong learning. This implies, and in fact hinges upon, the university taking a larger role in workplace professional development and forging continuing and mutually-beneficial relationships with industry and community partners.

Savage et al (2009) are amongst proponents of more effective relationships between university and industry. Citing their own research, they note:

…findings highlight the importance of establishing stronger links between academia and practice to ensure … graduates have the necessary technical and social skills to productively engage and contribute to their discipline during the critical transition-to-work phase of their careers (p. 1).

They also cite research that concluded that it is key “to try to understand how university programs can better aid students in the transitions to the professional environment” (p. 3). This is relevant to this paper as we consider strategies for better structuring and supporting transition from student to professional employee and the learning that might take place during that transition. Our conceptualisation of an extended span of influence for universities also suggests a greater stewardship role for the university in working with schools and other institutions to attract and steer youth prior to university matriculation to better prepare them to get the most out of their formal education and early career experience. We foresee stretching influence in this pre-university direction of particular benefit to at-risk students, including those of lower socioeconomic status and marginalised indigenous populations. Taylor et al’s (2007) portrayal of

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2 While these aspirations may sound lofty, there is some agreement, implicit or explicit, that they are amongst university aims (see, for example, Liu and Nguyen (2011); Wood and Kaczynski (2007) talk about citizenship and present a specific case of a transition program designed to promote orientations toward community service).


4 Though not indicated by Figure 1, there is a transition period between high school and university, but exploring that transition is beyond scope of this paper. First-year programs generally attempt to ease transition into university and increase retention. At least one source reviewed for this paper touched upon first-year programs and their relationship to transition into university (Taylor et al, 2007).
the student’s learning journey as consisting of three major identities and their shifts from pre-enrolment, to tertiary student, and through to professional provides some justification for our conceptualisation presented here and for further research into the nature and implications of transition when considering the entire student experience.

Transition, as envisaged here, is an important and neglected area of attention for educators as well as those concerned with professional development in employing organisations. A major practical concern is the conclusive body of evidence revealing that university graduates are simply not prepared for today’s workplace or to assimilate quickly and begin immediately contributing to the organisation’s objectives (Frawley and Litchfield, 2009; Grealish and Trevitt, 2005; Hays, 2012; Raybould and Sheedy, 2005). Citing convincing studies and including their own findings, Wood and Kaczynski (2007) make a particularly strong case for graduates’ lack of work-readiness. They state categorically that:

Few university graduates are prepared for the realities of work, with even fewer displaying the skills necessary for success in gaining employment (p. 94).

In general, it can be said that (a) graduates themselves often report lacking important understanding about workplace culture and behaviour, not to mention feeling inadequate with respect to practical skills and (b) managers in employing organisations consistently rate new graduates as poorly equipped in terms of practical and interpersonal skills (see Wendlandt and Rochlen, 2008, for additional strong support of this assertion). Most specific deficiencies identified fall into the range of generic skills and desirable attributes (see Clements and Hays, 2012; Savage et al, 2009; or Wood and Kaczynski, 2007).

Much of the literature on transition focuses on employability, including job-seeking and winning skills as well as capabilities that are needed in and sought by employers. Thus, transition implies transition-to-work and graduates’ readiness for work,\(^5\) as opposed to, for example, more generalised life transitions or individual evolutionary growth and development. This emphasis neglects what takes place and the learning that can and may need to occur during transition. We

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\(^5\) See, as examples, Chiavacci (2005), Savage et al (2009), or Wang and Lowe (2011). A notable exception is Taylor et al (2007) who emphasise the identify aspects of transition. They do not use the term transformation, but imply that learners *transition* from identities and self-concepts as students to identities as emerging professional workers. Their sense of self changes as part of an on-going process (and they can regress as well as progress during this process). We introduce the term transformation here to acknowledge that transition often concerns significant change in an individual learner’s world view, sense of self, and being. Transition can be a part of the transformational learning process. More research is needed to explore the relationship and identify any significant distinctions between the two major concepts.
see transition as a significant gap between university study and professional career. Creating this gap is the fact that (a) universities—given they have transition programs—prepare students for transition but withdraw support once the student has graduated and (b) organisations essentially take over the transition process through induction once a graduate has been hired. This problem may be exacerbated by the graduate whose learning habits and skills may not transfer to or equip him or her for the learning tasks posed by transition.6

The period between study and career is understood as a hiatus and appears to be treated by both university and organisation as a no man’s land, with neither necessarily having the responsibility, resources, or mechanisms to work in the transition space. This “between” period may be negligible for fortunate graduates being hired prior to or coincident with graduating, or long and fraught for graduates who do not immediately find relevant, professional employment. In any event, it is not the actual time of the interval that is important but what happens within it. And, as explained previously, transition is not a neatly defined discrete period between study and work, but a variable area that overlaps and unifies them (at least potentially). As shown simply in Figure 2, the conceptual solution to addressing the gap (G) is by both universities and organisations converging into the transition space.

Figure 2. Conceptual diagram illustrating convergence into the study-work gap by university and employing organisation.

Converging into the transition space to close the study-work gap, relying on both university and organisation goodwill and wherewithal, is, granted, easier said than done, but this paper offers strategies for addressing the gap and unifying university and workplace learning. Figure 2 is additionally useful in that it retains the idea of transition embracing both academic study and workplace learning, as well as acknowledging the gap between them. The gap is an important concept having a dual meaning. The first meaning is merely the time (interval) between study and career. The second connotation, more significant, is the gap between the learning habits and skills acquired in university study versus those needed to navigate the transition gap and, even

6 Exploration of this is beyond scope of this paper but deserves greater attention as suggested in directions for further research. More generally, extensive work has been done on transfer, see, for example, Harris et al (2008), Kirby et al (2003), Lynch et al (2006), Meldrum and Atkinson (1998), Nixon and Murr (2006), and much of the deep learning literature, with Lekoko (2005) and Havard et al (2005) as indicative.
more importantly, those specifically needed and valued in the workplace and required for lifelong learning.

In addition to discussing transition, the gap between study and professional employment, and closing that gap, this paper also contrasts the learning that takes place in either setting and depicts impacts on and reactions of the student-come-employee as he or she confronts a different learning environment. This confrontation is likened to the culture clash experienced by travellers or when people first intensely work with those from wholly different backgrounds. Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008) describe this thoroughly with respect to university-to-work transition, noting change in culture as one of three major confrontations or transition problems graduates undergo, along with lack of experience and skills and inflated expectations.

The learner’s experience during transition has significant implications for all parties concerned. For the student, these include adjustment or acculturation to the new organisation, lifelong learning, and career advancement. Implications for the organisation include learning-curve times upon hiring, retention, and employee motivation, performance, and potential. The university stands to gain or deepen relationships with individuals as they progress in their careers, and with organisations as it comes to be perceived as having relevant and important roles to play in individual professional and organisational development.

Traditionally, the university has played little role in this transition or in direct employee professional development at the workplace; admittedly, many universities have a “commercial” arm providing consulting and training services, but these are essentially peripheral to the core business of education and, in any event, do not focus directly on transition or closing the gap between study and work. This paper argues that university involvement during transition is critical and can lead to a range of positive outcomes, not least of which is the opportunity to continue to influence “student” growth and development long after graduation. While some may argue that such continuing education exceeds the university’s charter or resources, goodwill and relational capital fostered is certainly of value. There is, arguably, also a business opportunity that might be realised should the university extend its educative capacity beyond traditional formal years of study into transition.

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7 Stiwe and Jungert (2010) are amongst scholarly sources discussing the student experience during transition.
8 Savage et al (2009) make the link between graduate capabilities, lifelong learning, and transition to work strategies. Refer to Footnote 3 for additional references for lifelong learning.
Importantly, the paper outlines the respective responsibilities of students, university representatives, and organisational members in ensuring the smooth transition from university study to full-time professional employment and enriching the learning that may occur during that period. This is a significant contribution as there appears to be little if any articulation or delineation of such roles and responsibilities in the literature. This ostensible dearth is not surprising given that there has been little work done on the role of universities during transition or the nature of university-industry partnerships to facilitate transition. The mechanisms put into place, the relationships that develop, and the shared understandings of the nature and importance of this transition period are crucial. They provide the support structures, stimulation, and facilitation to enable continuous learning and lead to graduates who have the mindsets and skills to make the most of workplace learning.

**Transition—Defined and Characterised**

Transition is a period, phase, or intermediate stage between two distinct and discernibly-different states or stages in an organism or other entity. It implies movement. While a period or stage, transition is foremost a process—a work in progress so to speak. A range of terms that supplant or elucidate transition include evolution, progression, advancement, conversion, adaptation; even passage (Wendlandt and Rochlen, 2008) and journey (Taylor et al, 2007), the latter two terms used liberally by the authors of this article. While a transition might be to a lesser state or condition—a regression or devolution—the terms provided here generally infer movement toward a better or higher state of being or next [expected] stage of existence, as in student to worker, youth to adult, novice to expert, recruit to veteran, and so on.

For us, transition is not an event or an activity, though it may encompass on-going activities and multiple events. These may be related and purposeful, or seemingly unconnected and random. At the same, a given individual may assert or feel a sense of control over what happens during...

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9 Savage et al (2009) have noted that: “In order to generate a better understanding of what occurs during the transition-out phase from student-learner to engaged-professional, a better understanding of specific roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder is required. Furthermore, better defining the relationships between capability development, the context in which they are embedded and the subsequent learning that occurs is needed” (p. 4).

10 Authors admit that an extensive body of literature exists and has been amassing for decades on programs designed to close the theory-practice gap and make transition from study to work easier such as internships, cooperative education and, more recently, work-integrated learning. There is no doubt that these programs are relevant, worthwhile, and ease transition. But they generally occur during or interleaved between the student’s formal study, not subsequent to graduation and may or may not entail substantial collaboration with the industry or community partner. Related programs discussed in the transition literature are designed to prepare students for transition or for their prospective new roles in industry rather than supporting them through transition. Indicative sources include Stiwne and Jungert (2010), Taylor et al (2007), Wendlandt and Rochlen (2009), and Wood and Kaczynski (2007).

11 See Taylor et al (2007) who discuss the transition from novice to ‘one of the team’, which, occurs during their third transition phase (re-incorporation).
transition or may feel that what does or does not happen is beyond his or her control, imposed by society, luck, or other agents. Taylor et al (2007) suggest that transition can be perceived by the learner [and perhaps, we might add, by observers of the learner’s behavior] as mysterious, experienced as “something is happening to me.” Transition is not a static period, inert; it is fluid and dynamic. Also as used here, transition is not a clearly delineated stage between two separate states—specifically, formal study and professional work—but an overlapping phase. This is very important because conceiving of transition in this way opens opportunities for both universities and organisations. They can both share in and contribute to environments that will smooth the transition for students and enhance the learning that might take place during it. They can both influence students before they graduate, during the transition period between study and work, and afterward, when they are professionally employed. How universities and organisations may affect transition environments and influence students throughout the transition period are explored in later sections of this paper.

Transition has generally been conceived of as having three phases. Taylor et al (2007) have identified these three phases as (1) separation, (2) transition, and (3) re-incorporation. Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008) designate them as (1) anticipation, (2) adjustment, and (3) achievement. The authors of this paper find the corollaries to Lewin’s (1943; 1951) field theory and stages of change conspicuous and relevant. His stages (1) unfreezing, (2) movement, and (3) refreezing are widely accepted and employed in organisational development (see Burnes, 2004, or Marshak, 1993, as indicative sources). They involve unfreezing the status quo, or equilibrium, action to adopt a change, and refreezing the change to make it endure. Readiness to and for change (see Walker, 2004) may have important implications for an individual learner’s approach to and effectiveness in dealing with transition and, thus, for design and delivery of programs designed to prepare students for and support them through the transition process.

Contrasting University and Work Learning

Transition poses a range of learning challenges and opportunities. Successful transitions (and, possibly, those less successful) imply learning, though such learning may remain unwitting to the learner. Several sources reviewed touch on learning that occurs during transition or discuss transition as part of the learning process. Savage et al (2009), for instance, state that “understanding the learning that occurs during the transition-to-work phase is complex” (p. 3)

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12 From their abstract; page unnumbered.
13 Clements and Hays (2011) employ aspects of Lewin’s field theory (force field analysis) in their case study on institutional and curricular change.
and that “better understanding of the specific learning that occurs during the transitional phase is necessary” (p. 4). Taylor et al (2007) maintain that transition affords a profound opportunity for learning. However, little has been found in our review of the literature that addresses structuring or facilitating learning during transition.

Learning does not cease upon completion of a course of study or the conferring of a degree. When a graduate commences her or his professional career, learning only intensifies: the pace, the expectations, and consequences are all magnified. So, too, can be the levels of stress and anxiety felt by the learner. The transition from tertiary education to the workplace includes a drastic change in the environment and context in which learning takes place (Lynch et al, 2006), and whilst programs such as work-integrated learning, internships, and cooperative education all serve to introduce students to the workplace as a learning space, only a small minority of students ever receive the opportunity to participate in such bridging activities. An examination of the contrasts of classroom-based and situated workplace learning (Fuller and Unwin, 2002; Lave and Wenger, 1991), coupled with the acknowledgement that universities are, at present, unequipped to deliver real-world problems in professional settings to an entire student cohort, emphasises the gap addressed in this paper.

As Lynch et al (2006) have noted, “Learning in work and learning in the university have contextual differences…” (p.23) and that, “New understandings about learning in the workplace and in higher education points toward the need to take account of the context in which learners utilise their knowledge and skills” (p.15). The following table, contrasting these two contexts, draws on Cooper et al (2010), Fuller and Unwin (2002), Hays (2008; 2012), Lave and Wenger (1991), Ross (1998), Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008), and others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Academic Learning</strong></th>
<th><strong>Workplace Learning</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student learning key terminal objective.</td>
<td>Learning instrumental or incidental. Organisational outcomes as primary goal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning about, of, and for, usually in the classroom or on-campus, though increasingly virtual.</td>
<td>Learning with, through, and in, usually on-site / part of work; sometimes sent to off-site training.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Broad career-based or lifelong learning; acontextual. Theoretical and abstract.</td>
<td>Specific task-oriented learning; context-specific. Practical and applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning usually one-dimensional, involving a given mode. Use of specific formula, process, theory, etc., required.</td>
<td>Learning involving the whole person / multimodal. Whatever works to get the job done.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning generally by oneself; sometimes with others (peers).</td>
<td>Learning generally from others (colleagues), gradually moving toward shared learning and mentoring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low risk; Accountable to self (or group members).</td>
<td>High risk; Accountable to clients, colleagues, patients, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners compete with other individuals for grade in prolonged or defined time parameters (e.g., one semester).</td>
<td>Transient / indefinite learning as a team or organisation; competition amongst teams or with external competitors.</td>
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Simple: generally passive, planned, and predictable. Simulated, artificial, controlled, detached.  

Complex: generally active, purposeful, unpredictable and spontaneous. Authentic and embedded.

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<tr>
<td>Transmission of knowledge from expert; student as “empty vessel” (learner as recipient).</td>
<td>Generation of knowledge through experience; all expected to have and contribute knowledge and skill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescribed learning outcomes and objectives; learner dependent on external authority for instruction and assessment. Learning task distinct from work or may be impractical and not usually applied. Teacher-directed.</td>
<td>Learning tasks and situations vague and poorly-defined; learners relatively autonomous. Learning tasks and requirements are embedded and virtually inseparable from work. Worker-directed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodic / frequent feedback provided by teacher, tightly-linked to learning tasks.</td>
<td>Infrequent or generalised feedback provided by manager; work, itself, source of most feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producing while paying to learn.</td>
<td>Being paid to produce while learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students can “master” the study game. They can learn to win the game without learning much of that is meaningful or transferable. Often surface learning.</td>
<td>Learners must learn to learn. Harder to learn superficially and win as the game continually changes. Often deeper learning with greater transfer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Comparison between academic and workplace learning.

Considering the drastic differences of the two contexts as sites of learning, it is no wonder that so many students feel unprepared for the realities of work life (Grealish and Trevitt, 2005; Wood and Kaczynski, 2007) or are perceived by managers as being under-equipped. One strategy employed by organisations to compensate for the lack of work-readiness of many university graduates is the graduate [recruitment] program. These generally involve rotations through different units or roles, accompanied by standard induction training and, possibly, specialist training and mentoring. Such programs offer an area where universities and organisations might work more closely to structure learning and support graduates through transition. It is unfortunately the case that only very small numbers of graduates are inducted through such programs and, then, probably only the very elite, as these programs can be very competitive. The much greater number of university graduates for whom graduate programs are unavailable comprises a substantial cohort of learners who might benefit from additional transitional education and support.

Learner Impacts from and Responses to Transition

Impacts on learners from and through transition may be as diverse as the individuals undergoing it. That said, there is bound to be disorientation or dissonance that transpires as a consequence of everything changing around the learner and requirements for the learner to change to accommodate new and different surroundings. Concerning the latter, the learner may not realise that he or she must change, or may not possess the skills and knowledge to do. In any event, tensions are likely to arise as the learner confronts a new reality that has different expectations and imposes new rules of behaviour. These might entail any or many of a raft of demands, some relatively minor, some more formidable, ranging from dress, grooming, and punctuality, to
interpersonal interactions and orientations to teamwork, through to expectations regarding initiative, autonomy, and self-direction. Recent graduates may find themselves relegated from a “senior,” authoritative and respected amongst peers and relied upon by their teachers, to novice—low man on the totem pole.

However experienced, it is doubtful that recent graduates recognise or appreciate the learning challenges posed by transition or have sufficient strategies for taking them on. Unless they have undergone—and learned from—one or more transitions in the past, they probably do not have the skills to navigate the rough terrain that can be the transition. Unless they successfully surmount the hurdles of transition—and learn their important lessons—moving into the next phase may be stalled or cumbersome and their performance and effectiveness in that next stage may be undermined or inhibited. If, what, and how individuals learn during transition can be a major influence on future performance and learning.

**Transition Implications**

The process of transition and how it is dealt with, as just noted, has serious implications for individual learners; but implications extend to universities and organisations as well. At the minimum, university faculty and program managers need to grasp the gravity of transition and the costs of failing to adequately prepare students for and support them through transition—that their charter to educate and prepare graduates for the demands of adult life, including career and citizenship, extends beyond the traditional formal years of study or instilling discipline knowledge and skill. Fulfilling this extended role requires a new way of thinking, as well as additional resources and new programs and other mechanisms.

Organisations—the potential employers of university graduates—need also to realise the importance of smooth and enriching transitions, and need to take a more active role in working with universities to expand and enhance transition programs. It will be important to establish that effective transition programs lead to healthy retention rates, reduced learning-curve times, and better overall performance for new hires. It may be predicted that smoother, more-effective transitions lead to greater positive morale. These all provide potential areas for universities and organisations to work on together and to demonstrate through rigorous research.

Finally, it would be good if students were more demanding of universities to provide them with helpful transition preparation and transitional supports. Since most would be unaware of the importance of transition and the challenges it poses, students need to be introduced early to the concept of transition and to the transition programs and other supports provided by the university.
that they may wish to take advantage of. First-year programs can provide the context and mechanism for such introduction.

**Role of the University in Transition**

Transition provides reason and opportunity for a larger or extended role for the university. Many universities already have programs for students designed to make their transition to employment easier, though it is unclear how many students on a national or international level actually participate or how they benefit from these programs. Further, we have found little reference to programs that extend beyond graduation. Most organisations that employ university graduates have some form of induction or orientation program. Clearly there exists some gap between the number of students or graduates sufficiently prepared for transition and those actually employed professionally. This presents a golden opportunity for universities to develop programs to bridge this gap between study and work.

There may be many mechanisms and strategies for bridging the gap. Probably those undertaken as collaborations between universities and partner organisations would be most beneficial. Transition-focused events, workshops, seminars hosted and run jointly would permit expertise from and expectations of both academics and managers to enrich content and delivery. Exchanges are also seen as potentially very fruitful. An example might be a faculty member working in an employing organisation directly with students and graduates and their supervisors, and / or advising on training design and delivery. Industry and community managers spending time in the classroom, giving guest lectures, tutoring, and mentoring are other examples. The point is to get students, academics, and industry and community people together, thinking and talking about transition and how to smoothen and enrich it and how they can each play more active parts throughout the process.

**Role of the University in Employee Professional Development**

Transition affords, and in many respects requires, an expanded role for universities in employee professional development, at least in so far as (a) transition is accepted to be a process that extends well into the workplace and that (b) the university is seen to possess expertise that can assist in employee professional development and shares some responsibility for continuing to support graduates through the transition process. These conditions need to be understood and accepted by university faculty and industry and community partners as well, if effective collaborations are to be achieved. Realising this shared understanding may pose no small challenge.
Positive Outcomes of University Involvement in Transition and Beyond

We expect there to be multiple benefits of greater university involvement in transition and beyond. Some workplace benefits have been noted: improved retention and morale; quicker learning times for new hires, with corresponding improved performance and effectiveness. Advantages for students and graduates in increased confidence and capability as they undergo transition are inestimable. The university is likely to be perceived as more appealing to potential students, as well, when stronger ties exist between it and industry and when students can expect to be more attractive to potential employers. Transition programs can be an important distinguishing feature of a university. There are larger potential benefits as well, such as greater university-community engagement and the positive outcomes that arise from such interaction in both directions: improved, more-relevant curricula; mutually-beneficial research and consulting projects; greater cross-fertilisation; and more-focused attention on issues of shared concern.

Respective Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders in Transition

Each stakeholder has a vested interest in smooth and effective transitions, students, universities, and employing organisations. But to achieve the positive outcomes identified above, each stakeholder also must play a part, contributing to the viability of transition programs and their success. What we are saying, here, is that transition programs cannot be entirely for students/graduates or industry and the community. They must be with and through to be viable. Each program and arrangement may be different, and it is important that stakeholders work toward a shared vision of success, and clearly define, come to understand, and fulfil their respective roles and responsibilities.

Conclusions

Transition—as in transition from academic study into the professional workforce—is a complex, encompassing, and challenging process with far-reaching implications for students, universities, and organisations. The costs of a transition gone bad are substantial, impacting graduates immediately and long-term and the organisations that employ them. Universities must assume at least partial responsibility for the detrimental affects of absent or deficient transition programs, even subsequent to a student’s graduation. The positive outcomes of a smooth and effective transition process are legion, and presumably outweigh investment costs incurred by universities and organisations in installing and running transition programs, and, in the case of students, in participating fully in them. If industry and community bodies do not initiate demands for universities to “lift their game” in terms of transition, then universities must proactively
champion them and enlist the support of their industry and community partners in designing and delivering viable and effective transition programs.

It is instructive to conceive of transition as more than an interval between study, but a flexible period extending deeply into the curriculum and well forward into at least a graduate’s first professional employment. Such conceptualisation permits development and delivery of a range of programs and mechanisms to help students prepare for transition and beyond and to exact the best-possible learning from the transition experience. This calls for a greater role for universities in preparing students and graduates for adulthood and career and in professional development in and for the workplace. This, in turn, requires greater collaboration between universities and their industry and community partners. Transition, as a process encompassing both study and work, requires the input and involvement of both if it is ever to be most effective. Transition can and perhaps should serve as a key focus and delivery mechanism for university-community engagement. It forms part of the engagement strategy at the authors’ university, for example.

Where transition programs are small or do not exist, universities can begin by establishing working collaboratives with industry and community to build new programs from the ground up. Such programs would likely be relevant to all parties and enjoy a great deal of ownership. The relationships, mechanisms, and instructional content entailed in existing cooperative education and work-integrated learning programs can be extended and enhanced to better address transition needs and challenges of students and prospective workplaces and bridge the gap between study and work.

We hope that readers, through this paper, will have attained a deeper understanding of transition and a greater recognition of its importance and implications. Any proposed university program can be lost amongst all the important programs that exist or are in need of introduction or improvement. That said, the potential impacts of transition, positive and negative, are substantial and should be given due consideration when it comes to curriculum revision and investment decisions. To those who would propose new or improved transition programs, this paper may strengthen the case.

**Directions for further Research and Exploration**

We have only scratched the surface here, and there is much more to be discovered and publicised. In terms of research priorities, we suggest that studies seeking to demonstrate the benefits and learning outcomes of various transition programs and models is needed. A modest amount of work has been done on the transition experience, but a much more thorough understanding of the
transition process is required. Of particular value would be, it seems, to identify more- and less-effective transition strategies, with an eye toward using findings to improve programs. It would also seem most productive to explore the nature and the potential of learning throughout the transition process. There appears to be little that has examined what individuals learn during and from transition, or how; or what the learning opportunities posed by transition are and how to exploit them. Of specific relevance is what we describe as the “learning transfer problem.” This problem is premised on the belief that the [sometimes consummate] study skills students develop through formal education may be ineffectual or even counter-productive during later stages of transition, that is once they’ve graduated. How to enhance graduates’ ability to learn and transfer and apply that learning must be central to any transition program. Finally, there is likely to be considerable relationship between transition and transformation / transformational learning (Brooks, 2004; Harris et al, 2008). An extensive body of literature on transformative or transformational learning exists, much of which might be quite relevant to and inform an understanding of the transition process and the development of successful transition programs.

References


