

Abstract

With a high skills mismatch in the South African labour market (approximately 53% from Mission Talent Mass Uniqueness: A Global Challenge for One Billion Workers, 2019), and a diminishing of confidence in higher education graduates due to a lack of workplace skills and competencies (2015 Talent Shortage Survey, 2015), South African higher education has come under the spotlight to try and improve the quality of graduates entering the labour force. While there is a vast amount of knowledge and research on what skills are desired and/or required from various labour forces globally, it has proven challenging to successfully implement and integrate those competencies into higher education. This study focusses on the perspectives and values of higher education institutions, their staff and their students as to what skills and competencies they value in the professional development of the students and aligning to those with the required/desired competencies provided by the literature and research. This study develops the concept of Independent Capability (IC), provided by Stephenson (2012), within a South African, private higher education context that focuses on improving the ability of graduates to perform better in the world of work. This is the concept of Independent Capability for Work (IC_w) and proposes that the development of IC_w within tertiary students through IC_w engaging educational practices can provide an implementable pathway to improved quality of graduates. It then proposes two assessment tools that can be used to measure engagement with IC_w within educational practices. The Capabilities Approach was used as a conceptual framework as its primary principle is the development of individuals to enact their valued life functionings (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009), to which IC_w strongly aligns. Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) was used as a framework for the formulation of the assessment tools. The study utilised an Exploratory mixed-method to identify and evaluate the competencies/functionings that are valued by the 5 private higher education institutions, 9 of their faculty and 120 of their students using document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and highly structured questionnaires to establish the competencies/functionings that constitute IC_w. The findings of the study argues that IC_w is an amalgamation 3 aspects: Cognitive, Emotional, and Personal/Professional Traits. Moreover, it argues through the findings that each aspect has 3, most-valued functionings within the South African private higher education context. A call is made to utilise the IC_w assessment tools provided by this study to conduct further research into IC_w engaging practices in South African education across all levels and phases.