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Collaborative strategies for designing employability curriculum in a liberal arts context

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Abstract

In Australian higher education, the push for curriculum innovation to enhance graduate employability is crucial but faces contention and debate. While the importance of integrating employability skills is widely recognised, perspectives on how and whether to incorporate these as curricular objectives vary, especially in liberal arts programs. This paper explores a multidisciplinary academic team's experiences of embedding employability units into the Bachelor of Arts and undergraduate Communication and Creative Arts degrees at one Australian university. It addresses the challenges of diverse disciplinary perspectives on employability, career education, and work-integrated learning (WIL), and the design for a diverse student cohort, including career starters, career advancers, and career changers from multiple disciplinary contexts. Utilising Tuckman's 'forming, storming, norming, and performing' model, the paper evaluates the team's dynamics, offering insights and guidance for academics and institutions undertaking similar curriculum innovation projects to enhance graduate employability. This case study highlights the institutional support necessary for fostering sustainable curriculum reforms and the positive effects of collaborative curriculum design on the professional development and teaching capabilities of the educators involved.

Keywords
Employability, curriculum, collaborative curriculum development, work-integrated learning, arts, multidisciplinary, team development, peer-supported teaching practice

Introduction

The discourse surrounding higher education globally has increasingly centred on the concept of employability, with Australian universities being no exception to this trend. Campbell et al. (2022, p. 18) distinguish employability from other academic concepts, such as graduate attributes, by emphasising its focus on the post-graduation experiences of students, integrating 'broader ideas of career development and lifelong learning as attributes that support successful navigation and negotiation of future work opportunities.' This emphasis has sparked a fervent push towards innovative curriculum design, aimed at equipping students from diverse backgrounds with the skills and capacities necessary for future career success. Although employability's value is widely recognised, its integration as a curricular objective remains contentious, fuelling ongoing debates across disciplinary contexts (see Gregory and Kanuka, 2022). This tension is particularly evident in liberal arts programs, which are characterised by a philosophy of promoting broad intellectual

engagement across the humanities, social sciences, and arts. These programs typically aim to develop critical thinking, communication skills, and ethical reasoning in students, as exemplified by the Bachelor of Arts degree. However, there is often considerable debate within these programs about which skills in the curriculum best facilitate students' transition into the labour market (Klein and Walton, 2023; De Dijn et al., 2023). For creative graduates, especially, the transition from education to work and career can be more fraught than for many other disciplines or fields of study (Bridgstock and Cunningham, 2016).

In recent years, the Bachelor of Arts degree in Australia has seen significant structural changes aimed at embedding a clearer focus on employability skills, striving to equip students with a holistic understanding of the human condition alongside career readiness (Gannaway, 2014). However, this shift has elicited mixed responses from within the academy (Cunningham and Bridgstock, 2012), reflecting broader debates about educational priorities and outcomes. The divergence in perspectives is particularly stark when considering the viewpoint of many academics who, according to Harvey and Shahjahan (2013), see employability as an outcome of their teaching, not a goal of the curriculum. This schism within the liberal arts typically reflects a tension between those educators who view employability as detracting from the pure academic pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and those who recognise the urgent need to prepare students for the changing world of work (Gleason, 2021). Academics who tend to prioritise employability are typically from 'professionally-oriented disciplines with strong links to workplaces such as archaeology, media, communication, museum or heritage studies' (Harvey and Shahjahan, 2013, p. 6; see also Gregory and Kanuka, 2024).

Integrating employability as part of core curriculum presents numerous other challenges, not least of all because the concept of 'employability' itself is complex and not a 'simple definable term;' it often lacks a uniform understanding among academics (Campbell et al., 2022, p. 18; see also Sin et al., 2019, p. 925). The scarcity of research offering guidance on the curriculum design efforts of multidisciplinary teams, tasked with embedding employability learning into higher education courses, is an added complication. As Jonker (2019) and colleagues explain, collaborative curriculum design, led by educator teams, has increasingly gained popularity as a strategy, demonstrating its importance in curriculum reform processes and their sustainability. In these collaborative contexts, educators are well positioned to be 'active architects of the educational experience' (Kilag et al., 2023, p. 229), sharing insights, best practices, and innovative ideas to address curriculum gaps while meeting student needs and industry demands. However, much of the literature related to employability tends to focus on the outcomes of co-design partnerships between academia, students (including recent graduates) and industry. While not denying the importance of this work, this leaves the processes of collaboration *between academics* within multidisciplinary curriculum design teams relatively unexplored. This is particularly true for teams within the creative arts, social sciences, and humanities where the debate around employability is most acute. Moreover, there is little evidence of the types of activities and conditions that contribute to the successful outcomes of these multidisciplinary teams. As Handelzalts (2019, p. 161) notes, existing research concentrates on the inputs and outputs of collaborative curriculum design efforts rather than 'how these teams get off to a good start and are sustained in their design work.' This is despite the significant effects these aspects of the collaborative process can have on curriculum development outcomes.

This paper attempts to bridge this gap by presenting a case study of a multidisciplinary academic team's experiences of embedding a core sequence of employability units into the Bachelor of Arts and undergraduate Communication and Creative Arts degrees at one Australian university. By concentrating exclusively on the early design stages of their work, the paper responds to Handelzalts' call for a deeper understanding of the strategies that support the strong beginnings of multidisciplinary collaborations in educational settings, and their continuous and productive engagement. It sheds light on the challenges encountered by the team in reconciling divergent disciplinary perspectives, developing curriculum for a diverse student cohort and aligning whole-of-degree innovations with strategic university commitments. Analysed through the lens of Tuckman's

(1965) ‘forming, norming, storming, and performing’ model, the team’s experiences offer critical insights into the dynamics of collaborative curriculum design. This exploration not only serves as a scholarly case study of curriculum innovation in practice, but also as a challenge to some of the assumptions in models such as Tuckman’s and other prevailing conceptualisations of team development. Through this case study, we further contribute to a view of the institutional capacities necessary to support graduate employability curriculum design and the sustainability of such reforms, including the capacity to maintain, adapt, and continuously improve upon them.

Charting new horizons: the genesis of the FAE Employability sequence

The journey to embedding a scaffolded sequence of course-wide employability units of study into the curriculum began in 2021 following my appointment as the academic Director of Employability for the Faculty of Arts and Education (FAE). A comprehensive consultation process was initiated shortly after appointment, engaging in exploratory conversations with a broad spectrum of stakeholders from Faculty and University leadership to the University’s careers and employment service, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) leaders and practitioners from other faculties, as well as professional and academic colleagues coordinating WIL activities in the FAE. This engagement was crucial to understanding the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the project brief: to embed employability-focused curriculum interventions into the Bachelor of Arts and undergraduate Communication and Creative Arts degrees (or ‘courses’, the preferred institutional nomenclature).

Informed by these consultations, we facilitated a series of collaborative workshops and design sprints with academic colleagues from both the School of Communication and Creative Arts (SCCA) and the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS) – owners of the aforementioned courses – alongside professional staff from the Faculty’s WIL team. These sessions were instrumental in developing a nuanced understanding of curriculum requirements, culminating in the creation of what is now known as the ‘FAE Employability sequence’. This sequence introduces a scaffolded course-wide approach to graduate employability, offering students units in career development learning, entrepreneurial and employability skills-building, and WIL across each year of undergraduate study, commencing in the first year with a common core career development learning unit. A flexibility of unit choice, built into the second and third years of study, allows students to tailor their educational journey towards personal and professional goals.

The development of the FAE Employability sequence was further enriched by two participatory design workshops (CoLabs) involving students and industry representatives, which yielded valuable insights into stakeholder perceptions of employability and identified essential content, resources, and learning activities for units within the sequence. Conducted during ongoing disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and major workplace changes at the University, these workshops were pivotal in aligning the FAE Employability sequence with the institution’s future strategic direction, and ensured that the proposed curriculum was contextualised to meet the diverse learning needs of career starters, career advancers, and career changers from across the multiple disciplines in both SCCA and SHSS. These collaborative sessions also underscored the necessity of both recognising and leveraging the unique value that disciplinary approaches bring to the job market – attributes that render students from liberal arts programs highly employable (De Dijn et al., 2023; Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, 2018) – as well as the need to prepare students for a future world of work not yet imagined.

Development of the new units of study in the FAE Employability sequence commenced the following year, led by a dedicated team of five academic staff members from SCCA and SHSS, in collaboration with me as Director of Employability. This multidisciplinary curriculum development team embodied the collaborative spirit championed by Bird et al (2015, p. 20), also including a range of professional staff from career education specialists to ‘academic student support advisors, librarians and learning technologists.’ While this paper primarily focuses on the educators’ experiences as curriculum leads

for the FAE Employability sequence, the support of this broader collaborative network is acknowledged as a key factor in the success of the curriculum design process.

The formation of this multidisciplinary educator team was guided by a careful selection process, aimed at ensuring the right mix of expertise and perspectives. Disciplinary affiliations spanned Communications, Criminology, Creative Arts, and International Studies, with additional teaching expertise in WIL and experiential education. Each academic staff member was allocated workload for a six-month period to develop five of the eight new units in the sequence. Team members were appointed as curriculum leads for specific units after consultation and negotiation with me as Director of Employability. This strategic approach was designed to ensure that the development of each unit was not only aligned with the team's collective goals, but also the individual interests and professional growth goals of each team member. In two instances, colleagues embraced the challenge of leading the development of units outside their primary areas of expertise. Following the departure of another team member from the University part-way through the process, I stepped in to assume responsibility for one of the units designated for development in this initial design phase.

The tides of collaboration: Tuckman's model in curriculum development

The team's collaborative journey can be traced through the lens of educational psychologist and researcher Bruce Tuckman's model of small group development. Tuckman's model, first published in 1965 and later refined, delineates four key stages: forming, storming, norming, and performing.

In the initial forming stage, team members come together, getting to know one another and understand the tasks at hand, often relying on leadership for guidance. It is when, as Bonebright (2010, p. 113) explains, 'the group becomes oriented to the task, creates ground rules, and tests the boundaries for interpersonal and task behaviours.' This stage is also where team members begin to determine the energy and time they will need to devote to the group. This is followed by the storming stage, a period marked by 'conflict and polarization around interpersonal issues' as individuals navigate their roles and the team's dynamics (Tuckman, 1965, p. 396). This is considered crucial for the growth of the team. As the team moves into the norming stage, colleagues start to resolve their differences, develop stronger bonds, and establish norms that enhance collaboration, leading to a more organised and productive environment. Finally, the performing stage is reached when the team operates at a high level of efficiency, with colleagues working seamlessly towards the team's goals, demonstrating strong levels of autonomy, motivation, and problem-solving capabilities.

Despite being a reflection of its time, Tuckman's model arguably remains one of the most influential and widely-cited frameworks for theorising the ways that 'dynamics develop and change within small groups' (Colombini and McBride, 2012, p. 195). The model suggests that teams progress through the stages of forming, storming, norming, and performing in a sequential manner, with each phase building upon the achievements of the last to foster group growth and development. Despite our rapid progression through these stages, due to the unique time constraints of our work, the team's experience of leading the design of units within the FAE Employability sequence offers insights into the model's applicability in the context of curriculum development in contemporary higher education. Our experiences also challenge Tuckman's model in several ways.

Forming stage: Getting acquainted and establishing ground rules

The 'forming' stage of the team's development was marked by dynamic collaboration within the group, including a series of kickstart workshops, followed by regular team briefings and progress updates, and collaborative decision-making. An initial face-to-face meeting of the educators, who typically work across different campuses, proved instrumental in providing a space for social interaction that allowed team members to develop interpersonal connections with one another and laid the foundations for our collaboration. From the beginning, roles within the team were clearly defined, as were development timelines, ensuring a shared understanding of each member's

contributions and responsibilities. Curriculum leads were furthermore assigned the responsibility of coordinating their respective units during their first year of implementation, enhancing the sense of ownership and commitment to the project's success.

A key priority at this early stage of our collaboration was arriving at a shared understanding of 'employability' among team members. Given the diverse interpretations of employability, WIL, and career education encountered during the initial collaborative workshops and design sprints with academic colleagues from SCCA and SHSS, aligning our definitions as a team was imperative to both the development of a coherent curriculum and for promoting a broader understanding of these concepts, and their application, among colleagues in the Faculty as well as students.

The difficulties of identifying a universally accepted definition of employability are well-documented, compounded by the evolving nature of work (Harvey and Shahjahan, 2013). This complexity was apparent in our own discussions, with some team members advocating for a more prominent inclusion of creative practice (as work) alongside the professional- and career-oriented language typically associated with popular definitions of employability (e.g. Yorke, 2006). These discussions proved instrumental in sensitising the team to the nomenclature used within units, aiming to ensure inclusivity for those students likely to encounter the more 'non-traditional' employment scenarios inherent in media and other creative sectors. While the University's *Education and Employability Guiding Plan* offered a broad and foundational definition of employability, we found that identifying key messages – such as clearly differentiating 'employability' from 'employment' and framing WIL as an enabler of graduate employability – resonated most strongly with other academic colleagues.

To structure our curriculum development efforts and devise a shared vision for the impact of our work, the team established a set of guiding principles for the project, informed by the 'learning view' of employability. This approach positions employability not as an add-on but as an integral component of curriculum, designed to help students 'develop professional identities and engage more meaningfully with learning opportunities offered during their study, and drive their own capability acquisition in line with their personal career goals' (Campbell et al., 2022, p. 19). Our work was also informed by commentary from graduate outcomes surveys and recent scholarship suggesting that liberal arts programs must adapt to meet the demands of the 21st century, particularly through a course-wide approach to building professional identity, starting in the first year of study (Carson, 2021) and focusing on the inclusion of small business skills, entrepreneurship skills, self-management skills and industry experience (Bridgstock and Cunningham, 2016; Bennett and Richardson, 2022). These skills have been woven into the FAE Employability sequence, to varying degrees, at all levels.

Our guiding principles further underscored the team's commitment to promoting a stronger culture of reward and recognition for colleagues contributing to employability and WIL within the Faculty. For our part in this, we devised a strategy that involved documenting our own collaborative processes and disseminating project outcomes through academic publications, conference presentations, and other internal briefing opportunities. This approach not only established a culture of peer-supported teaching practice (PTP) within the group (see Hansen et al., 2023), but also contributed to the professional development of individual team members. By consistently adopting inclusive language and referring to ourselves as 'the team' in public forums, we strengthened our collective identity and collaborative ethos. This approach cultivated an environment for authentic conversation, where team members could 'clarify their own point of view and validate it in light of the views of others' in the team, fostering a sense of agency and mutual trust (Jonker et al., 2019, p. 139). Reflecting on this practice, one team member notes that 'it was professionally really helpful for me in that it allowed me to be more critical of my own materials and to share them before they got tested on students' (Tony). To facilitate ongoing collaboration in the periods where we could not meet in person, a Microsoft Teams site was established, serving as a digital hub for communication and resource-sharing.

Storming stage: Navigating complexities and embracing different viewpoints

In Tuckman's (1965) model, the 'storming' stage of team development is often marked by conflicts and disagreements, arising as team members grow more comfortable with one another. In our experience, although we did not encounter significant tension within the group, the storming phase of our collaboration did surface inherent challenges in navigating the complexities of disciplinary and team identities. Some team members faced criticism from colleagues in their home discipline regarding their participation in the curriculum innovation project. This often stemmed from a concern about the potential loss of disciplinary identity for students within the sequence's course-wide approach to employability learning, debates over the place of employability in a liberal arts education, and/or general change fatigue among academic colleagues.

Despite these obstacles, our team had made an early commitment to embrace a design approach that sought to transcend disciplinary boundaries to meet our aim of developing an employability curriculum tailored to a remarkably diverse group of students. This diversity related to not just their disciplinary backgrounds, but also their individual learning needs, professional aspirations, stages of life and work experience, and their preconceptions about career education and willingness to engage in conversations about employability. During the storming stages of the project, however, there was a natural tendency for some team members to default or retreat to the familiarity of their respective disciplinary paradigms during conversations about our approach to content, learning activities and assessment for units within the FAE Employability sequence. Part of this was about socialising ourselves towards multidisciplinary collaboration in the teaching and learning space. As Tam (2015, p. 38) explains it, one of the benefits of this kind of collaboration is the opportunities it affords educators 'to challenge individual beliefs and practices through ongoing communication with colleagues, hearing the multiple perspectives of others, sharing new experiences and acquiring new understandings.' But as one team member notes:

> *Getting to develop a unit from the ground up like this is not very common. Most of the time, we do it, but we build them of our own, we repair old and tired units. We don't often build something from the ground up with a team of designers working with you* (Tony).

Echoing this sentiment, another team member highlights the uniqueness of our undertaking: 'We often collaborate with people outside our discipline in research, but less so in teaching. This experience has shown me why it is important to think of teaching and learning as a collaborative activity' (Erin).

Another factor was coming to an appreciation, as a team, of the full breath of diversity within our student cohort and the way in which the individual unit, for which we were the curriculum lead, fit within the broader FAE Employability sequence. A collaborative approach to curriculum development necessitates that academics 'step outside the traditional private space of their teaching and curriculum development and talk with their colleagues about their subject's curriculum, the relationship of their subject to surrounding subjects and to the program curriculum as a whole' (Bird et al., 2015, p. 23). One strategy we used to support this during the storming stage, to encourage team members to step outside their disciplinary comfort zones, was to imagine the student journey through the FAE Employability sequence from the perspective of different student personas. This allowed the team to 'see' the sequence through the eyes of students, as a scaffolded and integrated learning experience rather than a string of disparate and disconnected units (Bird et al., 2015).

> *The professional development that I gained here was also the widening of my own understanding of employability and what it is a career journey looks like. The interesting thing is I was able to pay this forward to the students I now teach [within the sequence]… The collaborative experience is in the DNA of the unit itself* (Erin).

Challenges also arose during this stage around developing content for units outside one's area of expertise. Where team members experienced a knowledge gap – be it in terms of subject matter or

grappling with how to design for students beyond their disciplinary frame of reference – I actively sought to connect them with colleagues, both within the team or external to it, who could support constructive outcomes. One-on-one meetings between myself and these team members were common during this phase. Reflecting on this in the later stages of the project, these team members highlighted the practical advantages of developing new expertise in a multidisciplinary setting, as well as the satisfaction derived from uncovering new skills and areas of interest:

> *Entrepreneurial Mindset wasn't my area of expertise, so I have learnt a lot about it. It was a swift learning curve… [but] one of the things I have learnt is that it is an area that I really, really enjoy working in* (Katherine).

> *I also learned a lot from this collaborative team process that I feel I can take and transfer into other aspects of my teaching design, particularly around the use of the templates on the unit site and learning a lot about their full capabilities and other learning development tools* (Emma).

This commitment to a scholarly, peer-supported methodology continues as a hallmark of the team's approach to curriculum design. Drawing from diverse feedback sources – such as students, industry, colleagues, scholarship – and engaging in reflective practice, the team has established a cycle of continuous improvement that aims to enrich both the student learning experience as well as our own teaching and learning practices and professional development.

Norming stage: Cultivating cohesion and establishing a group identity

As the team progressed into the 'norming' stage described by Tuckman, we developed a cohesion, with differences understood and appreciated, and roles and norms established. As Colombini and McBride (2012, p. 196) describe it, this stage of team development marks 'a transition to the establishment of a communally-negotiated group identity.' At this point, the team started to find its rhythm, striking a balance between working collectively and operating independently. This phase was marked by significant capability-building efforts, with individual team members actively developing the skills and knowledge needed to contribute effectively to the project. Standing Zoom meetings, as a regular point of connection, became a fixture of our routine, fostering a sense of stability and sustained interaction. The Microsoft Teams site evolved, serving not just as a repository for documents and resources, but as a virtual space where team members could engage in discussions, ask questions, and share insights. Our approach to leadership was inherently collaborative, allowing each member to pursue individual objectives within the team context. As Director of Employability, my role evolved to emphasise functionality over authority, focusing on nurturing a culture that fosters positive outcomes. Team members less familiar with the 'non-traditional' employment conditions associated with media and other creative industries – including non-linear career pathways or portfolio careers, the precarity of labour, and links between personal identity and creative practice (Bridgstock and Cunningham, 2016) – started to normatively integrate their newfound understandings of this into their contributions to the curriculum design process.

Performing stage: Collective decision-making and problem-solving

In the 'performing' stage, the team reached a level of operational efficiency that enabled us to confidently collaborate on decision-making and tackle problem-solving together. This phase led to the brainstorming of innovative enhancements for the project, notably the decision to create a digital platform called the Employability Hub. This hub aims to orient students towards their learning in the FAE Employability sequence, highlighting the importance of employability skills-building, providing guidance on possible pathways through the sequence, and serving as a central repository for information and resources common to all units across the sequence.

In this stage of the project, PTP also became a hallmark of our collaboration, with team members engaging in a pilot of near-peer developmental review (see Hansen et al., 2023) to refine the design of individual units and ensure quality of teaching and student outcomes prior to delivery. Despite its

benefits, this review process did surface concerns for some team members, more reminiscent of the 'storming' stage of Tuckman's model:

> *Reflecting on my contributions and looking at those of others was sometimes a bit intimidating, but that's partly because my unit was being delivered a little later, so I had the benefit and opportunity to learn from the experiences of team members. But, at times, I felt like I was a little bit behind. [However] the team was always really supportive in terms of where I was at with the development of the unit, so it was a minor challenge really* (Emma).

Aligning with Colombini and McBride's (2012, p. 196) description, team members were 'generally satisfied and capable of balancing individual with collective responsibilities, navigating complex tasks collaboratively' during the 'performing' stage of the project. A high level of commitment, flexibility, and a willingness to experiment characterised this phase, as the team navigated the complexities of the project with resilience and creativity. Critical reflection on project objectives in relation to timelines for the delivery of units prompted the team to collectively opt for a staged rollout of several planned interventions, such as incorporating e-portfolio capability into each unit across the sequence. This decision marked a significant milestone in our journey through Tuckman's model, demonstrating the team's evolution from navigating personal dynamics and establishing a shared vision to becoming a cohesive unit capable of reflective and strategic collective decision-making.

Beyond Tuckman: More 'transformation' than 'adjournment'

Although Tuckman originally saw 'performing' as the 'final stage of group evolution,' he (with Jensen) later augmented the original model to include a fifth stage known as 'adjourning' or 'the death of the group' (Tuckman and Jensen, 1977, pp. 425, 426). This stage, introduced to the model in 1977, addresses the disbanding of the team, the completion of the task, and the conclusion of relationships between the team members. It recognises the end of the group's collaborative efforts and the emotional responses that might accompany such a dissolution. In academic settings, however, the conclusion of a team project does not always mark the end of a group's collaboration, especially where a program of curriculum development carries over into implementation, including unit delivery and the building of teaching capability. Our experience of this brings to light certain limitations in Tuckman's model, some of which have also been noted by other scholars.

While the model continues to be cited as a useful framework, it may not fully capture the intricacies of multidisciplinary team dynamics in the context of curriculum innovation, which itself is an iterative process. Critics, such as Rickards and Moger (2000), argue that the model does not account for how groups change over time. Colombini and McBride (2012, p. 196) elaborate on this by noting that 'aspects of forming may occur each time the group disbands and meets again, and storming may resurface when new decisions are made or new goals set, interrupting periods of norming or performing.' This perspective is further supported by concerns that Tuckman's model does not adequately reflect the variable significance of its stages in real-world scenarios.

For instance, in our experience, the 'forming' stage proved crucial in establishing a foundation for the team's sustained and effective collaboration. The resolutions and understandings achieved during this initial phase served as a reference point or touchstone we could return to when navigating challenges in subsequent stages, highlighting a deviation from the siloed and strictly linear progression suggested by Tuckman (1965) and Tuckman and Jensen (1977).

> *The way that Katrina asked us to meet in person first really helped us connect as a group and understand one another – our humour, how we interact, and what sort of support we could offer each other – and that really encouraged our collaboration across all units; not just focusing on your single unit. [As a result] I felt more able to contribute to other units in the way that they were designed, the sequence overall, and the way that the units interact with each other* (Katherine).

Academic teams, especially those operating in multidisciplinary contexts, may therefore experience dynamics that are more fluid and iterative than what Tuckman's model outlines, exhibiting a level of complexity that a linear progression of phases fails to capture. Rather than adhering strictly to a sequence that culminates in 'adjourning', these groups may cycle back to earlier stages of the model or continue working together in different capacities, thereby entering into a phase more aligned with 'transformation' or 'evolution' (see Figure 1). This is exemplified by the experiences of the FAE Employability curriculum development team which, despite having exhausted formal workload hours for unit design, have continued to collaborate with one another. The team has worked diligently to establish a robust foundation for the future development of the sequence's units and to enhance teaching capability to support their successful delivery; purposefully selecting, recruiting, and inducting both sessional staff and other academic colleagues as unit coordinators into 'the team.'

Forming	Storming	Norming	Performing	Transforming
• Selection of the team – 'getting the right mix' • Initial F2F workshop and space for social interaction • Roles already negotiated • Shared understanding of 'employability' a priority • Agreed guiding principles of design • Long-term vision • Consistent nomenclature: 'we', 'the team' • The team as a 'brain's trust' • MS Teams site	• Concerns over expertise • Navigating disciplinary and team identities • Criticism from colleagues • Facilitating connections and project support	• Balance in working collectively and independently • Team capability-building • Standing meetings and regular points of connection • MS Teams as a site for collaboration and resource-sharing	• Collective decision-making and shared problem-solving • Established culture of peer-supported teaching practice (PTP) • High levels of commitment, flexibility, and feedback • Support for experimentation	• Commitment without formal workload hours • Renewed focus on team's long-term vision • Evaluation and continuous improvement • Subgroup projects and seed funding • Continued capability-building and expansion of 'the team'

Figure 1: Reimagining Tuckman's Stages of Team Development

Further to this, several team members have actively sought seed funding to pursue a series of sub-projects, the ideas for which were sparked during the curriculum design process. These initiatives, aimed at further enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes within the FAE Employability sequence, were not able to be undertaken within the short timeframes of the initial design period. They include a collaboration between the Director of Employability and another team member on the development of an interactive web-based digital simulation for leadership training and practice, and a separate Students as Partners project to capture and create a collection of student-led perspectives and stories focusing on employability for the sequence's common core first-year unit. The team's sustained participation in PTP, including our engagement in collaborative research projects and external peer review, showcases a dedication to enhancing the sequence's offerings and contributing

to the wider conversation on graduate employability, as well as advancing scholarly work in this area. The team's work has also been shared within the University's teaching and learning community and supporting staff, including at Faculty Board meetings, the University's teaching and learning conference and among peers in the Graduate Employability Action Learning Group. In 2023, our work was recognised with a FAE Award for 'Curriculum Innovation Based in Scholarly and Practice-based Research that Advances Strategic Agendas in Teaching and Learning.'

Conclusion

This case study's reflection on the collaborative design of an employability sequence of learning within a liberal arts context has illuminated both the distinctive challenges and opportunities that accompany such strategic initiatives. At the heart of curriculum innovation aimed at enhancing graduate employability lies the challenge of either re-modelling existing courses or integrating new components that align with industry demands and future employment trends. This process, however, is fraught with inherent challenges, including potential resistance from faculty members who may perceive such changes as a departure from core academic values or an encroachment on disciplinary domains. Our team's journey, characterised by a shared commitment to evidence-informed curriculum design and a dynamic collaborative process, highlights the importance of academic collaboration that extends beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries, especially when designing programmatically for employability curriculum across degrees and student cohorts. The successes achieved, often in spite of the challenges faced, underscore the resilience and collaborative spirit of the team while also pointing to the need for strong institutional support of such innovative ventures.

It is important to recognise that our team's collaboration was far from typical. As highlighted by Jonker et al. (2019), it diverged from the more common practice of curriculum development focused on personal educational practice, engaging instead in a comprehensive and holistic re-imagining of curriculum across two schools within a Faculty, involving the consolidation of existing WIL units. This called for a unified strategy, encompassing a shared vision, clear objectives, and delineated responsibilities, all under tight time constraints. These conditions demanded both structure and flexibility in our collaboration, creating a foundation of support and transparency critical for maintaining team cohesion.

While academic leaders may find theoretical models like Tuckman's stages of team development useful for structuring and supporting effective team dynamics that sustain the collaboration of multidisciplinary colleagues over time, our experience demonstrates the importance of adapting and tailoring these models to fit specific circumstances and the unique contours of a project, remaining receptive to evolving team dynamics. For example, we found ourselves sustained in our work by factors often absent from these theoretical frameworks: 'Using humour was something that got us through a lot of challenges and it was a way to really deal with the tight deadlines that we had' (Emma). This interpersonal aspect of collaboration, while perhaps overlooked in formal models of team development, proved critical in maintaining group morale and cohesion under pressure.

The foundation of our success lay in the implementation of evidence-informed guiding principles, regular workshops, briefings, and updates, and a commitment to reflective practice. Drawing from diverse feedback sources – including students, industry, and peers – enabled us to cultivate a culture of continuous improvement. The mutual respect and trust cultivated among team members spurred collective decision-making and innovation in curriculum design, demonstrating the profound impact of diverse disciplinary perspectives and collegiality on project outcomes.

However, it is clear that our team's accomplishments, while noteworthy, did not occur in isolation but were influenced by a broader institutional context that highlighted the need for a supportive framework for innovation. Effective workload management, strategic resource allocation, administrative support and a culture that not only values but rewards innovative teaching and learning

practices emerged as essential factors in ensuring that the drive for curriculum renewal is not overwhelmed by the everyday demands of academic life.

Facing the challenges of sustaining intensive collaboration without formal project hours or workload recognition underscores the need for ongoing institutional support and investment. This is crucial for the 'road testing' and iterative development of employability curriculum. It highlights a broader institutional role in ensuring the long-term success of curriculum innovation projects if they are to maintain their relevance in the context of both changing educational priorities and employment landscapes. This commitment must also extend to the evaluative practices of teaching teams, recognising that excellence in curriculum delivery evolves over time.

In conclusion, our experience affirms the significant benefits to universities in cultivating environments that actively encourage and make space for multidisciplinary collaboration, recognising its indispensable role in curriculum innovation, particularly in the context of graduate employability. Engaging in multidisciplinary curriculum development teams can also significantly enhance the professional development of academic staff. The diverse perspectives that converged through our own collaborative efforts not only enriched the curriculum outcomes we were able to achieve in terms of designing units that cater to the learning needs of a diverse student cohort, but they also contributed significantly to the professional development of each of the educators involved. As a consequence, we expanded not only our understandings of the University's strategic objectives and operations, but also our own collegial networks and expertise, which has had a flow-on effect into other areas of our respective disciplinary teaching.

This case study, then, serves as both a testament to the transformative potential of collaborative curriculum design as well as a clarion call for higher education institutions. By recognising and supporting the efforts of multidisciplinary educator teams, universities can ensure that employability curriculum development remains a dynamic, integral component of the educational landscape, but also significantly contributes to staff development and capacity-building. Investment in such collaborative projects can promote professional growth, enrich academic expertise, and bolster a culture of innovation that can benefit educators, industry partnerships, and students alike, equipping them to navigate the complexities and unpredictability of the future world of work.

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