Employer-supported Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities

By
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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University
23rd November, 2017
I am the author of the thesis entitled Employer-supported Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

In the contemporary Australian labour market, individuals are expected to flexibly respond to the dynamic demands of the workplace by ensuring that they are constantly engaged in ongoing education and training. Specifically, ubiquitous discourses of lifelong learning have been inculcated and accepted to the extent that ongoing participation in continuous higher education has become the norm. As individuals must increasingly compete with each other and consider multiple career paths throughout their working lives, the extent to which they are able to obtain not merely higher education credentials, but the right kinds of credentials, such as postgraduate and higher research degrees, has amplified. Owing to these changes, growing numbers of employees are now undertaking continuing higher education in Australia. Many of these individuals are engaged in concurrent paid employment alongside their tertiary studies.

Research on the support which is provided for students engaged in contemporaneous higher education and paid employment (employee-students), has largely focused on the role of the government and higher education providers in affording this assistance. The role of the employer is hitherto sidelined. This is an interesting omission, as in practice, employers represent key stakeholders in employee-students’ education pursuits. Specifically, how employers provide support for employee-students and how this support is engaged with - in organisational policy and practice, has been overlooked in extant literature. Therefore, the overarching aim of this research is to explore the connection between Employer-supported Higher Education (ESHE) policy and practice.

Drawing on a critical theoretical lens, this thesis explores employee-student experiences of undertaking higher education alongside paid employment. It also examines manager experiences of supervising employee-students involved in this undertaking. Further, these experiences are interrogated in terms of the discourses that employee-students, managers and organisations employ regarding valuations of higher education as a key phase of lifelong learning. Practices related to the ways in which ESHE is provided and engaged with are also investigated. A mixed-methods
approach drawing on critical grounded theory and descriptive statistics was used, with data obtained from relevant organisational policy (and related) documents, online survey questionnaires, cross-site in-depth interviews and a management focus group.

The findings demonstrate that assumptions relating to the value of undertaking higher education alongside paid work are influenced by managerialist agendas, over broader understandings of the value of higher education participation to workplace learning and whole-person development. These beliefs influence how ESHE is provided and engaged with – in policy and practice, which in turn, influences the lived experience of both employee-students and workplace managers. Specifically, as the nascent model of the habitus of ESHE that emerged from this research demonstrates, the lived experience of undertaking higher education alongside paid employment and supervising individuals involved in this undertaking, is an inherently uncertain and risky one. It is a practice maintained through complex knowledge-power relations that may disadvantage particular employee-student cohorts.

This is concerning given that the findings also indicate that employee-students tend to be self-directed learners and high performers. They transfer higher education-facilitated learning to the workplace through extensive knowledge sharing and various forms of informal and formal social learning in the workplace. Yet, employee-students that study off-campus, outside business hours and / or undertake higher degrees by research, tend to receive less ESHE than employee-students studying via traditional on-campus modes. Certainly, this research indicates that organisations may be fostering cultures of mediocrity, rather than genuine cultures of learning. This tension both stems from and maintains a discursive divide between how ESHE is provided and engaged with in policy and practice and has further implications for building and sustaining a highly skilled workforce of professionals.
Acknowledgments

Thank you to Associate Professor Lyn Harrison and Dr Tracey Ollis, for accepting the supervisory baton part way through my research project and for supporting me through the various and challenging milestones of PhD study. Thank you for gently challenging my ideas in a way that gave me the time and space to reflect on the wisdom of your considered and thoughtful provocation.

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A PhD is difficult not least for the ways in which it changes the self as for how it places pressure on even the most robust of relationships. To my family and friends, thank you for your ongoing care, encouragement and at times, indispensable humour. The collective acknowledgement is not for want of sincere appreciation of your individual words and kindnesses along the way.

To Maple, you have proven a consummate study hound and a timely reminder that there is nothing wrong with being an organic farrago.
To all who participated in the research study – a sincere and ginormous thank you. I hope that this research will lead to improvements in adult education policy and practice. Broadly, I hope that this research helps all those with noble learning intentions hampered by ignoble barriers to learning.
Publications and Presentations


Stewart, L 2014, ‘Understanding employee-learner experiences for enhanced study support’, Presentation of key findings of master’s research at the UPSI-Deakin 2nd Consortium of Asia-Pacific Education Universities (CAPEU) Graduate Research Symposium, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), Tanjong Malim, Perak Malaysia, 30th October to 1st November 2014.

### Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<th>Acronym</th>
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<tr>
<td>AQF</td>
<td>Australian Qualifications Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAQDAS</td>
<td>Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software</td>
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<td>DOT</td>
<td>Department of Treasury</td>
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<td>ESHE</td>
<td>Employer-Supported Higher Education</td>
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<td>G20</td>
<td>Group of Twenty</td>
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<td>GT</td>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
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<td>HCT</td>
<td>Human Capital Theory</td>
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<td>HR</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRSCEE</td>
<td>House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment</td>
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<td>L&amp;D</td>
<td>Learning and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>Master of Business Administration</td>
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<td>n</td>
<td>Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFP</td>
<td>Not for Profit</td>
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<td>PhD</td>
<td>Doctor of Philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td>QSR NVivo</td>
<td>Qualitative Research Software using In Vivo Coding</td>
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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a reflection on how my experiences as an employee and higher education student have shaped my interest in the research topic. Secondly, the key terms used within this thesis are defined and discussed. I then provide an overview of how the value of higher education is contextualised within broader discourses of lifelong learning and earning. I maintain that it is within these discourses that higher education is conceptualised as being distinct from other forms of adult learning, which may influence the employer support offered to those engaged in it. The research problem and research significance are expounded, while the aims and research questions are explicated with reference to how adopting a critical constructivist conceptual framework may aid practical reform. Lastly, a brief overview of the thesis structure has been provided.

1.2 Why Employer-supported Higher Education? A Personal Reflection

As a teenager, I remember discussing various social equity issues with my mum. Well-intentioned and passionate but with limited life experience, I readily exclaimed that this was not right, and that was not fair and that things in the world had to change. Her pragmatic and no-nonsense response was: ‘life’s not fair, get used to it’. Needless to say, my disappointment in her disenfranchisement was only surpassed by my sheer outrage in her having given up on the potentiality of challenging the status quo to make the world a somehow better place. It struck me as a particularly hard pill to swallow as my mum was always strongly invested in facilitating open and questioning minds in her children; she had a true passion for lifelong learning.

Perhaps she was just tired and worn-out that day. Regardless, for many years I thought about the expression and realised that there was a cold, hard grain of
inescapable logic in its first clause. However, my issue had perhaps never really been with the first element of her response, but rather the latter. It was the ‘get used to it’ that had really troubled me. Yes, life may not be objectively and inherently fair. Indeed, considered from various theoretical perspectives, it is likely an unachievable and incalculable goal. But surely, it is the process of trying to make it at least somewhat fairer that is the moral thing to do. Overtime, I came to accept that ontologically, mum was right; it would be difficult to achieve some sort of objective, perfect sense of fairness or true equality in any aspect of social life, and epistemologically even more difficult to prove it. Despite what popular political rhetoric might suggest, as Bourdieu (1986 p. 46) emphasizes, our social world is simply not one of

... perfect competition or perfect equality of opportunity, a world without inertia, without accumulation, without heredity or acquired properties, in which every moment is perfectly independent of the previous one, every soldier has a marshal’s baton in his knapsack, and every prize can be attained, instantaneously, by everyone, so that at each moment anyone can become anything.

However, I remained convinced by the notion that there must still be degrees or shades of fairness or equity, and that by questioning the systemic issues that create and maintain systems and structures of social inequity, we might move closer to a kind of idealised equality. Even if the latter exists only as a conceptual magnet pulling us towards an imperfect end state; as Marginson (2011a p. 27) argues, in relation to issues of equity and fairness, ‘ideas matter’ because ‘theories of justice affect policy’.

Although my journey through higher education and concurrent paid employment has been an unavoidably deviating and difficult one, it is this notion of equality and social justice that has been a common thread throughout my academic studies to date. It also underpins my rationale for choosing the topic of employer-supported higher education (ESHE) for my doctoral dissertation. That is, not only have I selected this topic for its theoretical and practical significance and because it is underresearched, but also because the employer support that I have received for my higher education studies over the years has been inconsistently and inequitably
afforded. Further, what has been offered in employee study support policies is not always what has been offered in practice.

Like many others, I have juggled paid work and university study over a decade in manifold iterations, including full-time work and part-time study, full-time study and part-time work, on-campus and off-campus study, coursework and research, unskilled and skilled work. When combined with the unavoidable necessity of earning a living, lifelong education is an extremely rewarding yet difficult process. Moreover, it can be made more or less difficult by the ways in which ESHE is provided. For example, I have had managers provide long-winded and curly explanations as to why the particular course that I was studying was relevant to the extent that it warranted several hours of study leave but was not sufficiently relevant for course fee reimbursement, to veiled warnings regarding exclusionary consequences should I elect to move departments whilst receiving study support, despite me having never mentioned or alluded to having any intention to do so. I have also worked in teams where peers who I have otherwise gotten on very well with, have made fun of my taking several hours of study leave on a Friday afternoon to ‘go shopping’ or ‘relax at home’.

These experiences actually lead me to stop applying for study support for a time. When I did summon the confidence to again ask for study leave with a new employer, it became clear that the employee study support policy was designed to do little more than pay lip service to study support and that the definition of ‘relevant study’ (a key criterion for endorsement) was highly subjective and open to various forms of management power and control. For example, in this particular instance, for my study to be determined relevant it needed to be focused not only on the specific disciplinary area in which I was working, but rather, one very exact topic within this disciplinary area. One which my direct manager needed to report on for the ultimate purpose of achieving his own pressing performance goals in the following six months. He therefore advised that for the support to be approved, I would have to tie my research studies to this particular project, which I was almost prepared to do, until I mentioned that the university ethics process would not permit me to work to his timeframes and he suggested that I should simply disregard the university ethics process. I cannot recall his verbatim response, but the message was
clear: ‘I don’t care about ethics – work to my terms or forget about receiving study support’.

Because I was not prepared to agree to these dubious terms, I decided to continue my studies without employer support until I was ultimately, albeit begrudgingly, offered several days’ study leave once my manager had perhaps sensed my waning engagement. Thus, in the last six months of my two year employment, I received a minimal allotment of study leave; a provision I was entitled to all along, at least according to the organisational policy. My manager and I rarely, if ever, discussed my higher education involvement from that point on. My studies became detached from my role – moved from the realm of the professional to the personal; from the public to the private. This was despite the fact that I took the initiative to apply many of the skills that I learnt from my research studies to my direct role in an informal way; skills which were indeed lauded, but interestingly not recognised as having stemmed from my higher education involvement.

Further, the overwhelming anecdotal evidence from various informal discussions that I have had with friends, family members, colleagues and acquaintances over the years has also tended to indicate a high level of variability in ESHE experiences. Their narratives have been diverse, ranging from those who have had direct managers that demonstrated blatant disinterest in their higher education studies, to those that have been lucky enough to report to managers who have shown a genuine and keen interest in all aspects of their higher education journey. The latter were often buttressed by generous financial and temporal incentives, recognised by peers and managers, and provided with comprehensive learning and emotional support. However, one thing that has always struck me – both during and after these conversations, is that the ways in which ESHE is afforded always strongly influences an individual’s attitude towards both their direct manager and their employer. Specifically, their level of motivation, engagement and loyalty towards them, contributing to their overall experience of being a higher education student and a paid employee.

Perhaps I was just unlucky in my experiences of ESHE. Certainly, in retrospect, I rue not having had the confidence to negotiate my study support provisions more
effectively. Though I still wonder to what extent this lack of confidence stemmed from the insecurity that accompanies a lack of financial security and growing up in a family where university study was not seen as a ontological rite of passage, but rather one of many possible life choices. That is, if one was willing to accept a large degree of financial, social and psychological sacrifice along the way. Either way, like so many others, these experiences strongly influenced my identity – both as a student and as an employee. They have provided me with the impetus to achieve a new learning focus: the interrogation of ESHE. Simply, how are employers providing for employees engaged in higher education? How are employees engaging with this support? Is it enough? Is it provided fairly? If not, how can we do things differently?

1.3 Definitions of Key Terms

1.3.1 Higher Education

One common question which was asked by participants throughout the data collection phase of this research project, was ‘well, what do you mean by higher education, exactly?’ Participants were often unsure what types of education could be formally considered higher education. Therefore, to provide participants with a consistent response, and for the purpose of reliability, the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (Department of Education and Training, 2016a) was drawn on to demarcate higher education as any program of study rated at an AQF level of seven and above. This includes Bachelor Degrees, Bachelor Honours Degrees, Graduate Certificates, Graduate Diplomas, Masters Degrees, and Doctoral Degrees. Whilst it should be noted that participant confusion around ‘what counts’ as higher education is an interesting finding in and of itself, a discussion of this issue is outside the scope of this thesis.

1.3.2 Employer-supported Higher Education

In the context of this research, Employer-supported Higher Education (ESHE) refers to any form of formal and/or informal support that employers provide to employees
undertaking higher education alongside their paid employment. Whilst these provisions generally include formal study leave time and/or full or partial course fee reimbursement only, I define ESHE as including these formal provisions, in addition to any other forms of formal or informal support, regardless of whether or not they are currently provided, conceived and/or documented – in policy or practice. This is in keeping with the critical and transformative aims of my research. The purpose of conceptualising ESHE in an expansive way is to ensure that ESHE is not limited only to what is currently provided, but rather developed to encapsulate those affordances which may be provided in the future, as informed by the findings from this investigation and subsequent research.

It should be noted that ESHE is presently understood in varying ways by different stakeholders. As there is currently a lack of consistent terminology to describe the topic – both across organisational policy and practice and academic literature, a specific definition of ESHE is therefore needed. In existing scholarship and organisational discourses, ESHE can variously be referred to as either equivalent to or as a specific type of, the following: ‘study assistance’, ‘study support’, ‘academic leave’, ‘study leave’, ‘study time’, ‘study and research assistance’ ‘employee study assistance’, ‘education assistance’, ‘tuition assistance’, ‘employer-sponsored higher education’ or ‘employer-supported higher education’. I have selected the latter term because whilst these other expressions may sometimes be considered as equivalent to ESHE, they can also refer much more generally to employer provisions for formal adult learning other than higher education, such as certificates or diplomas provided at a sub-tertiary level. As mentioned in the previous chapter, higher education is uniquely politicised and linked to issues of power, status and social mobility (Marginson, 2006, 2011a; 2016b). Thus, ESHE represents a very particular type of ‘study support’ and should therefore be delineated as such.

Another point to note is that where an organisation provides only leave time for study, they sometimes term their policy a ‘study leave’ or ‘study time’ policy, rather than use more general terms, such as ‘study support’ or ‘study assistance’. This is because they are not providing any support other than paid leave time to study (i.e. course fee reimbursement). Lastly, there exists even further variation in ESHE nomenclature and its conceptualisation across international literature. For example,
in the United States, ESHE is more commonly referred to as ‘tuition assistance’ and largely focused on financial reimbursement for higher education course fees, as opposed to providing other forms of non-fiscal support. For the purposes of cross-comparison, I will discuss this point in detail in the final section of this chapter. In sum, there is a great deal of inconsistency in the way that both ESHE is provided, defined and conceptualised; an issue that this research aims to redress.

1.3.3 Employee-student

I challenge the ontological and epistemological assumption that individuals undertaking university study alongside paid employment, are best considered and conceptualised as foremost employees or foremost university students. Rather, drawing on the basic premise of role theory (Mead, 1934; Parsons, 2013), I argue that whilst individuals do have various social roles which they enact in different ways and in different contexts, there is also an element of individual or whole-person constancy evident in their enduring worldview. As they act out these roles not just within, but also across, different contexts, concurrently. As proponents of whole-person learning theory argue, an individual has the capacity to engage in learning in a cognitive, affective and self-aware way, as they move within and across social roles and contexts (Hoover, Giambatista, Sorenson, & Bommer, 2010; Rogers, 1995). This lasting psychosocial perspective could perhaps be likened to Bourdieu’s (1977, p. 72) notion of ‘habitus’ - our internalised and enduring way of perceiving the social world based on our previous experiences of interacting within it. Indeed, this thesis argues that the habitus of ESHE provides a useful lens through which to understand the different, sometimes conflicting, ways in which ESHE is understood by employee-students.

Essentially, by conceptualising these individuals as employee-students, we can account for the notion that they are enacting several significant social roles at the same time in their life, and engaging in learning within and across them, contemporaneously. We can emphasize the notion that learning is, by its very nature, a continuous sociocognitive and sociocultural process (Billett, 1996) It is influenced by, and itself influences, our interactions as they occur within and across constantly shifting sociocultural milieus (Billett, 1996). It allows us to view learning not as
something that occurs within a defined social role (e.g. learning as an employee), but rather in and across social roles concurrently, as individuals draw on previous knowledge, skills and experiences to engage in, and reflect upon, their learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Dewey, 2004; Schon, 1984).

It should be noted that this conceptualisation of the individual as an employee-student is not to suggest that the social roles of employee and student should be privileged over other ones in which the individual is actively engaged. Rather, the term is simply used to highlight the overlap of learning that occurs as individuals engage across these two very significant life roles, within, and beyond the workplace and university milieux.

As a final note, in my Master’s research project (Wapling, 2013), I erroneously referred to these individuals as ‘employee-learners’, which upon reflection, I realised stemmed from an unintentional presupposition that employees should be foremost conceptualised as ‘workers’ and learners as ‘enrolled students’; the very conceptualisation which I was trying to avoid. Rather, employee-students is a more useful term as it suggests that both social roles are equally important and that learning actually occurs within and across them contemporaneously.

1.3.4 Organisational Learning

Organisational learning is a broad term which can be defined in many ways. Similar to ESHE, for the purposes of this research, I have therefore elected to draw on my own classification of organisational learning to highlight several key learning assumptions. Firstly, employees may learn skills and knowledge and develop understanding which is both explicitly and tacitly sanctioned by their employer. Secondly, organisational learning is not bound to that which occurs in the physical workplace setting but also applies to that which occurs beyond it, provided it is in some way relevant to how an individual engages in their role as a paid employee.

Thus, for the purposes of this thesis, I define organisational learning as:
the development of skills, knowledge and/or understanding that occurs through any implicitly or explicitly employer-sanctioned learning process and influences how an individual engages in their role as an employee. It includes, but is not limited to, all types of formal and informal education, training, coaching or mentoring processes that are in some way relevant to the work that the individual performs as an employee.

For the purposes of this research, organisational learning has been further divided into two categories, which I have defined in the following sections.

1.3.5 Informal Work-focused Learning

Informal Work-focused Learning refers to any learning which is relevant to an individual’s role as employee and explicitly or implicitly sanctioned by their employer, but not formally recognised or organised by their employer. This may include, but is not limited to, impromptu role shadowing, informal coaching, learning by observation, learning by doing, self-directed learning and research.

1.3.6 Formal Work-focused Learning

Formal Work-focused Learning refers to any learning which is relevant to an individual’s role as employee, explicitly or implicitly sanctioned by their employer and formally recognised or organised by their employer. This may include, but is not limited to, organised role shadowing, formal coaching and mentoring and participation in internal or external training courses which may or may not be externally accredited.

The above may include many of the same types of learning which are encompassed in informal work-focused learning, however, the chief difference is that these processes are in some way formally recognised and/or organised by the employer. Whilst the learning that occurs in higher education fits the above definition of both formal and informal work-focused learning in terms of its role in organisational learning, as will be explained in the next chapter, the learning which occurs throughout an individual’s involvement in higher education has hitherto been
considered as separate from other forms of organisational learning. Therefore, in keeping with the existing literature and for the purposes of clarity, for the moment, higher education will be considered as separate from organisational learning. However, the argument that builds throughout this thesis is that conceptualising higher education in this way (as separate from organisational learning), is problematic given the flow of learning which occurs as individuals operate flexibly within and across the milieux of higher education, work and the broader community.

It should also be noted that the terms ‘informal work-focused learning’ and formal work-focused learning’ have been used in favour of the more well-known ‘informal work-based learning’ and ‘formal work-based learning’. This has been done purposively to transcend the former’s inevitable connotations with a kind of bounded physicality, an association which is becoming less relevant as individuals work and study in increasingly distributed ways (Beaumont, Stirling, & Percy, 2009; Lea & Nicoll, 2013; Vrasidas & Glass, 2002).

1.3.7 Learner Responsibility

A key finding of my Master’s research was that Australian employee-students tend to assume immense personal responsibility for their success or failure in managing higher education alongside paid work (Wapling, 2013). They tend not to view external influences, such as broader social systems and structures, as contributing to their success in undertaking simultaneous work and study. The issue of learner responsibility is an important one because continuous higher education is becoming increasingly essential for career progression due to ‘credential inflation’ – the trend for more individuals to hold qualifications than the number of skilled jobs actually requiring them (Collins, 1979).

1.4 Background and Context

In an increasingly globalised world; one characterised by risk, instability and rapid change, the higher education sector has had to continually evolve to keep pace
(Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). It is now widely accepted that the economic implications of expanding informationalism have led to an enterprise reliance on perpetual knowledge generation (Burns, 2002; Castells, 2004; Olssen & Peters, 2005). It has been argued that to ensure commercial sustainability, the production of highly-skilled knowledge workers is vital for economic competitiveness and growth (Drucker, 1969; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Wong & Neck, 2012). The economy has become increasingly characterised by the need for continuous learning (Biesta, 2006; Crick & Joldersma, 2007). Under this kind of regime, ‘educated people [become] the “capital” of a developed society’ (Drucker, 1996, p. 120). Although, the conceptualisation of individuals in this way has been subject to ardent debate (Patrick, 2013).

This focus on knowledge as a chief source of economic prosperity, generated through sustained collective productivity, raises some important questions around the nature and value of knowledge as it is imbued through traditional and non-traditional education and training means. Specifically, in terms of assessing what counts as knowledge and how this knowledge is managed (Kelly, Luke, & Green, 2008). In addition to, what is considered legitimate or useful learning (Biesta, 2006). For example, it is recognised that the workplace and university environments have become progressively interconnected (Olssen & Peters, 2005). It is also recognised that increasing numbers of individuals are now undertaking work and tertiary study simultaneously (Bexley, Daroesman, Arkoudis, & James, 2013; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment (HRSCEE), 2009; Saar, Vöörmann, & Lang, 2014). Employers, however, are weighing up the value of supporting employees to gain additional knowledge and skills through external higher education, versus other forms of organisational learning such as internal or privately provided training (Mason, 2014). In short, one of the key outcomes of these important global changes is that the value of traditional higher education has been extensively questioned (Alves, 2011; Bills, 2003; Coffield, 1996; Côté & Allahar, 2011; Dolton, Greenaway, & Vignoles, 1997; Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015; Jones, 2013; Lai, To, Lung, & Lai, 2012; Marginson, 2011b; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007; Mason, 2014; Ruben, 1995; Saar et al., 2014; Tynjälä, Välimaa, & Boulton-Lewis, 2006; Vona, 2014).
It is against this political and economic backdrop, including growing internationalisation (Marginson, 2002b) and the massification of the higher education market (Marginson, 2002a), that increasing numbers of individuals are now participating in higher education (Marginson, 2016a). In addition, these students are also undertaking higher education alongside paid employment (HRSCEE, 2009; U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, 2012). Further, the phenomenon of ‘educational inflation’ has a role to play (Hubbell, 2015; Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015). Specifically, it has infused lifelong learning rhetoric with an overwhelming focus on the end goal of credentialing over the process of learning. These changes in the education and employment landscape have led to diverse groups of employees (Rifkin, 2004; Ross & Whitfield, 2008) and employee-students (Saar et al., 2014, p. 587), previously considered non-traditional students, having become the new norm. This influx has resulted in an amplified need for higher education loans with growing numbers of students incurring university debt (Department of Treasury (DOT), 2015).

However, as Wheelahan (2007) recently discovered, within the Australian policy context, assumptions about educational pathways and how they relate to the changing needs of the workplace may be based on beliefs around idealised learning trajectories, rather than accurately reflecting the reality of education and employment pathways, in practice. So, despite a governmental commitment to promoting lifelong learning and despite increasing numbers of Australians becoming more educated, skill shortages and mismatches across industries remain (Wheelahan, 2015). Therefore, in seeking to understand why these incongruencies exist and persist, it is important to explore the ways in which different stakeholders currently view and value higher education, as distinct from other forms of adult learning, and how this relates to the ways in which it is supported, for the following key reasons:

- Higher education is political; it is influenced by policy and therefore its value is highly contested in terms of the ways in which it may be perceived to provide both ‘public’ and ‘private’ benefits (Marginson, 2007, 2011b; 2016b)
• Higher education has been linked to increased social status (Marginson, 2006, 2011a), social mobility (Pásztor, 2014; Stuart, 2012) and income-earning (Marginson, 2006; 2016b) and therefore issues of power are likely to be bound up in the diverse ways in which it is valued and supported.

• Increasing numbers of Australians are undertaking higher education and incurring university debt (DOT, 2015), so it is important to understand how different stakeholders value higher education, to determine the extent of alignment between diverse perspectives regarding the value of higher education.

• Compared with higher education, employers may view organisational education and training provisions such as informal workplace learning and privately-provided external training, as more appropriate for the rapidly shifting needs of the internal labour market (Mason, 2014); the former may be perceived as more cost effective and/or quicker to complete.

The way in which popular discourses of both lifelong education and lifelong learning intersect with higher education, is therefore also of central relevance to the present topic. As Billett (2010) cautions, however, it should be noted that lifelong education and lifelong learning, whilst related, are not identical concepts. The former may comprise an element of lifelong learning but is not equivalent to it, as the latter is likely to encompass many other informal and formal learning experiences, as they occur within but also outside institutionalised educational contexts (Billet, 2010).

Thus, by considering higher education in this way - as not just a means through which to learn skills and knowledge that enable qualification attainment for credentialing. Nor as the rough equivalent of lifelong learning. But rather, as a form of lifelong education that may constitute an element of lifelong learning, but is not reducible to it, higher education may be considered as interlinked with, rather than
separate from, other forms of adult education such as workplace learning. As Wheelahan (2007 p. 14) explains:

The learning needs of individuals and the enterprises for which they work are not the same. While enterprises may need specific skills, individuals need knowledge and skills that enable them to live in their whole world as a condition for the exercise of knowledge and skills in one domain [emphasis in original].

Thus, considering higher education as a form of institutionalised learning (education) that both shapes, and is shaped by, other formal and informal learning as it occurs throughout the lifespan, means that what is learnt in higher education is likely to influence, and be influenced by, what occurs outside the university context. That is, the learning that occurs throughout tertiary studies is co-constructed with the diverse range of learning experiences that occur in and across other personal and professional spheres, including the domain where individuals are likely to spend a substantial portion of their life – the workplace.

Therefore, conceptualising higher education as a key element of lifelong education, which for a sizeable and growing proportion of individuals, forms a formative component of their lifelong learning, highlights the need to interrogate the role of the employer in supporting higher education. This requires the movement from a focus on higher education qualifications as stackable credentials to an emphasis on how the skills and knowledge learnt in higher education relate to the learning that occurs both within and beyond the university context. This includes the learning which occurs in the workplace, in other education environments and in broader life situations. This reconceptualisation of higher education and interrogation of the employer’s role in supporting it, may aid both governmental and organisational policy-makers in achieving some degree of alignment between diverse stakeholder values. This may be useful to the extent that it allows ESHE policy and practice to meet the pragmatic learning and learning support needs of key stakeholders. It has implications for the enactment of lifelong education, as an important component of lifelong learning.
1.5 Research Gap and Research Problem

The value of higher education has been investigated generally (Clark & Anderson, 1992; Coffield, 1996; Côté & Allahar, 2011; Dolton et al., 1997; Jones, 2013; Lai et al., 2012; Marginson, 2011b; 2016b; Servaes, 2008). It has also been explored specifically in relation to employability outcomes (Leuze, 2007; Norton, 2007) and graduate satisfaction (Lai et al., 2012). The role of the employer in supporting higher education for those engaged in paid employment alongside higher education, however, has been largely overlooked in extant literature (Saar et al., 2014). At an organisational level, it has recently been suggested that ESHE is now at risk, as employers have become less willing to provide course-fee reimbursement to employee-students (Mason, 2014 p. 306). This trend may reflect a change in employer values and/or broader ideological shifts relating to the perpetuation of neoliberal views of education influencing higher education policy (Jones, 2013). This includes the increased transfer of responsibility for learning from organisations to the individual (Holm 2007).

Specifically, if the changes brought about by neoliberalism are requiring individuals to assume increased responsibility for negotiating their learning within and across organisational settings, then this shift may be creating climates of increased risk and uncertainty. This risk and uncertainty may manifest in the ways in which both employees and employers communicate and negotiate learning support affordances such as ESHE. This is a meaningful and concerning issue given that ‘significant challenges remain for non-traditional students who need to support their education without assistance from their employer’ (Dougherty & Woodland, 2009 p. 183). These students may experience unique risks associated with the negotiation of appropriate learning support affordances. Certainly, it represents a potential conflict between employer values and motivations as relates to employee-student values and motivations versus broader governmental agendas.

Further, in contrast to other forms of employee entitlements, in Australia, the provision of ESHE is not only an under-researched topic, but an inconsistently governed one. Whereas some public sector organisations provide ESHE as part of
externally-mandated industrial agreements, other public and private sector organisations are largely free to create and adjust their ESHE provisions internally. Moreover, how these ESHE policy provisions are enacted in practice, across all private and public sectors, is largely unknown, unclear and under-researched. It is understood in different, sometimes inconsistent, ways by both individuals and organisations. This leaves room for the provision of ESHE to be determined at the subjective discretion of individual workplace managers. How it is understood and provided may therefore reflect certain ideological assumptions relating to the value of conventional higher education as contrasted with other types of organisational learning, such as privately-provided formal and informal workplace training. Ergo, there is room for individual values to be enacted and applied in diverse ways across different teams, departments and organisations. Consequently, if there is a mismatch between organisational, departmental or team objectives, management (at any level) agendas and employee-student assumptions, then ESHE could be inconsistently and inequitably afforded.

Scant literature currently exists on the topic of ESHE (Saar et al., 2014). It has been argued that existing theoretical approaches may be premised on economic-determinist models such as Human Capital Theory (HCT, Becker, 1993). Whilst it is certainly important to recognise the economic benefits of higher education, relying solely on these types of paradigms can be problematic (Marginson, 2016b). Mainly, because they tend to assume that all individuals – including workplace managers and employee-students, value higher education in the same way, and will therefore engage with ESHE in the same way. If this is the case, then the way in which organisations provide support for diverse groups of employee-students may be based on assumptions which presuppose that all employees are therefore motivated to engage in higher education alongside paid work, in the same way. Following this line of reasoning, organisations may therefore be making the assumption that all employee-students can be kept motivated and engaged via the same type of ESHE strategies. Namely, those based on formal, employee relations benefits, such as course fee reimbursement and minimal allotments of study leave time. This may have implications for employee-student motivation, wellbeing and ultimately productivity, potentially undermining the very aims that employers are seeking to realise.
As Biesta reasons (2006 p. 170), lifelong learning, when conceptualised within an economic framework such as the learning economy, raises the question of who defines the learning agenda? The answer to this question is likely to have implications for adult-learner motivation to engage in lifelong learning, because adults are unlikely to be motivated ‘if they have no say in the content, purpose or direction of such learning’ (Biesta 2006, p. 170). Therefore, developing a deeper and more critical understanding of ESHE affordances - in terms of how they are constructed and engaged with by different stakeholders, may give employee-students more say in the content, purpose and direction of their learning.

1.6 Significance

This research is timely, as the federal government plans to significantly increase ‘lending to students through the higher education…loan schemes…to support human capital formation, improved productivity and labour market outcomes, and social opportunity’ (DOT, 2015, pp. 75-77). After the uncapping of Higher Education places in 2010, and again in 2012, increased numbers of students have been entering university studies in Australia (DOT, 2015). Despite a recently declared deferment of the 2015 funding reforms, under the proposed higher education funding scheme, they will likely continue to do so (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016). If we are to devise appropriate measures of support - financial and otherwise, for employee-students and their employers, it is important to gain an understanding of how higher education is valued, especially as this relates to the role of the employer in providing such support. Moreover, by exploring how these values may be bound up in discourses of lifelong education, lifelong learning and organisational learning - in policy and practice, we can ensure that there is some degree of alignment between them.

In sum, the potential significance of this research is wide-reaching in scope. It is likely to have multifaceted and highly practical consequences for governmental and organisational policy-makers, employers, workplace managers, employee-students, tertiary educators and administrators across all sectors. Specifically, three key areas of significance have been identified, as detailed in the following section.
1.6.1 Organisational Significance for Employers and Employee-students

There is a growing trend for employers to work alongside higher education providers to create workplace-customised education programs (Gorshkov & Kliucharev, 2013). Standard higher education course offerings and the comparatively more traditional, academic curriculums that they offer, however, need not be rendered redundant. On the contrary, it is important that employees have the opportunity to undertake conventional higher education alongside paid work, if they are to engage in the type of innovative and critical thinking vital for challenging existing organisational norms. As Barnacle and Usher (2003 p. 347) explain, today’s knowledge economies rely heavily upon innovation; ‘the emergence of new ideas and new ways of doing things - for economic prosperity’. It is therefore important that employee involvement in continuing higher education is not viewed by employers as an irrelevant undertaking and that ESHE is not seen as an imposition or risk, but rather, as a practical mechanism through which workplace change is cultivated.

Currently, many organisations offer ESHE to their personnel (Buddin & Kapur, 2005; Cappelli, 2004; Fenton Jr, 2004; Saar et al., 2014). This support generally takes the form of course fee reimbursement and/or allotments of study leave (Hudson 2001 cited in Cappelli, 2004). It is interesting that this kind of study support is so prevalent, given an existing lack of research on whether these types of employee incentives, and the ways in which they are engaged with, are actually aligned with the values and motivations of employee-students and employers. Cappelli (2004 p. 214) has noted that ‘it is something of a surprise that any employers should offer such support, let alone that most employers do’, as

… post-secondary education represents the classic example of the type of investments in employees that we would not expect employers to make because the skills and knowledge it produces are general skills useful to other employers.

In other words, if we are to adopt a view of higher education based on the assumptions underlying HCT (Becker, 1993); that employees are predominantly motivated by the accrual of human capital, then it is unlikely to be in an employer’s
best interest to offer ESHE. This is because HCT presupposes that in the absence of internal promotion opportunities, when employees gain additional generalist knowledge and skills (as opposed to organisation-specific, specialist skills), turnover is likely to increase (Benson, Finegold, & Mohrman, 2004). HCT assumes that they will seek out more-skilled roles in the external labour market that can offer higher salaries.

Nevertheless, in spite of this reasoning, many organisations do continue to offer some form of study support for higher education (Buddin & Kapur, 2005; Cappelli, 2004; Fenton Jr, 2004; Mason, 2014; Saar et al., 2014). So, although HCT may account for why employees undertake tertiary study (to increase their human capital) and why employers decide to support them in circumstances where opportunities for promotion exist within their company (in which the employee can add direct value through specialist skills). This does not explain why employers would continue to offer study support in situations where there is an absence of internal promotion opportunities. Further, HCT does not adequately explain why employers would provide the same type and amount of higher-education support for employee-students deemed average performers, as compared to that which is provided for high performers.

More importantly, when higher education is only seen to add organisational value upon successful degree completion, rather than during the process of its completion, employers may be missing out on vital opportunities to harness the learning that occurs whilst employees are participating in it. Management behaviour influences organisational subculture and employee motivation to transfer learning in the workplace (Egan, 2008). Reconceptualising the value of higher education in the workplace may therefore aid managers in the development of more effective modes of providing ESHE in practice. As explained by Wheelahan (2015 p. 21), who argues,

Labour market development strategies can never just be focused on education and qualifications [as] while education may help students to develop capabilities, these capabilities may not be able to be realised in workplaces that resist change and which provide few opportunities for discretionary learning or for the development of autonomous practice.
For example, there is a general association between employee motivation and learning transfer in the workplace (Kontoghiorghes, 2002). This raises the possibility that there may also exist important relationships between employee-student motivation and academia-to-industry learning transfer. Developing a thorough understanding of the beliefs and expectations that employee-students hold regarding the value of higher education may therefore represent a crucial first step in determining how ESHE is provided and engaged with and how this might relate to employee-student motivation and engagement. To that end, the findings from this study may prompt employers to explore more targeted and strategic approaches to ESHE policy and practice. The value of this may be amplified for businesses that are unable to provide large amounts of course-fee reimbursement to employee-students. For example, those generating minimal revenue (i.e. not for profit organisations or emerging start-up companies).

1.6.2 Enhanced Employee-student Health and Well-being

The Group of Twenty - a community comprised of government leaders from some of the world’s wealthiest nations, recently made a key recommendation concerning the improvement of workplace health and safety for employees (G20, 2014). This recommendation was not operationalised in much detail. One substantial element of occupational health and safety that has received much recent attention in research and professional practice, however, is work-related psychosocial hazard management and stress management (Kortum & Leka, 2014; Leka, Van Wassenhove, & Jain, 2015). Additionally, the well-being of higher education students has been identified as an issue of current and ‘global concern’ (Deasy, Coughlan, Pironom, Jourdan, & Mannix-McNamara, 2014).

The increasing interconnectedness between the workplace and university environments is documented (Nicoll & Fejes, 2011; Olssen & Peters, 2005). The link between employee health and well-being and student health and well-being, however, has scarcely been drawn. Rather, when considered across business and education-centered literature, the former has been addressed as a largely discrete construct to university student well-being. This theoretical fissure is of significance, as conceptualising the well-being of individuals in this way neglects to acknowledge
that individuals exist as both employees and university students concurrently. An individual experiences stress as a student and as an employee at the same time. The roles of student and employee are interlinked and are likely to influence each other contemporaneously via the experience of ‘stress contagion’ which occurs as we move across different social roles (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989). Unless this role connectedness is addressed, our understanding of employee-student health and well-being will remain limited. This is problematic given that the concurrent undertaking of work and study has been associated with increased employee-student stress and burnout (Holm, 2007; Wapling, 2013).

By developing a more robust understanding of how experiences of undertaking higher education alongside paid work are perceived and valued by relevant stakeholders, we may be able to determine whether the ways in which ESHE is currently afforded and engaged, is effective in promoting employee-student well-being.

1.6.3 Supporting Diverse Employee-student Groups

The Australian government has recognised that encouraging employees from diverse backgrounds, ‘especially older Australians and women, to enter, re-enter and stay in work’, is vital for economic growth (DOT, 2015 p. iii). Research into how employees from diverse backgrounds, such as those undertaking higher education alongside paid employment (employee-students), can be better supported, however, has not been forthcoming. Applying a more critical conceptual lens to the ways in which different cohorts view and value higher education may therefore be useful in helping determine whether current ESHE approaches are actively enabling or encumbering diverse learner groups - in policy and practice. Moreover, understanding how different employee-students engage with ESHE may highlight particular forms of systemic disadvantage.
Examples of diverse employee-student needs include:

**i) Responding to an Aging Workforce**

The age of retirement has become increasingly protracted (DOT, 2015). This has occurred as workplaces seek to manage older workers’ motivation and performance, rather than simply facilitate their progression to retirement (Newton, 2006, p. 94). Understanding *why* older employees undertake higher education may therefore have important implications for how they can be kept motivated and engaged. This is important because if there is a misalignment between how older employee-students’ value their involvement in higher education, as compared to how their employers or managers value it, there may be implications for the relevance of support offered to them. For example, Isopahkala-Bouret (2015 p. 95) recently discovered that many older workers are choosing to undertake higher education for the purposes of gaining credentials which they believe are necessary to keep abreast of the increasing credentialing demands associated with their paid work, as opposed to viewing higher education as a pre-retirement hobby or personal interest.

As Istance (2015 p. 228) argues, ‘there are contradictory messages about ageing populations and their engagement in learning within the literature and in common debates’. These messages relate to how prevailing economic discourses of lifelong learning situate older adults as moving *out* of the knowledge economy, towards retirement. This conception, he argues, ultimately downplays their involvement in ongoing education and training and marginalises them as lifelong learners (Istance, 2015).

**ii) Women, Education and Work**

In 2014, the G20 (2014) made a commitment to investing in education and training by reducing the gap in participation rates among women and men by 25 percent by 2025. There is a longstanding trend that women are more likely to undertake higher education than men (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2014). It therefore stands to reason that a more holistic investigation into not only how female employee-students value higher education, but also how higher education is valued
by those responsible for supporting women in this undertaking, must be executed. Specifically, how current forms of ESHE are provided and engaged with may obscure other forms of systematic disadvantage. For example, Saar et al. (2014 p. 600) found that women received less financial support for their tertiary studies than men. This is a worrying finding given that ESHE represents a key component of the ‘portfolio of resources that pay for post-secondary education’ (Cappelli, 2004 p. 214).

**iii) Younger Employee-students and Socioeconomic Disadvantage**

Younger employee-students, including recent school leavers and university graduates, represent a large subsection of employee-students required to juggle work and study contemporaneously (Doogan, 2009). The importance of investing in education and training by ensuring that young people are more actively engaged in education and employment, has previously been recognised as a core commitment by the G20 (2014). Indeed, the governmental promise to provide better education and employment trajectories for Australian youth through a more thorough understanding of their unique educational and employment needs, is not new. Previously, an Australian parliamentary inquiry into the growing number of students that were combining work and study found that ‘for an increasing number of young people there is an added dimension which is placing further pressure on their lives: the part-time job’ (HRSCEE, 2009, p. vii). The report also acknowledged that ‘despite the rise in student workers, the impact of competing demands on young people’s lives is not well known’ (HRSCEE, 2009, p. vii).

Indeed, the HRSCEE (2009 p. vii) has previously recommended that:

> … further research should be undertaken to examine student pathways and the impact of part-time employment and other extracurricular activities on students’ academic performance and retention, including the motivations of those students who work longer hours.

A follow up report on exactly what this was supposed to entail has not been forthcoming.
This is a significant omission, as part of assessing the impact of juggling simultaneous work and study involves cultivating a genuine understanding of how young people value higher education. It may be in contrast with the ways in which it is valued by the government, university educators, administrators and employers. Moreover, it has been shown that employees that undertake paid work alongside post-secondary studies are likely to achieve less successful results (Draper, Oltean-Dumbrava, Tizaoui, & Newbury, 2011 p. 13). Similarly, Krause, Hartley, James, and McInnis (2005) found that students working longer hours may demonstrate lower academic performance, although follow-up research suggests that the association between hours of paid work and academic performance is far from conclusive (James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010). Regardless, many students may be working alongside higher education study out of ‘economic necessity’, rather than simply as a means to earn additional ‘pocket money’ (Doogan, 2009). Their reliance on appropriate forms of ESHE may thus be greater than for other employee-student cohorts and therefore warrants further investigation.

1.7 Research Aims

The overarching aim of this research is to explore how experiences of undertaking higher education alongside paid work (and/or supervising employees involved in this undertaking) relate to assumptions and beliefs regarding the perceived value of higher education and the employer's role in supporting it - in organisational policy and practice.

The research aims are to explore how:

1. the experiences of employees undertaking higher education alongside paid work relate to the beliefs and expectations that they hold regarding the value of higher education

2. the experiences of managers supervising employees undertaking higher education alongside paid work relate to the beliefs and expectations that they hold regarding the value of higher education
3. these beliefs and expectations relate to how ESHE is provided and engaged with, in organisational policy and practice

4. might developing an understanding of these beliefs and expectations, and their relationship with the provision of ESHE, assist employers in developing ESHE strategies that enable lifelong education for diverse employee-students.

This PhD project springboards off prior research that I have undertaken, which explored how the experiences of employees undertaking concurrent tertiary study (employee-students), influenced perceptions of the value of completing simultaneous work and study (Wapling, 2013). This prior research found that the value which employees place on undertaking higher education whilst working, was primarily conceptualised in terms of goal-directed motivational factors. Specifically, that employee-students tended to value the undertaking of higher education to the extent that it enabled them to reach the goal of degree attainment. The extent to which motivation was maintained during this process was related to the employee-students’ ability to effectively manage time. Of most relevance to the current project however, was the finding that employee-students’ ability to manage time was influenced by the key variable employer-support, with expectations around the provision of ESHE related to employee-student ability to manage competing time demands to successfully complete their program of study (Wapling, 2013).

Whilst this initial research focused on how employee-students valued higher education, in terms of their perceived experiences of undertaking higher education alongside paid work, it did not explore the value placed on higher education from the perspective of other key stakeholders, namely, employers and workplace managers. Further, it did not focus on the beliefs and expectations that employee-students and other key stakeholders hold regarding the value of higher education in relation to how ESHE is both provided and engaged with. This is an important omission as different stakeholders may have unique expectations and beliefs relating to the value of higher education, in terms of its role and significance across
both educational and vocational contexts. This may have implications for how
ESHE is provided and engaged with and the relationship between the two.

In sum, the role of the employer in supporting higher education, as relates to how
higher education is valued - in policy and practice, remains a much under-
researched topic. The proposed project therefore represents a fruitful area of adult
education research that may offer tangible benefits for ESHE policy and practice,
informing future research and practice.

1.8 Rationale for a Critical Theoretical Approach

As aforementioned, higher education is unique from other forms of adult education
and training due to its politicised nature and the ways in which it is tied to status,
power and privilege (Marginson, 2006, 2011a, 2016b). A central assumption of this
thesis is that the learning and knowledge generated through higher education
participation is likely to be valued differently to the learning and knowledge
generated through participation in other forms of adult education and training. It
differs from informal and formal organisational learning. This is likely to influence
the support that employers provide for higher education – both in policy and in
practice. Specifically, knowledge-power relations may influence the ways in which
higher education is valued, as contrasted with other forms of adult education and
training, and this may influence the ways in which ESHE is provided and engaged
with.

Indeed, values are not neutral but rather influenced by broader cultural, social and
political ideologies (Starrs, 2013). These assumptions are influenced by discourses
of power. As Bagnall (2000, p. 23) explains, ‘contemporary lifelong learning
discourse is almost invariably within a framework of assumptions, commitments,
beliefs, values and concepts’. For example, Wheelahan (2015) recently found that
assumptions regarding educational pathways, and the trajectories between education
and work, are often not congruent with reality. She argues that ‘this disconnect
arises from policy frameworks that do not engage well with labour market realities’
(p.6). The ways in which different values relate to the construction and contestation
of knowledge (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998), and how these views are bound up in discourses of lifelong learning (Nicoll & Fejes, 2011) is central to this investigation. This is because they shape the ways that employers elect to provide support for higher education and how relevant stakeholders engage with this support – in policy and practice.

Moreover, the organisational systems in which these key stakeholders (i.e. employee-students, employers, workplace managers, tertiary educators, administrators and policy makers) operate (i.e. the workplace and university), may be imbued with unequal power relations (Blackmore & Sawers, 2015; Orta, 2015; Qian, Xu, & Xiaodong, 2014). These influence, and are likely influenced by, popular lifelong learning rhetoric. For example, policy rhetoric at the organisational and governmental level may purport to be supportive of achieving greater educational parity through improved learning support initiatives. Successful implementation of policy, however, depends upon the actions and interactions of a large network of diverse stakeholders. A focus on the nexus between ESHE policy and practice, especially as relates to issues of parity in not just gaining access to, but rather supporting the whole experience of undertaking higher education, therefore forms a central element of the overarching research aim.

1.8.1 Conceptual Framework

The research questions were explored by investigating a) how assumptions underpin valuations of knowledge and learning in ways that b) are socially influenced but not determined, c) shape and are shaped by knowledge-power relations via discourse and d) may therefore have pragmatic and emancipatory implications for individuals and organisations - in policy and practice. A blended conceptual framework employing a constructivist epistemology, whilst drawing on a critical theoretical lens, was therefore adopted.

This approach allowed me to draw on Charmaz’s (1990, p. 1161) social constructivist preoccupation with questioning ‘taken-for-granted interactions, emotions, definitions, ideas, and knowledge’. I was aware of how, as a researcher, I would also be constructing and reconstructing my own assumptions and knowledge
through the research process. Indeed, throughout the data collection process, I found that my position as an insider/outsider contributed to these changing constructions. For example, when interviewing staff performing human resources and training-related roles, I felt that my social role was in constant flux. I was considered as an insider – a fellow human resources professional drawing on accepted learning and development jargon at one moment, but then quickly reminded by participants of my external ‘student researcher’ status in the next. As Merriam et al. (2001, p. 405) highlight, ‘in the real world of data collection, there is a good bit of slippage and fluidity between these two states’.

Further, owing to the close ties between higher education and social status (Marginson, 2006, 2011a, 2016b), my conceptual lens highlighted the ways in which knowledge-power relations are linked to discourse (Fairclough, 1989; Foucault, 1980). Bourdieu’s (1984; 1990b) theory of habitus, practice and distinction was considered alongside Foucault’s (1980) theorisation of knowledge, exploring power in relation to discourse. These perspectives were used to interrogate how disadvantage might be perpetuated as diverse learner groups engage in continuing higher education with the inheritance of capital creating a ‘scholastic mode of production’ (1984; 1979). The concept of habitus was also drawn upon to explore, in detail, the ways in which ESHE is understood in varying ways by different employee-students and employers and how these understandings relate to the negotiation of ESHE affordances within a climate of risk and uncertainty.

The notion of ‘study relevance’ in ESHE decision-making was also considered in relation to the Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of ‘doxa’ - a discursive mechanism by which certain views become accepted as common-sense and legitimised at the expense of others. This was considered in relation to Foucault’s (1980) ‘regimes of truth’ to discuss how forms of discourse become recognised as objective truths, themselves maintaining and creating new forms of power. I have also drawn upon Foucault’s (1978, 1980, 1995) notion of ‘disciplinary power’ to explore the ways in which participation in ongoing higher education becomes accepted as a social ‘norm’, influencing the ways in which individuals self-monitor their engagement in higher education, to conform to this norm. I argue that as norms are created and reinforced via discourse, they come to be accepted as ‘doxa’ over time.
1.9 Thesis Structure

In this chapter, I have explained how my personal and professional experiences have informed my research focus. I have also defined the key terms used in this thesis. A contextual overview of how higher education participation in Australia is positioned in relation to other forms of continuing adult learning and development and ESHE has been offered. The research problem, research significance and aims have been outlined in detail.

In Chapter 2; the first section of the literature review, an overview of how higher education is currently viewed and valued in a broad context, is provided. This chapter proceeds in two main sections. Firstly, a critical analysis of how dominant valuations of higher education are reflected in lifelong learning and earning discourse in ways which privilege particular valuations of learning and learners is explicated. Secondly, an overview of relevant existing literature on ESHE from a cross comparative perspective is discussed.

In Chapter 3; the second section of the literature review, the organisational learning–workplace learning disconnect is explored and the notion of the workplace as a learning organisation is problematised. A case is made for the use of a blended critical theoretical framework to explore the research questions by highlighting the knowledge-power relations and structure-agency tensions inherent in ESHE policy and practice.

In Chapter 4, a rationale for using a mixed methods research design, drawing on primarily qualitative methods, to explore the research questions is provided. The research design, data collection and analysis techniques are presented in detail and the research quality is discussed.

In Chapter 5, the findings from the first phase of data collection and analysis (policy analysis) are collated and presented.
In Chapter 6, the findings from the second phase of data and analysis (survey analysis) are collated and presented.

In Chapter 7, the findings from the third phase of data collection and analysis (cross-site, in-depth interviews and focus group) are presented and discussed with reference to the collective findings from the previous phases of data collection and analysis.

In Chapter 8, the findings from the overall grounded theoretical analysis, including the emergence of the unifying theme of risk and uncertainty and the model of the habitus of ESHE, are presented and discussed with reference to knowledge-power links. Issues of research quality, including the testing of sufficiency and reliability, are also considered.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by proposing that the different ways in which ESHE is understood and engaged with by various stakeholders may be addressed by developing a deeper awareness of the habitus of ESHE. This allows for improved mechanisms of communication and negotiation, whilst acknowledging that this approach is still ultimately characterised by risk and uncertainty as relates to the unequal power relations inherent in the employee-employer relationship. Recommendations are made for how the ESHE generated from this research may contribute to improvements in how ESHE is provided and engaged with - in policy and practice. Limitations of the research study and avenues for future enquiry are also discussed.
Chapter 2. The State of Play

2.1 Introduction

There is a current dearth of literature on how employers provide support for employees undertaking higher education alongside paid employment (Mason, 2014; Saar et al., 2014). Further, as Saar et al. (2014, p. 587) explain,

The opportunities to work while studying depend largely on the role of employers in promoting learning. However, both theoretical frameworks and empirical studies typically focus on the behaviour of firms in providing training.

Moreover, existing research has scarcely investigated how employer support for higher education is provided at the level of both organisational policy and practice. Indeed, the very term ‘employer-supported higher education’ (ESHE) is contested. It is also one which I have selected for the purposes of this research after a review of the existing literature indicated a lack of consistent terminology for describing the topic; an issue discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

In positioning this research within the field, it is therefore necessary to review the broader literature on higher education, in terms of how it is contextualised and conceptualised within existing discourses of lifelong learning and earning. Specifically, the ways in which the value of higher education is theoretically framed within these discourses is critically interrogated, as this is likely to relate to the ways in which higher education is valued at a macro socio-political level. Furthermore, it is argued that the ways in which higher education is valued at the macro level influence how it is valued at the meso level of organisational policy and practice (and vice versa). Thus, it is also necessary to review relevant literature on organisational learning theory and workplace learning theory in terms of their relationship to each other. This is important because the ways in which higher education is viewed and valued at the organisational level are likely to influence how it is supported by employers in organisational policy and practice. Lastly, as ESHE provisions are not only afforded, but also engaged with by individuals at the
micro level, a consideration of relevant literature as relates to structure-agency tensions and knowledge-power relations is also discussed.

To explore these topics, this literature review proceeds over two chapters and four main sections; the progression of which is outlined below.

In the current chapter, which is the first component of the literature review,

i. an analysis of how the value of higher education is conceptualised and contextualised within the wider literature on lifelong learning and earning is provided. The ways in which key socio-political changes, based on neoliberalist economic assumptions, have influenced valuations of higher education in Australia, is discussed. These assumptions are contrasted with more traditional democratic ideologies relating to the value of higher education. I also discuss educational credentialing theory as it relates to Human Capital Theory (HCT, Becker, 1993), and Bourdieu’s (1986) theorisation of capital.

I argue that the lived experience of undertaking higher education, including the challenges that individuals face in navigating the dynamic structural, systemic and relational barriers to participating in higher education, and obtaining appropriate ESHE, is marginalised in dominant lifelong learning discourses. I contend that this relegation of structural and systemic factors in existing discourses serves neoliberal political agendas by strengthening individuals’ sense of agentic learner responsibility. This maintains inequality and disadvantage in relation to continued higher education access and engagement in practice.

ii. the paucity of Australian, European and United States-based research on ESHE is discussed from a cross-comparative perspective. I argue that the higher education funding approach adopted by a nation is influenced by its unique socio-political and cultural constitution and is thus likely to influence how ESHE is conceptualised, afforded and engaged with.
In Chapter 3, which is the second and final component of the literature review,

iii. a case for how higher education has been sidelined in existing organisational and workplace learning discourses in presented. It is argued that due to the different disciplinary underpinnings of these discourses - business management and education, respectively, they continue to be informed by competing epistemologies and axiologies of learning. It is argued that these discursive disconnects are sustained by complex knowledge-power relations which are reinforced in organisational policy and practice.

iv. the conceptualisation of the modern workplace as a genuine ‘learning organisation’ is questioned with reference to the sidelining of the higher education-facilitated knowledge and learning in extant organisational learning discourse. It is argued that a more expansive definition of study relevance is needed for higher education-facilitated informal learning to be legitimised as a key form of knowledge and skill generation - in organisational policy and practice. I argue that by adopting a critical theoretical lens; one which centralises the role of knowledge-power links and structure agency tensions, the value of the process of participating in higher education alongside paid work can be reframed beyond its significance as a once-off credential-generating event.

2.2 Problematising Higher Education and Lifelong Learning in Australia

2.2.1 Lifelong Learning: Democratic Roots and Neoliberal Economic Imperatives

Over time, lifelong learning has evolved to become a complex, value-laden paradigm assuming multiple, contested meanings (Biesta, 2006; Nicoll & Fejes, 2011). For example, popular political discourse, has tended to inaccurately conflate the concept of lifelong learning with lifelong education (Billett, 2010). Therefore, crucial to any discussion of lifelong learning is a clarification of the term as it
relates, not *equates*, to lifelong education. Engagement in continuing higher education, despite often being equated with lifelong learning, is actually more closely aligned with *lifelong education*. That is, the latter specifically comprises institutionalised forms of learning, as opposed to the organic and inevitable learning that all humans engage in, across all contexts, all of the time which is more closely associated with the former (Billett, 2010). Drawing on these definitions, higher education is thus positioned in this research as a *form of* lifelong education, which for a growing proportion of individuals forms a significant *phase of* their lifelong learning.

Indeed, one of the major shifts to have occurred in adult education theory over the last 50 years has been the centralising of notions of lifelong learning (Biesta, 2006). This shift has been driven by significant changes in national and international labour markets. These changes have resulted from a complex mix of social transformations such as informationalism and globalisation (Castells, 2004). They have also formed alongside the growing influence of neoliberal political agendas (Giroux, 2004). As explained by Giroux (2004, p. 495), neoliberalism is a political ideology which sees the labour market as the ‘organising principle for all political, social and economic decisions’, so that all goods and services are valued in terms of the extent to which they can be marketed and commodified. This regime undermines ‘democracy, public goods, the welfare state, and non-commodified values’, rendering public services such as education particularly vulnerable as teachers are increasingly wedded to the role of ‘supplier’ and students to ‘consumer’ (Giroux, 2004, p. 495).

However, before progressing, a caveat that should be briefly noted is the propensity for neoliberalism to be used as

… a generic descriptor for right-leaning, negative phenomena [which] is not particularly helpful because such usage implies that neoliberalism is a unitary concept which belies the complex and contested nature of the phenomenon. It also does not acknowledge that neoliberalism is only one of the many things influencing contemporary public policy and private practice (Rowlands & Rawolle, 2013, p. 261).

Thus, whilst neoliberalism is a useful term for describing how certain social, economic and political principles have influenced the role of higher education as a
key form of lifelong education, the neoliberalist movement and its underlying ideology is not entirely responsible for the changing role of higher education as a key component of lifelong education. Rather, whilst neoliberalist values are likely to shape how higher education is valued and engaged with, there are other ideologies, and interpretations of ideologies, which are likely to influence how knowledge and learning are viewed and valued over time. Indeed, it is the exploration of how the experiences of diverse individuals influence their assumptions relating to the value of higher education, that is a central focus of this research. This necessitates an awareness of how assumptions may be socially constructed but not determined, in manifold and complex ways.

Regardless of the exact mechanisms through which these social developments have occurred and are maintained, it is accepted that they have resulted in a new type of economy characterised by the need for continuous knowledge generation – ‘a knowledge economy’ (Drucker, 1969) and a new type of society – a ‘learning society’ (Hutchins, 1968). The latter is predicated on the need for continuous knowledge generation, achieved through perpetual education and training. As Gee (2000 p. 61) explains, under this kind of regime, an individual’s ‘employability’ rather than their ‘employment’, becomes crucial to their security in the labour market, with the former determined by their involvement in both professional and personal projects. This occurs as they:

… see and define themselves as a flexibly rearrangeable portfolio of the skills, experiences and achievements they have acquired through their trajectory through project space as team members of communities of practice operating as distributed networks to accomplish a set endeavour which then terminates the community (Gee, 2000, p. 61).

The purpose of adult education has been reconceptualised from a necessary vocational checkpoint, or once-off significant life event, to an ongoing economic process, characterised by the need for engagement in continuous education (Faure et al., 1972). This reimagination of adult learning has resulted in the privileging of economic conceptions of lifelong learning and lifelong education in popular political and organisational discourses of education and employment (Biesta, 2006, 2012; Shaw & Crowther, 2014).
The conceptualisation of lifelong education, however, has not always been driven as strongly by neoliberal, economic objectives. Traditionally, it has been associated with more democratic aims, such as ensuring that individuals not only learnt the requisite skills and knowledge to succeed in the world of work, but were also provided with a degree of freedom to find meaning and personal fulfilment. Although, as Faure et al. (1972, p. 101) cautioned almost five decades ago, ‘democracy has to blaze a path through a mass of obstacles and snares’. The result is that over time the notion of lifelong education has lost much of its democratic roots in favour of more economic conceptualisations of lifelong learning (Biesta, 2006).

Whilst it is outside the scope of this literature review to discuss in detail how these changing conceptualisations have occurred, there is a watershed moment worth mentioning. As noted by Biesta (2006, p. 172), ‘the idea that lifelong learning is first and foremost about the development of human capital – an ‘investment in human resources’ – so as to secure competitiveness and economic growth’, was initially articulated in a key document released in 1996 by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development entitled ‘Lifelong Learning for All’ (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 1996). As Biesta (2006) explains, this important document advocated for strategic policy development that privileged conceptualisations of lifelong learning centered on building individuals’ capacity to continuously adapt to changing and unstable economic and vocational conditions, as opposed to pursuing higher education for more democratic or emancipatory ends. It has been argued that contemporary lifelong learning discourses have continued to reinforce this economic version of lifelong learning (Bagnall, 2000; Biesta, 2006; Nicoll & Fejes, 2011).

The economic objectives of lifelong learning should not be ignored. Indeed, they form a vitally important and useful component of lifelong education. The concern, however, is that existing discourses of lifelong learning and lifelong education tend to reinforce neoliberal economic ideologies at the expense of democratic ones. For example, learning aims such as those related to achieving more ‘emancipatory knowledge-interests’ (Crick & Joldersma, 2007, p. 89) and facilitating social equality through ongoing education (Biesta, 2006), tend to be underemphasised.
That is, located within current discourses of lifelong education and lifelong learning, the non-economic objectives of continuing higher education are either discounted or obscured by an overriding focus on the economic ones, which are reinforced through popular political and organisational rhetoric (Biesta, 2006).

Biesta’s (2006 p. 173) simple, tripartite model for conceptualising lifelong learning offers a useful framework through which to understand how the notion of lifelong learning has not only changed over time, but continues to be conceptualised in much governmental and organisational discourse. In his framework, Biesta (2006, p. 173), suggests that there are three primary ways in which lifelong learning has been and can be conceptualised: a) as a means to achieve economic objectives such as skill and knowledge development for organisational productivity and global competitiveness, b) for the purposes of ‘personal development and fulfilment’ and finding meaning and c) as a way in which social justice can be obtained through the ‘empowerment and emancipation of individuals so that they become able to live their lives with others in more democratic, just and inclusive ways’. In today’s knowledge-based society, however, learning is increasingly viewed not as a personally meaningful endeavour, but an economic one (Bagnall, 2000; Biesta 2006). Thus, in presenting this model, Biesta (2006) argues that two of the original key objectives of lifelong learning – the personal and the democratic, have been superseded by more economic and political ones.

Moreover, he also uses this model to highlight the ways in which these seemingly lost aims of lifelong learning have not really disappeared, but rather have transmogrified within hegemonic economic and political discourses that serve the agendas of particular stakeholders (Biesta, 2006). Indeed, an example of this can be found in Shaw and Crowther’s (2014, p. 391) research on community-based education now defined as ‘a professional field that is increasingly beleaguered by managerialist imperatives and in which democratic engagement has become increasingly compromised’; a result of lifelong learning agendas ‘underpinned by economistic concerns and the unquestioned need for growth and competitiveness’ (p.397).
This focus on the economic, neoliberal imperatives of lifelong learning is therefore particularly problematic for individualistic western societies, such as Australia, which are influenced by democratic ideals such as ‘the fair go’. This is because when conflated with dominant economic and political discourses of lifelong learning, lifelong education becomes conceptualised as an undertaking to which everyone has equal access. Even though there may exist extensive socioeconomic barriers not just to gaining access to, but also to maintaining ongoing participation in, lifelong education as a supposedly democratising component of lifelong learning. Specifically, it has been argued that these kinds of pervasive neoliberal influences and the prevailing discourses which they promote, have actually resulted in the practice of lifelong learning having become increasingly conceptualised as an individualistic undertaking (Biesta, 2006; Gouthro, 2009; Olssen, 2005; Bagnall, 2000). Individuals are now ‘expected to assume personal responsibility for making decisions about their life and learning trajectories’ (Gouthro, 2009, p. 158).

Certainly, it can be argued that individuals should take a great deal of responsibility for their lifelong education and learning, given the personal and professional benefits which it affords them. However, assuming individual responsibility for the ongoing financing of lifelong education including those types of lifelong education which are seen to have more economic or social value, such as higher education (and specific types of higher education), and negotiating the support and resources to engage in this learning (including ESHE), should under a truly democratic regime, not be left entirely up to individuals. This is because the structure of society and the economy is such that not everyone is provided with the same social, structural and relational resources to draw on when negotiating these outcomes. Bourdieu’s (1986) theorisation of capital is useful in this respect as it explains how inequality exists and persists.

Contrary to modern economic conceptualisations of HCT (Becker, 1993), which focus chiefly on one form of capital only – economic capital, Bourdieu (1986, p. 47, emphasis in original) explains that capital is infinitely more complex and is manifested in three main forms:
... as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of nobility.

As Bourdieu (1984, p.143) expounds, although the individual can (under certain conditions) transform one type of capital into another, ‘the value objectively and subjectively placed on an academic qualification is in fact defined only by the totality of the social uses that can be made of it’. Thus, if an individual has sufficient economic capital to obtain an academic qualification, this is not to say that the qualification will be viewed as equivalent to every other form of academic qualification held by every other person. Rather, it will be located on a continuum of social value and its position on this continuum will depend on a number of factors. These include the type of qualification and the status of the institution from which it is received, which is related to the status associated with ‘geographical space’ and which is ‘never socially neutral’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 102).

Moreover, as Bourdieu (1984) explains, over time, it is possible for academic qualifications to lose their value as a result of changing social structures and systems. Changes over which the individual may have limited control. For example, during times of rapid credential inflation, whereby the only way to retain the value of academic capital is to increasingly accrue not just more of it, but more of the right, or the most socially valued, kinds of it. That is, to obtain ‘distinction’ via higher education credentials, the academic qualifications with the most cultural capital must be obtained (Bourdieu, 1984). Thus, the individual needs to have sufficient amounts of the right type of economic, cultural and social resources not only to obtain the academic qualification, but to use it as a meaningful form of capital in and at a certain space and time. This ability, to a large extent, is dependent on the reservoir of economic, cultural and social capital that they have previously accrued or inherited (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). Given that not everyone starts with the same amount and type of capital, inequality easily becomes compounded and disadvantage entrenched.
Further, it is argued that under the present neoliberal regime, the promotion of lifelong learning for serving purely economic interests, has resulted in the shifting of responsibility for lifelong education not only to the individual, but also away from the state, towards the private sector (Biesta, 2006; Giroux, 2004; Patrick, 2013). As Gouthro (2009, p. 158) argues, this backing away of the state creates:

… a climate of competition [that] pits learners against one another, as education becomes valued for credentials and skills that situate individuals in more advantageous positions within an economy that demands a flexible and adaptable workforce.

Higher education affords a particular social status within modern, developed nations such as Australia (Marginson, 2011a, 2016b). The role of higher education, as a crucial component of lifelong education, thus becomes centralised in an increasingly competitive struggle for who can gain access to, and who can do lifelong education (as the most socially valued phase of lifelong learning) the best.

### 2.2.2 Higher Education and Credentialing: Contrasting Theories of Capital

Credential inflation is the dirty secret of modern education; if everyone admitted it publically – worse yet, if it became a topic for political discussion – it would force us to face head on the issue of class inequality and indeed growing class inequality, in part directly tied to the expansion of credentialing (Baker, 2011, p. 234).

It has been argued that under the present neoliberal regime of the knowledge economy, the value of higher education has changed (Collins, 2011; Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015). Due to the massification of higher education, ‘as the number of persons with academic degrees has gone up, the occupational level for which they have provided qualifications has declined’ (Collins, 2011, p. 228). This means that as increasing numbers of individuals compete with each other to gather more knowledge through higher education, a bachelor’s degree becomes seen as a minimum requirement for entry into many professional positions, rather than the pinnacle of educational achievement (Collins, 2011). In other words, ‘the value of educational degrees has decreased and one needs increasing amounts of degreed or certified education to gain a certain job status’ (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015, p. 85).
Therefore, as more and more individuals compete with one another to gain entry to particular job roles for which a bachelor’s degree is a bare minimum entry qualification, a cycle of ‘credential inflation’ is created whereby individuals need to undertake additional higher education qualifications (at a higher level) to be considered qualified for these roles (Collins, 2011; Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015).

The concern is that educational credentialing has increased to the extent that it has resulted in an obscenely competitive and pressurised culture of constant credentialing (Baker, 2011; Collins, 2011; Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015). Higher education credentials are now viewed foremost as tradeable commodities in the knowledege economy. Additional credentials are perceived as symbols of increased ‘levels’ of human capital (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961). Additionally, economic theories of credentialing, such as HCT (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961), are less concerned with the content of learning, or process by which it occurs, than with its ultimate economic outcome – a tradeable credential. In this theoretical framework, higher education is thus positioned as a homogenous, quantifiable and predictable process through which to obtain socioeconomic assets. As Collins (2011, p.229) argues, under this regime, degrees become perceived chiefly as ‘bureaucratic markers channelling access to the point at which they are cashed in, and guaranteeing nothing about their value at the point at which they are cashed’.

As highlighted by Bills (2003), however, conceptualising higher education in this way can be criticised for failing to explain exactly how highly-educated individuals receive higher positions in the labour market. It has been recognised that credentials are closely tied to social signalling and screening (Bills, 2003) (they can be perceived as social badges which influence an individual’s ability to attain certain positons of employment, ultimately leading to social and economic success). Specifically, signalling (Spence, 1973) and screening (Greenwald & Stiglitz, 1986) theories critique human capital theory by suggesting that rather than additional education qualifications increasing human capital in terms of their direct value in the labour market, they operate as a marker for an associated personal quality (e.g. intelligence or conscientiousness) that results in higher pay within the labour market. It is important, however, that the learning which occurs through higher education is not reduced to the attainment of a credential, as merely a
socioeconomic symbol. Because if participation in higher education is viewed simply as a standardised pathway to a credential; the attainment of which is dependent on individual ability and effort alone, then the corollary may be that the process of learning through higher education, and the support that is provided for it, becomes viewed as an individual responsibility. Thus, structural barriers influencing credential attainment, as one element of engaging in higher education, will remain marginalised in policy discourse.

Further, this view has implications for practice, as it obscures the differing levels of experience, effort and resources required to engage in the actual learning process. The support (or lack thereof) which is provided for higher education, is also likely to influence the social and economic value which the recipient is able to provide to employers and other social networks, such as the family and wider community, whilst they are studying. The process of undertaking higher education and individual engagement with the knowledge and learning that it facilitates, during and after degree completion, is vastly heterogeneous. Not everyone has the same experience of getting in (access to), staying in (continued access to) and participating in (continued engagement in) higher education. As more individuals undertake higher education alongside paid employment, whether by choice, or out of perceived socioeconomic necessity, these differences between individuals are likely to be amplified. Therefore, it is crucial that higher education is viewed as a process which is accessed and experienced in diverse ways, rather than reduced to a credential which is tied to a once-off symbolic event (the receipt of a credential).

In sum, the problem with economic theories of credentialing such as those premised on HCT (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961), is that not only do they fail to explain how credentials are tied to job status (and socioeconomic status, by implication), they fail to adequately account for how those credentials are arrived at. As aforementioned, Bourdieu’s (1986) theorisation of ‘cultural capital’ is useful here, because it can help to explain why individuals succeed to differing extents in their ability to transform educational capital into a usable form of cultural and economic capital. Indeed, it challenges popularist views of lifelong learning, such as those influenced by HCT and premised on neoliberal assumptions of supposed meritocracy and individual accountability. It achieves this by acknowledging that
not everyone has access to the same resources that make doing (let alone continually doing) higher education, possible.

However, as Bills (2003) argues, whilst promising in terms of explaining social stratification and educational opportunity, cultural capital theory still does not provide a complete explanation as to precisely how this might occur in terms of the relationship between ‘credentials and job assignment’. He concludes somewhat defeatedly that

\[ \text{The meaning of credentials, which includes both their value as indicators of productivity and their use as means to social closure, varies too greatly to permit any definitive assessment of whether schooling is a socially productive investment or a “training robbery” (Bills, 2003, p. 462).} \]

In attempting to address this issue, it could therefore be argued that focusing on the exact nature of the relationship between higher education credentials and job attainment (and by implication socioeconomic success) is less important than simply accepting that this relationship exists a priori, regardless of our understanding of its exact constitution. That is, it is not the precise nature of this relationship (that which exists between higher education credentials and future socioeconomic success), but rather the existence of it, which can be taken as a premise from which to initiate the more pragmatic issue of how to address credentialing equity. Whilst, prima facie, this may be viewed as a workshy departure, it may actually catalyse the formation of a new theoretical path to understanding the relationship between higher education credentials and socioeconomic success.

In other words, the perceived insolubility of this so-called wicked problem may actually stem from a, hitherto, almost exclusive focus on determining the exact nature of the relationship between credentials and job attainment by relying primarily on macro-level metanarratives to unilaterally link credentials to issues of control, capital and/or ability. Rather, if we shift the focus to how higher education is valued at the macro theoretical level, but also and equally as it is valued at the meso level of the organisation (the firm), the micro level of the individual (the employee-student and/or the manager), and the relationship between them, then we
could use this conceptual detour to move past the theoretical bind which existing credentialing theories are in. This may allow us to derive new insights from a somewhat more pragmatist, yet still highly critical, conception of the value of higher education, as a process which leads toward credentialing and job attainment in socially patterned, yet highly differentiated, ways - in policy and practice.

For example, to understand how higher education credentials are valued in the external labour market, it is important to first look at how they are valued in the internal labour market. As it is the key power brokers within the workplace (supervisors and managers) that create and enact organisational policy and remake practice and cultural norms (Bills, 2003). Part of this norm-making and culture-setting involves determining how credentials (and the process of their acquisition) are valued as relates to certain employment positions and individuals. If managers are supervising employees undertaking higher education alongside paid work, this may influence their management praxis and the ways in which credentials (and the process of their acquisition) are valued in organisational practice. This may, in turn, influence the learning culture (both stated and unstated) of teams, departments and the wider organisation.

Indeed, Baker’s (2011) research on the institutionalising of educational credentialing is a useful starting point in explaining how distinct processes of credentialing operate in unique ways to ensure ‘educational credentialing is deeply integrated into the organisational culture’ (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015, p. 85). A full discussion of Baker’s (2011) model is outside the scope of this chapter, but is useful in allowing us to view credential acquisition – a key component of doing higher education, as becoming ingrained in organisational culture in complex and normative ways and therefore exposed to social ‘taboos’ when accepted modes are transgressed. Thus, credential acquisition - a key component of engaging in higher education, is likely to be tied to issues of power and control, just as the accrual of knowledge through higher education participation is likely to be linked to issues of power and control and influenced by affordances of capital. Certainly, if we adopt this approach, then Bills’ (2003) dismissal of Bourdieu’s (1986) cultural capital theory to the application of credentialing, may be somewhat premature. That is, how employee-students and managers afford and engage with the ‘getting of credentials’,


not just the ‘credential which is got’, is likely to relate to the support which they provide, accept and / or engage with throughout this acquisition. This is likely to be influenced by their existing levels of capital.

In sum, the demand for credentialed employees may not exist in the internal or external labour market (Collins, 2011). Rather, constant credentialing might have emerged less out of labour needs than out of the increasing institutionalisation of formal education (Baker, 2011). But the demand for employee-students that (via their involvement in the process of higher education) they engage in critical thinking so as to be productive and motivated employees, remains. In fact, not only does this need remain, but it remains a key issue that many employers and broader communities are seeking to solve in the 21st century. This means that Bourdieu’s theory of capital (1986), and critical theory more broadly, still have something to offer if we are to investigate the ways in which diverse learners become engaged in and stay engaged in higher education alongside paid work.

2.2.3 Compounding Disadvantage: Continuous Higher Education and Inequality

When successful lifelong learning is predicated on the individual’s ability not just to engage in higher education, but to continuously engage in it, then their success in this undertaking becomes related to the extent to which they can afford the time and money involved in completing multiple higher education programs over time. The problem is that not all individuals start out with the same amount of economic and cultural resources or ‘capital’. This disparity does not somehow magically even out over time. Rather, time plays a key role in the extent to which this disparity is maintained in a complex and compounding fashion. Whilst somewhat limited in its applicability, due to its reliance on a faulty premise which assumes that all individuals are raised within a traditional family unit, Bourdieu’s (1986, p. 50) argument is useful in explaining how this disadvantage occurs:

The link between economic and cultural capital is established through the mediation of the time needed for acquisition…furthermore, and in correlation with this, the length of time for which a given individual can prolong his acquisition process depends on the length of time for which his
family can provide him with the free time, i.e., free time from economic necessity, which is the precondition for the initial accumulation (time which can be evaluated as a handicap to be made up).

An example of how *time* crucially influences an individual’s ability to engage in ongoing higher education alongside paid employment, not just directly, but also indirectly, relates to the ubiquity of new technologies in facilitating ongoing education (Batalla-Busquets & Pacheco-Bernal, 2013). That is, the extent to which an individual can continuously engage in lifelong education relates to their ability to perpetually obtain the requisite technological skills, knowledge and resources needed to undertake this learning. However, an individual’s ability to obtain and maintain access to, and keep up-to-date with the purchasing, operation and learning of such technology, is not accounted for in existing economic models of lifelong education and learning. Rather, in these models, it is assumed that everyone not only *should* be, but *can* be, equally involved in lifelong education. In fact, ‘not to be engaged in some form of useful learning is increasingly seen as a problem’ (Biesta, 2006, p.170), specifically, an *individual* problem of the individual’s own making, rather than an issue stemming from the socioeconomic situation into which they were born, and feel the vibrations of, for their entire life.

The prevailing economic conceptualisation of lifelong learning may therefore ignore, or at least *obscure*, the role of power and privilege in both gaining access to, and engaging with, continuous education. As Bagnall (2000, p. 20) contends, the sentiments informing contemporary lifelong learning discourse have come to see ‘education as a commodified private good, for which individual’s should pay’. The problem is that not everyone can afford to pay the *same* amount, for the *same* type of education, for the *same* duration. Rather, to engage in lifelong education takes time and to borrow a hackneyed adage, *time is money*. In this way, certain types of higher education assume certain forms of symbolic capital: ‘the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability that are easily converted into political positions as a local or national notable’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 291, emphasis in original).

In other words, there currently exists a glaring social access and equity problem related to the real-world *practice* of engaging in higher education, as an increasingly
necessary and privileged phase of lifelong learning. Whilst, as Billett (2008) argues, individuals can engage with and negotiate their learning via their interactions with others, and considerations of these interactions, the concern is that not everyone is afforded with the same level of *negotiating power* in these relations. This is particularly problematic in relation to ESHE, as the individual must prove that their higher education study is sufficiently ‘relevant’ to their direct role and negotiate appropriate support arrangements with managers who are in positions of power.

These positions may allow managers to legitimise particular interpretations of *relevance* at the expense of others. Whilst negotiation skills can be trained, they are strongly tied to self-confidence (Gelfand, Major, Raver, Nishii, & O'Brien, 2006; Stevens, Bavetta, & Gist, 1993). Further, self-confidence is not only influenced by personality, but also related to the psychological inculcation of a kind of Marxian class consciousness, or more particularly through an individual’s ‘class habitus, the internalised form of the class condition and of the conditionings it entails’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101). As Bourdieu (1984, p. 170) explains:

> The habitus is necessity internalised and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general, transposable, disposition which carries out a systematic, universal application…

Thus, our way of perceiving the social world and our naturally-merited position within it, is not entirely fixed but neither is it entirely fluid. Individual dispositions such as self-confidence can be deeply entrenched and hard to change, especially, when present life circumstances dictate the level of risk that can be taken in regards to negotiating suitable employment-education outcomes. Therefore, the way that an individual engages in these relations of negotiation is likely to be influenced by sociocognitive factors which are to an extent malleable, but also influenced by enculturations over which they may have limited conscious control. This is especially problematic in regards to the process of negotiating ESHE which involves brokering support for higher education as a distinct form of learning strongly tied to social status (Marginson, 2006, 2011b) and social mobility (Pásztor, 2014; Stuart, 2012). It is also why employee-student negotiations of ESHE must be
considered with reference to broader debates relating to how a more democratic society might be achieved.

As Holm (2007, p. 25) argues, a key and generally hidden assumption that popular lifelong learning rhetoric makes is that, ‘lifelong learning can only be made possible if individuals are able to coordinate a number of different time windows: work time, family time, free time and learning time’. Indeed, one of the key findings from my Master’s research on the experiences of employee-students undertaking concurrent work and higher education was that their ability to maintain motivation and well-being was related to the extent to which they were able to successfully balance competing time demands across all spheres of their personal and professional life (Wapling, 2013). However, the issue is that if certain individuals and social cohorts are not endowed with the same negotiating power and/or self-confidence as others, then they may then struggle to obtain and maintain appropriate ESHE arrangements. The maintenance of the type of high-level time management required for engaging in continuous higher education is a key phase of lifelong education. This is concerning, as in a society predicated on the need for continuous knowledge generation and constant credentialing, time-management ability becomes an increasingly crucial factor in individuals’ ability to succeed or fail in adhering to societal norms, and by implication, their ability to achieve social and economic success.

As Holm (2007, p. 28) explains,

…how individuals manage their time is not only determined by their abilities and willingness but also by the options provided/restricted by the environment in which they live [and] the company belongs to one’s working environment.

For example, it is currently assumed that the individual employee-student can simply and easily negotiate an ESHE contract with their employer. But negotiating in the workplace is often enacted within a sticky web of power relations. Where employee-students are already experiencing stress due to the juggling of multiple life roles and responsibilities, including, but not limited to, the juggling of higher education and paid work, negotiating ESHE may prove additionally difficult. Many
organisations are already reluctant to support work-focused formal training, which is often publically endorsed, but privately precluded, in practice. As Holm (2007, p. 26) explains:

… businesses’ appreciation of the necessity of continuous training is inconsistent with the fact that it does not take priority in the corporate course of events. It is against this background of varied and contradictory attitudes that negotiations take place between employers and employees.

Indeed, whilst organisations may employ ‘organisational learning’ rhetoric indicative of a genuine commitment to lifelong education and/or lifelong learning, it has been reported that the operational demands of the organisation often take precedence over both informal and formal work-focused learning (Holm, 2007). Employees may have to ‘sacrifice their attendance’ if workplace operations demand it (Holm, 2007, p. 30). This raises interesting questions around whether these findings might also be extended to the undertaking of external higher education alongside paid work and the support provided for it. For example, study leave time (a common form of ESHE) may be subject to similar conditions in organisational policy and/or practice. As argued by Nicoll and Fejes (2011, p. 405):

… discourses of lifelong learning may have specific describable relations with knowledge in some locations, but others elsewhere. Effects of lifelong learning are multiple, fragmented, dispersed and prone to reversal and interruption.

It is here that the democratic and personal arms of lifelong learning seem to have morphed from their original liberal roots into a rhetoric fallacy which is convenient for the modern organisation to exploit. They can readily perpetuate the misconception that everyone has access to equal amounts of time across each life stage and that it is the individual’s a) ability to exercise their democratic ‘right’ to engage in continuous learning and b) ability to sustain motivation to learn, that determines their success or failure as a learner, and as a worker, in the knowledge economy. However, motivation to continue studying is related to time management ability (Holm 2007; Wapling 2013). Further, time management ability is related to the socioeconomic resources or ‘capital’ that one has inherited or amassed. Therefore, this raises questions around who can really afford to fulfil their lifelong learning ‘duty’ (Biesta, 2006).
Where an individual has more competing life responsibilities, they have more competing time windows to manage and it may be socially-marginalised individuals that experience these time demands most acutely. As Holm (2007, p. 27) argues: ‘lifelong learning is not just something that happens voluntarily but is rather forced upon individuals as a requirement which is, at least in part, time-related’. This highlights an important point around the increased shifting of responsibility for lifelong education from the employer to the individual. To not undertake perpetual education and training in an increasingly competitive and unstable economic environment could mean the threat of job loss, demotion (Holm, 2007) or even out-grouping. ‘This situation proves especially fatal for women’, as they must juggle multiple social roles and responsibilities, including paid work, higher education and the lion’s share of familial caring responsibilities (Holm, 2007, p. 28).

As the ability of employees to manage time whilst engaged in ongoing learning pursuits is related to the experience of stress and psychological coping (Holm 2007; Wapling 2013), it is crucial to question the value that employers place on higher education, in terms of its relationship with time. The ways in which the concept of time is considered within existing approaches to ESHE must also be considered. Understanding these connections and how they are represented in organisational policy and practice discourses may allow us to explore alternative methods of supporting employee-students from diverse backgrounds. It may also help employers to manage psychosocial hazards affecting employee-students, through the implementation of more targeted ESHE strategies.

In sum, addressing diversity issues not only directly, via conventional employee-specific or student-specific diversity strategies, but also indirectly through targeted employee-student diversity strategies such as ESHE, may represent a more efficacious and sustainable approach.

2.2.4 Non-linear Learning Trajectories and the Non-ideal Lifelong Learner

If there are systemic and structural socioeconomic reasons why certain individuals are not able to continue pursuing higher education, as a privileged component of lifelong education, in the same way as others, then they may be viewed as deviating
from social norms. This may further isolate them from subsequent lifelong learning opportunities. The cumulative effect of disadvantage has been explained by Green (2009), who argues that an individual's level of educational attainment impacts not just their immediate employment opportunities, but also their social and life opportunities more generally. Therefore, in its current iteration, the notion of lifelong education and its corollary: lifelong learning, represent less of a democratic undertaking than a renewed way of entrenching social disadvantage.

Bourdieu (1984, p. 111) endorses this idea, arguing that the unique relationship between an individual’s initial reservoir of capital versus the capital that they have accumulated at any given point of time, ‘explains why practices cannot be completely accounted for solely in terms of the properties defining the position occupied in social space at a given moment’. This is because the relationship between any sort of practice and one’s social roots is the product of what Bourdieu (1984, p. 111) terms the ‘inculcation effect’. These are the familial conditions which an individual is born into, and therefore absorbs by virtue of being subject to those conditions, and the effects of the ‘social trajectory’ – those circumstances that relate to changes in individual ‘dispositions and opinions’, that result from their unique developmental trajectory.

In other words, the practice of undertaking higher education is likely to be influenced by the cumulative effects of changes to social position, as this influences an individual’s unique ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1984), over time. Employee-students are unlikely to represent a homogenous group of equally time-rich and resource-rich lifelong learners, as is assumed in many economic and political discourses of lifelong learning. So the support that is offered to them in policy may be misaligned with what is actually required, in practice.

It is worth mentioning here that a modern culture of credentialism has also had unique implications for the employee as an autodidact. Before the rise of constant credentialism, in many professional fields, the self-taught (i.e. autodidact) employee, with a wealth of knowledge and skills learnt ‘on the job’, was seen as having a more or less equivalent (or arguably greater) value than a university graduate in the same field. However, autodidacts without formal university
qualifications have now had to *re-gain* this knowledge and skill through the acquisition of formal credentials. This is required not because a large portion of the previously acquired knowledge and skills somehow became lost or superseded. Rather, a culture of constant credentialism requires them to perpetually and publically *prove* their knowledge and skills through the formal recognition of learning. Thus, those with the ability to undertake not just higher education, but increasingly *higher* levels of higher education, can ensure that the adult autodidact is disadvantaged in a cumulative fashion. They are constrained by the time and money needed to attain equivalent qualifications at later stages in life. They may also be limited by a lack of access to high-status higher education institutions.

As Bourdieu (1984) argues, certain types of higher education are likely to have different qualities of value and levels of legitimacy, based on their positioning within the ‘scholastic market’. Constant credentialism, referred to by Bourdieu (1984, p. 147) as ‘the overproduction of qualifications’ and their ‘consequent devaluation’, therefore presents a contradiction of the ‘scholastic mode of reproduction’. Individuals in positions of greater social power cannot simply rely on previous levels of educational attainment that have served their interests and maintained their capital in the past. Rather, they need to employ new strategies to ensure that they are maintaining an advantage over those with less social power. That is, power over those who are gaining access to the very thing (educational credentials) which previously granted those in power the same power that they are seeking to maintain under changing social conditions.

It is therefore likely that for a proportion of employee-students who enter higher education later in life, decisions about higher education must be made less on the basis of course or institutional status than on more pragmatic factors such as *accessibility*. The autodidact that enters higher education later in life may be more constrained by previously-made life commitments relating to, inter alia, financial, caring and employment responsibilities. These commitments may influence the extent to which they can attend university in person and attend specific types of universities, in person. Thus, for the autodidact to keep up in the credentialing race, they may have to accept less say in how they participate in higher education. This includes what *types* of higher education they can access, the *location and/or mode*
in which they can study and for how long. These constraints, according to Bourdieu’s (1984) reasoning, provide another mechanism through which society is structured in ways that privilege those with reservoirs of cultural capital i.e. those that are more likely to have begun higher education at an earlier life stage.

Further, employee-students from diverse backgrounds, such as aging workers (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015) and those responsible for familial-care (Gouthro, 2009), are examples of non-ideal learners who may be experiencing disadvantage due to the ways in which higher education is viewed and valued. As Wheelahan (2015, p. 21) explains,

… individuals’ successful participation in work does not depend just on the nature of their qualifications…it also depends on broader economic and social arrangements such as supportive and sustainable housing, transport and access to childcare and employment.

Moreover, as Gouthro (2009) contends, the increasing assimilation of public and private life often obscures structural barriers, such as the role of the mother and care work in shaping women’s experiences of lifelong learning. This is an important point, as much popular lifelong learning rhetoric tends to focus on issues of educational parity in terms of gaining access to education rather than the potentially more vexed but vitally important, systemic issues affecting sustained engagement in education, as this relates to broader socioeconomic factors.

As Gouthro (2009) argues, the role of the carer or mother is often sidelined in discourses of education and work. This is problematic in a learning society characterised by credential inflation and perpetual higher education engagement. That is, the additional role that women and carers play is likely to contribute not only to the way in which they are conceptualised as employees and university students, but also to effective lifelong learning. Thus, for many individuals, given the practicalities of enacting idealised lifelong learning agendas through continuous engagement in higher education, lifelong education is unlikely to be an unproblematic, linear undertaking. Progression and promotion in the workplace is often interrupted for women with dependents (Huber & Huemer, 2015). Likewise, when lifelong learning is conflated with lifelong education, and conceptualised in
primarily economic terms, divorced from its personal and democratic arms, its idealised form becomes increasingly exclusionary.

For example, Gouthro (2009) found that women tended to choose education and training options that caused minimal disruption to the family environment, such as part-time or online education. Where they do seek to follow idealised, linear learning trajectories, their attempts may be thwarted by particular stakeholders, such as their direct supervisors, in organisational practice (Gouthro, 2009). She provides the following anecdote, illustrating a clear deficiency in how ESHE is engaged with in practice:

One participant, feeling demoralized by her male supervisor’s loss of interest in her work, attributed it to her decision not to move away from her family to continue her doctoral studies: ‘you don’t want three degrees from the same university, end of story’ (Gouthro, 2009, p. 165-166).

When women’s existing workloads from paid employment, unpaid care work and continuing higher education collide with conflicting ideas around the value of higher education, in terms of who should be supported at work, women may experience layers of systemic disadvantage. This may be amplified by organisational rhetoric that insists lifelong education is equally achievable and experienced by everyone, in the same way. This further entrenches a sense of learner responsibility for individual success or failure in lifelong learning (Holm, 2007; Wapling, 2013). It also raises the question of why individuals should continuously engage in lifelong education, as part of their personal lifelong learning journey, if they lack the control to ‘make decisions about the content, purpose and direction of their learning’ (Biesta, 2006, p. 176).

Another example of how certain employee cohorts may be disadvantaged in a cumulative fashion comes from Isopahkala-Bouret (2015, p. 83) who argues that ‘the pressure to attend higher education and upgrade credentials in midlife comes from the fact that aging workers are compared, and compare themselves, with the educational degree of the younger generation’. Given that over the past several decades, the overall level of education required in the workforce has increased due to younger generations receiving more education, credential inflation has meant that
older workers, regardless of how experienced or competent they are, are at a disadvantaged position in the workforce (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015 p. 84). This is because popular lifelong learning rhetoric dictates that they must continue higher education, ideally at a minimum postgraduate level, to maintain their position in the workplace and in the workforce, more broadly. This concern has previously been raised by Cross (1981) who argues that, whilst privileged compared to the general population, older adult learners in higher education are still at a disadvantage compared to younger learners who may be more able to attend to their studies in a full-time capacity, an enrolment mode which may offer certain learning advantages.

Indeed, it is these employee-student cohorts that may benefit most from targeted ESHE, given the government’s movement away from the role of lifelong-learning provider towards that of lifelong-learning regulator (Biesta, 2006). For example, the creation of more long-sighted, strategic and targeted ESHE mechanisms may represent a potential way of engaging employee-students from diverse backgrounds, including women, both within and outside the workplace. As Bagnall (2000) argues,

> If the prevailing discourse of lifelong learning is to be made more culturally progressive – in both its educational activities and its learning outcomes – it cannot be through a return to traditional progressive ideologies (Bagnall, 2000, p. 20).

**2.3 ESHE: A Global Issue? Comparative Considerations**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, although there exists scant research on ESHE, this paucity is specifically evident across Australian and European literature. Specifically, as explained by Saar et al. (2014), where research has looked at employer support for learning, the focus has overwhelmingly been on that which is provided for informal and formal work-focused training, as opposed to higher education. As Mason (2014, p. 305-306) adds, rather than focusing on the provision of ESHE as an indirect form of employer-higher education provider engagement, previous research has also tended to concentrate on the

> … ways in which employers may engage directly with higher education institutions, for example, in curriculum development, provision of student
work placements and contractual arrangements regarding business-related research and consultancy or university training provision for employees.

Further, the small amount of existing research on ESHE, other than that conducted by Saar et al. (2014) and Mason (2014), who have investigated ESHE from Estonian and UK perspectives respectively, tends to conceptualise it as equivalent or reducible to tuition assistance – employer-led reimbursement of higher education course fees. However, even narrowly conceptualised in this way, ESHE as tuition assistance has itself received little research attention (Benson et al., 2004).

Moreover, from reviewing what literature on tuition assistance does exist, it is apparent that it is considered largely in a North American context. I therefore argue that how ESHE is conceptualised and studied across nations and cultures is likely to be determined by the unique constitution of national higher education funding structures and systems, which are, at least in part, socioculturally shaped.

For example, in their research on ESHE within a post-socialist Estonian context, Saar et al. (2014) discovered that particular socio-political changes in Estonia have resulted in the adoption of political agendas informed by dominant neoliberal values. This includes those that centralise human capital models and promote the doctrine of individual responsibility in adult learning rhetoric. Coupled with austere economic policies related to education and training taxation, they argue that these changes have had a significant influence on how Estonian employers provide training for their employees and that this is also likely to influence how higher education is provided and / or supported by employers. (Saar et al., 2014)

More specifically, a nation’s higher education tuition fee policy is likely to influence how employer-sponsored tuition assistance is provided. As Marcucci and Usher (2012, p. 5) explain,

Tuition fee policies can be divided into three main categories: i) tuition fees for all, whether upfront or deferred, ii) no tuition fees and iii) dual track tuition fees. Each category is closely linked to a country’s view of parental financial responsibility for their children’s higher education.

Most Asian and European countries follow a similar higher education tuition funding approach to the United States (Marcucci & Usher, 2012); they have
‘upfront’ tuition fee policies whereby the individual or their family must pay their course fees and interest directly upon enrolment (albeit with the assistance of student loans and financial aid for eligible individuals and families that meet certain means-tested income thresholds). In these countries, the financial element of ESHE may therefore be privileged over that of study leave or other forms of employer support. This may also explain the lack of literature on forms of ESHE other than tuition assistance for course fees.

This higher education funding approach can be contrasted with the Australian model in which higher education course fees can generally be deferred through the income-contingent government Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) and gradually paid back upon completion of study once a particular income threshold is reached (Department of Education and Training, 2016b). This is an approach also adopted in the United Kingdom (Department for Education, 2014). On the surface, these kinds of income-contingent loans for higher education may be perceived as more generous than those based on upfront ‘mortgage-style loans’ (i.e. those employed in the US and many European and Asian countries). However, just because they ‘prevent students who are unable to repay going bankrupt or having their credit rating downgraded’, this does not discount the actuality that there are still significant living costs associated with undertaking higher education in Australia (Cherastidtham, 2016). As Marcucci and Usher (2012, p. 5) explain,

… tuition fees indicate that a portion of the per-student instructional cost that is the responsibility of the student and/or his/her family to pay. Tuition fees are considered distinct from other fees that are used to cover institutionally provided non-instructional services such as campus transportation or student health care, as well as recreational and athletic programs.

In addition to some of the fees outlined above, students must also consider the purchasing of accommodation, on-campus parking and meal expenses, textbooks, stationary, computers, software, efficient and reliable internet connection and other entirely necessary, but oft-considered discretionary, expenses associated with undertaking higher education. Whilst Australian employee-students may be able to claim some of these expenses through the Australian taxation system, they still need to pay all expenses upfront and then claim them back at the end of the financial
year. This presupposes that they have the fiscal reserves required to do so. In reality, many may not, and, of those who do, their access to them depends largely on both familial ability and familial willingness to facilitate this financial exchange.

As Marcucci and Usher (2012, p. 5) explain,

… in those countries with no tuition fees or with deferred tuition fee policies, parents are not considered to be financially responsible for their children’s higher education nor are children themselves expected to pay while they are studying.

Thus, despite Australian employee-students having access to income-contingent loans, there exist many other fees associated with undertaking higher education which those without a large amount of self or family-generated funds are unable to afford. They must therefore engage in paid employment alongside their studies. For a large proportion of Australian higher education students, having the time to study and the ability to balance paid employment with study, may thus be equally or more important than receiving employer-supported course fee reimbursement, at least in the short term. This is because HELP loans for course fees can be repaid at a later date. Moreover, for Australian employee-students undertaking higher education alongside unskilled, partially unskilled, casual and/or contract employment, living expenses may present more of an issue than for those undertaking continuing higher education alongside more professional, skilled and/or permanent positions of employment. Those engaged in casual or contract employment alongside their higher education may have less say in when and how they can take time off work to study.

Thus, in Australia, the assumption is made that the government financially covers support for higher education, not the parents, family or student themselves. Indeed, this is a dangerous misunderstanding, as it assumes that the cost of participating in higher education can be reduced solely to course fees. The corollary of this misapprehension is that ESHE can also be reduced to employer-sponsored tuition assistance for course fees. Whereas, as aforementioned, in reality, there exists a whole suite of costs (economic and non-economic) associated with undertaking continuing higher education. These are currently paid for by parents, families and.
their children, not the state. Unless these hidden costs are moved from the discursive realm of discretionary and made fully transparent, individual employee-students are likely to receive inappropriate and/or insufficient support from both the government, and, as is the subject of this thesis, from their employer.

In sum, in determining how ESHE is conceptualised and provided, I maintain that different nations, industries and organisations are likely to have characteristic social structures and cultures which influence their conceptualisations of how higher education is valued and should be buttressed. Therefore, rather than imitating the US model of providing course fee reimbursement or ‘tuition assistance’, either in isolation or as the dominant form of ESHE, there may be alternative modes of support more closely aligned with the unique needs of Australian employee-students. However, unless we explore the experiences of undertaking higher education alongside paid employment, as perceived by Australian employee-students and workplace managers, and question how ESHE is provided and engaged with, we are unlikely to know whether ESHE is as effective as it could be – in policy and in practice.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the ways in which higher education is viewed and valued as it relates to relevant literature on lifelong learning and earning, theories of credentialing and capital have been discussed. Issues relating to how systemic inequality is maintained over time and how these operate to disadvantage non-ideal learners have also been key foci. Lastly, I have provided an argument for how sociocultural valuations of higher education and ESHE might relate to national higher education fee structures, as influenced by broader socio-political factors.

In the next chapter, the literature review shifts from a macro to a meso and micro focus on how the value of higher education is conceptualised and contextualised within extant organisational learning and workplace learning literature. I argue that the theoretical and practical disconnect between these two bodies of literature stems from differences in their respective philosophical and disiplinary underpinnings.
These are reinforced and maintained by intricate knowledge-power relations and unresolved debates around structure and agency. I conclude by arguing that a critical theoretical approach is needed to move towards a new understanding of their interconnectedness. This will reposition and reform the role of ESHE in existing discourses of organisational learning.
Chapter 3. Locating Higher Education in Organisational and Workplace Learning

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore how higher education is conceptually positioned in relation to theories of organisational learning and workplace learning. Specifically, I argue that to understand how higher education is sidelined in extant discourses of organisational learning and workplace learning, it is first necessary to explore how the latter have themselves traditionally been estranged in existing literature (Hodkinson, 2005; Saar et al., 2014). This disjuncture can be considered in terms of the latter’s disparate theoretical underpinnings; management and education studies, respectively (Engestrom & Kerosuo, 2007). The contested epistemologies and axiologies of learning which underpin these disciplinary traditions are also explored.

Further, I argue that these contrasting perspectives are created and maintained through complex knowledge-power relations that are reinforced through shared and unshared discourses in and across different communities of practice. It is argued that one way in which this occurs is via the notion of relevance, whereby certain forms of knowledge and learning come to be valued and legitimised over others in the workplace. To explore these issues, I draw on Bourdieus’s (1977; 1984; 1990b, 1993) theory of practice and Foucault’s (1978; 1980) conceptualisation of knowledge-power relations and discourse, to present a case for the adoption of a critical theoretical lens. The aim of this approach is to reframe the relevance of higher education-facilitated learning to workplace learning. This perspective also confronts the pervasive influence of knowledge-power relations and structure-agency tensions.
3.2 Exploring the Organisational Learning-Workplace Learning Disconnect

In this section, I argue that organisational learning theories and their underlying behaviourist and cognitivist epistemologies, have been largely superseded by more constructivist and democratic understandings of workplace learning (Beckett, 2001; Beckett & Hager, 2001) in theory. However, the former remain highly influential and pervasive in modern organisational learning and development (L&D) policy and practice. I contend that this theory-practice rive is largely a result of organisational learning theories being based not only on a different set of philosophical assumptions, as compared to workplace learning theories, but also as stemming from the ways in which the former are created and maintained through complex knowledge-power relations in the workplace. Specifically, I argue that such relations are created and maintained through organisational discourses which tend to privilege theories of organisational learning over theories of workplace learning. It is suggested that these discourses are transmitted both in and across different communities of practice, as the individuals which comprise them operate in and across different work spaces over time and support certain learning agendas at the expense of others.

3.2.1 Explicating Organisational Learning Theory

The relationship between organisational and individual learning, in terms of where one starts and the others ends, is contested (Hodkinson, 2005; Senge, 2006; Wang & Ahmed, 2002). Organisational learning, however, can be broadly defined as learning which seeks to discover ‘explanatory mechanisms for success and failure in organisational renewal and subsequently organisational knowledge formation’ (Engestrom & Kerosuo, 2007, p. 336). It is concerned with ensuring the successful management of workplaces (Engestrom & Kerosuo, 2007). The aims of workplace learning, however, are more pedagogical in nature (Engestrom & Kerosuo, 2007). Workplace learning is more concerned with the process of how learning occurs in practice, as informed by education-based, rather than management-driven, objectives (Engestrom & Kerosuo, 2007, p. 336).
The concept of organisational learning began in the United States, spring boarding off ‘rationalist managerial ideas’, such as Taylorist conceptions of scientific management (Garratt, 1999). These were heavily influenced by the behaviourist assumption that ‘all human problems are reducible to a simple, single, quantifiable answer through the application of logic, rationality and financial measures’ (Garratt, 1999, p. 204). Over time, conceptions of organisational learning have been infused with more humanistic and constructivist perspectives. It has been argued, however, that they still heavily rely on empiricist ideas relating to the rational modification of human action; they are informed by ‘systems thinking’ – the basis of popular management ideology (Garratt, 1999; Wang & Ahmed, 2002).

This kind of thinking informs one particularly well-known exemplar of organisational learning theory which has previously been critiqued by educationalists Beckett and Hager (2001): the conception of the workplace as a ‘Learning Organisation’ (Senge, 2006). Because a comprehensive discussion of organisational learning theory is beyond the scope of this chapter, to understand more about the underlying epistemologies characteristic of these types of theories, in this section, I offer my own brief analysis of learning organisation theory (Senge, 2006). As part of this critique, I explain how learning organisation theory is limited by a) its failure to explain the relationship between structure and agency as relates to individual and organisational learning, and b) its underestimation of the relationship between knowledge and power.

The underlying premise of Learning Organisation Theory (Senge, 2006), is that the workplace can be considered as a dynamic system, composed of separate but related components, which when operating harmoniously together, ensures that individual, group and organisational learning are efficiently facilitated. The major assumption that learning organisation theory therefore makes is that individuals learn as components of a system. Thus, when individual learning is directed in ways that facilitate the achievement of collective team agendas (those aligned with predefined business objectives), then organisational learning can be said to have occurred. Specifically, Senge (2006) argues that to achieve genuine ‘learning organisation’ status, an institution must draw on five key ‘disciplines’:
• The pursuit of personal mastery which involves each employee ‘approaching one’s life as a creative work, living life from a creative as opposed to reactive viewpoint’ by ‘continuously ‘clarifying what is important to us’ and ‘continually learning how to see current reality more clearly’ (p. 131-132)

• The individual and collective challenging of mental models – our established ‘deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting’ (p. 163)

• A shared vision – a ‘force in people’s hearts, a force of impressive power’; ‘at its simplest level, a shared vision is the answer to the question “What do we want to create?”’ (p. 192)

• Team learning – ‘the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire’ and ‘builds on the discipline of building a shared vision’ (p. 218)

• Systems Thinking – ‘the discipline that integrates the disciplines, fusing them into a coherent body of theory and practice’, which ‘continually reminds us that the whole can exceed the sum of its parts’ (p. 12).

Learning organisation theory (Senge, 2006) is useful in at least centralising the importance of ‘deep learning’: the process whereby individuals use cognitive processing strategies to make distinctions about how processes and events occur, ascribe meaning to them, and alter the way they think about them, rather than simply determining what processes and events are occurring around them (Marton & Saljo, 2005). It does not, however, clearly explain how this learning process occurs. That is, despite introducing the concept of challenging ‘mental models’ (fixed and ingrained beliefs) (Senge, 2006), as relates to deep learning generally, how this transformation occurs is not interrogated in detail. Without understanding how these processes actually occur in practice, it is difficult to see how individual mental models relate to the other five disciplines to result in collective organisational learning.
For example, learning organisation theory is based on the assumption that all employees *can* (and should) freely challenge their personal mental models to achieve new and innovative collective business outcomes. However, this presupposes that all individuals working across an organisation will be equally able and/or willing to do this. This may not be the case whereby the status quo is adequately serving the current or perceived future interests of particular individuals at the time change is initiated (Coopey, 1995). As Coopey (1995, p. 196) explains, learning organisation theory fails to consider

… various issues about differences of interest, value and belief...it is not clear how these differences will be resolved in the learning context where, compared to their peers in more traditional organisations, individuals have more to gain or lose in terms of their own development and associated rewards and where, if the organisation structures and processes are established as planned, individuals and semi-autonomous groups will have greater scope to negotiate.

Central to this issue is the role of social structures and human agency in influencing and being influenced by individual and group behaviour. For example, mental models may be closely aligned with individual pursuits for personal mastery. Likewise, personal visions may *partially* align with shared organisational visions (and therefore the team learning required to realise them), but may not necessarily be *reducible* to them. Indeed, where disruptive and creative thinking is required at the organisational level, it may be undesirable to mandate such an alignment. Further, because the challenging of mental models is likely to involve not merely reflection but rather, *critical reflection*, it concurrently involves a transformation of self-identity (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 1991). This learning process is likely to be subject to a degree of personal resistance not duly acknowledged by learning organisation theory.

As Beckett (2004, p. 80) summarises, mental models are forms of ‘representational understanding’ which are essentially ‘one-dimensional’ ways of depicting how we understand reality. They signify the notion of reality in an unconnected and limited sense. As an alternative, learning models based on ‘inferential understanding’ more fully encapsulate reality as modes of perception that emerge
… through semipublic, organic, and reflexive aspects of experience, where adults at work find themselves acting anticipatively because they want to face up to and learn from contingencies (Beckett, 2001, p. 81).

Essentially, inferential understanding is the kind of understanding that we rely upon when we communicate with others and are understood by others through ‘socially located articulation of justifications’ that demonstrate how we have learned through ‘reason-giving’ and intend to take action based on this reasoning (Beckett, 2001, p. 80). It is through these processes that we learn, as our intentions become known by others and others’ intentions become known by us. Practice is ‘co-constructed’ (Beckett, 2001). As Beckett (2001) further notes, assumptions based on representational understandings of learning are common to other cognitivist organisational learning theories, such as Argyris and Schön’s (1978) theory of single and double loop learning, which whilst useful to an extent, are limited in their failure to centralise learning within a broader relational context.

Indeed, Senge (2006, p. 136) himself concedes that the acceptance of personal mastery as being relatively accessible and uncontested in learning organisation theory presents a valid issue. Presupposing that individual values, beliefs and interests will be naturally aligned with (or, I would add, easily manipulated to be aligned with) those of the team and greater organisation is a naïve (and I would add, potentially coercive) assumption. This failure to link individual agency to collective learning can be explained by the tendency of organisational learning theories to privilege certain social roles and environs over others. In doing so, they come to be viewed as isolated components of a context-specific practice (i.e. workplace practice). In these types of models, how broader sociocognitive and sociocultural factors contribute to an individual’s ontogeny are largely ignored (Billett, 2008). The social role of the employee is thus given overwhelming prominence over the other roles which they concurrently enact (e.g. simultaneous university student, mother, community volunteer etc.).

In sum, these types of models fail to centralise the agentic and relational nature of learning which occurs as individuals navigate the workplace and broader life contexts (Beckett, 2001; Beckett & Hager, 2001; Billett, 2008; Boud & Garrick, 1999).
As Billett (2008) explains, individuals always bring a diverse range of prior skills, knowledge, personal histories and subjectivities to any given learning experience (whether these are considered traditionally educative or not); they interact with others both agentically and relationally. Thus, as Wheelahan (2007 p. 183) explains,

… approaches that ignore the social result in abstract and disembodied learning divorced from the social context in which it is to be realised [whilst] conceptions that downplay individual agency tend to privilege workplace learning at the expense of the broader development of the individual.

A focus on social participation within, but also beyond a specific social milieu, is therefore important because it is through this participation that individual perception and meaning-making arises and develops (Dewey, 2004). In other words, ‘our interests are experienced personally, that is, subjectively, but their changeability is a matter of give-and-take as our actions within practices evolve’ (Beckett, 2013, p. 81).

By reducing the individual’s social role to that of foremost employee, they become viewed through an overriding ‘capacity-building’ lens (Beckett, 2013). This perspective privileges their ability to contribute to increased collective productivity outputs at the expense of broader conceptualisations of individual learning and development. For organisational learning to occur beyond a surface level, however, it must necessarily involve individual learning and individual learning necessarily involves both a very social and a very private, or personal element (Dewey, 2004; Mezirow, 1991). For individuals to change their worldview, a socioculturally-located sociocognitive shift is required. This shift cannot be conceptually located in the professional or organisational context alone. It must necessarily involve proportionate changes in the individual’s public and private spheres. This process unavoidably involves change in selfhood and identity (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 1991).

In sum, theories of workplace learning now generally acknowledge the importance of both formal and informal learning experiences (Beckett & Hager, 2001; Boud & Garrick, 1999; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 2013; Solomon, 2003). However, the problem is that theories of organisational learning still privilege managerialist
imperatives based around achieving bare minimum compliance standards. They also underestimate the extent to which ‘prior learning, including education…construct[s] the whole person’ (Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson, & Unwin, 2005, p. 66; Hodkinson, 2005). That is, organisational learning systems accept the notion of predictable rationality. However, in doing so, they fail to account for how and why individuals or groups might deviate from predicted behaviours, in practice, such as in conditions where organisational learning needs are misaligned with the long-standing personal value systems of employees.

Further, whilst workplace learning theory may offer a useful means through which to address the deficiencies inherent in organisational learning theory, the question of why the former is not being used to its full potential by contemporary workplaces, remains.

### 3.2.2 Explicating Workplace Learning Theory

[Workplace learning] has largely emerged as an extension of educational research stepping beyond the confines of schools and other institutions of formal learning. The commitment of studies in workplace learning is commonly pedagogical: improvement of conditions and practices of learning and instruction in work settings (Engestrom & Kerosuo, 2007, p. 336).

As the above excerpt explains, the aims of workplace learning are influenced by education-based theory and concerned with how learning occurs in practice (Engestrom & Kerosuo, 2007, p. 336). The notion of practice is contested and informed by different disciplinary traditions, including but not limited to education, sociology, philosophy and psychology (Hager, 2013). Practice, in its most rudimentary sense, involves purposeful learning through experience (Beckett & Hager, 2001). Experience is not merely what happens to us as passive agents, however. It is influenced by how we intentionally act throughout experiences (and subsequent experiences) (Dewey, 2004). Therefore, practice also requires the making of judgements to solve novel problems (Beckett & Hager, 2001). In this way, ‘people typically develop know how…a type of knowing what to do in practice that is evident in their various intentional actions’ (Beckett & Hager, 2001, p. 5).
This understanding of practice is very much aligned with the Aristotelian notion of ‘phronèsis’, in that it centralises the making of ‘practical judgements’. These judgements are influenced by specific elements of previous experiences, however, there are qualities within such elements that are stable and common to all experiences and our knowledge of them (Sachs, 2011). Whilst within this definition, practice is largely viewed as intentional, it should be noted that the source and nature of this intentionality is contested and not to be equated with a necessary rationality. As I will argue later in this chapter, how intentionality arises in terms of its relationship to individual agency, the unconscious and conscious, is still very much contested. It is closely linked with key debates regarding the relative influence of social structure versus individual agency.

Further, in the same way that I use the term practice in a broad and general sense, borrowing from Beckett and Hager (2001, p. 3), I also employ the term ‘workplace practice’ in a similarly expansive way. That is, as a type of practice that includes both professional work and non-professional work such as service occupations, trades, management and professional roles. I have chosen to refer to workplace practice in a unitary sense, rather than make the distinction between professional and non-professional practice. This is because whilst higher education was previously linked more closely with professional practice, it has now permeated all professional and non-professional sectors, such that the traditional divisions between professional and non-professional occupations (Green, 2009), and between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education, have become increasingly blurred (Karmel & Lu, 2012).

There are a number of factors contributing to this change, such as those stemming from constant credentialism and the massification of education. The basic corollary, however, is that participation in higher education is no longer restricted to occupations traditionally considered professional (e.g. medicine and law). Rather, over time, it has become tied to previously considered para-professional occupations such as nursing and teaching (Green, 2009). Furthermore, through its role in facilitating employee movement from specialist or technical-type roles to vocational training positions (Gleeson, 1996), higher education has also become more closely linked with occupations previously considered non-professional such
as trade-based occupations. Thus, in attempting to locate higher education’s role within organisational and workplace learning theory, for the purposes of this research, the distinction between professional practice and non-professional practice is less central, than is a consideration of the difference between formal and informal learning, and work-focused learning versus non-work-focused learning.

It should also be noted that unlike Beckett and Hager (2001), I have deliberately excluded unpaid work from my definition of work-focused practice. Rather, I have made the distinction between work-focused practice and non-work focused practice. The latter incorporates all forms of what Beckett and Hager (2001, p. 3-4) term unpaid work, including but not limited to, domestic and caring responsibilities, voluntary work and hobbies.

In sum, I use the term ‘practice’ to denote all forms of learning through experience, whether it occurs in or beyond a chiefly work-focused context. Whereas when discussing practice in relation to a particular social context or environment, I delineate between social contexts by using a qualifier such as ‘work-focused’. This is not to privilege certain social contexts as facilitators of practice and/or learning. On the contrary, it is to highlight the ontological notion that practice is a fluid and ubiquitous construct. It is not confined to a context but is more easily analysed in relation to a specific context at a given point in time. For example, the workplace is one such context with reference to which practice can be best understood in situ, as the workplace operates as an organisation comprised of different practices, which have certain rules and limits that both guide and are guided by, these shared understandings of practice (Schatzki, 2012). Although, it is worth mentioning that these rules and limits are not always precise but often blurred as individuals increasingly work and learn across fluid and distributed contemporary spaces (Beaumont et al., 2009; Lea & Nicoll, 2013; Vrasidas & Glass, 2002).

Another useful and ubiquitous concept used in workplace learning theory is the notion of ‘communities of practice’, which refers to ‘a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). The situated nature of the workplace provides a means through which such communities can evolve (Lave &
Wenger, 1991). Although, a community of practice is not merely a group who shares a certain physical space. They may or may not be physically located in the same space (Line, Anne, & Réal, 2005). Rather, it is foremost the sharing of experiences, discourses, methods (Wenger, 1998) and goals (Hodges, 1998) over time, that creates and sustains a community of practice. That is, when entering a community of practice, individuals may move from positions of legitimate peripheral participation (e.g. novice status) to full peripheral participation (e.g. expert), as they gain experience and expertise predominantly through situated learning. This occurs as they apply knowledge and practice skills in social contexts which are often largely informal (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Communities of practice provide a means of communication through which to ‘try out’ or practice new knowledge, ideas and skills in informal situations and refine them over time (Beckett, 2001). For example, an employee-student may learn new knowledge and skills through her participation in higher education but then try out this higher education-facilitated learning in informal workplace situations, as she participates within her work-focused communities of practice. As Hodges (1998) explains, belonging in a community of practice, is influenced by participation in a community of practice. Thus, it should be noted that when tensions arise within communities of practice, such as in situations where participants have different views of how learning ought to occur, then this

… contradictory participation does not fulfil the need to redirect participation to more inclusive practices, and membership is contingent on an ongoing engagement with the dominant traditions (Hodges, 1998, p. 283).

Thus, communities of practice have shared participatory goals based on pre-existing ideological traditions which whilst mutable, are nonetheless reproduced by the modes of participation endorsed by the dominant order (Hodges, 1998).

3.2.3 Communities of Practice and the Theory-Practice Divide

It has been argued that over time, workplace learning theory has moved away from ‘old epistemological models, by which scientific, objective, and relatively inert formal education and training were supposedly transferred to impressionable minds’
(Beckett, 2001, p. 73), to more constructivist-type views which centralise personal meaning making through socially-embedded practice (Beckett, 2001; Cranton, 1992; Erut, 2000; Knowles, 1970; Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Schon, 1987). This theoretical shift, however, has not necessarily translated to a commensurate shift in practice. Rather, the neoliberal managerialist imperative of privileging universal bottom line metrics ensures that the heterogeneity associated with constructivist views of workplace learning is largely ignored in practice. Whilst it is perhaps unsurprising that in the ‘messiness’ that characterises everyday work practice (Schon, 1987), theoretical ideas may not always translate directly into practical solutions, it is important to explore this theory-practice divide. As it may help us to understand how it contributes to the sideling of higher education and the support provided for it, in organisational policy and practice.

When considered alongside knowledge-power relations and structure-agency debates, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of ‘communities of practice’, provides a useful departing frame through which to understand how the divide between organisational learning and workplace learning remains. That is, as individuals participate relationally in and across different practices, including but not limited to those situated in the workplace, their worldview evolves (Dewey, 2004). This active participation may, in turn, influence the constitution of the communities of practice in which they are involved. That is, an individual working within a community of practice may seek to ensure that in designing and facilitating workplace learning initiatives, progressive constructivist principles are employed (i.e. as part of their instructional design strategies etc.) and this approach may be adopted by the group. But for this to occur, their views must be accepted and aligned with the dominant ideals of the community of practice to which they belong (Hodges, 1998).

Communities of practice, however, develop a collective memory that emerges as members share similar experiences over time (Wenger, 1998). This retention is not neutral but shaped by power, which

… knits itself into identity in such a way that its patterns are diffuse, writing through relations with others, with practices, activities, participation, and with identity, distorting, disclosing, and encoding the historicised self (Hodges, 1998, p. 288).
Thus, how an individual is presented with the practical opportunities, freedom, guidance and trust to apply new knowledge and skills to work-focused activities, is likely to be related not only to their agentic ability and desire to do so, but also to their identity. This identity is related to the communities of practice in which they operate, or more accurately, the dominant views of learning that these communities espouse. Thus, communities of practice are not created equal and do not operate in a vacuum. Rather, they are co-constructed alongside other communities of practice that operate within and across organisational bounds. They both shape and are shaped by the identities of their members. Therefore, if an organisation privileges the learning perspectives of particular communities of practice over others, by virtue of their epistemological alignment with a certain set of managerialist philosophies and objectives, the extent to which a community of practice can negotiate outcomes facilitative of a progressive constructivist approach to learning may be unavoidably constrained.

For example, a Learning and Development (L&D) community of practice may subscribe to progressive constructivist learning principles based on contemporary workplace learning theory and seek to implement learning strategies based on these ideas. However, if their underlying goals and philosophies do not align with those held by senior managers operating within, and across, other communities of practice informed by competing epistemologies of learning, then the L&D community may lack the power to advocate for their implementation in practice. Thus, contemporary workplaces may publically purport to share a single overarching organisational vision or goal in theory. Given that multiple, overlapping communities of practice likely operate within (and across) different organisations (each with its own dominant epistemologies and axiologies of learning), however, it is unlikely that this unitary view will be unproblematically shared in practice.

Rather, the extent to which the goals and epistemologies of a community of practice are aligned with those of the senior management group, is more likely to influence the extent to which their guiding theoretical lenses might be adopted in practice. ‘Any community of practice produces abstractions, tools, symbols, stories, terms, and concepts, that reify something of that practice in a congealed form’, states Wenger (1998, p. 59). Thus, enacted in practice, organisational learning and
workplace learning theories may simply be functioning as another means for individuals and groups to be controlled, as leaders attempt to inculcate dominant managerialist values (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996).

Whilst this argument relates to how L&D communities of practice may operate within organisations generally, it is also likely to have very particular ramifications for how higher education is valued and supported in the workplace as a specific type of learning. That is, in the context of work-focused learning (that which does not traditionally include higher education-facilitated learning), whilst the formal component of learning is usually resourced and controlled by L&D practitioners and communities of practice, the informal component of work-focused learning necessarily occurs across communities of practice. It is therefore likely to be influenced by the dominant assumptions adopted by the different communities of practice which operate within and across the workplace. L&D practitioners and communities of practice are therefore likely to have more control over how formal learning is facilitated than how informal learning is facilitated, given the former’s tangibility and temporal boundedness. Thus, the informal component of work-focused learning may fall less under the influence of L&D communities of practice, than under the guidance of other communities of practice in (or with) which the employee interacts. These may include those which subscribe to more rationalist, managerialist philosophies and agendas.

This same reasoning can also be applied to how higher education is supported in the workplace. Because the formal component of higher education-facilitated learning (i.e. that which occurs via lecturers, tutorials etc) occurs outside workplace practice, whereas the informal component (i.e. ‘learning transfer’), occurs in workplace practice, L&D communities of practice may have limited control over how the latter is viewed and valued. Thus, the extent to which higher-education facilitated informal learning is seen as relevant to work-focused learning may be determined less by an objective and consistent yardstick, than by the subjective and shifting opinions of dominant communities of practice. This is likely to have ramifications for the support which is provided by employers to employees engaged in higher education study.
Indeed, there is ‘significant overlap’ between informal and formal learning and the ‘transferring’ or ‘application’ of learning from one context to another is neither a straightforward nor easy process (Hodkinson, 2005). As Billet (2002) explains, educational institutions and workplaces provide different situations for participation in learning to occur. Learning is therefore better understood through a study of the content and quality of the participation enabled through these practices, rather than creating unnecessary binaries between the two. After all, as Hodkinson (2005) notes, what moves from a university context to a workplace context is the person - the learner. Further, the extent and depth to which the learner changes as a result of engaging in different learning practices is highly variable and dependent to a large extent on their intention to learn and learn in practice (Hodkinson, 2005). Moreover, how this change occurs is likely to be highly personal and linked to identity and identity transformation (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 1991, 2000). This may be characterised by, among other things, a change in self-confidence (Hodkinson, 2005).

Adopting this view, whether or not the learning that occurs ‘in’ the workplace or ‘in’ higher education is relevant to an individual’s employment, is of less importance than how the flow of learning occurs as employee-students participate in and across different communities of practice and in doing so, transform their identity and their praxis. As employee-students move from a position of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ to ‘full participation’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in their workplace, it is important to understand how informal learning, facilitated by participation in higher education, might intersect with the formal and informal components of other work-focused learning. This must be understood in relation to their participation in and across overlapping communities of practice and any conflicts relating to their identity - as an employee-student specifically, and as a learner more generally.

Further, it is through the relational and informal nature of this participation, that less experienced employee-students may learn how to solve novel problems, from more experienced members of communities of practice, whilst providing more experienced members with new insights. As Fuller et al. (2005) note, existing and already skilled members of a community of practice can still learn from
‘newcomers’ in practice. Further, as Beckett (2001, p. 75) highlights, this knowledge sharing within and between communities of practice, is likely to occur informally, through ‘coffee-break or water-cooler conversations, second opinions, dissent and conflict, and striving toward certain immediate successes’. It occurs ‘when a worker is aware that she or he is learning from these experiences (not merely undergoing them)’ (Beckett, 2001, p. 75). Indeed, engagement in higher education alongside paid employment, far from being irrelevant to workplace practice, may actually offer additional opportunities to engage in these very forms of informal learning.

Although, it should be noted that ‘legitimate peripherality’ is a complex notion, implicated in social structures involving relations of power (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As individuals gain more expertise, peripherality becomes ‘empowering’ and ‘can be a source of power or powerlessness, in affording or preventing articulation and interchange among communities of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 36). As aforementioned, the feeling of belonging in a community or communities of practice is dependent on how an individual identifies with the dominant traditions (and associated ideologies) that characterise them (Hodges, 1998). Conflicts may therefore arise when an individual identifies more strongly with the dominant traditions represented by higher education communities of practice, over workplace communities of practice. This is likely to present a conflict for both the individual and the workplace-driven communities of practice in which she participates. This may create a perspectival tension to work through and understand in terms of employee-student identity and belonging.

In sum, communities of practice are not neutral spaces, but are shaped by unique belief systems and discourses (Wenger, 1998). These ideologies come to characterise and dominate their praxis, over time (Hodges, 1998). In this way, the learning goals and epistemologies of different communities of practice that operate within and across organisations, may not always be aligned. Rather, issues of control and power may determine the types of learning which are legitimised or viewed as relevant to workplace practice. Moreover, the nature of these knowledge-power relations as relates to employee-student participation in higher education may be unique, given the intimate connection between higher education and social
status (Marginson, 2006, 2011a; 2016b). Thus, to reconceptualise and reposition higher education within these discourses, a consideration of knowledge-power relations as concerns the ways in which study relevance is determined in practice, is required.

3.3 Interrogating Relevance via a Consideration of Practice

Existing workplace learning theory is extremely useful in centralising the role of social practices in co-constructing learning as it occurs in workplace practice and in acknowledging broader sociocultural and political influences on workplace learning. Bourdieu’s (1977; 1984; 1990b, 1993) theory of practice provides even greater detail as to how this co-construction might occur. This theorisation is especially pertinent where there is marked conflict or tension between individual and organisational learning practices or between communities of practice with competing ideologies regarding the relevance of learning.

Because Bourdieu (1977, 1993) views practice as being located not within a particular social institution, such as the workplace, but rather within a broader socio-political and economic context, individual agency can be viewed in terms of the conflicting social roles which one simultaneously holds. These roles may be in opposition with one another and enacted in different ways in and across practice. This is relevant to the present topic as an employee-student engages in learning not just within a workplace context, but through participation in both formal and informal work-focused and higher-education facilitated learning activities. As Bourdieu (1993, p. 72) explains, individuals operate not only within and across physical social spaces (i.e. the workplace and university), but also within and across social ‘fields’, defined as:

… structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analysed independently of the characteristics of their occupations which are partially determined by them.

Thus, whilst all agents involved in a field, such as those employed in a particular workplace or industry, necessarily ‘share a number of fundamental interests, namely
everything that is linked to the very existence of the field’, ‘the structure of the field is a state of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in…struggle’ (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 73). As Bourdieu (1993) explains, an individual can thus be seen to interact and negotiate with their social world (which is composed of various ‘fields’) via the ‘habitus’, defined collectively as

… systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 53).

This interaction occurs in ways that are influenced by an individual’s knowledge and understanding of the social field as a ‘game’ and their position in relation to it. As Bourdieu (1993) clarifies, it is through this interaction and struggle that individuals develop a sense of ‘illusio’ which can be defined as a

… ‘feel’ for the game and the stakes, which implies both the inclination and the capacity to play the game, to take an interest in the game, to be taken up, taken in by the game’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 18, emphasis in original).

Bourdieu (1993) argues that individuals are motivated by rewards inherent in the field, perceived as various forms of capital, which have the potential to be related to, and integrated with, their existing reservoirs of capital. Individuals will naturally seek to in some way expand upon, change or increase their capital. This pursuit is always conditional, due to the intrinsic boundaries of the field, and mediated by their unique way of viewing the rules of the field via the habitus (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 73). Because this action operates through the notion of illusio (Bourdieu, 1993), which is essentially a perception and judgment of the rules inherent in a social situation, it is necessarily personal and influenced by the position of the habitus in relation to the field.

Thus, it should be noted that whilst ‘durable’, the habitus is also somewhat in flux, as systems of dispositions can be exchanged in various ways depending upon the conditions of existence that one is exposed to and their experiences of engaging with this existence (Bourdieu, 1990b). Therefore, given that social fields have rules
that control how different forms of capital can be accumulated *within* them, but also transformed *across* them, how an individual will be motivated to engage in them is likely to be manifested via the habitus in somewhat organised ways. Yet, precisely *how* an individual engages in a given social field, via illusio, is also ultimately somewhat idiosyncratic. It is dependent on the inculcation of the habitus in response to the inherent dynamism of the social fields in and across which the individual engages.

Therefore, if we are to adopt a Bourdieusian view of the learning organisation, it is not as Senge (2006) understands, the *other disciplines* such as ‘team learning’ and ‘shared visions’ that determine whether ‘personal mastery’ will be achieved through the challenging of ‘mental models’ (and by virtue of that assumption, the occurrence of organisational learning). But neither is it only inferential understanding obtained by consciously ‘weighing up the objectivity of inherited knowledge…against our wants and desires, in a socially intelligent judgement that shapes a purpose’ (Beckett 2013, p. 75). Rather, it is the *habitus* which mediates individual action in response to a particular social field (through the engagement of illusio) that is likely to control how we participate in learning (Bourdieu, 1990b, 1993).

Extending this rationale, because each employee operates through a different sense of illusio, influenced by the habitus in relation to the social field (e.g. the workplace or industry in which they work), an individual’s position within that field is essentially determined by a structure (albeit a dynamic one) that has developed not only within, but also *beyond*, the social field. Thus, the unique reservoirs of capital that one has, and has experienced, prior to entering a social field has a strong bearing on how one engages with the capital comprising the new field. Therefore, the idea that all individuals will engage in individual learning practices in ways that achieve team learning and shared visions in more or less equivalent and power-neutral ways, is highly questionable. In short, because the learning organisation’s effective operation is contingent on all Senge’s (2006) five disciplines working optimally at the same time (through equivalent forms of individual and collective engagement in each of these disciplines), conceptualising the workplace as a *learning organisation* in this sense, is unlikely to ever exist beyond a theoretical paradigm.
As Finger and Brand (1999) concluded after trying to apply learning organisation theory to the Swiss Postal Service, whilst learning organisation theory may ‘make change less threatening…it is not possible to transform a bureaucratic organisation by such learning initiatives alone’. Indeed, this focus on the constancy of bureaucracy implies a missing consideration of the pervasive influence of power relations in workplace learning. That is, in organisational learning practice, the learning and knowledge that is deemed relevant and useful is likely to be contested and determined by the subjective and shifting opinions of key stakeholders that operate within a bureaucratic system. Knowledge-power relations may operate to reinforce or redirect certain individual and group learning agendas over others via the notion of relevance, depending upon the ways in which power operates within, but equally beyond the organisation.

Thus, an organisation’s purported learning culture is always linked with personal and relational agendas which both maintain and reshape existing organisational structures in ways that are not power-neutral and rarely predictable. As Finger and Brand (1999, p. 146) highlight,

… the transformation of an organisation’s culture cannot be achieved without simultaneously transforming the structures and the organisation of work. Also, focusing exclusively on training activities in order to foster learning…favours this purely cultural bias.

Coopey (1995) has also noted this point, explaining that rather than centralising the notion of power, as it relates to knowledge and learning in creating organisational culture, the learning organisation conception is a ‘unitarist’ one, whereby politics and power are correlated with conflict and problems. Power becomes viewed in terms of threats to the relatively fixed, pre-determined and agreed-upon organisational culture, rather than as a natural, mutable and potentially uncomfortable, but entirely necessary component of all forms of individual and group learning. As Foucault (1980, p. 119) has previously stressed, this misapprehension of power as a negative or prohibitive force is both pervasive and erroneous, as power ‘doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but…traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse’. However, as increasingly, organisations publically subscribe to
promoting the latter kind of culture, despite privately doing so only to achieve the same ends previously obtained through a commitment to the former, this perspective predominates; management maintains control over organisational learning (Bauman, 2000).

Indeed, both existing organisational learning theory and workplace learning theory tend to underemphasize not only the influence of power (operating at agentic, relational and structural levels), but also the close relationship between power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980, 1995). This is a crucial issue given that no learning can occur without knowledge and knowledge is intimately linked with power (Foucault, 1980). It could therefore be argued that by minimising the role of power as it relates to how knowledge is elicited, repressed, acquired, released, shared or withheld in the workplace, promotes an uncontested organisational learning-value hierarchy of relevance.

That is, through the discourse contained in policies and publications relating to organisational learning, workplaces may promulgate the idea that all learning is viewed and valued equally. However, in practice, certain forms of learning and knowledge may be tacitly endorsed or privileged (via the notion of relevance) at the expense of others. Thus, control over learning may be achieved and maintained through the use of language, which as Bourdieu (1984) explains, can be deftly employed in institutions to determine what knowledge is learned and transferred in a social space, and how. Certainly, power relations both influence and are influenced by discourse (Bourdieu, 1984; Fairclough, 1989; Foucault, 1980). Further, it is through discourse that particular forms of knowledge and learning are valued and legitimised in the workplace (Billett, 2002).

Therefore, to understand how these knowledge-power relations might be enacted through discourse to create dominant modes of learning, Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of ‘doxa’ and Foucault’s (1980) notion of ‘regimes of truth’ provide a useful theoretical lens.

Firstly, ‘doxa’ (Bourdieu, 1984) is the idea that the way in which we experience the world is characterised by particular rules and conventions which come to be
acknowledged as *common-sense* or judicious. In doing so, they concurrently organise both reality and our way of thinking about it (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 471). Applying the notion of ‘doxa’ to organisational learning, employee-students may thus come to view their position within the organisation and their value to it, through the established language (determined by the rules of the organisational hierarchy) of learning *relevance*. That is, the type of higher education study which is considered *work-focused* and therefore *relevant* is less a product of an objective judgment about an uncontested reality, than it is a product of how the organisational rules and regulations governing L&D are determined by the judgements of key stakeholders. Specifically, judgements of those who have ultimate control over the creation, maintenance and imposition of these rules. Thus, the unquestioned acceptance of the notion that higher education-facilitated workplace learning is a somehow less relevant *type* of learning, compared to more traditional work-focused learning, becomes doxa. In this way, common-sense assumptions become unquestioned collective verities, as opposed to powerful mechanisms through which dominant beliefs (e.g. dynamic managerialist agendas) are authenticated and inculcated.

Thus, to question a universally-accepted notion or ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1980), such as to whether a higher education course is ‘relevant’ to one’s position of employment, requires the subordinate employee to take a great personal and professional risk in challenging the doxa. In doing so, they are publically questioning something that appears to be socially accepted as both prudent and reasonable. The notion of *study relevance* may therefore help management to maintain the doxa by ensuring that relevant learning is defined and communicated within narrow, substantive terms, whilst being surreptitiously couched not in objectivity, but in the subjective agendas of management. Through these discourses of relevance, doxa is thus maintained. Employees remain wary of challenging it as common-sense judgements are accepted as a necessary and ubiquitous element of workplace practice (Beckett, 2013).

Through doxa (Bourdieu, 1984), it becomes apparent that rather than the questioning of learning relevance being perceived as an employee seeking to explore or subscribe to a different epistemology and/or axiology of learning, it may
instead be perceived as them simply lacking in crucial insight and good judgment. In this way, the employee-student that challenges the notion of whether their higher education course is relevant to their position of employment is not viewed as subversive or dissident but rather, incompetent. Thus, to avoid the possibility that the employee’s dissonance might in some way be a justified reaction to an ineffective or even dysfunctional organisational system, the power relations and structures that give rise to the organisational doxa are maintained through the censure of the individual employee as a ‘problem child’. Indeed, precisely how learning relevance becomes doxa in and across different organisations and teams, is a crucial process to explore. It has already been argued that workplace learning discourses which reinforce distinctions between workplace learning and higher education, as opposed to finding commonalities between them, present a limitation (Hodkinson, 2005). This is implicated in such a ‘crucial process’.

In sum, learning organisation theory (Senge, 2006) and other systems-based theories of organisational learning based on rational cognitivist principles, whilst intending to provide useful theoretical frameworks for practical use, have provided theoretical approaches for theoretical use. This is a result of the underemphasis on the organised yet dynamic nature of the sociocultural and sociocognitive underpinnings of human agency and the pervasive role of knowledge-power relations in communities of practice specifically, and practice, broadly. The concern is that despite these evident shortcomings, the notion of the modern workplace existing as, or being equated with, a learning organisation as a power-neutral construct, remains. This is problematic as it is likely to influence dominant discourses of learning in organisational policy and practice, and in turn continue to influence constitutive practices as a ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1980). That is, if organisations self-identify or advertise themselves as a ‘learning organisation’, or some iteration of the term (e.g. ‘learning-focused organisation’), this evokes connotations with a genuine commitment to the equitable facilitation of all forms of individual L&D, rather than the privileging of certain ‘types’ of learning over others.

As I have just argued, however, in the same way that ‘individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning’ (Senge, 2006, p. 129), organisational learning
does not guarantee individual learning. As Coopey (1995, p. 198) maintains, ‘the proponents of a learning organisation envisage that control will be vested in the learning processes but do not clarify who has ultimate responsibility for the control of the organisation’. Interrogating knowledge-power links and structure-agency tensions is therefore crucial to understanding how individual and organisational learning relate and how different forms of learning may be privileged over others.

3.4 Understanding Knowledge-power Links via Structure-Agency Tensions

We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault, 1995, p. 27).

Before trying to understand how different forms of learning and knowledge are valued in the workplace, it is first necessary to investigate what learning is valued and who decides. Decision-making is unlikely to be ideologically neutral (Beckett & Hager, 2001). Therefore, it is important to consider the role that power plays in relation to knowledge, in terms of how this relationship influences organisational decision-making about learning. A consideration of knowledge-power links may enable an exploration of how certain forms of organisational learning and knowledge are legitimated over others and how higher education specifically, is valued as a facilitator of learning – one that is uniquely linked to social power (Côté & Allahar, 2011; Marginson, 2006, 2011a).

Given the link between power, social stratification, status and class (Weber 2010), I argue that higher education’s role within organisational learning is likely to be contested, if not more contested, than other forms of organisational learning. This is partially because the completion of higher education produces credentials which provide the individual with both educational and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). Further, participation in higher education facilitates specific forms of knowledge creation and learning (i.e. critical thinking skills) that
are likely to be not only subject to, but also generative of, unique forms of power and control. The relationship between knowledge and power is bi-directional and relational (Foucault, 1995).

*Power* as a general construct has been defined in manifold ways. Perhaps, most notably by Weber (2010, p. 137) ‘as the chance of a person or a group to enforce their own will even against the resistance of others involved, through a communal action’. Weber (1978) views power as a result of the bureaucratic control exercised and peddled by the state. However, Foucault (1980, p. 198) perceives power as not existing in any ‘substantive sense’, as rigidly organised top-down oppression, but rather as corresponding to ‘a more-or-less organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations’. Foucault (1980) argues that power does not have to be equated with, or reduced to a specific space and time, but rather transcends both spatial and temporal confines. He argues that it operates as more of a loose weave existing across society, rather than tightly knitted in individual psyches or social structures. Thus,

… power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

Like Foucault, Bourdieu (1984; 1991) sees power as more widely distributed than Weber; that is, not only flowing from the state and determined by bureaucratic control but also embedded, created and recreated in social institutions and relational interactions within and outside the institutional context. Bourdieu (1991, p. 166) views power as ‘symbolic’. It is necessarily internalised and reproduced through individual unconsciousness. It is ‘a power of constructing reality’ through which the world has meaning (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 166). But Foucault and Bourdieu’s conceptions of power diverge on the point of exactly how this process of internalisation, as it influences individual action, actually occurs in practice.

For example, Foucault (1995) sees power as having moved from the macro level of the state to the more meso level of social institutions, over time. He argues that it
operates through disciplinary structures and standardised processes of organisational control, which ultimately shape people’s behaviour as they internalise and react to these structures and processes of control. Further, Foucault (1978) explicitly states that power is not a structure, nor an element of individual agency, but rather is ubiquitous because it stems from all things and places and in this way is intimately linked to the notion of ‘truth’. Thus, he reasons that particular systems of power produce and maintain truth, and the effects of power generate and transmit truth through social regimes which are ‘political’, ‘economic’ and ‘institutional’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 133).

The problem is, however, that if power is inherently dynamic and fluid then it cannot be understood directly but must be accessed via these ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1980), which are politically, economically and institutionally derived and maintained as the right or accepted ways of doing things. Foucault (1980), however, does not suggest that by accessing power through these regimes we can somehow reform them or ameliorate the effects of power. Rather, he argues that we might hope to understand how power produces reality as ‘the individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production’ (Foucault, 1980, p.194).

Therefore, whilst, Foucault’s (1980) approach is somewhat useful in accounting for how power flows from the institution to the individual via regimes of truth, it does not explicate how this might occur in patterned or unpatterned ways that enable us to analyse tensions between the individual and the institution for more transformative outcomes. Thus, whilst Foucault’s conception of power is extremely useful in highlighting the links between both knowledge and power, and power and truth - in both a general sense and as relates to knowledge production through discourse, it also presents a noticeable limitation with regards to how knowledge and power links relate to structure-agency tensions, specifically. This is a crucial issue. If we are to understand how ESHE is both provided and engaged with (in policy and practice), in terms of not just the collective, but also the individual’s lived experience of working and studying concurrently, a conceptual frame that provides an explicit ontology of how power-knowledge relations are manifested in both structure and agency, and the relations between them, is needed.
Through his notion of ‘habitus’, Bourdieu (1984) overcomes some of these limitations to an extent. The ‘habitus’, as Bourdieu (1984, p. 170) explains, is useful to a consideration of structure-agency debates as it can explain how, through practice, external structures become internalised. That is, in any given situation the habitus unavoidably affects the way that the individual acts, and subsequently acts, and through this action simultaneously transforms the habitus in both that interaction and all subsequent ones. Therefore, the ‘durability’ of the habitus over time and its simultaneous ‘transposability’ means that ‘the same habitus can lead to very different practices and stances depending on the state of the field’ (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 116). Thus, the habitus can explain how people make decisions as thinking agents through their interactions with others (who are also operating through the habitus) and with reference to the broader social structures that recreate the impetus for this and all subsequent action.

Therefore, as opposed to Foucault (1995) who focuses on how power is produced and maintained through disciplinary structures, Bourdieu (1990a) sees power as being ‘symbolic’. More importantly, symbolic power operates to produce ‘limits’ between what knowledge and practices are acceptable, which an individual gets a ‘sense’ of when they take these limits for granted (Bourdieu, 1984). When objective structures and mental structures co-create each other and result in the acceptance of the dominant perspective within a certain social ‘field’, individuals adhere to accepted social norms via the notion of ‘doxa’, or as previously explained - the unquestioned acceptance of a certain mode of perceiving the world, considered to be the rational or common-sense one (Bourdieu, 1984). To that end, Bourdieu’s theory is useful in helping us to understand how different forms of learning become legitimised over others. Specifically, in terms of how knowledge-power relations may be enacted between the individual and the social world in practice.

In locating the processes of learning within practice, just as Beckett (2001) centralises the role of ‘inferential understanding’ in relation to ‘representational understanding’, by emphasizing the role of objective structures in relation to mental structures, Bourdieu’s theory of practice (1977; 1984; 1990b) overcomes a unilateral focus on mental structures, in favour of a co-construction between objective structures and mental structures as the determinants of practice. It should
be noted, however, that in viewing the habitus as inherently mutable yet also acting consistently, as Bourdieu himself admits, his theory invokes a degree of inherent determinism (1990a). This is problematic, as a philosophical corollary of this stance is that the nature and/or extent to which free will might be exercised is always constrained. It does not fully address the sliding doors moment when an individual acts consciously or unconsciously in a way that violates the laws of the habitus within a given social field at a specific point in time. Bourdieu assumes that the habitus operates independently of our consciousness of it. During occasional moments, however, where the line between an unconscious impetus to make a decision collides with the conscious impetus to act in an opposite/milder/bolder variation of our unconsciously mediated predisposition, the line between structure and agency becomes conceptually blurred. Given the possibility for this consciousness clash or sliding doors moment to occur in practice, in adopting Bourdieu’s theoretical ideas, one must accept the discomfort which this educes.

Indeed, this limitation of practice theory has not been lost on other social theorists. For example, in trying to move away from the overriding objectivism-subjectivism inherent in Bourdieu’s work (and the work of other poststructuralist theorists), Giddens (1979, p. 6) argues that the relationality of power is important to its definition, as power relations are ‘regularised relations of autonomy and dependence’. These relations are bi-directional because:

… however subordinate an actor may be in a social relationship, the very fact of involvement in that relationship gives him or her a certain amount of power over the other (Giddens, 1979, p.6).

Thus, according to Giddens (1979, p. 68) ‘power is not a description of a state of affairs, but a capability’, exercised through a ‘dialectic of control’ (p.149) inseparable from the notion of agency; to not engage in the dialectic is to not be an agent. Whereas Foucault (1982) focuses on the notion of the self as a space where discourses of power collectively influence agency - in so far as the self is an agent which is ‘free’ to act, Giddens’ (1979) view of power and the self is one which sees individual consciousness as being at the heart of agency. That is, via the notion of ‘reflexivity’ - the action of continuously monitoring our behaviour in a way that enables us to ‘self-regulate’ it, our intention to act is intimately bound up with how
we consciously and rationally think about our conduct in relation to our pre-existing knowledge.

Thus, Giddens (1984) reasons that agency is as much determined by structure as structure is determined by agency. It is this argument which forms the basis of his ‘structuration’ theory. But this tenet is both a strength and Achilles heel of Giddens’ reasoning. It has been criticised by Archer (2007, p. 41) who contends that in trying to overcome the objectivist-subjectivist divide, Giddens has conflated structure and agency by suggesting that their ‘properties and powers are completely interdependent and ineluctably intertwined’. Archer (2007, p. 41) argues that just as Giddens achieves such conflation through his notion of reflexivity, by attempting to explain subject-object relations through the notion of the habitus, Bourdieu also commits the same offense by failing to fully explain how the habitus relates to consciousness in a way that is not merely unconscious or ‘semi-conscious’, but concurrently conscious, thus ultimately over-socialising the individual.

Drawing on the critical realist philosophy of Bhaskar (1993, 2008) and subscribing to its basic premise that there is an independent world regardless of our knowledge of it, even though it is through this knowing that we come to understand it, Archer (1995, p. 65) suggests that ‘a theoretical approach which is capable of linking structure and agency rather than sinking one into the other’ is more useful. Specifically, she reasons that:

… structure and agency can only be linked by examining the interplay between them over time, and that without the proper incorporation of time the problem of structure and agency can never be resolved (Archer, 1995, p. 65).

Archer’s (1995) focus on the relationship of the passage of time to structure and agency is perhaps as crucial as Foucault’s (1980) highlighting of the nature of ‘space’ to ‘politics’. Just as Foucault (1980) argues that space is both political and changes with politics (not merely because of it but also in spite of it) through history, Archer (1995) suggests that the relationship between structure and agency cannot be understood without reference to time. Thus, given the importance of time to exploring the experiences of employee-students engaging in simultaneous
learning through higher education and paid employment, a consideration of time as it relates to structure and agency, and to power and knowledge creation and legitimisation, provides a useful arm to my theoretical framework. Specifically, as discussed in Chapter 2, learning through higher education takes a great deal of free time. Time is something which is not freely available to all individuals in the same way and to the same extent. Thus, participation in higher education is highly political and time-related even before it is considered in relation to an employment context. In an employment context, experiences of work and study are therefore likely to be subject to complex knowledge-power relations uniquely bound up with the notion of time.

3.5 Towards a Critical Theoretical Understanding of Employer-Supported Higher Education

To unpack mechanisms of knowledge and power in a way that privileges neither structure nor agency, nor analytically conflates them, it is useful to focus on how power operates at both structural and relational levels, as perceived consciously and unconsciously by the individual. However, ‘relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 93). Therefore, in the context of this research, these links must be accessed through a consideration of ESHE discourses. Specifically, how these discourses relate to decision-making regarding determinations of learning relevance, may offer a means through which to explore how employee-students and managers might themselves think more critically about ESHE provision and engagement. As Freire (2014, p. 65) argues, ‘critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action, must be carried on with the oppressed at whatever the stage of their struggle for liberation’.

Further, to consider whether higher education is conceptually positioned as being somehow outside of, or less relevant than other informal and formal work-focused learning, Bourdieu’s notion of doxa (1984) can be used to challenge taken for granted assumptions regarding the notion of learning relevance. This can be achieved by exploring how these assumptions may be latently or overtly expressed
in workplace learning and learning support discourses, functioning as ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1980). Moreover, Bourdieu’s notions of habitus (1990b) and illusio (1993) provide a critical lens through which to understand how experiences of undertaking higher education alongside paid work stem from individual differences in perspectives relating to the nature of learning - in and across the social fields (1993) of paid work and higher education.

In drawing on a largely Bourdieusian lens, however, it is important to note that akin to Giddens’ (1979) notion of reflexivity, Bourdieu’s practice theory assumes that individuals will always act rationally and engage in rational dialogues (through a dialectic of control), even if they are unconsciously aware that they are doing so, or when their actions superficially appear to be wholly irrational. However, as Coopey (1995 p. 199) explains, workplaces cannot become utopias ‘through the pursuit of shared goals in a climate of collaborative high trust and a rational approach to the resolution of differences’. This is not to say that some relationships will not be marked by a degree of rationality and high trust. Rather, not all employees will always engage in rational action through trusting relations at all times and in all spaces.

As Foucault (1980) argues, ‘with relations of power, one is faced with complex phenomena which don’t obey…the dialectic’. For example, as employees seek to gain further skills, knowledge and credentials through higher education, they are likely to increase their social power within the workplace and as Foucault (1980) explains, mastery can be acquired. However, once mastery is obtained via power, the use of power facilitates additional forms of counteracting power which may thwart the effects of the first using its strengths against itself (1980). Thus, as power shifts, employee-students and managers may act in ways which are not always rational and which disobey the dialectic. Therefore, in centralising the relations and tensions between knowledge and power and structure and agency, as they remain both constant and shifting over time, it is also important to consider rationality and irrationality, as relates to notions of trust and competition. Indeed, by questioning the rationality of the dialectic as concerns knowledge-power relations, Foucault’s work indicates the need to go beyond the inherent rationality of the habitus, to a consideration of more irrational and dispersed forms of power and control.
In sum, by remaining aware of structure-agency tensions, as relates to how decision-making may be influenced by both *unconscious* inculcation of the external social world (and the manifold knowledge-power relations that exist within it), *and conscious* awareness of action (both rational and irrational), the determinist elements of Bourdieu’s (1977; 1984; 1990b) theory can be countered. This can be achieved by maintaining an awareness of the individual’s lived experience of self and identity, over time.

3.6 Conclusion

By centralising the inherent and sometimes incompatible philosophies underlying workplace learning and organisational learning theory, I have argued that this theoretical fissure has resulted in higher education being sidelined in existing discourses of both organisational and workplace learning. I have provided a critique of the premises underlying organisational learning through a workplace learning lens, arguing that learning is social and relational (Billett, 2006b; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Therefore, the relational and social nature of learning must be thoroughly explored to understand *how* learning occurs in workplace practice and in practice, more broadly. Specifically, through a consideration of practice, I have argued that the *relevance* of higher-education and ESHE to organisational and workplace learning might be better conceptualised through a consideration of its role in facilitating work-focused *informal* learning. Lastly, I have centralised the role of knowledge-power relations and structure-agency tensions in determining learning *relevance* through the legitimising and de-legitimising of certain kinds of knowledge and learning over others, as contributes to the maintenance of the theory-practice divide.

I argue that there is a strong impetus to move toward a new theoretical approach to understanding how employee-student and workplace manager experiences of undertaking higher education, and supervising employee-students involved in this undertaking, relate to the ways in which higher education is valued and supported in the workplace. I contend that by adopting a blended critical theoretical perspective informed by Foucault’s (1980, 1995) consideration of knowledge-power links and
specifically by Bourdieu’s (1977; 1984; 1990b) practice theory, whilst remaining cognisant of structure-agency tensions as relates to the notion of time (Archer, 1995, 2007), a more transformative understanding of EHSE policy and practice may be developed. Within this theoretical scaffold, the lived experience of undertaking higher education alongside paid work, as it relates to the self and identity, may be understood in a more nuanced way. This can be achieved by drawing on cross-disciplinary understandings of learning to reframe both the relevance and value of higher-education-facilitated learning to work-focused learning.

In the next chapter, I provide an overview of the methodology and methods used in this study. I provide a detailed overview of the data collection and analysis phases before discussing the quality and reliability of the research approach.
Chapter 4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a rationale for using a mixed methods research design and methodology drawing on both critical grounded theory (CGT) and descriptive statistics, is presented. Specifically, I have provided an overview of how the research design and methodology were developed and executed. The data collection and analysis methods used have been described and the research quality discussed. Ethical considerations have also been expounded.

4.2 Research Questions

The research questions explored are:

1. How do the experiences of employees undertaking higher education alongside paid work relate to the beliefs and expectations that they hold regarding the value of higher education?

2. How do the experiences of managers supervising employees undertaking higher education alongside paid work, relate to the beliefs and expectations that they hold regarding the value of higher education?

3. In what ways do these beliefs and expectations relate to how Employer-supported Higher Education (ESHE) is provided and engaged with, in organisational policy and practice?

4. How might developing an understanding of these beliefs and expectations, and their relationship with the provision of ESHE, assist employers in developing ESHE strategies that enable lifelong education for diverse employee-students?
4.3 Research Design and Methodology

A mixed methods approach incorporating grounded theory, supplemented with descriptive statistical analysis was employed. An overview of both grounded theory (GT) and of critical grounded theory (CGT) - as a unique rendering of this methodology, is also provided.

4.3.1 Adopting a Qualitative Mixed Methods Design

Whilst it is widely acknowledged that qualitative and quantitative research methods have distinct strengths, it has also been recognised that both approaches have inherent limitations (Bryman, 2012; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). For example, quantitative research can be extremely useful for measuring social phenomena, seeking to establish causative or correlational relations and minimising researcher bias through replication. It has been criticised, however, for treating humans and the social world in the same way as non-human phenomena. That is, quantitative research tends to ignore our capacity for interpretation and undermines social complexity by suggesting that human qualities can be precisely measured (Bryman, 2012). Likewise, qualitative research is useful for exploring how individuals interpret and make meaning of the social world, and for facilitating extensive contextual descriptions of human experiences and processes. It too, however, is often criticised for being subjective, difficult to replicate, lacking generalisability and transparency (Bryman, 2012).

Given the limitations of relying on either quantitative or qualitative methods alone, it was determined that a mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis would be most useful. Indeed, blending qualitative and quantitative research methods to draw on the inherent utilities and underlying philosophical assumptions of both, is a key reason why mixed methods has become an increasingly popular research approach among social scientists (Bamberger, 2000; Creswell & Creswell, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

This emphasis on using mixed methods as not just a means to narrowly target specific methodological or philosophical shortcomings of employing either
 qualitative or quantitative methods in isolation. But rather, to comprehensively understand the research problems under investigation, is an important nod to the significance of aiming for holism in conducting social research. Although, it should also be noted that whilst mixed methods approaches employ both quantitative and qualitative research methods, these are best thought of less as discrete methods and more as occurring on a continuum (Bamberger, 2000). They work together to give a deep and rich view of the data. A mixed methods research design may fall closer towards the qualitative or the quantitative end of the continuum, depending upon the precise nature of the research design and philosophical rationale behind its creation (Bamberger, 2000). Indeed, the aim to explore participant experiences and assumptions in depth, was a chief reason why qualitative data was adopted in the present research design.

The principal proponents of the mixed methods approach each centralise this key notion of promoting understanding via integration in distinct yet related ways. For example, Bamberger (2000 p. 18) argues that this integration can be achieved by ‘taking into consideration the influence of contextual variables such as social organisation, culture or the political context [to] broaden the conceptual and analytic framework of a study’. Further, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010 p. 560) argue, whilst mixed methods research is of maximal value when different forms of data are ‘fully integrated across all phases of a study’, other research designs (e.g. those that select different methods of data analysis to add to the quality of the research findings, even when it would have been easier and cheaper to use only the one method), represent thoughtful ways of promoting understanding over convenience. Indeed, integration can occur at the procedural level of both data collection and analysis, whereby different methods are used within a singular, overarching conceptual framework. Alternatively, this can occur at the philosophical level, by incorporating different methods reflecting distinct worldviews within a singular research design (Greene, 2011).

When integrating mixed methods within the research design, Creswell and Creswell (2009) highlight the need to examine the dual roles of the actual procedure of mixing. These are to ‘integrate or converge the quantitative and qualitative data by collecting both forms of data and then combine, integrate or
compare the two data sets’ (p.4), and to connect the data so that the results from one form of data collection and analysis are used to guide the second form of data collection. Similarly, Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) have explored this idea and identified five specific purposes for mixed-methods, each with an associated design strategy:

(1) triangulation - the use of two or more methods to minimise researcher bias so that when two or more methods are used to address these biases and the results converge, validity can be enhanced

(2) complementarity – the elaboration or enhancement of results generated from each method to increase understanding and meaningfulness of each set of results, which also increases the validity of the study

(3) development – the use of results from one method to inform subsequent methods, which increases validity by spring boarding of the inherent strengths of each of the methods used

(4) initiation – the conscious search for paradox and contradiction by using discordant results from different methods to develop new conceptual insights and perspectives, increasing breadth and depth of the study

(5) expansion – the use of methods for different components of the research inquiry to increase the conceptual scope of the inquiry.

As Greene et al. (1989) discovered, in practice, however, rationales for selecting mixed methods can match one or more of these purposes. Indeed, in terms of my rationale for using mixed methods, my purpose stemmed from each of the five rationales mentioned by Greene (1989) and colleagues. Specifically, I drew on both Greene et al.’s (1989) purposes and design strategies for mixed-methods research and Creswell and Creswell’s (2009) illustrative interpretation for how these designs might be carried out in practice. I created a research design in
which each element was selected to achieve a different methodological aim (Figure 4.1).

*Figure 4.1: Mixed-methods Research Design Used for the Present Study*  
*Adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2009), p. 6*

As part of the first phase of data collection, organisational study support policies (and related documents) were collected and analysed for treble purposes. For the initial purpose of stand-alone interpretation through critical grounded theory (CGT) – to explore the key issues, themes and relations that emerged from the policy data as a socially-constructed discourse. To conceptually inform phase 2 of the data collection and analysis through the process that Creswell and Creswell (2009) refer to as ‘building’. Lastly, the final aim was to aid critical reflection and retroductive reasoning processes as part of overall grounded theory (GT) methodology by contrasting qualitative and quantitative findings.

In phase 2 of the research design, qualitative and quantitative survey data were collected and informed by the previous policy collection and analysis. The survey questions were modified as a result of the policy analysis findings, but were kept conceptually broad to allow for additional data relating to the original research aims, to emerge. The main purpose of collecting and analysing the survey data was to obtain an initial *feel* for how the policy affordances were interpreted and engaged with *in practice* and to actively seek out potential ‘negative cases’. 
Thus, the developing codes could be thoroughly developed, yet continuously interrogated and challenged, in light of any further insights that emerged throughout the research process.

Lastly, the aim of the third phase of data collection and analysis was to develop the categories and conceptual relationships which emerged from the previous phases of data collection and analysis, through a consideration of practice in-depth. This phase involved conducting 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews and a single focus group across three different organisational work sites of differing sizes, constitutions and sectors. By reflexively analysing and interrogating the data from this phase and previous research phases, the intent was to arrive at a deeper understanding of the research topic through all phases of data analysis and reflection upon this analysis.

4.3.2 Grounded Theory as a Methodology: An Overview

Originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), GT is a social research methodology for systematically analysing data to develop a theory which has a pragmatic application (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010; Nelson, 2015; Oliver, 2012). However, rather than relying solely on the ‘logico-deductive’ reasoning characteristic of positivist and post-positivist frameworks, or the inductive reasoning characteristic of many qualitative, constructivist approaches to data analysis, systematisation in GT means adopting a reasoning method called ‘constant comparison’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 104) originally described, constant comparison involves:

… generating and plausibly suggesting (but not provisionally testing) many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems… some of these properties may be causes, as in analytic induction, but unlike analytic induction others are conditions, consequences, dimensions, types, processes, etc. In both approaches, these properties should result in an integrated theory.

Moreover, it should be noted that because the constant comparative method does not attempt
… to ascertain either the universality or the proof of suggested causes or other properties… in contrast to analytic induction [it] requires only saturation of data - not consideration of all available data, nor are the data restricted to one kind of clearly defined case (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.104).

Over time, GT has been interpreted and adapted in many different ways (Birks & Mills, 2015; Weed, 2009). For example, whilst initially holding congruent ideas about the enactment of carrying out GT in practice, Strauss and Glaser later diverged in terms of their conceptual positions. Specifically, Strauss (1987) sought to add greater structure to the process of doing GT in practice, advocating for the use of three specific phases of coding: open, axial and selective, to guide data analysis:

1. **Open coding** should be completed as the first stage in data analysis and involves reviewing the data and then highlighting initial impressions, ideas or themes (Strauss, 1987)

2. **Axial coding** which involves coding ‘more intensively and concertedly around single categories’ to build up ‘a dense texture of relationships around the “axis” of the category being focused upon’ (Strauss, 1987, p. 64) and cogitate on what conditions and interactions are associated with the social issue represented by the emergent category as related to other nascent categories

3. **Selective coding** is the analytic phase in which the researcher determines which categories are the most central and important by virtue of their ability to link and explain all the other categories and relationships that have emerged through the data analysis (Strauss, 1987).

Further, in partnership with Corbin, Strauss further developed his unique approach to coding, explaining that during the axial phase of data analysis the **conditions**, **consequences** and **actions** embedded in the data should be analysed with reference to each other for the purposes of fully developing the emergent relations between codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
Influenced by the constructivist movement (Birks & Mills, 2015), Charmaz’s (1990, 1995, 2006) version of GT is another well-known iteration which emphasizes the ways in which the researcher socially constructs and interprets the data. Because Charmaz (2008) recognises the inherent subjectivity in GT construction and interpretation, her version of coding calls for a more fluid and flexible approach. Charmaz (1990, p. 1170) explains:

> When using the grounded theory method, researchers actively form questions and seek data… the questions that researchers put to the world, how they collect their data, and which issues and processes they see within it all fundamentally shape their analyses.

In sum, Glaserian, Straussian and Charmazian approaches to implementing GT in practice, have unique advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, in approaching the data, I have combined elements of each methodological rendering for the purposes of investigating my research questions.

Another useful advantage of GT methodology is that it does not employ deductive reasoning or inductive reasoning alone, but rather a combination of both. This allows key concepts to be derived from individual interpretations and applied to individual interpretations in ways that concurrently confirm and yet challenge both forms of reasoning in an iterative fashion. GT thus requires the use of abductive or retroductive reasoning (Bhaskar, 2005). Abduction in GT can be described as

> … a type of reasoning that begins by examining data and after scrutiny of these data, entertains all possible explanations for the observed data, and then forms hypotheses to confirm or disconfirm until the researcher arrives at the most plausible interpretation of the observed data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 186).

As Oliver (2012, p. 380) explains, ‘retroduction is simply abduction with a specific question in mind’. Thus, in considering a question that we have about a particular social matter, we are engaging in retroduction when we think in ways that allow us to

> … make plausible models of the unknown mechanisms generating identified patterns of phenomena, which are then empirically checked out and, if and when deemed adequate, in turn explained, in a continually unfolding dialectic of explanatory and taxonomic knowledge (Bhaskar, 2009, p. 72).
The phased-nature of the mixed methods research design was therefore supported by the iterative quality of GT methodology. Further, mixed methods and GT are compatible to the extent that when combined together they may:

… advance social justice inquiry by providing a fuller understanding of complex problems, placing actions in context, demonstrating how people experience or impose inequities, involving stakeholders in the research, and explicating connections between actions and events (Charmaz, Thornberg, & Keane, 2017, p. 432).

I found the metaphor of an emulsion useful for explaining how the mixed methods design phases coalesced with the GT coding and data triangulation (Figure 4.2). It provides an efficacious and logical organising structure for the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Figure 4.2: Mixed-methods Research Design Using Grounded Theory Techniques Adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2009), p. 6

Considered separately, the policy documents and survey questionnaire data are independently useful elements of the research design. It is only when they are contrasted and agitated through the use of follow-up qualitative data collection (in-depth interviews and focus group/s), however, that a temporary theoretical emulsion can form and policy and practice can be considered in a meaningful way. Without additional reflection and retroduction, this understanding is unavoidably unstable and fluctuating; the researcher is required to go through a final interpretative
process. One where the researcher must engage in retroductive reasoning techniques and reflection through constant comparison to move from a temporary conceptual understanding to a more stable theoretical emulsion. Reasoning and reflection are the emulsifying agents that enable this process.

4.3.3 Putting the 'Critical' in Critical Grounded Theory

Bryant and Charmaz (2010 p. 440 - 441) explain how GT is a useful qualitative mode of inquiry which informs critical analyses of social phenomena and relates to critical theory and pragmatism:

The difference between grounded theory and critical theory is that rather than try and integrate many...theoretical accounts into one large theoretical superstructure, grounded theory aims to use the most appropriate method of observing for the purposes of generating a theory and reporting it. Rather than attempting to achieve the superiority of the critic, grounded theory promotes sensitivity and fit. This is grounded theory’s pragmatism. This pragmatism provides great potential for accommodating critical theory.

Similarly, Nelson (2015) argues that when thoughtfully executed within a constructivist framework, a GT that emphasises pragmatism but also ‘research as a practice’ and ‘reflexivity’, provides a balanced methodological approach which can enhance understanding and provide a significant degree of explanatory power in researching social phenomena. Further, Hadley (2014, p. 10) argues that

… critical grounded theory should be seen less as a major departure from grounded theory and more as being a member of the next generation of Grounded Theory’s family of methodologies.

Oliver (2012, p. 371) also suggests that a more critical approach to grounded theory may be useful to the extent that it addresses ‘the interconnectedness and practice and theory’. In line with Bryant and Charmaz (2010), I argue that GT can be adopted alongside a combined critical theoretical and constructivist lens. Specifically, I argue that the potentiality for enacting social change offered by CGT can and should be tied to more traditional critical theory.

As there is minimal extant literature on CGT in general, and even less literature on specifically how it might be carried out methodologically in practice, I adopted an approach based on both Charmaz’s (1995, p.38) basic questions for coding and my
own conceptual framework which centred on the interplay between constructions of 
knowledge, power, values and learning.

Charmaz’s guiding questions for coding:

- ‘What is going on?
- What are people doing?
- What is the person saying?
- What do these actions and statements take for granted?
- How do structure and context serve to support, maintain, impede or change 
these actions and statements?’

Additional guiding questions based on my conceptual framework:

- In what ways do power, control, advantage and disadvantage manifest in the 
data - implicitly and explicitly?
- How is knowledge and learning viewed and valued in terms of the above?
- In what ways might these views and values be challenged by individuals and 
organisations?

Further, although issues of age, race, ethnicity and gender were consciously 
considered in relation to these questions and my formal research questions, unlike 
Hadley, I did not specifically seek them out in every piece of data analysed in a 
prescribed or formulaic way. On careful reflection, for the purposes of replicability, 
perhaps this would have been methodologically advantageous, however my 
reasoning at the time was that I foremost needed to heed Glaser and Strauss’s 
(1967) original caveat not to ‘force’ the data, as well as both Strauss and Corbin’s 
(1998) and Charmaz’s (2008) recommendations to take a flexible and relaxed 
approached to GT data analysis. I wanted to explore issues of power and control as 
related to these issues, but was keen to ensure that they emerged in their own time 
and way. This was achieved by remaining aware of Nelson’s (2015) advice to 
remain ‘reflexive’ and ‘self-critical’ whilst doing GT.
Finally, in their consideration of CGT as an approach for undertaking organisational research, Kempster and Parry (2011, p. 118) suggest that to ensure a thorough philosophical and methodological approach, researchers should:

- place a strong emphasis on the contextual understanding and explanation of social phenomena rather than the pursuit of seeking ‘universal truths’
- assume that there will be ‘contextual variation’ and therefore review research outcomes that seek to both challenge and confirm similarities and differences in emergent findings…

This advice was considered in the research design. The data was triangulated across policy documents, surveys, interviews and a focus group and was obtained across three different organisational work sites. Key concepts and relationships that emerged through the data were considered collectively across the organisational contexts and separately, with respect to the idiosyncrasies associated with specific organisational sites.

### 4.4 Qualitative Phase One: Organisational Study Support Policies

#### 4.4.1 Introduction

In this section, I explain how the data from phase one of the research design was sampled, collected and analysed. Barriers and limitations that were encountered throughout the research process are discussed and I conclude with a brief overview of associated ethical considerations.

#### 4.4.2 Selecting Policy Samples

The first phase of the data collection and analysis involved the collection of 32 employee study support policies and related documents. These documents included a range of policies, policy statements, procedures, determinations, guidelines, enterprise agreements and formal directives. All were related to the provision of study support for employees undertaking higher education. A small number of other documents including an induction handbook, a relevant fair work decision
document, four information webpages and one online job advertisement discussing study support as an employee benefit, were also collected and included within the ‘policy documents’ sample.

Whilst I was keen to obtain a minimum of 20-30 policy (and related) documents, on the basis of Creswell’s (1998) advice for qualitative data collection, I was also cognisant of Glaser’s (2001) dictum that for the purpose of GT analysis, ‘all is data’. That is, data collection should not be limited to qualitative interviews alone, but rather, expanded to include any other data available to the researcher that may be useful to their developing theoretical paradigm (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, whilst I initially sampled only study support policy documents, I later expanded the scope of my initial purposive sampling to include other relevant documents to add both new codes and more conceptual depth to the existing ones.

4.4.3 Data Collection

The documents were all obtained from online, open-access sources and their collection was facilitated through a basic internet search using the search engine ‘Google’. Various iterations of a number of relevant key words and phrases including: ‘employee study assistance’, ‘employee study support’, ‘study leave policy’, ‘education and study leave’, ‘organisational study support’ were entered. The documents were primarily collected from the websites of local, state and federal government organisations, with one document obtained from a not-for-profit organisation and one obtained from a private retail company. It should be noted that whilst I was initially optimistic, and perhaps naïve, about the possibility of obtaining a reasonable amount of policy documents from the private sector, obtaining relevant documents from this sector was notoriously difficult. My search yielded only one fair work determination relating to a private company which contained several study support-related clauses.

The policy documents were downloaded, saved and uploaded to QSR NVIVO – a well-known computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) tool. On average, the study support policy and procedural documents ranged from 6 – 12 pages in length.
4.4.4 Data Analysis

Following the basic GT coding techniques recommended by Strauss (1987), the policy documents were open coded using QSR NVIVO. This involved carefully reading and re-reading the text and conducting a ‘line-by-line analysis’, which involves considering individual phrases and key words to develop an understanding of the nature of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 72). This approach is useful in the early stages of opening coding because these ‘categories also become the basis of [subsequent] theoretical sampling’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 73). During open coding, it is important to ensure that the researcher does not narrowly focus on certain codes that initially catch their attention at the exclusion of others which may emerge more slowly over time, or may be more subtly manifested. As this can lead them to miss key themes, concepts and relations which may be crucial to their understanding of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

A key element of conducting GT research involves ‘memoing’. Memos can be written or diagrammatic (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). They help the researcher to ‘elaborate processes, assumptions and actions that are subsumed under [a] code’ (Charmaz, 1995, p. 42-43). Memoing starts in open coding and continues until the selective coding phase, or when the researcher is ready to write their ‘first draft’ of the emerging model (Charmaz, 1990). Whilst grounded theorists differ in terms of precisely how this process should be conducted, the importance of undertaking some type of memo-ing or notetaking is considered a key aspect of GT (Charmaz, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As Charmaz (1990) explains,

… through memo-writing, the researcher takes his or her emerging ideas apart, checks them, and outlines further data collection. During each stage of memo-writing, the researcher may use his or her theoretical background to deepen the analytic insights of his or her developing grounded theory.

My memo-writing in the open coding stage of policy analysis involved firstly using the NVIVO ‘code selection at new node’ option for new codes, which allows the researcher to enter both a name and a brief description of the code. Further the
‘memo link’ option was also used to add memo’s to existing codes which contained a more detailed description of the nascent character and properties of the code.

These memos and notes were used extensively throughout the open coding of policy documents to record my subjective first impressions of the data as thoughts which flowed from my ‘stream of consciousness’ (James, 1890). These thoughts were often phrased as provisional questions, reflections or musings rather than statements. I concentrated on the rapid harnessing of my unadulterated interpretation of the concepts as they emerged, paying little attention to spelling, grammar or other formal writing requirements. I felt that it was important to document my insights quickly and candidly, rather than slowly and cautiously after having rationally filtered them. I wanted to capture the rawness and emotion of my initial conscious and unconscious reaction to reading the data.

A date was recorded next to each memo and I often returned to them to add further insights. Over time, the codes, related memos and notes organically evolved to reflect a more nuanced, balanced and emotive tone. As some of the data contradicted my initial impressions, I was forced to revisit my memos and modify my initial conceptualisation of the various emerging categories.

4.4.5 Ethical Considerations

Researching online is a contested area of research ethics (Berry, 2004; Capurro & Pingel, 2002; James & Busher, 2015; Kantanen & Manninen, 2016; Knobel, 2003; Warrell & Jacobsen, 2014). ‘Whether all internet research should be considered human subjects’ research or not’ is a particularly contentious area of online research ethics, with some researchers maintaining that all online research involves human subjects, even if indirectly, and others arguing that pre-existing and ‘non-intrusive’ online data should not be considered as involving human subjects (Warrell & Jacobsen, 2014).

A key aspect of this debate is the extent to which online data is considered public or private, with public data generally seen as non-intrusive and therefore exempt from formal ethical restrictions (Berry, 2004; James & Busher, 2015; Warrell & Jacobsen, 2014). Some researchers, however, have argued that it is potentially
neither. Rather, they maintain that it exists somewhere in the boundary between the private and public spheres (Kantanen & Manninen, 2016). Therefore, it is perhaps best considered on a case-by-case basis (Kantanen & Manninen, 2016). In this way, decision-making can take a distributed and flexible, rather than centralised, approach (Berry, 2004). Because the policy data was collected from naturally-occurring, public open-access documents, rather than individual human subjects, I felt confident that they rested firmly in the public domain. Moreover, I had obtained ethical approval for obtaining these documents from the Faculty Human Research Ethics Committee (ethics reference: HAE-16-008) supporting this view (Appendix 3. Ethics: Letter of Approval).

I also drew on Capurro and Pingel’s (2002, p. 194) notion of employing an ‘ethics of care’ to guide the online collection of policy (and related) documents. This means 1) having respect for the participants of online research, 2) being cognisant of the potential for ‘abuses with regard to misuse of instrument-oriented analysis by political and/or private bodies’, 3) conducting research in a socially responsible way especially with regard to those considered to have less social strength in the online and offline world, and 4) paying attention to gender and cultural biases (Capurro & Pingel, 2002, p. 194).

One way in which I demonstrated this respect for participants was to ensure anonymity by omitting the names of the organisations that created and owned the documents. Even though the majority of documents were publicly accessible, the overarching aim of the study was to explore patterns in how individuals and organisations provide and engage with study support. It was not to call attention to any one institutional approach or to ‘name and shame’ organisations. Thus, even though online documents in the public domain may be used to help to locate a study theoretically, historically, politically or socially in ways that do not require the author’s anonymity to be preserved’ (Knobel, 2003, p. 189), I still felt that it was important to be careful in presenting this data with anonymity.

Lastly, given my focus on equity and power relations, I was theoretically and personally sensitive to these issues. Representing a large public university, I needed to give due consideration to how my own social positioning may have situated both
the academy and myself, as its envoy, as somehow ‘other’ to the rest of the public and private sphere. By including documents from public tertiary institutions for analysis, I ensured that the interrogation of these issues was directed not at specific sectors or types of institutions. No organisation or individual escaped the critical research gaze.

4.5 Quantitative & Qualitative Phase Two: Key Stakeholder Surveys

4.5.1 Recruitment and Sampling

Participants for the survey questionnaire were recruited via several different means including both soft copy / online advertisements and hard copy flyers. As an incentive, participants were offered the option to enter a random prize draw to win one of three one-hundred dollar Coles Group & Myer gift vouchers (ethics reference: HAE-16-008). A summary of these recruitment methods is provided below.

Soft Copy / Online Recruitment

- Online posts on academic social media sites: ‘ResearchGate’ and ‘Academia’
- Original and ‘shared’ posts on the generic social media sites: ‘Facebook’ and ‘LinkedIn’, including posts in HR-specific groups and Higher Degree by Research pages
- Original posts in relevant threads on the ‘HR Buzz’ forum – a online discussion forum specifically targeted at HR practitioners
- Emails distributed to family, friends and colleagues which included both direct contact and requests for forwarding to relevant professional contacts in business and industry and personal contacts where relevant
- Posts in ‘Study Connect’ forum – an online discussion forum targeted at individuals a) considering study at an Australian university, b) already studying at an Australian university and/or c) providing advice regarding university study in Australia
• Posts in relevant threads and pages on popular generalist online discussion forums: ‘Whirlpool’ and ‘Reddit’, with posts in 28 Australian university-specific discussion threads.

**Hardcopy Flyers**

• One local newspaper – Central Victoria region
• One community noticeboard – Central Victoria region
• Two Geelong-based Deakin University campus noticeboards – general and student union-affiliated

During this phase, sampling was *theoretical* to the extent that it was progressively directed at obtaining increasing variation within and across stakeholder cohorts. This is in line with Glaser’s (1978) finding that during the initial stages of GT, the researcher will be organically drawn to obtaining additional data sources from which they perceive the maximal amount of relevant data can be drawn. This allows the researcher to test their initial ideas and to challenge and further develop the emerging codes and categories (Glaser, 1978). Sample quantity was important to capture maximal diversity in experiences and assumptions for the purposes of open coding. Indeed, survey questionnaires were specifically selected for phase 2 of the data collection and analysis because they offer the advantage of being able to collect and describe data from a wide and dispersed population (Babbie, 2007; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Wright, 2005). They also offer the pragmatic advantage of allowing the researcher to collect data more efficiently and at a lower cost than traditional, paper-based surveys (Cohen et al., 2007).

Although, one pertinent caveat associated with conducting *online* survey analysis is that the researcher is likely to reach participants from a younger demographic (Wright, 2005). This may impact on the generalisability of the findings. I therefore chose to use a range of online participant recruitment mediums, including both professional and non-professional social media sites, in addition to contacting colleagues, friends and family of different ages and working at different levels of seniority across different sectors. The contacts were also asked to forward on the survey to interested parties at their workplace as a kind of *snowballing* technique. Further, I ensured that some hard copy flyers were distributed and an advertisement
was included in a local newspaper to reach individuals less likely to engage in online activities. Ultimately, however, survey respondents still tended to be young in age, with the majority of respondents aged between 18 and 39 years at the time that they completed the survey.

4.5.2 Survey Design and Development

There were unifying themes running through both versions of the questionnaire and several of the questions addressed the same key construct but the wording expression and/or tense was modified to suit each stakeholder group. Indeed, the ability to ask sets of similar questions to the same or different cohorts is one of the advantages of self-administered data collection methods such as the survey questionnaire (Fowler, 2013). Unlike semi-structured interview questions, survey questionnaires can ask a large number of participants the same question which enables a more efficient comparison of responses. Although, as Glaser (2007) notes, whilst survey questionnaires are useful tools in GT research, their instrumentation should be oriented towards the purpose of promoting depth of understanding, as opposed to a quick and dirty means to collect a large amount of data in a short period of time, or to simply confirm narrow, preconceived ideas about the nature of the data.

There were also some questions (both demographic and general) that were specifically directed to each stakeholder group only. For example, additional demographic questions were presented to the employee-student stakeholder group regarding their current course of study that would not have been relevant to ask the manager group. All questions were loaded into the online survey questionnaire software tool: Survey Monkey®. A title page, plain language statement and online consent form were included. The demographic and general survey questions for both cohorts are include in Appendix 2. Survey Questionnaire Questions.

Both nominal and ordinal data scales were used to collect demographic data. The data for the general questions was gathered using a combination of nominal, binary and ordinal scales comprised of forced-choice and 5-point Likert-scales, with some questions providing respondents with an additional field to deliver a written response. The addition of open-ended responses was included in instances where the
participant selected ‘other’ as their response to a forced-choice question, but also in instances where I was interested in collecting further detail about their written views on particular issues. For example, where participants indicated that they did not receive study support from their employer or did receive support but not all that they believed they were entitled to, they were asked to briefly indicate why they thought that this was the case. There was also an open-ended question included at the end of each version of the survey where participants could add a more detailed written response on any aspect of their experience undertaking higher education alongside work (or in the case of the manager/HR professional cohort – the supervising of this undertaking) and/or the employer support received for these studies.

The nominal scales were used for forced-choice questions that were discrete from each other and not ordered, such as for questions related to reasons for studying, or the most difficult things about studying a higher education course and working at the same time. Whereas ordinal scales were used when respondents were asked to indicate the perceived level of usefulness (not useful to very useful) of study support received, the level of support received from their manager (very low to very high), or how often they thought managers encouraged staff to undertake higher education (almost never to almost always). Binary scales were used for questions where there were only two descriptive options that the individual could choose from (e.g. yes or no responses).

It should be noted that the 5-point likert scales were not linked to a numerical value or number range such as 1 to 5, but rather written descriptions only. This was a deliberate feature of the chosen ordinal scale design stemming from the philosophical assumptions underlying the blended critical theoretical and constructivist conceptual framework. Indeed, in scale design and measurement, whether ordinal data is considered ‘truly quantitative’ or more ‘qualitative’ like nominal data is subject to debate (Darbyshire & McDonald, 2004; Downward, 2005; van Belle, 2011). For example, whilst some theorists argue that, like nominal data, because ordinal data does not technically follow a normal distribution (it is ‘non-parametric’ as opposed to ‘parametric’), it cannot be subject to the same statistical testing techniques as interval or ratio (strictly quantitative) data which do...
assume a normal distribution (i.e. when the distance between the categories on the scale is exact, such as measurements of weight or height) (Stevens, 1946). In other words, ‘the major limitation of the ordinal scale is that the psychological distance between ranks is unknown, and unlikely to be equal’ (Darbyshire & McDonald, 2004).

In line with Stevens (1946), I have chosen to employ ordinal data in the purist sense. That is, given my blended constructivist and critical theoretical approach, I argue that ordinal data can be obtained to the extent that it offers a general description of the proportion or percentage of respondents that subscribe to a general interpretation of a variable (e.g. the usefulness of a certain type of study support) in a specific and unique sampling of individuals. However, whilst these proportions might indicate the general extent to which certain concepts are perceived, to extrapolate meaningful data from these proportions necessarily requires additional qualitative analysis. Specifically, for the purposes of understanding the present research topic, it is the usefulness of deductive reasoning through ordinal data (and the nominal data) analysis that paves the way for additional inductive and retroductive reasoning through further qualitative analysis. Specifically, for the purposes of understanding the present research topic, it is the usefulness of deductive reasoning through ordinal data (and the nominal data) analysis that paves the way for additional inductive and retroductive reasoning through further qualitative analysis. In this way, the deeper meaning of the data can be obtained, as the ordinal data is used as part of the theoretical sampling technique inherent in GT, rather than as a statistical measure of central tendency or as a means through which to precisely extrapolate findings to the general population.

4.5.3 Survey Piloting and Revision

To ensure that the survey instrument contains no errors and can be readily understood and completed by the respondents, it is important to pilot a survey prior to distribution (Cohen et al., 2007). Therefore, prior to the formal data collection phase, the survey was piloted with three disinterested but critical friends aged 30, 35 and 59 working across the fields of emergency services, graphic/web design and telecommunications engineering. These individuals were selected based on both convenience and my prior knowledge of their predilection for, and expertise in, various areas of information technology and information systems. The pilot survey was also distributed to my research supervisors for review. As a result of this
piloting phase, a number of minor changes, mainly relating to survey usability and comprehensiveness of the demographic response options, were made.

These included 1) expanding the industry categories to ensure that they were more broad and inclusive, 2) adding in a note to respondents to click the buttons inside the survey form rather than the internet browser, 3) modifying the gender and ethnicity response options to use maximally inclusive language, 4) adding in the blank open-ended question at the end of each survey version to garner additional written feedback and 5) removing unnecessary repetition of questions addressing similar constructs.

4.5.4 Data Collection

The online survey questionnaires were distributed to participants using Survey Monkey®. Participants were directed to click on a web link which took them to a summary page detailing the aims of the research, the plain language statement and consent form. There were rules embedded in the survey directing participants to specific sets of questions based on their responses to screening questions. For example, ‘if respondent answers A for question 1, direct respondent to question 8, if they answer B direct them to question 2’. These ‘skip logic’ rules were embedded to create a more streamlined, customised and intuitive user experience for respondents from different backgrounds and to minimise the time involved in completing the survey. This may have contributed to the high number of completed responses. Further, although the ‘skip logic’ took additional time to embed, I found that ultimately, the researcher benefits from this kind of online survey design as it allows the data to be contained within a single survey instrument, which makes comparing and contrasting responses across cohorts and respondents more efficacious.

4.5.5 Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analysed using the inbuilt ‘analyse data’ function in Survey Monkey® and by exporting the data into Microsoft Excel for the purposes of collating descriptive statistics. This was completed according to the previously outlined approach for analysing and presenting ordinal, nominal and binary data; that is, frequency counts and percentage frequencies. Further, for the purposes of
analysis, the data was separated into both *demographic* data and *general* data, which was further stratified into broad themes. In addition to the descriptive statistics, the qualitative written survey data was also loaded into NVIVO and open coded as part of the broader CGT analysis.

Whilst the majority of responses and respondents were genuine and helpful, one nuisance respondent was identified and removed from the survey. From reviewing all the individual responses provided by this individual, it was clear that unlike another respondent whose responses were somewhat offensive but potentially a genuine reflection of his personal views, this nuisance respondent had added information into the open-ended response boxes that was consistently incendiary. His responses were thus removed from the final results. This encounter prompted me to think about the nature of conducting research in online open-access discussion forums. As Wright (2005) has noted, survey research facilitated through online discussion forums can be perceived in a particularly negative light by some online community members, with the researcher or the research instrument itself becoming beleaguered.

### 4.5.6 Ethical Considerations

In terms of the ethical threats posed to the individuals who elect to participate, the collection and analysis of online survey data differs from the collection and analysis of online documentary data. Namely, this difference relates to the extent to which online data is considered public or private (Berry, 2004; James & Busher, 2015; Warrell & Jacobsen, 2014). When requiring participants to respond to an online survey, the researcher has proactively facilitated the creation of new data which involves the deliberate elicitation of personal views. It is therefore arguably more personalised than pre-existing online data, such as policy documents.

Because of its private nature, conducting survey research presents unique challenges, such as ensuring that participants give informed consent, fully understand the aims of the study and how their responses will be analysed and published (NHMRC, 2007). The plain language statement and consent form was therefore vitally important to embed into the online survey so that participants were fully informed as to how this information would be protected and how these
activities would be conducted, as well as providing them with opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time (Appendix 4. Ethics: Plain Language Statement and Consent Form).

4.6 Qualitative Phase Three: Cross-site In-depth Interviews and Focus Group

4.6.1 Introduction

In this section, the methods used to collect and analyse data from across three different organisational work sites are outlined. Specifically, I explain how a) the work sites and participants were recruited, b) the interview and focus questions were developed, and c) the data was obtained and analysed during this research phase. Lastly, ethical issues associated with conducting research within organisations, as part of in-depth interviews and focus groups, is briefly discussed.

4.6.2 Recruitment and Sampling

Organisations were theoretically sampled, with the aim of obtaining maximal diversity in size, sector, constitution and culture. Like the surveys, however, there was also an unavoidable element of convenience in the sampling approach, with the sites also selected based on pragmatic factors including their willingness to participate, extant relationships with the research team and physical location. The three organisations that participated have been provided with organisational pseudonyms for the purposes of ensuring anonymity. A descriptive summary of the organisational work sites that participated is provided in Table 4.1.

Potential organisations were discussed with my supervisors. Two of the participating organisations were initially approached through a combination of ‘cold’ LinkedIn messaging and emailing, with the third approached through a professional contact of one of my supervisors. In each organisation, I obtained a chief point of contact - a senior manager of the human resources or organisational development team. Regular contact was maintained with the chief contacts - over the phone and via email, to ensure that a trusting and professional relationship was
built between myself, the supervisory team, the participating organisation and Deakin University. The chief contact was provided with the organisational human research ethics plain language statement and consent form as well as a copy of an electronic flyer and participant recruitment email template to distribute to their team and/or internal organisational contacts. The aim in creating the email template and flyer for the chief contacts was to minimise the amount of additional work involved for the participating organisations, thereby maintaining positive relations and minimising the risk of withdrawal from the research.

Table 4.1: Description of Organisational Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Red Organisation</th>
<th>Blue Organisation</th>
<th>Green Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry</strong>*</td>
<td>Health Care &amp; Social Assistance</td>
<td>Financial &amp; Insurance Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sector</strong></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Not-for-profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size</strong></td>
<td>Over 6000 staff employed</td>
<td>Approximately 600 staff employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Located across several physical sites in regional Victoria</td>
<td>Main office located in metropolitan Melbourne, Victoria with other sites across Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing Study Support Provisions</strong></td>
<td>Study leave provided, no financial reimbursement of course fees</td>
<td>Study leave provided, financial reimbursement of course fees selectively provided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) standard classification of industries

In terms of incentives, all participating organisations were offered and provided with an executive summary and short research report detailing both the general research findings and a list of recommendations specifically tailored to their organisation. Whilst there were no monetary incentives offered to the individual participants in this phase of the data collection, all participants were offered a copy of the research findings to review.
4.6.3 Development of Interview and Focus Group Questions

Interview questions were based on the tentative findings from the previous two phases of data collection and analysis. Similar to the survey questionnaire design, there were two discrete iterations of the interview schedules with some questions specifically tailored to each cohort group (Appendix 1. List of Interview and Focus Group Questions). Given that they were theoretically developed, the questions were unique to those included in the questionnaire but they were related to the same general themes. The questions were piloted with the first participant in each cohort from the Red Organisation and the wording of several questions was simplified to make the interpretation clearer for participants. After piloting and modification, there were 14 questions included in the employee-student version of the interview schedule and 15 general questions included in the manager/HR professional interview schedule with optional interviewer prompts listed. There was also an additional question at the end of both interview schedules that asked the participant to contribute any further relevant information.

The focus group schedule contained only 3 questions directed at the Manager / HR Professional cohort, specifically. This schedule was developed for the Red Organisation only after all the other employee-student and management interviews had been completed. This is because the opportunity to include an additional management focus group only arose after I had completed the initial interviews and requested additional participants from the chief contact who generously offered to recruit additional managers, and participate herself, in a short focus group. Because I only had 20-30 minutes with the 6 focus group participants and some managers needed to leave early, I selected the 3 key questions from the manager/HR Professional interview schedule that were most relevant to the developing theoretical categories. This focus group was very useful as it provided a large amount of additional written data for analysis.

4.6.4 Data Collection Across Organisational Work Sites

A total of 12 semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with eight females, and four males, and one focus group consisting of 6 participants (five female, one male),
were completed across the three organisational case sites over three months (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Total Number of Participants From Across Organisational Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Red Organisation</th>
<th>Blue Organisation</th>
<th>Green Organisation</th>
<th>TOTAL Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employee-student interviews</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manager/HR professional interviews</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manager/HR professional focus groups</strong></td>
<td>6 (5 managers and 1 administrator participated in a single focus group)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL Participants</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews ranged in length from approximately 25 to 58 minutes with most interviews lasting for between 35 and 40 minutes. The focus group took approximately 25 minutes. Two interviews were completed over the phone due to staff illness and a late request to participate. All other interviews were conducted face-to-face and on-site at the respective organisational sites using private meeting rooms. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim with two transcriptions completed by the researcher and the remaining transcriptions outsourced to OutScribe Pty Ltd., a professional transcription service. Participants were all provided with the option of reviewing their transcripts and requesting changes. Only one participant required changes and these were mainly as a result of some words being incorrectly transcribed due to a poor quality phone recording.

Whilst the interview schedules were used to guide the discussions with participants in light of the developing theoretical codes and categories, I was keen to build up rapport and let the conversation deviate at times to extract maximal (and potentially contradictory) information from the participants. In line with Yin’s (2010) recommendation for qualitative interviewing, I also let myself be guided by the amount of detail that the participants felt comfortable sharing and gave them ample latitude to contribute in their own time and in their own way. Indeed, one of the
advantages of conducting semi-structured, qualitative interviews, is that they allow the researcher to gain rich understandings of participant experiences and perceptions for the purpose of understanding and describing social phenomena (Grbich, 2012; Hays & Singh, 2011; Yin, 2010).

However, there are also a number of limitations associated with collecting data in this way (Yin, 2010). Specifically, a key issue that I encountered was desirable responding, with several staff, especially the managers, keen to initially focus only on positive aspects of the work-study experience and study support. I was concerned by this given that the research interview always involves an unequal distribution of power, with the interviewer unavoidably governing the interviewing (Creswell 1998). But as I built up rapport throughout the interviews and moved from general to specific questions relating to the challenges of receiving and /or providing study support, I was able to extract more candid responses from the participants. Indeed as the interviews progressed, many of the staff moved away from heartily promulgating the organisation’s unproblematic learning culture to indicate that they were not entirely satisfied with the ways in which the support was provided, and /or suggesting that improvements could be made, in practice.

In this sense, the one-on-one interviews were more useful than the focus group, as they allowed me to capture more authentic responses in depth. Whereas in the focus group, it was clear that despite all the respondents being in positions of organisational power (at least relative to the employee-student cohort), the perspectives of certain contributors were given more ‘air time’, leaving others to contribute in a more tentative, superficial and/or restrained way. Therefore, despite the benefit of being able to collect a large amount of useful and varied data from otherwise difficult to access participants, one limitation with the focus group was a restriction on the extent to which individual voices could be heard candidly, in depth. Indeed, this is a known issue with conducting focus groups previously highlighted by Yin (2010), among others.

Moreover, as Frey and Fontana (1991) have suggested, when used alongside traditional face-to-face interviews, focus groups are a useful method for flexibly and efficiently gathering data in naturalistic settings, however the usefulness of this data can be constrained by the inevitable influence of group dynamics on how
respondents share information. Nevertheless, the main advantage that they did offer was the opportunity to contrast group responses against the one-on-one management and employee-student interviews. As Lofland and Lofland (1984, p. 15) have suggested, when participants disagree with each other or hold different views in group interviews, it can provide ‘instances of interchange between contrasting perspectives’. Thus, group interviews can provide the researcher with a feel of the nature of power relations and power distribution in the field (Frey & Fontana, 1991). Certainly, these relations were evident in the data that was collected and analysed from the management focus group.

After the interviews and focus groups were completed, study support (and related) policy documents were requested from the Blue Organisation and Green Organisation as these were not publicly accessible. For the Red Organisation, the relevant employee agreements were obtained via an internet search after managers in the focus group provided me with the relevant details of these awards and agreements. One manager also emailed me a copy of an internal study support procedures document, which was a customised set of guidelines specific to her department. All additional documents obtained during and after the organisational interviews and focus group were loaded into QSR NVIVO for the purpose of open coding alongside the original set of policy documents obtained during phase 1 of the data collection.

4.6.5 Data Analysis: Axial Coding, Selective Coding and Reaching Theoretical Sufficiency

Transcribed interviews were listened to several times and checked for accuracy prior to being loaded into QSR NVIVO for open coding and then constant comparison with the other codes generated in previous phases of data collection and analysis through axial coding. Once axial coding had yielded a number of subcategories and tentative conceptual relations, theoretical saturation or more accurately ‘theoretical sufficiency’ was reached. It should be noted here that whereas Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe ‘theoretical saturation’ as being achieved only once the researcher determines that all codes are sufficiently developed, Dey (1999), suggests that ‘theoretical sufficiency’ is a more appropriate
term for describing the process, pointing out that the determination of saturation is always subject to researcher interpretation and thus inherently subjective.

Once theoretical sufficiency had been reached, a core category emerged as part of the developing theoretical model of ESHE.

4.6.6 Ethical Considerations

Organisations were provided with an organisational plain language statement and consent form which was signed by the chief contact. Participants within the organisations were also provided with a copy of the individual plain language statement and consent form (Appendix 4. Ethics: Plain Language Statement and Consent Form).

I discussed the ethical considerations with each of the chief contacts over the phone. Likewise, at the beginning of each interview and the focus group, participants were reminded of the aims of the study and associated ethical considerations. They were given the option to decline to answer any questions and also to withdraw their responses after the interview had been completed.

4.7 Evaluation of Research Quality

There are a variety of approaches for evaluating the quality of research and each one is associated with its own set of decision-making criteria (Elliott & Lazenbatt, 2004). For example, with its roots in positivism, quantitative research tends to rely on the use of reliability and validity measures (Golafshani, 2003). By contrast, qualitative research relies on more experiential, rather than experimented paradigms, the criteria to judge its quality and usefulness should be based on a unique set of criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, ‘trustworthiness’ in qualitative research has emerged as an alternative yardstick by which to measure the quality of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Establishing trustworthiness involves fulfilling three criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, with each of these criteria mapped to practical strategies for maximising rigour (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Given the qualitative leaning of this mixed methods study, I drew on some of these recommendations for ‘trustworthiness’ including *participant verification, triangulating the research methods, keeping an audit trail of notes, memos and diagrams* and providing *thick description by paying attention to context.*

Additionally, one of Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria for trustworthiness that was particularly useful during the process of constant comparison was ‘negative case analysis’, which involves actively seeking out cases that will disconfirm or challenge existing findings so that the researcher can respond to them through further investigation or reasoning to ultimately arrive at a stronger set of findings.

Indeed, this approach has previously been highlighted as being of particular use to grounded theorists (Glaser, 1965; Kolb, 2012), as it enables the researcher to refine conceptual categories as part of the constant comparative technique. Moreover, Glaser and Strauss (1967), suggest that the quality of GT should be judged by the extent to which it meets the criteria of *fit, work, relevance and modifiability.* Accordingly, these criteria were also used to judge the quality of the GT methodology as it was enacted in practice, and these are expounded below:

- **Fit** relates to the extent to which codes and categories emerged from the data organically without interpreting it to fit a preconceived theoretical objective; it was achieved by not forcing the data and staying open to conceptual possibilities through negative case analysis.

- The notion of *work* is pragmatic and relates to ensuring that the codes, categories and theory generated are able to provide an interpretation and/or explanation of the social issue in question; by triangulating the data and contrasting both policy and practice, this ensured a deep and multifaceted approach to understanding the topic under investigation.

- **Relevance** was demonstrated through triangulating the data and interviewing across organisational sites; the emergent theoretical findings were shown to be applicable and useful across contexts despite variation in the nature or extent of relevance within these contexts.
Lastly, modifiability is a measure of the extent to which the emerging theory might be flexible and adaptable across contexts, retaining its key elements but also accounting for the inevitable evolution of theory. This was achieved by presenting the emergent model of employer-support higher education and recommendations for its use in practice with a degree of provisionality, restraint and caution, but also with a large degree of confidence in the ability of its core elements to retain applicability and variation across space and time.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a rationale for using a mixed methods research design drawing on CGT supplemented with descriptive statistics, as my chosen methodology. An overview of the research design and methodology, including a discussion of the strengths and limitations of adopting this approach, has been discussed. A detailed overview of the data collection and analysis methods has been provided, including a recapitulation of relevant ethical issues and criteria for ensuring research quality.

In the next two chapters, I present the findings from phase 1 (policy analysis) and phase 2 (survey analysis) only. I then provide two combined data presentation and discussion chapters which present and explicate the data from phase 3 (interviews and focus groups) and the final phase of interpretation and reflection upon all the data which links all these in relation to extant theory.
Chapter 5. In the Absence of Practice: Policy Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of two data presentation chapters. In this chapter, I present the findings from phase one of the data collection and analysis: initial study support policy documentation. Whilst the initial categories that emerged from the first phase of data collection and analysis are presented in this chapter, they are not discussed in relation to theory until Chapter 7 (interview and focus group findings) and Chapter 8 (reflection on both policy and practice findings). This is because they are considered to be complementary to the additional findings generated from subsequent phases of data collection and analysis, and reflection in and upon them, as they emerged over time. They are best discussed with reference to the findings generated from the broader CGT analysis, which was specifically designed to triangulate different types of data across each research phase, as part of the mixed methods approach.

I begin this chapter by briefly presenting the initial codes that arose from the open-coding phase of the CGT analysis of the study support policy documents. This is followed by a more detailed presentation of the key categories and the tentative relations between them as they subsequently emerged. Lastly, I provide a reflection section in which I discuss how the policy findings emerged in both expected and unexpected ways and how this informed my nascent research perspective and subsequent data collection and analysis.

5.2 Open Coding: Initial Category Formation

After open coding of the policy documents was completed, a total of 50 initial codes had emerged. A summary of the original codes is included in Table 5.1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contingency &amp; uncertainty (risk?)</th>
<th>Quantifying learning</th>
<th>Learning as an <em>event vs process</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager decision-making</td>
<td>Study assistance as an employee relations 'benefit'</td>
<td>Study relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual learner responsibility</td>
<td>Manager control and monitoring</td>
<td>Inflexible versus flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study is <em>accommodated</em> rather than endorsed</td>
<td>Lack of tiered system for low vs high performers (culture of mediocrity?)</td>
<td>Employee trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What education or training (courses or levels) is supported</td>
<td>Red tape (hidden deterrence through policy complexity)</td>
<td>Employee success as skills, qualifications &amp; credentials capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretend parity re: decision making and negotiations</td>
<td>Deliberate separation of accredited (credentialled) vs non-accredited learning</td>
<td>Non-negotiable and determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA comprised of different kinds of provisions</td>
<td>Some learning activities are more 'valid' than others</td>
<td>Off campus students disadvantaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency around decision-making</td>
<td>Providing the bare minimum</td>
<td>Plain English (lack of) and/or legitimisation of decision making via legislative jargon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
<td>Study Assistance as a contract</td>
<td>Leave time &amp; flexible hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team, dept. &amp; org success (productivity)</td>
<td>Regard for employee's everyday living expenses</td>
<td>Performance appraisal Linked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum tenure for eligibility and employment mode (FT, PT etc)</td>
<td>Organisational responsibility to Staff</td>
<td>Assuming the worst in employees (McGregor's Theory X)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating and discussing study assistance with managers</td>
<td>Talent mgmt. &amp; succession</td>
<td>Hours (FT, PT, Fixed or Casual, shirt work, M-F etc) &amp; disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study performance</td>
<td>SA consultation (outside manager - employee relationship)</td>
<td>Acknowledging organisational idiosyncrasies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee well-being</td>
<td>Work-study balance and stress</td>
<td>Research students disadvantaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using examples to explain processes clearly to staff</td>
<td>Avenue for appeal</td>
<td>Lifelong Learning &amp; Lifelong Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old policy (is one or replaces one)</td>
<td>Owning learning as a possession (intellectual property)</td>
<td>Study preparation skills as part of study assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key selection criteria as determination of study relevance</td>
<td>Study assistance for family members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whilst I have chosen not to include the precise number of sources in which they occurred or the number of references made to them, the codes have been generally ordered by source reference frequency running left to right, top to bottom in Table 5.1. The reason why I have listed the codes in the general order of their emergence frequency and not by the precise numerical frequency with which they emerged, is because the aim of ‘doing’ GT is not to merely count the frequency of codes à la quantitative content analysis, but rather to openly classify the main themes or concepts in the data in a flexible yet systematic way by using inductive reasoning to explore them and discover relationships among them (Cho & Lee, 2014). Further, it should be noted that whilst the meaningfulness or significance of codes generated is not reducible to the frequency with which they occur (either within different sources or across them), neither is there a complete lack of relationship between the source frequency of the codes and their relevance to the emerging findings. That is, frequency counts did account for some of the initial code strengthening but could not be used as a reliable indicator for encapsulating the full meaning of the emergent properties of the categories, over time.

5.3 Initial Key Categories

Despite my caution with regards to drawing any premature inferences at this stage of the coding, there were a number of key categories that emerged in ways indicative of the pervasiveness of particular themes and prospective relationships in the policy data. Therefore, in this section I have selected a number of key codes to provide the reader with an understanding of how they emerged from the data. As part of this presentation, I have often outlined the key codes that emerged in terms of their initial conceptual clusterings. That is, in terms of their tentative thematic links with other preliminary categories.

5.3.1 Contingency & Uncertainty (Risk?)

Generally, the stated aims of the policies were to provide clarity and consistency around the process of applying for and granting study support for employees. However, a close reading of the documents revealed that on the contrary, the
The process of applying for and granting study support was potentially contingent, unclear and inconsistent. Specifically, the policy documents frequently used qualifiers to indicate that both the process of applying for study support and having the study support granted, was very much risky and uncertain. For example, the qualifier – ‘eligible’ was often used in relation to the application process, indicating that whilst employees were permitted to apply for support, this did not necessarily mean that they would be eligible to receive it. Further qualifiers were also frequently used across the policy documents – both in relation to the application process, and the granting and maintenance of study support. These included extensive use of the words such as: ‘may’ and ‘depends’, in addition to phrases such as ‘provided that’ or ‘depending on’. Examples of this contingent language are included below:

**Policy document 16: reference 4**

*This leave may be taken at the discretion of the employee, provided that 2 weeks [sic] notice is provided to the Manager*

**Policy document 8: reference 1**

*Study and exam leave up to an annual maximum of 5 days may be approved for PGY2+ Medical Officers and up to annual maximum 10 days may be approved for Registrars and above, who have an employment contract of 6 months or more. The amount of leave credited is pro rata based on the length of the contract and depends on the appropriateness of the course/seminar/conference/exam.*

**Policy document 31: reference 2**

*All continuing full-time and part-time staff members are eligible to apply for study support. Part-time staff are eligible to apply for study support on a pro-rata basis, calculated according to the proportion of full time hours they work.*
Policy document 29: reference 5

*Eligible staff* enrolled in a formal study program *may also be granted paid* leave to attend examinations. *Where the examination is scheduled on an afternoon,* examination leave is available for the time required to complete the examination and *may also be granted for the morning before the examination.* Likewise, for an evening examination, *leave may be granted on the afternoon before the examination.*

Policy document 31: reference 6

*Eligible staff* members enrolled in an approved course *may be entitled to a range of assistance including...*

Policy document 15: reference 7

*Other employees* *may utilise leave of five days per subject to a maximum of 10 or 20 days per annum, depending on the category of the course.*

The above excerpt (policy document 15: reference 7) is particularly dense with contingent language. In this short clause there are at least four *contingent qualifiers* which the employee must accept: 1) that they *may or may not* be able to utilise five days per subject, 2) that five days per subject *may be considered* as either the norm or the top limit of allowable days, that 3) all of this *depends on the type of course* they are studying and 4) *how* the decision-maker (manager/supervisor) determines all of these factors.

Adding to this notion of contingency and risk in relation to the process of *applying for* study support and the *initial granting of* study support, is its continued influence on the entire process of undertaking the study. Even *after* application approval, there is still the real possibility of academic failure, which may give rise to further experiences of uncertainty and risk should the employee fail to meet the required academic standard associated with their chosen program of study:
An employee who fails to satisfy contract provisions and/or to complete contracted service can have the contract terminated and be liable to repay financial assistance rendered, together with other costs and penalties defined by the contract.

Whilst there is nothing inherently shocking or novel about organisational policy documents using this kind of contingent and careful language, it is germane that this type of wording is so prevalent in study support policy documents specifically, given that my previous research found that the experience of undertaking higher education alongside paid employment, was one characterised by a high degree of risk and uncertainty (Wapling, 2013). Moreover, it was this uncertainty which often contributed to employee-students experiencing work-study-related anxiety and stress (Wapling, 2013). Therefore, if in attempting to clarify both the study support application, granting and maintenance process for staff, employers are using highly contingent and uncertain language, they may actually be contributing to a climate of uncertainty and risk for employees-students, and potentially underestimating the importance of providing them with greater clarity and certainty around both the process of applying for, and engaging with, study support affordances. This may have implications for employee-student well-being.

5.3.2 Employee Trust

Another category that was coded early in the policy analysis was ‘employee trust’. This category emerged in a variety of ways including through omnipresent references to employees needing to provide ‘proof’ or ‘evidence’ of their higher education enrolment, in addition to numerous references to the need for ongoing ‘monitoring’ of employee use of study support provisions. Indeed, this concept provides a useful example of how the key categories did not emerge in clearly delineated or isolated ways, but rather, were closely linked and overlapping with other key codes. That is, ‘manager control and monitoring’ emerged as a discrete code related to ‘employee trust’ but also to other codes including ‘manager decision-making’. Examples of how ‘employee trust’ emerged from the text are illustrated below:
Policy document 1: reference 4

Applications are to be accompanied by **proof** of paid enrolment, and for continuing students, **copies of previous results**.

Policy document 31: reference 4

Successful applicants for Staff Study Support may be provided with continued support for the duration of their studies provided the course continues to meet organisational needs and they supply **evidence** of successful completion of the term/semester, or in the case of research degrees, **a letter from the staff member’s research supervisor indicating satisfactory progress**.

Policy document 30: reference 2

The completed application **must be accompanied by documentation**, which **verifies** the employee’s enrolment in a formal study program and provides details of the units of study for the semester/trimester. Employees enrolling in a subsequent semester/trimester must also **provide evidence** of their previous semester/trimesters results.

Policy document 31: reference 5

A staff member **must provide receipts** for fees paid and **evidence of** successful completion of each course/subject or in the case of research degrees, satisfactory progress (i.e. certified copy of results, **certified copy** of certificate, supervisor’s statement) where reimbursement of fees is being claimed.

5.3.3 Manager Decision Making and Manager Control

Two additional key categories that emerged early in the open coding were ‘manager decision-making and ‘manager control and monitoring’. Whilst treated as relatively separate categories in the early stages of analysis, I have chosen to combine them
here for the purposes of contrasting their unique yet closely related properties.

Firstly, the code ‘manager monitoring and control’ often explicitly emerged in the written data as shown in the following excerpts:

**Policy document 1: reference 2**

*Managers are responsible for the approval of Applications for Studies Assistance, for the calculation of the study leave credit (using the formula on page 10) and ongoing monitoring of the use of those study leave credits by their employees.*

**Policy document 31: reference 2**

*The Staff Study Support application must be supported by the staff member’s immediate supervisor with final approval by the Vice-Chancellor/ Deputy Vice-Chancellor/Director People and Culture as appropriate.*

**Policy document 31: reference 4**

*If a staff member changes organisational areas during this time, approval must be sought from the new supervising manager.*

However, sometimes ‘manager control and monitoring’ was also more implicitly stated. For example, in the following excerpts, it is indicated that study leave will be given only when deemed ‘convenient’ to the department. The unstated question here is *who* decides whether it is convenient to the department and *how*? The intended, though tacit answer could be the employee’s direct manager and/or the department head via an ultimately subjective decision-making process. Indeed, in the following examples, the granting of study leave is firmly outside of the employee’s realm of control and rests entirely with the subjective and therefore *contingent* interpretation of ‘convenience’ by the employee’s manager.
Policy document 15: reference 1

Leave provided where course attendance requirements cannot be satisfied outside the hours of duty, where such leave is convenient to the department.

Policy document 15: reference 5

Approval of leave with pay for course attendance is subject to departmental convenience, irrespective of the eligibility of the employee. The supervisor will determine the amount of leave available where course attendance requirements cannot be satisfied outside the normal hours of duty.

In most instances direct supervisors were responsible for decision-making regarding the approval of study support applications. However, often a senior department head, executive or human resources representative was also required to ratify the decision made by the employee’s manager. Although, in the absence of a consideration of practice, and at this stage of analysis, it was difficult to determine whether this additional level of approval was a mere formality or a deep and genuine consideration from the second, senior organisational representative.

Like ‘manager control and monitoring’, the category ‘manager decision-making’ was also expressed both explicitly and implicitly across the policy documents. Examples of manager decision-making are included in the following excerpts:

Policy document 15: reference 2

Highly Desirable category - a course of study or research that is considered directly relevant to an employee’s current job and professional development plan. The suitability of the course is determined by the supervisor.

Policy document 1: reference 1

Studies Assistance approval is on a strictly discretionary basis and must be negotiated within the work unit before study commitments are undertaken.
Policy document 20: reference 6

A staff member may, with the approval of their supervisor or head of school or unit, vary working arrangements to allow for study leave to be taken in normal working hours in addition to the time granted as study leave.

Policy document 31: reference 12

‘Category A’ Study

Paid study time will be granted by the supervising manager to attend classes without loss of pay subject to the following limits:

‘Category B’ Study

Paid study time may be granted by the supervising manager up to the limits set above, but the staff member may be required to repay that time. Requests will be considered on a case by case basis by the relevant supervising manager. Approval will be subject to agreement between the staff member and their manager on how that is to be done.

Policy document 29: reference 3

Study time is a privilege, not a right, and while the study commitments and wishes of the employee will be considered, time off is always subject to the operational needs of the University. Arrangements for taking study time must be negotiated between the employee and their supervisor and agreed to prior to taking study time.

Another interesting finding was that whilst ‘manager control and monitoring’ and ‘manager decision-making’ were often couched in terms of mutual discussion, negotiation and agreement (as illustrated in the excerpts above), by neglecting to mention the influence of knowledge-power relations in these negotiations, any bargaining power imbalances between the manager and subordinate employee-student were largely obscured. The policy documents failed to explain exactly how
such ‘negotiations’ might realistically occur in practice. Whilst, this concern was addressed, albeit partially (see excerpt below), in several of the documents, this was very much the exception rather than the rule.

**Policy document 18: reference 3**

*Any absence for study (study preparation, voluntary residential schools, workshops etc) requires an application for leave (annual, LWOP, RDO or time in lieu). Supervisors are expected to sympathetically assess these applications.*

Related to this concern, an additional three codes that emerged and appeared to be in some way related to the categories of ‘manager control and monitoring’ and ‘manager decision-making’ were ‘pretend parity re: decision making and negotiations’, ‘transparency around decision-making’ and ‘negotiating and discussing study assistance with managers’.

For example, whilst the majority of the policy documents simply indicated that ‘study relevance’ would be determined by the employee’s supervisor, a number of organisations attempted to ensure that the decision-making process around determination of relevance appeared fair (see initial code: pretend parity re: decision making and negotiations), through the use of ‘transparency around decision-making’ discursive devices. Specifically, this included the use of ‘relevance’ assessment tools (figure 5.1 and figure 5.2). These devices gave the impression that a dispassionate system was used to ensure objectivity and fairness in decision-making and to obscure the possibility that decision-making regarding study relevance might ultimately be a highly subjective process, in practice.
Another way in which manager control was manifested in the policy documents was through the referencing of the provision of study support as a ‘contract’:

**Figure 5.1:** Supervisor Assessment Tool as an Example of Legitimising Manager Decision-making

**Figure 5.2:** Course Categories Manager Decision-making Tool for the Granting of Study Support
Policy document 15: reference 2

*The applicant must enter into a contract* to serve should the leave exceed 12 weeks. *All leave is subject to the business and convenience of the institute/school/work unit.*

Policy document 20: reference 1

*Upon completion of an SSP(L) [special studies program – long term] a member of staff will serve the [institution] for a period at least equivalent to the SSP(L).*

Further, despite many of the policy documents stating that study support provisions could be discussed or negotiated, this seemed to contrast starkly with the pervasiveness of themes (often manifested in the very same document) relating to study support decision-making as being largely fixed and non-negotiable. This contradictory information was encapsulated by the key codes ‘inflexible versus flexible’ and ‘non-negotiable and determined’:

Policy document 16: reference 1

*Compliance* with this policy *directive is mandatory.*

Policy document 32: reference 4

*Staff Specialists* must ensure that they *co-operate* with public health organisation management in implementing the arrangements set out in this Policy Directive.

Policy document 32: reference 10

*Home based study will not apply* to general reading relating to continuing...education activities.

Policy document 19: reference 4

*The application will be valid for the duration of the course of study...the application*
cannot be transferred to a different study course. Any change of study course, institution or employment with [the organisation] will immediately cancel the study assistance.

Another way in which it was indicated that study support was not always flexibly provided or negotiable was in relation to the support provided for part-time or casual employees. It was interesting that part-time employees, even those with permanent positions, were sometimes denied the opportunity for study support rather than having the opportunity to negotiate a lesser amount of support, or a certain type of support, in line with their position requirements, performance and value to the organisation:

**Policy document 19: reference 2**

This policy does not apply to part time or casual employees.

**5.3.4 Study Relevance**

In the policy documents analysed, the employee’s supervisor or direct manager had the responsibility for not only determining how much study support would be afforded to different employees, but also for determining what study support would be provided. This required the manager to either make a subjective decision about the ‘relevance’ of the course without parameters or guidelines, or in accordance with a set of guidelines or assessment tools (as previously discussed and shown in figure 5.1 and figure 5.2). Many policy documents indicated that this decision needed to be endorsed by a senior manager or human resources representative. Whilst decision-making tools such as those in figures 5.1 and 5.2 may provide a standardised format to guide the manager’s assessment of study relevance, ultimately, how these kinds of rating scales might be interpreted and applied in practice, may still be subjective at best and subversive at worst. The extant links between ‘manager control and monitoring’, ‘manager decision-making’ and ‘study relevance’ were therefore clear, but at this point in the analysis (in the absence of a consideration of practice), it was hard to explain precisely how they might be operating in and across different workplaces.
However, one finding that was clear was that the notion of relevance tends to be left implied, unstated and unpacked in policy documentation. It is considered taken for granted, assumed and common-sense, rather than contested or open to interpretation. Indeed, the code ‘study relevance’ was also related to the key category ‘contingency & uncertainty (risk?)’ as the determining of relevance was contingent on how the decision-maker (the employee’s manager/supervisor) understood ‘relevance’. Examples of the ‘study relevance’ category are illustrated in the following excerpts:

**Policy document 21: reference 1**

*The Study Assistance Scheme assists staff to gain a qualification that is relevant to their current position or career goals and maximises their contribution to the achievement of the University’s goals.*

**Policy document 1: reference 1**

*[the organisation] is committed to providing an environment in which employees are adequately equipped to achieve career and professional development needs relevant to their employment.*

In these examples, it is stated that study must be deemed relevant to either the employee’s current duties and/or the organisation generally. Indeed, the emergence of the code ‘study relevance’ in this way was similar across the majority of documents analysed. That is, it was generally stated that the study should be relevant to an employee’s current role and/or employment generally and/or the needs of the organisation. However, in a rare example included below, it was explicitly mentioned that study relevance did not have to be limited to the staff member’s current role or duties. This is interesting as whilst not overtly stated, the implication may be that for some staff, in this organisation, higher education study can be related to future duties, perhaps as part of a focus on employee succession.
These are predominantly TAFE or University programs that are considered relevant to work at [the organisation], although the study need not be related to the staff member’s current duties.

The following excerpt relating to study relevance is also particularly unique, as rather than simply stating that the study undertaken must be relevant to the employee’s current employment, discrete percentages have been applied to the ‘relevance’ of different levels of study:

The course of study must be directly relevant to the applicant’s current employment. For undergraduate study, at least 50% of the program must satisfy this requirement and for postgraduate study at least 75%.

The reasoning behind these percentages may stem from the assumption that undergraduate study is of a more generalist and protracted nature compared to postgraduate study. How this prescriptive, numerical definition of relevance might be achieved, understood or proven in practice, however, would be empirically difficult to determine. Moreover, this same policy was unique in that it actually specified that relevance should be determined with direct reference to the selection criteria contained in the employee’s position description:

Where the study is for subsequent qualifications which are relevant to the employee’s current position. Relevance will be determined with reference to selection criteria contained in the employee’s position description.

It is not clear whether this means that in determining study relevance the employee’s manager needs to map each task or responsibility listed in the employee’s original position selection criteria to the course of study to be
undertaken. However, given that each of these criteria may have different weightings in practice, and would likely expand or change as the employee develops in the role, the persistent question of exactly how these decisions might be made in practice, remains largely unaddressed in policy.

5.3.5 Learning as an Event: A Preoccupation with Quantifying Learning

Two other key categories that emerged in the initial stages of the policy analysis were ‘learning as an event vs. process’ and ‘quantifying learning’. In the same way that ‘manager control and monitoring’ and ‘manager decision-making’ emerged as discrete codes with a tentative link and were therefore discussed together, the former are also combined together in this section given their initial conceptual links. Firstly, as illustrated in the following excerpts a common theme throughout the majority of the policy documents was that higher education study was conceptualised as foremost an educational event, or series of events, rather than an ongoing learning process. The support that was provided for higher education was therefore almost exclusively limited to providing for the types of learning that could be defined in terms of bounded events, whether this be attending formal classes or examinations or travelling to them.

Policy document 2: reference 1
Subject to delegate approval, an employee may be granted:

a. up to five hours per week paid leave (plus necessary travelling time) to attend lectures; and b. paid absence for all required examinations.

Policy document 31: reference 5

Eligible staff members enrolled in an approved course may be entitled to a range of assistance including: time allocated for study during working hours, which will be negotiated on an individual basis to attend examinations, residential schools and classes, for consultations with supervisors and/or to study before an examination.
Whilst some policy documents indicated that employers were willing to be flexible based on employee-supervisor *negotiations*, support for the learning facilitated through higher education study was still largely couched in terms of defined activities or events:

**Policy document 4: reference 1**

*Assistance with studies and the level of assistance approved is at the discretion of the Delegate and may include: study leave with pay, up to an average of five hours per week to attend *formal classes and examinations*; up to three hours per week for travel.*

**Policy document 14: reference 1**

*The amount of leave credited is pro rata based on the length of the contract and depends on the appropriateness of the course/seminar/conference/exam.*

As is also illustrated in these examples, whilst the majority of policies did not allow for study leave to be used for non-event related learning, there were a small number of policies that offered the *potential* approving of study leave for assessment events, such as pending assignment or examination preparation and /or research theses:

**Policy document 4: reference 4**

*Where the period of Study Leave granted is less than the average of five hours a week, the Delegate may approve the difference as a leave credit which may be used to meet the requirements of *external studies/distance education courses*, attendance at prescribed examinations and field trips and preparation of prescribed assignments and theses.*

**Policy document 1: reference 1**

*Study leave credit can be used to prepare for examinations, write essays or for*
other valid study activities as agreed with the Manager.

In general, however, assignment preparation and research study were much less commonly acknowledged as legitimate study requirements. The majority of policies tended to be directed towards providing support for formal face-to-face classes, residential workshops and examinations. Support was more willingly provided for activities associated with the traditional delivery of higher education. Further, as I will explain in the next subsection, off-campus classes and online tutorials were generally seen as less legitimate learning ‘events’ as they lacked the face-to-face element of participating in a physical education setting and were thus less supported by employers. The assumption being that if the event took place outside work hours and/or was delivered online then the individual would require much less study leave time as part of their study support provisions.

This is a significant finding as conceptualising the learning that occurs through higher education as an event rather than a process may have a number of important corollaries for employee-student learning. Specifically, events have defined temporalities including start and end points. They also have spatial and contextual bounds. Thus, educational events are likely easier to control than learning processes. If the learning which occurs through an employee’s involvement in higher education is conceptualised in terms of discrete events, it can also be more easily quantified. That is, learning as an event can be understood and controlled in terms of how many hours it takes and where it takes place. Indeed, the preoccupation with fastidiously quantifying the amount of study leave provided for event-related learning was evident across the majority of policy documents studied. Some examples of the ways in which study leave for higher education events was carefully quantified, using mathematical formulas ranging from the relatively simple to the more complex (sometimes borderline byzantine), are illustrated in the exemplars, below:

Policy document 17: reference 5

In calculating and recording TESL, a Part-Time Staff Specialist will be allocated their entitlement on a pro-rata basis and days cleared will be deducted at their fractional rate. E.g. A 0.6 Staff Specialists whose annual entitlement is 15 TESL
days attends a 5 day conference, their balance will be deducted by 3 days (5 days x 0.6 FTE = 3) reducing their balance to 12 days.

Policy document 1: reference 6

The amount of study leave credit, which may be granted, is based on the following formula: \((L - G) \times N = C\)

\(L\) = the maximum hours per week which may be granted by the Manager to the approved student i.e. three, five or eight hours per week.

\(G\) = the number of hours approved for class attendance per week.

\(N\) = the number of tuition weeks in the study period (excluding class free periods), or, in the case of late application, from the date of approval.

\(C\) = the study leave credit available.

Figure 5.3: Example of Study Leave Quantification: Policy Document 32:

Reference 14

5.3.6 Research Students and Off-campus Students Disadvantaged?

Through the document analysis, it was clear that higher education study which could be tied to traditional, face-to-face learning events was, in the main, privileged over other forms of learning that lacked defined temporal or spatial bounds, such as online or off-campus coursework learning and/or research studies. These initial
emergences were open-coded as ‘off campus students disadvantaged’ and ‘research students disadvantaged’ to indicate that the majority of the policies were constructed in such a way that both off-campus students and research students were potentially disadvantaged in terms of the amount of study leave that was afforded to them. Perhaps because the learning that occurred outside of paid work time (including online, off-campus and flexible learning and research studies) was conceptualised as more boundless and thus difficult to control and quantify, compared with more traditional forms of higher education, these types of higher education study were considered to be either outside of the scope of the study support or as being worthy of a significantly more nominal provision of study leave.

For example, as shown in figure 5.4, the maximum release time for a full-time employee-student undertaking 2 units is 6 hours per week plus travel time of 1 hour is 7 hours per week. Assuming the study period is a 12 week semester and the employee works an average 38 hour week (7.6 hours per day), this would work out to be just over 11 days per study period. Whereas a full-time employee employed for the same time fraction undertaking off-campus study would receive just under half this amount (5 days) per study period. Similarly, in the next example (figure 5.5), if a full-time employee studying on-campus receives the maximum 4 hours per week study leave across two standard 12-week semesters, she would obtain approximately 6 days of study leave per study period or over 12 days of study leave for the year. A full-time employee undertaking residential on-campus studies would receive up to 16 days per year. Under this same arrangement, however, their colleague working identical hours, but undertaking online and distance education with no compulsory residential schools, would receive a paltry 1 day per annum per subject of study leave.
**Figure 5.4:** Example of Study Leave Quantification: Policy Document 21:
Reference 2

### Study requiring on campus attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compulsory weekly attendances</th>
<th>Maximum release time</th>
<th>For example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Up to 6 hrs per week</td>
<td>For enrolment in two 4.5 unit courses in one study period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Up to 1 hour travel time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive attendance</td>
<td>Up to 10 days block leave over the academic year.</td>
<td>2.5 days study release to attend a 4.5 unit summer/winter course at Reference 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly attendances combined with intensive attendance</td>
<td>Up to 3 hrs per week and 2.5 days block leave in one academic period</td>
<td>For enrolment in two 4.5 unit courses in one study period.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Study not requiring on campus attendance

Up to 10 days in the academic year, for example, 5 days per study period.

**Figure 5.5:** Example of Study Leave Quantification: Policy Document 9: Reference 2

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### Attachment 1: Study Time Summary Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Study Time available</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weekly Study Time (Face to face lectures/classes)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular classes</td>
<td>0.5 hours paid study time per hour of lecture time</td>
<td>4 hours study time per week</td>
<td>Can be taken in addition to study time for exams or continuous assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block (Intensive) attendance</td>
<td>0.5 hours paid study time per hour of lecture time</td>
<td>16 days per annum</td>
<td>Can be taken in addition to study time for exams or continuous assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Online and Distance Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not eligible for weekly study time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory Residential School</td>
<td>Up to 15 days paid study time per annum</td>
<td>15 days per annum</td>
<td>Can be taken in addition to study time for exams, but not in addition to study time for continuous assessment. Subject to evidence of the requirement to attend compulsory residential school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No compulsory residential school</td>
<td>1 day paid study time per annum per subject</td>
<td>1 day per annum per subject</td>
<td>Can be taken in addition to study time for exams or continuous assessment (not both)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination</td>
<td>2 days paid study time for each subject with final examination (includes day of exam)</td>
<td>10 days per annum</td>
<td>Cannot be taken in conjunction with study time for continuous assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous assessment (continual form of assessment, eg through assignments with no formal examinations)</td>
<td>1 day for each subject with no final examination</td>
<td>10 days per annum</td>
<td>To be taken in lieu of study time for exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Higher Degrees by Research</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>up to 10 days paid study time per annum</td>
<td>10 days per annum</td>
<td>Cannot be taken in conjunction with any other type of study time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Higher Degrees</td>
<td>up to 16 days paid study time per annum</td>
<td>10 days per annum</td>
<td>Cannot be taken in conjunction with any other type of study time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES:**
1. Study Time is available for full-time staff to undertake part-time study only, up to a maximum of 50% of an equivalent full-time course load, at any time. Part-time staff will receive pro-rata benefits.
2. Staff members may work flexible working hours to accommodate study by mutual agreement with their HOD, HDA or Dean.
3. Study Time does not accrue and is not available during vacation periods for the course involved.
4. A 'Lecture' refers to any prescribed compulsory attendance at classes held during normal working hours or for exam preparation, assignments and travel to classes.
5. Study time for higher degrees (ie Masters or PhD) will only be granted for the minimum time given to complete the degree when enrolled part time. If the minimum time to complete a Masters part-time is four years, then study time will be granted for a period no greater than four years.
Whilst not all policies were as detailed in terms of the on and off campus provisions afforded, it was still clear that, in general, off-campus employee-students were eligible for far less study leave than their on-campus counterparts. For example, in the following excerpt, off-campus, online and research study is not even mentioned in relation to study leave (although interestingly, as an aside, almost all of the classification descriptors for the positions in this service require some level of research skills ranging from low to high level research skills), with only the following clause relating to on-campus study listed:

**Policy document 5: reference 1**

*An Employee may be granted sufficient paid leave to enable travel to and attendance of up to seven hours of classroom activity or related project work per week.*

Whilst some of the policies did explicitly acknowledge research studies, many of them failed to explain in the same level of detail (as that which was provided for coursework studies) what provisions would be afforded and how they would be afforded. In this way, it is hard to know which category (e.g. on-campus, off-campus etc) research students would be placed into according to the policy documents (again, this was related to the previous category of ‘contingency & uncertainty (risk?)’). Moreover, where information regarding study leave affordances for research students was provided, it was similar to that which was provided for off-campus students. It was less than what was provided for traditional on-campus coursework students. For example, in policy document 9: reference 2 (figure 5.5), a full-time employee and research student receives less than a full-time on-campus coursework employee-student undertaking either classroom based learning or on-campus residential seminars.

Further, in the following excerpt, research study is recognised but only 5 days is offered per semester, contrasted with 2.5 days per subject up to a maximum of 5 days per semester for off-campus coursework, and 4-6 hours per week (up to approximately 9.5 days per semester) with an additional 4 hours of leave for each examination completed. Again, in this example both research students and off-
campus students receive approximately half of the study leave than the on-campus coursework students.

Policy document 20: reference 1

A full-time staff member who has obtained approval to undertake a research-based degree (where at least 50% of the course assessment is based on original research and the production of a thesis) is entitled to 5 days study leave per semester for the research component of the course.

These findings are concerning as if off-campus students have selected that particular mode of higher education delivery due to pre-existing barriers to learning, their off-campus status may be compounding other extant barriers to undertaking higher education study. Similarly, given that research studies such as PhD programs, have traditionally required less prescribed coursework in Australia compared to other countries (Group of Eight, 2013), they are likely to be characterised by more flexible events and commitments (e.g. fieldwork or supervisor meetings as opposed to traditional classes). Therefore, employee-students undertaking research studies may be disadvantaged by existing study support policies which conceptualise and privilege learning in terms of the extent to which it can be classified as a neatly bounded learning event.

5.3.7 Accommodating (Not Endorsing) Study and Individual Responsibility

Several initial codes emerged relating to how higher education study appeared to be merely accommodated, rather than endorsed, by employers. For the purposes of brevity and conceptual coherency, I have included these codes alongside the master code: ‘study is accommodated rather than endorsed’ for discussion in this subsection. In addition to the master code, this tentative code cluster also included the codes: ‘study assistance as an employee relations ‘benefit”, ‘providing the bare minimum’, ‘organisational responsibility to staff, ‘red tape (hidden deterrence through policy complexity)” and ‘plain English (lack of) and/or legitimisation of decision making via legislative jargon’. Finally, I have also linked the code ‘individual responsibility” to this cluster as it can be best understood as a
prospective corollary (and possibly a concurrent antecedent) of employers’ preoccupation with accommodating, rather than endorsing, higher education study as a formative component of an employee’s lifelong learning expedition.

Essentially, what this cluster of codes indicated was that rather than being eagerly endorsed by employers, participation in higher education was merely accommodated through the positioning of study support as an ‘employee benefit’. Whilst almost all the policies indicated that the course studied must be somehow ‘relevant’ to either the individual’s job role and/or the broader organisation, and a small number indicated that it should be discussed in relation to the individuals performance review, they failed to link the undertaking of higher education to the individual’s broader learning and development or professional development goals in a specific, contextualised and pragmatic way. There was an overwhelming lack of consideration given to how the learning from higher education would be applied, transferred or practiced in the workplace.

Rather, as the following excerpts demonstrate, study support for higher education was positioned as being a necessary ‘organisational responsibility’ to staff, as opposed to an undertaking connected to a comprehensive workplace learning and development strategy, as a means to reward or recognise high performance, or to facilitate the motivation or well-being of staff. In this way, akin to other legislated employee relations provisions, such as sick leave or annual leave, study support emerged as an affordance that had to be provided as an almost begrudged requirement. Conceptualised as such, providing more than the bare minimum amount of study support was therefore avoided.

Policy document 32: reference 1

[The organisation has] a responsibility to ensure all Staff Specialists employed in the [sector omitted] have appropriate and equitable access to TESL [training, education and study leave] that is relevant to both the Staff Specialist and [the organisation] and establishes entitlements to TESL.
Policy document 1: reference 1

[The organisation] is committed to providing an environment in which employees are **adequately equipped** to achieve career and professional development needs relevant to their employment.

Policy document 31: reference 1

**Adequate appropriate training and development is to be provided** to employees with a minimum of two percent of the salaries budget of the work unit allocated overall to training and staff development in accordance with the needs of the unit.

To ensure that only the bare minimum amount of support was offered, across the majority of policy documents studied, the language used was often replete with human resources and managerialist jargon. This type of language would no doubt be difficult for those working outside of a legalist interpretative framework of employee relations to decipher:

Policy document 15: reference 1

*The Study and Research Assistance Scheme (SARAS) does not apply to General Employees as defined in the Public Service Act 2008 (Qld) s.147 (i.e. casual employees…) (Other than Public Servants) Award - State 2012).*

Policy document 18: reference 1

*Employee Initiated Education Clause 27 (v) of the Local Government (State) Award 2010 states: “[the organisation] may grant an employee undertaking a course consistent with [the organisation’s] training plan although not at [organisation’s] requirement, leave with pay or leave without pay to attend course requirements provided that the employee gives reasonable notice of such requirements. Where the employee is not granted such leave [the organisation] shall give preference in granting annual leave or to other accrued leave to attend course requirements provided that the employee gives reasonable notice of such requirements.*
Moreover, many of the policy documents indicated that employer support for higher education was a process covered in proverbial red tape, with employee-students required to navigate various form-filling processes and continuously provide evidence of their higher education enrolment and satisfactory academic and work progress:

Policy document 1: reference 1

The following documents must be forwarded to the Studies Assistance Officer who will process the bursary payment and maintain statistical data: - Authority for Payment of Bursary form - Copy of the Application for Studies Assistance (accompanied by proof of paid enrolment) - Previous semester results if applicable.

Relatedly, these codes emerged in ways that could be tentatively linked to the code ‘individual learner responsibility’, as the documents indicated that employees not only needed to continuously prove themselves as being trustworthy, but also assume responsibility for deciphering the legislative jargon contained in the policy documents and navigating associated red tape. As previously mentioned, it was also the employee’s role to initiate discussion about applying for their studies with their manager and to negotiate study support provisions with their manager. Whilst, I was reluctant to jump to any premature conclusions at this stage of the analysis, I could see that as it had in my master’s research (Wapling, 2013), the notion of individual learner responsibility was emerging as a potential key theme. I was reminded of its connection with the neoliberal imperatives of lifelong learning.

5.3.8 Disincentivising High-performers: A Culture of Mediocrity?

The findings from the initial policy analysis indicate that there are manifold ways in which high performing employee-students may be disadvantaged or deincentivised, with study support policy affordances encouraging a culture of mediocrity. Firstly, by conceptualising the learning which occurs through participation in higher education as comprised of isolated and bounded events, it may come to be viewed somehow separate to the learning which occurs on-the-job in the ‘hot action of work’ (Beckett, 2001), or divorced from the broader L&D activities that an
employee completes as part of their ongoing professional development. Higher education-facilitated learning may be viewed primarily in relation to the time that the employee must be physically away from the workplace; that is, away from their operational duties. In this way, rather than viewing the employee-student as learning before, after and in between formal higher education events, as they apply the skills and knowledge gained through participation in higher education in different situations, higher education learning may be viewed as taking the staff member away (temporally and spatially) from the perceivably more pragmatic responsibilities of their job role. Rather than as facilitating their ability to perform their role more effectively or efficiently across time and space.

However, the problem with this perspective is that whilst employee-students engaged in lower level service-based positions may add the majority of value to the organisation through their physical presence at work (e.g. a call centre operator must be physically present to undertake transactional work such as answering calls), other employee-students may add their value through more nuanced operational and strategic work which may not require as much physical presence (e.g. a senior consultant may not to be physically present in the workplace to conceive ground-breaking ideas and strategic initiatives). Thus, when learning through higher education is viewed primarily in terms of the physical presence or absence of the staff member undertaking it, the learning that occurs as the individual develops in and across different life roles, including but not limited to that of employee and student, may be undermined.

Further, there may exist a distinction between not only junior and senior staff but also between high-performing staff employed at the same level of seniority. For example, two junior call centre operators may be both somewhat physically and temporally bound by their role and perform the same set of routine duties but an operator undertaking a concurrent university degree may have more potential to apply new skills and knowledge to enhance her performance of these duties than an employee that has yet to undertake any higher education. Further, if both of these employees are undertaking the same part-time university degree, then whilst they may have equal potential to apply the skills and knowledge learnt in higher education to their performance within their job role, their ability to do so may relate
more closely to their individual aptitude, attitude, personality and previous learning experiences etc. In short, rather than tailor the support provided to staff in a way that might incentivise, reward or motivate them, the vast majority of study support policies analysed indicated that for all staff, across all roles and levels of seniority, satisfactory work performance and/or satisfactory academic performance is all that is required to receive study assistance:

Policy document 31: reference 1

Staff members must seek approval for study support prior to the commencement of the relevant study period. Continuing study assistance is subject to satisfactory progress in study (at least a pass level on all subjects).

Policy document 1: reference 1

For students on continuing studies, satisfactory results from the previous semester are required before reimbursement can be paid.

Policy document 15: reference 1

Assistance is available from the date of appointment for [an employee]

- The course subjects are being undertaken for the first time
- The employee’s service is satisfactory
- The employee gives an undertaking to pursue the course diligently to its successful completion
- The supervisor approves and provides the assistance requested
- Course progress is satisfactory.

Policy document 21: reference 1

Study release is approved for one academic period, or for yearlong courses, the academic year. Ongoing support will be dependent on a satisfactory level of work performance.
Certainly, according to the information contained in the study support policies analysed, there are no provisions for attaining additional support if you are a high-performing employee and/or high-performing student. Likewise, there are limited incentives for employee-students that seek to adapt, apply or transfer higher education knowledge or skills to the job in critical, innovative or creative ways. Rather, perhaps through a misplaced desire for transparency and equity (or at least the appearance of it), through these policies, organisations may be encouraging cultures of mediocrity. This may have implications for the motivation and engagement of high performing employee-students.

Indeed, only a handful of the policy documents acknowledged the explicit connection between higher education study and the employee performance appraisal process specifically, rather than via a more general ‘satisfactory’ work performance related clause. Two examples of policy documents which did include explicit links between higher education study and performance appraisal processes are included below:

**Policy document 31: reference 2**

*The chosen course of study must directly enhance the staff member’s performance in their current role or in anticipated duties as discussed and agreed as part of the PRPD process and must be aligned with the strategic direction of the Faculty/Division/Directorate/Campus*

**Policy document 22: reference 1**

*In order to be eligible for study support: the course of study must be relevant to your role and included in your performance planning and review (PPR) plan*
5.4 Reflection in and on Action: Nascent Issues and Relationships

To position myself in the research and provide some additional context to explain my developing conceptual position, I have provided a reflection section in both this chapter and the subsequent one. Schon’s (1984) notions of ‘reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’ provide a useful vehicle to facilitate the achievement of this aim. Simply put, reflection-in-action can be described as thinking about what we are doing while we are doing it and throughout this process modifying or adapting our action on the basis of these thoughts (Schon, 1984). Whereas, reflection-on-action can be described as thinking about what we did after the process of having done it and through this process modifying or adapting the way that we might act in the future, on the basis of these thoughts (Schon, 1984).

Firstly, many of the initial codes and categories that emerged from the data appeared to be closely aligned with my initial thoughts about the topic in terms of my own experiences applying for, receiving, creating and administering study support in practice. For example, the majority of policy documents did not integrate study support within their broader organisational learning and development frameworks or talent management strategies, nor did they indicate that support for higher education study could be perceived as anything other than leave time and/or financial reimbursement.

Although, what was somewhat more enlightening was the amount of diversity across the policy documents analysed relating to a) the differing amounts of leave and reimbursement provided and b) the sheer amount of detail that some of the policies included in relation to the calculation of study leave time. The mathematical formulas and tabulated data were heavily bound up in managerialist language and legalist jargon which was difficult to decipher. I could see how it would be easy for employees to simply accept their manager’s interpretation of the policy provisions rather than negotiate optimally suitable study support affordances.
This language labyrinth was somewhat unsurprising as I had previously employed the same careful language when writing HR policy documents and study support documents for employers in the past. I understood the importance of promoting perceived transparency and objectivity for the purposes of avoiding litigation and controlling the provision of resources to ensure fiscal control and sustainability. However, having not worked for a large state or federal government service provider, and given that many of the documents obtained came from the public sector, I underestimated the extent to which employee relations (ER) documentation could, through written discourse, create such conceptual entanglement in relation to what I had thought most employers considered only a minor element of ER entitlements.

Secondly, the recurrent emergence of the codes: ‘contingency, uncertainty (risk?)’ and ‘individual learner responsibility’ was somewhat unsurprising having also developed strongly in my masters-level research project on a closely related topic (Wapling, 2013). However, whilst the codes: ‘employee trust (lack of)’, ‘manager decision-making’ and ‘manager control and monitoring’ were also somewhat expected, given my previous experiences working in human resources and navigating employer-sponsored study support for my own studies in the past, they were perhaps even more prominent in the policy documents than expected. This was exciting as it tended to confirm my suspicions about the general concepts and themes present in employee study support documents. But I was still worried that perhaps my critical-theoretical philosophical bias and somewhat challenging past experiences with study support had led me to overstate some of the key codes. I wondered: to what extent had my interest in issues of social power and control lead me to seek out related themes in the documents?

I was wary of confirmation bias and aware that this was the very first phase of data collection and analysis, representing not only one mode of collecting the data, but also the initial stage of GT open-coding. I was therefore intent on ensuring that all findings were treated as strictly provisional at this stage.
Another issue I considered at this stage was that whilst the initial codes and their relational clusters could be considered as indicative of fairly enduring categories and relations, even provisionally linking categories into tentative clusters was a confounding process, as the categories did not emerge neatly in linear or unidirectional ways. Rather, it seemed as though they were all related to each other but in different ways and to differing extents and these relations were constantly shifting. Thus, without more data it was difficult to understand how these relations came to be without employing a heavy dose of my own researcher bias and subjectivity. Whilst initial conceptual clusters did seem to fall together fairly organically (that is, without forcing the data), to draw stronger links between them at this stage in the analysis would have required an assumptive cognitive jump largely based on the logic of my own empiricism; one I was not prepared to make.

After the bulk of the policy analysis was ‘complete’, I realised that there was some conceptual gel missing. I had my own empirical glue but it had been with me too long and I didn’t trust its adhesive properties, I needed a fresh medium and I needed more data. I hoped that ‘adding practice’ through the consideration of the survey data would provide me with the necessary adhesion. In the absence of practice, my understanding of policy was unavoidably partial.

Whilst the survey questions were largely constructed prior to the implementation of phase 2: survey analysis, after analysing the policy data, I did review them to ensure that they were broad and open-ended enough to target all of the issues and relations that were emerging through the policy analysis. The intent was not to narrow down the survey questions in light of the policy findings, but rather to exploit their exploratory potential to the absolute maximum.
Relatedly, a piece of advice received by one of my supervisors at this policy analysis-survey development intersect greatly facilitated the achieving of this aim. She suggested that to provide participants with the opportunity to freely provide additional written information about their personal thoughts and experiences, I could add in an additional long-form open-ended question at the end of the survey. This ultimately provided me with additional written data that would later prove vital to my understanding of the policy-practice nexus.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the data that was obtained in phase one of the data collection and analysis. This included a consideration of the initial key categories and tentative relations that emerged from the collection and open coding of a total of 32 employer study support policy (and related) documents. Further, I have clearly explicated that as the initial categories and relations were still nascent and dynamic, they have not been discussed as definite, but rather as precursors to further data collection and analysis. Lastly, a ‘reflection in and on action’ section has been included to provide the reader with a personal understanding of how my conceptual positioning unfolded in the early stages of the CGT analysis. This is discussed in relation to my prior experiences of working as a human resources practitioner and concurrent higher education student, in addition to my philosophical attunement to, and proclivity for, exposing the implicit and explicit manifestations of knowledge-power relations in organisational policy and practice.
Chapter 6. Adding Practice: Survey Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from phase two of the data collection, which involved the distribution of online surveys comprising both forced-choice and open-ended questions. An overview of the population studied, response rates and participant demographics is provided, followed by the presentation of qualitative statistical data and written data relating to the following:

- Self-reported employee-student and workplace manager / HR professional experiences of undertaking higher education alongside paid employment, or supervising this undertaking, respectively

- Key comparisons of self-reported employee-student and workplace manager / HR professional experiences of undertaking higher education alongside paid employment and supervising this undertaking, respectively

- Self-reported employee-student and workplace manager / HR professional perceptions of Employer-supported Higher Education (ESHE) provisions, and engagement with these provisions

- Key comparisons of self-reported employee-student and workplace manager / HR professional perceptions of ESHE provisions, and engagement with these provisions.

A full description of code development as generated from the written open-ended survey responses is not provided in this chapter, however. This decision has been made to avoid unnecessary duplication as the written survey data was analysed alongside all other written data generated in the antecedent and subsequent phases of the data collection and analysis, as part of the broader CGT analysis. Instead, what is reported in this chapter, is only the new codes generated from the open-ended survey data (see section 6.5.6).
6.2 Survey Respondent Demographics

6.2.1 General Background Information

General demographic information was collected for both employee-student and manager / HR professional cohorts (n=210), with additional demographic information collected for the employee-students (n=195). Gender ratios were almost equal with 48.10% (n=101) of participants identifying as female, 51.43% (n=108) identifying as male and 1 participant identifying as male to female transgender (0.47%). The vast majority of respondents were aged between 18 and 39 years of age with just under half (45.71%) aged between 18 and 24 years of age (Table 6.1).

Over 60% of respondents identified as belonging to an Oceanian background and just under 20% as belonging to a North-west European (including British and Irish) racial or ethnic background. The majority of respondents indicated that their household/family status was single (65.24%, n=137), with 18.09% (n=38) and 16.67% (n=35) of respondents indicating that they were either in defacto relationships or married.

Table 6.1: Age Group of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>45.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>24.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11.90</td>
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<td>35-39</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.2.2 Education

The number of respondents whose highest level of education achieved was a bachelor’s degree or secondary school completion was almost even at 32.86% (n=69) and 32.38% (n=68) respectively, with a further 16.67% (n=35) of respondents indicating that they had a master’s qualification. For those that had previously completed higher education, 125 individuals indicated the disciplines in which they had previously studied (Table 6.2). These were varied with the most popular discipline being ‘Arts, humanities and social sciences’ (16.80%).

Table 6.2: Disciplines Studied in Previous Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts, humanities and social sciences</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science (pure/basic sciences)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and teaching</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information technology</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics and policy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied science</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine and/or medical imaging</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture and built environment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information systems</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International studies and languages</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing and midwifery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition and dietetics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vet Science</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.2.3 Employment

Participants were asked to respond to a forced-choice question relating to the chief basis on which they were employed (Question 8). Of the total 210 respondents, employment mode was almost evenly distributed with 30% (n=63) of respondents employed in a full-time capacity, 25.24% (53) working part-time and 39.05% (n=82) employed casually. The remaining 5.71% (n=12) of respondents indicated that they were employed on a fixed-term/contract basis. In terms of level of seniority, there was an almost even split between those employed at a junior level (46.67%, n=98) and those employed in a mid-level capacity (42.38%, n=89). The remaining 10.95% (n=23) of respondents identified as senior-level employees. It should be noted that one limitation with requesting that individuals self-report their current level of seniority is that depending on a number of factors such as organisational type and size, age and experience, these levels may be inflated or deflated depending on the individual’s perception of their position level relative to the broader industry and/or sector.

Just under half of the respondents (49.52%, n=104) were employed in private companies, with an additional 20.48% (n=43) employed in public companies. The remaining respondents worked in not-for-profit (NFP) (5.71%, n=12) organisations, government roles (14.76%, n=31) or listed their industry/sector as ‘other (please specify)’ (9.52%, n=20). In terms of the latter, the vast majority indicated that they worked for higher education providers, including public universities and independent schools. There was also one participant who was working across both public and private companies and in their own business and one respondent indicating that they were transitioning from a NFP to a government role. The top two industries in which respondents were employed were ‘education and training’ and ‘retail trade’ (Figure 6.1).

Lastly, the majority (60%, n=126) of respondents were employed in large organisations (≥ 200 employees), with the remaining respondents employed in almost equal amounts in medium (20-199 employees) and small (<20 employees) organisations with 19.05% (n=40) and 20.95% (n=44) employed in each sized organisation respectively.
6.2.4 Additional Demographic Information: Employee-student Cohort

Respondents that identified as employee-students were required to respond to additional demographic questions specific to their current higher education studies and employment. Of the 199 respondents that identified as employee-students, 195 (97.99%) completed all the additional demographic questions (questions 14-19), with 4 (2.01%) of the respondents failing to respond to all of the additional questions. Of those employee-students that did respond (n=195), just under half (49.23%, n=96) indicated that they were currently studying an undergraduate bachelor’s degree, with an additional 28.72% (n=56) indicating that they were currently studying a doctoral degree or PhD. The remaining respondents were studying either a coursework master’s degree (14.87%, n=29), a graduate certificate or graduate diploma (4.10%, n=8), or a master’s degree by research or with a substantial research component (3.08%, n=6). The majority (78.46%, n=153) of respondents were studying on-campus. The remainder were studying either off-campus/online (15.38%, n=30) or off-campus/online with some residential seminars or intensives (6.15%, n=12). The disciplines respondents were currently studying are shown in Table 6.3.
Table 6.3: Disciplines Studied in Current Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, humanities and social sciences</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science (pure/basic sciences)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.67</td>
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<td>Education and teaching</td>
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<td>Information technology</td>
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<td>4.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medicine and/or medical imaging</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.62</td>
</tr>
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<td>Applied Science</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.10</td>
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<td>Law</td>
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<td>3.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Politics and policy</td>
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<td>2.56</td>
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<td>Environmental studies</td>
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<td>2.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nursing and midwifery</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture and built environment</td>
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<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
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<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information systems</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Arts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International studies and languages</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport management and/or sport science</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vet Science</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition and dietetics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optometry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property and real estate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*<em>Total</em></td>
<td><strong>195</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding

Respondents were asked to indicate both the length of time that they had been working for their current employer as well as the length of time that they had been working in their current role for their current employer, with just under half
indicating that they had been employed in their current role with their current employer for less than 12 months (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4: Frequency of Tenure Length with Current Employer and Tenure Length in Current Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure Length</th>
<th>Current employer</th>
<th>Current role with current employer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;12 months</td>
<td>31.79</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>18.97</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>20.51</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 years</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7 years</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9 years</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 10 years</td>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total*</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding

6.3 Response Rates

6.3.1 Employee-student and Manager/HR Professional Cohorts

Of the 210 respondents that agreed to participate in the study, all provided the demographic information and progressed to the initial filter question that required them to select the key stakeholder category that best fitted their current situation (i.e. employee-student or workplace manager/HR professional). At this point, all participants responded, with 199 (94.76%) respondents identifying as a ‘university / higher education student and a paid employee’ and 11 (5.24%) respondents identifying as a ‘manager that supervises employees undertaking higher education alongside their paid work or HR professional that administers employee study assistance’.
6.3.2 Employee-students

Of the 199 respondents that identified as an employee-student, 195 (97.99%) completed all the additional demographic questions (questions 14-19) specific to the employee-student cohort (e.g. those questions related to discipline currently studied and length of course enrolment) with 4 (2.01%) of the respondents failing to respond to all of the additional demographic questions.

Of the 199 participants that identified as employee-students, 188 (94.47%) responded to a question relating to why they made the decision to enrol in higher education (question 20) and 186 (93.47%) responded to a question relating to the most difficult aspects of working and studying concurrently (question 21). In terms of participant awareness of ESHE (question 22), 171 (85.93%) of those identifying as employee-students responded.

Out of the 199 respondents that identified as an employee-student, only 42 (21.11%) respondents indicated the type of study assistance that their employer provided (question 23) and only 44 (22.11%) respondents indicated whether or not they were currently receiving study assistance (question 24), with those that were receiving study assistance all able to indicate who suggested that they should apply for it (question 28). Furthermore, 18 of the 199 (9.05%) employee-student respondents provided additional written information regarding their perceived eligibility or ineligibility for study assistance (question 25) and 2 of the 199 (1.01%) respondents that were receiving study assistance, but not all they were entitled to, provided additional information regarding why they thought that this was the case (question 26).

Of the 199 employee-student respondents, 27 (13.57%) responded to a question relating to the usefulness of study assistance (question 27) and 169 (84.92%) indicated their preferences regarding different forms of existing and hypothetical forms of employer-sponsored study assistance (question 30). Regarding the informal support that employee-student respondents currently receive from their managers 170 (85.43%) individuals responded (question 29). Furthermore, 172 (86.43%) of all employee-student respondents indicated the frequency with which
their direct manager provided them with opportunities to apply or transfer the knowledge and skills that they were learning in higher education to their current job role (question 31).

In terms of improving the employer support that was provided for their studies, 172 (86.43%) and 171 (85.93%) of employee-student respondents indicated the extent to which they thought their direct manager and their employer, respectively, could do more to support them with their studies (question 32 and 33). With regard to personal views relating to responsibility for undertaking higher education (question 34), 172 (86.43%) of employee-students responded and in relation to whether or not employee-student respondents thought that study assistance was provided fairly in their workplace (question 35), 171 (85.93%) of employee-students responded.

The final question (question 36) issued to employee-student respondents was an open-ended question relating to barriers to professional learning, including higher education and/or suggestions on how support for this learning might be improved. Almost a quarter (23.62%, n=47) of all respondents identifying as an employee-student provided a written response. Indeed, some of these responses were so detailed that despite being set to its maximum character limit, the electronic survey system was unable to provide sufficient capacity for all of this information to be recorded. Nevertheless, the written responses that were obtained via this means offered an additional source of rich data for subsequent analysis.

### 6.3.3 Workplace Manager and HR Professionals

Interestingly, despite only 11 respondents identifying as a workplace manager or HR professional in the initial cohort screening question, 12 individuals completed the survey questions directed expressly at the workplace manager/HR professional cohort. After detailed investigations, it was discovered that the reason for this discrepancy stemmed from one respondent indicating that they were a manager/HR professional in the initial cohort screening question, then completing all the manager/HR professional-specific questions before going back to the cohort screening question and changing their response to the *employee-student* category and completing those questions also. That is, one individual was inadvertently
double counted in the survey, as after failing to adhere to the survey instructions to select the role that they ‘most identified with’, they ended up assuming the position of both manager and employee-student. In effect, this resulted in this individual responding to both the employee-student and the manager/HR professional category questions, initially identifying as a workplace manager/HR professional but subsequently as an employee-student as well.

As a result, all (100%, n=12) workplace manager / HR professional respondents indicated the reasons why they believed that employees undertook higher education study (question 37) and why they personally undertook higher education (question 38). Further, all (100%, n=12) respondents indicated the most difficult things about working and studying in higher education concurrently (question 39) and the most important types of education / training to ensure both short-term (question 40) and long-term (question 41) development. However, only 11 of the 12 (91.67%) respondents indicated whether their organisation offered study assistance for higher education studies (question 42) and the only respondent that indicated ‘no’ to this question was able to provide a written comment as to why they thought this might be the case (question 43).

6.4 Experiences and Assumptions Relating to Undertaking Higher Education and Paid Work

6.4.1 Reasons for Enrolling in Higher Education Alongside Paid Work

Employee-student respondents were asked to list the top four reasons why they decided to enrol in a higher education course (question 20) and the manager/HR professional cohort were asked two variants of this question. Firstly, the latter were asked the top four reasons why they thought their employees enrolled in higher education (question 37) and why they personally undertook higher education study if applicable (question 38). A comparison of the top four most highly ranked responses are listed in the table below.
Table 6.5: Comparison of Perceived Reasons for Employee-student Enrolment in Higher Education Across Cohorts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question No. / Cohort</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Top four reasons for enrolling in higher education</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 Employee-students</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>To increase my knowledge and/or skills for use in <strong>future job roles</strong></td>
<td>146</td>
<td>77.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To increase my <strong>job/career prospects</strong> in my chosen occupation or field</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>70.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To further my <strong>specialist knowledge</strong> and/or skills related to a particular subject area</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>65.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To derive a sense of <strong>personal meaning or fulfilment</strong> from continuous learning</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>55.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 Manager/HR professionals (perception of employee-students)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>To increase their knowledge and/or skills for use in <strong>future job roles</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To further their <strong>specialist knowledge</strong> and/or skills related to a particular subject area</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To increase their knowledge and/or skills for use in <strong>current job roles</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To increase their potential for increased <strong>salary/earnings</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 Manager/HR professionals (perception of themselves)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>To further my <strong>specialist knowledge</strong> and/or skills related to a particular subject area</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To increase knowledge and/or skills for use in <strong>future job roles</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To increase potential for increased <strong>salary/earnings</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To increase my <strong>job/career prospects</strong> in my chosen occupation or field</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were two particularly interesting findings to note regarding this comparison. Firstly, whilst both the employee-students and manager cohort rated an increase of
knowledge and/or skills for use in future job roles and the development of specialist knowledge as two of the top four reasons why employees undertake higher education, the cohorts differed in terms of the other two top reasons why employees undertake higher education study. Whereas employee-students indicated that the other top reasons for enrolment were to increase their job/career prospects in their chosen occupation or field and to obtain personal meaning and fulfilment from continuous learning, respondents from the manager/HR professional cohort indicated that the other top reasons why employees would decide to undertake higher education were a desire to increase their knowledge and/or skills for their current job roles and to increase their potential for increased earnings.

Whilst there is likely a strong relationship between increased job prospects and increased earnings, it is interesting that the manager/HR professional selected the increased earnings option specifically, whereas the employee-students selected increased job prospects, as the latter is a more general response that may likely include increased earnings but is not necessarily solely reducible to them. Rather, it may be that in the latter response option the language is less direct; employee-students felt more comfortable indicating that they wanted to increase their job prospects generally rather than only obtain a greater salary.

Moreover, whilst two of the top reasons that the manager/HR professional cohort decided to themselves personally enrol in higher education were aligned with both employee-student reasons and with their perception of employee-student reasons, the other two reasons reported by this cohort were the potential for increased salary or earnings and to increase their job prospects in their current field. These findings may offer a possible and partial explanation for why managers thought that one of the top reasons why employees would enrol in higher education would be to increase their salary or earnings; it was one of the top reasons why they personally enrolled in higher education.

However, if managers enrolled in higher education to increase their job prospects in their current field generally, this does not necessarily explain why managers/HR professionals indicated that they thought one of the top reasons why employee-students would enrol in higher education would be to increase their knowledge and
skills for use in their current job roles. A possible explanation could be that the respondents identifying as managers/HR professionals took part in the survey precisely because they were responsible for administering and/or approving study assistance and so this belief stemmed more from the assumption that staff would choose to undertake higher education primarily so that they could use the skills and knowledge developed in their current role, as opposed to for use in their field, more broadly. Alternatively, these managers/HR Professionals could have themselves been concurrent employee-students that were also seeking study support.

In terms of responses that were provided for this particular set of questions, it should be noted, however, that there is a noticeable difference in sample size for each cohort with the number of employee-students (n=188) respondents vastly outnumbering the workplace manager/HR professional cohort (n=12). Nevertheless, the large sample size for the employee-student cohort provides a good representation of some of the top reasons why employee-students elect to undertake higher education study alongside paid work and which could be explored in future research.

6.4.2 Difficulties Associated with Undertaking Higher Education Alongside Paid Work

Both employee-student and manager/HR professional cohorts (regardless of whether the latter had themselves undertaken higher education) were asked to indicate the top four most difficult things about working and undertaking higher education at the same time. Whilst both respondent cohorts indicated that balancing study with work demands and managing the workload associated with studies were among the top most difficult aspects of undertaking higher education concurrently with paid work, the two cohorts differed with respect to the other reasons that they rated as the most difficult things about working and studying at the same time. Whilst the employee-student respondents indicated that time management/organisation and balancing study with a social life were also among the most difficult aspects of working and studying concurrently, manager/HR professionals believed that managing the workload associated with family or caring responsibilities and financial pressure resulting from everyday living expenses as
among the most difficult. Indeed, this difference can likely be explained by the age difference between the employee-students and managers that completed the survey.

Thus, to investigate this finding in more detail, the manager/HR professionals and employee-student cohort responses were filtered by gender and age. There was an almost equal number of respondents identifying as male and female in the manager/HR professional category suggesting that gender likely didn’t play a role in the discrepancy between the two cohorts. However, age may have influenced this result as the distribution of ages for employee-students was indicative of a younger sample where the majority of total respondents (72.86%, n = 199) were aged between 18 and 29 years old, as contrasted with the manager/HR professional cohort, where the majority of respondents that originally identified as a manager (90.9%, n = 11) were aged between 25 and 44. That is, both family commitments, caring responsibilities and concerns about finances are likely to be issues that become increasingly prevalent as individuals become older, move out of home or student accommodation and obtain more financial and familial responsibilities.

Indeed, if the employee-student cohort was limited to postgraduate employee-students only as opposed to all higher education studies, it is likely that the age distribution for the employee-student would reflect a set of concerns more aligned with that of the manager/HR professional cohort.

Table 6.6: Comparison of the Most Difficult Aspects of Undertaking Higher Education Alongside Paid Work Across Cohorts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question No. / Cohort</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Top four most difficult things</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 Employee-students</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>Balancing study with work demands</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>83.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Managing the workload associated with my studies</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>67.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balancing study with my social life</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>50.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Managing and organising my time both in and outside work | 91 | 48.92

Balancing study with work demands | 11 | 91.67

Balancing study with family or caring commitments | 7 | 58.33

Managing the workload associated with studies | 7 | 58.33

Financial pressures resulting from managing everyday living expenses | 4 | 33.33

### 6.4.3 Manager/HR professional Views of Higher Education and Skill Development

The manager/HR professional cohort (n=12) was asked which two types of education and training were the most important for ensuring both short-term (question 40) and long-term (question 41) skill development for employees. Whilst ‘on the job training / informal workplace learning’ was the most frequently selected response for both short-term (100.00%, n=12) and long-term (58.33%, n=7) staff development, the respondents indicated that ‘informal or formal coaching / mentoring’ was also among the top two most important types of education or training for ensuring short-term staff development (50.00%, n=6), whereas ‘higher education / university study’ was ranked as among the top two types of education or training for ensuring the long-term skill development (50.00%, n=6) of employees. It should also be noted that none of the manager / HR professional respondents selected higher education as among the top types of education and training for ensuring the short-term development of staff. Whilst this finding is unsurprising given the protracted duration and academic nature of many higher education courses, it is worth noting as it may relate to how employee-student motivations for undertaking higher education are perceived and the kinds of support that are provided for their studies as part of their short and long term professional development.
6.5 ESHE Provisions and Engagement

In this section, I detail the findings from the survey relating specifically to the employer-supported higher education (ESHE) affordances and provisions.

6.5.1 Stakeholder Awareness of ESHE Offered

There was a large amount of variation in terms of key stakeholder awareness of whether ESHE was offered by their employer. Whilst the vast majority (64.33%, n = 110) of employee-students indicated that their employer did not offer ESHE for their studies, the remaining 23.98% (n=41) indicated that their employer did offer ESHE, and the final 11.70% (n=20) indicated that they were unsure whether ESHE was offered. This contrasts with the manager/HR professional cohort responses whereby the vast majority of respondents (72.73%, n=8) indicated that they did offer ESHE, with only 9.09% (n=1) indicating that they did not offer ESHE and 18.18% (n=2) indicating that they were unsure whether or not ESHE was offered by their organisation. One of these participants noted that the reason why they did not offer ESHE was simply ‘lost productivity’.

Again, it should be noted that there was a vast difference in cohort sample size, which is likely to account for a proportion of this variation. It may also be explained, however, by the large proportion of undergraduate and younger students in the sample who were undertaking undergraduate studies and working in more junior positions. Despite these two factors, this finding was deemed worthy of further investigation in the ensuing phases of the data collection and analysis. This is because another possible reason for the variation may be related to whether the existence of available ESHE affordances is clearly communicated and whether managers actively encourage staff to apply for ESHE, or whether they are dissuaded from applying for ESHE, keeping employee knowledge of it somewhat hidden. Indeed, there was a question included later in the survey that was directed at the Manager/HR professional cohort (question 47) which yielded some relevant results presented later in this chapter. Further, to investigate this in even further detail, a
question was added to the interview script for phase three (in-depth interviews) of the data collection and analysis.

In regards to the type of support offered, the majority of employee-students (80.95%, n=34) indicated that the ESHE offered to them took the form of study leave, followed by partial course fee reimbursement (42.86%, n=18). Respondents from the Manager/HR professional cohort also indicated that study leave (100%, n=5) and partial course fee reimbursement (100%, n=5) were also the main forms of ESHE offered (Table 6.7). Of the three employees that indicated ‘other’, written responses were: 1) ‘flexible working arrangements’, 2) ‘lets me choose which days I would like to work (small family business)’ and 3) ‘time of [sic] during exam periods, a substitute fills in for me (I am not paid)’. These three responses could indicate that a less formal form of ESHE – ‘flexible working arrangements’ may be another way in which employers support staff undertaking higher education.

Table 6.7: Comparison of Forms of ESHE Offered as Indicated by Employee-student and Manager Cohorts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question No. / Cohort</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Top four most difficult things</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23 Employee-students</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Study Leave</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>80.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Full course fee reimbursement</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partial course fee reimbursement</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 Manager/HR professionals</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Study Leave</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Full course fee reimbursement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partial course fee reimbursement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of receipt of ESHE provisions, 45.45% of employee-students (n=20) indicated that they were receiving all the ESHE that they were entitled to, 50% (n=22) indicated that they were not receiving any ESHE and 4.55% (n=2) indicated
that they were receiving ESHE but probably not all that they were entitled to. Of the 2 respondents that indicated they were receiving ESHE but probably not all that they were entitled to, a follow-up question asking why they thought that this was the case yielded the following 2 responses: 1) ‘my current boss constantly interrupts my scheduled days for study with meetings etc’ and 2) ‘I think the SET policy does not match school practice especially when it comes to doctoral studies’. This is an interesting finding which highlights the need to interrogate the ways in which ESHE is not only provided in policy but also in practice, as well as providing further support for the finding outlined in Chapter 5; manager decision-making and manager control is likely to have a significant bearing on how ESHE is provided in practice.

For those respondents who indicated that they were not receiving any ESHE, 18 out of 22 (81.82%) respondents provided written responses to a question that asked them to indicate whether they knew why they were not eligible. The main issues were grouped into categories and are listed below in order of the extent to which their inherent themes emerged from the more-commonly cited to less-commonly cited reasons. These categories were also considered in relation to the overall themes and relationships that emerged from phase 1 of data collection and analysis (policy analysis) for the purposes of the evolving critical grounded theoretical analysis.

Table 6.8: Reasons Why Employee-students Believed That They Were Not Receiving ESHE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study relevance</td>
<td>Respondents indicated that the study was not considered relevant either by themselves or by their manager or employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment mode or tenure</td>
<td>Respondents in this category believed that their employment mode and or tenure meant they were ineligible i.e. part-time employee or under 12 months tenure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager decision-making</td>
<td>Respondents believed that their manager a) was not interested in their study, b) decided that their study was irrelevant, or c) used their discretion to reject study assistance due to some other factor e.g. ‘too many other employees also studying’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear / Politics</td>
<td>Respondents were either unsure whether they would receive study assistance as they felt their employer may not be invested in them and/or they made the conscious choice not to apply. E.g. ‘I do not want to draw attention to my studies…and I do not want to be beholden to my employer’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgets/Resources</td>
<td>Budget restrictions were mentioned as a real or perceived barrier to receiving ESHE for some respondents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course limit</td>
<td>One respondent indicated that they had already received study assistance for a previous degree and thought they were ineligible to receive it for a second course of study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty with application process</td>
<td>One respondent indicated that the process to apply is ‘incredibly difficult’ and ‘ultimate support is limited’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of applying for study assistance, the majority of employee-student respondents (57.69%, n = 15) indicated that no-one suggested that they apply, but rather they ‘looked into it’ themselves, although just over a third (34.62%, n=9) indicated that their direct manager had suggested that they apply for it. Further, 1 (3.85%) respondent indicated a colleague or friend suggested that they should apply and 1 (3.85%) respondent indicated that ‘a fellow student who has the same employer’ indicated that they should apply.

Respondents in the workplace manager/HR professional category were also asked whether they were responsible for administering or approving study assistance, with 33.33 (n=3) indicating that they either review and approve/reject applications or administer study assistance, 55.56% (n= 5) indicating that they did not have anything to do with approving or administering ESHE and 11.11% (n=1) indicating
that they supported the state manager in reviewing and approving/rejecting applications.

Those in the workplace manager/HR professional cohort responded to a related question (question 47) asking them how often managers in their organisation actively encourage employees to apply for study assistance, whilst only 5 managers responded, there was an even split between respondents that indicated ‘sometimes’ (40%, n =2) and ‘only occasionally’ (40%, n =2), with 1 (20%) respondent indicating ‘almost never’. Respondents in this same cohort were asked whether in their experience, applications for ESHE had increased or decreased with 60% (n=3) indicating that the number of applications had stayed the same, 20% (n=1) indicating applications had decreased slightly and 20% (n=1) indicating that for an unspecified reason the question was not applicable. Unfortunately, however, given the very small number of responses to this question, these findings are difficult to interpret in any meaningful way.

Lastly, respondents in the Manager/HR professional category were asked to indicate on what basis it is decided that study assistance is approved, with respondents able to select as many responses as desired from a list of multiple choice responses. The most popular bases selected were a) that the study is deemed relevant to the employees current job role (100%, n =5) and b) that the study is thought to possibly be relevant to employees future progression in the organisation (100%, n=5). Only 2 respondents (40%) indicated that decisions are also based around whether or not the employee is a high performer and 1 respondent (20%) indicated that whether the employee has been identified as part of the organisation’s succession plan or talent management strategy, is also a key factor in decision-making.

Again, given the small number of responses for this particular question, it is difficult to interpret these findings in a meaningful way. However, it is interesting to note that both high performance and talent management were mentioned as considerations given that the majority of the organisational policy document reviewed tended to indicate that study relevance and satisfactory work performance were the only factors on which study assistance approval decisions should be based.
Indeed, this may reflect manager decision-making and control as it is enacted in practice, as contrasted to what is stipulated in organisational policy.

6.5.2 Perceived Usefulness of Formal and Informal ESHE Provisions

In this section, I present descriptive statistics regarding the perceived usefulness of both formal and informal ESHE provisions as perceived by the employee-student cohort.

Firstly, employee-students were asked to rate the usefulness of the study assistance that they currently received on a 5-point likert scale ranging from ‘not useful’ to ‘very useful’. Almost two-thirds of respondents indicated that it was ‘useful’ (33.33%, n=9) or ‘very useful’ (29.63%, n=8) with exactly one-third of respondents indicating that they found it to be of either ‘limited usefulness’ (14.81%, n=4) or ‘not useful’ (18.52%, n=5). The remaining 3.7% (n=1) indicated that it was of ‘average usefulness’. Participants were also asked to rate the level of informal support that they received from their direct managers/supervisors outside of the formal ESHE provisions that they received on a 5-point likert scale ranging from ‘very low’ to ‘very high’. Just under half of respondents indicated that the level of informal assistance received was ‘high’ (22.35%, n=38) or ‘very high’ (22.35%, n=38), with the remaining participants rating it as ‘moderate’ (26.47%, n=45), ‘low’ (14.71%, n=25) or ‘very low’ (12.94%, n =22).

These results indicate that whilst existing forms of formal ESHE are useful for employee-students in the main, there exists room for improvement in terms of ensuring that they are maximally effective for all employee-students. It also highlighted the need to ask participants further open-ended questions around why and how they found formal support provisions such as study leave and course fee reimbursement to be effective (or ineffective) in the ensuing interview phase of data collection. Further, findings tended to indicate that the informal support provided by managers is mixed and may present another area of ESHE that could be improved upon and investigated in further detail. Thus, the informal support provided by managers was identified as an area for further qualitative questioning to be carried out in the third phase of the data collection and analysis.
Regardless of whether or not employee-students were currently receiving ESHE they were then asked to indicate what forms of study assistance for higher education they thought would hypothetically be most useful for them personally. They were asked to select as many options as desired from a list of pre-defined suggestions and also had the option of selecting the category ‘other’ and specifying further suggestions. The responses, as shown in table 6.9, indicate that in addition to the main two forms of formal ESHE commonly and currently provided (study leave time and course fee reimbursement), there is a significant amount of employee-student support for the perceived efficacy of other forms of ESHE (which may be formally and/or informally provided and engaged with). This is an extremely interesting finding as it indicates that whilst current types of formal ESHE are perceived as useful by employee-students, there exist many additional and/or alternative ways in which support may be provided in policy and in practice.

Specifically, whilst the top two most popular responses were study leave (68.05%, n=115) and course fee reimbursement (44.97%, n=76), interestingly, over a third of respondents also indicated that there were a number of other forms of support, in addition to or instead of, study leave time or financial reimbursement, that they would find useful. These included ‘open discussions with their team and manager regarding work and study commitments’, ‘frequent opportunities to transfer the skills and knowledge learnt in higher education to their job role’, ‘genuine interest and support from their direct manager’ and ‘clear organisational policies regarding their study assistance entitlements’. Further, over one quarter of respondents indicated that ‘open conversations with their manager and team about the value they could bring to the team and organisation’, ‘clear communication regarding study assistance entitlements’ and ‘support from colleagues’ would be forms of support that they would find useful.

Several respondents (4.14%, n=7) also selected an ‘other’ option, with 4 (57.14%) of these participants indicating that no other forms of ESHE would be useful, or that they had no expectation of any further support, with 1 respondent indicating permanent/ongoing work, as opposed to contract work, would be a useful form of employer support, and 1 respondent indicating that they had felt the need to ‘hide’ their higher education study from their employer due to feeling ‘pressure to be more
available to my employer in order to keep my job’. In a similar vein, the final respondent in this category indicated that they were nervous about open discussions regarding work and study with their manager and team because of how they would be perceived. They were concerned that they would be viewed as not ‘fully dedicated to the job’ and too ambitious and that this would be perceived not as a strength, but rather as a weakness, in their organisation.

Table 6.9: Preferred Forms of ESHE Indicated by Employee-students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of support</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An appropriate amount of study leave / time off to study</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>68.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course fee reimbursement / money towards course fees</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>44.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open discussions with my manager and team regarding my study and work commitments</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>40.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent opportunities to apply the skills and knowledge learnt in my studies to my current job role</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>36.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genuine interest and support from my direct manager regarding my studies</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>36.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear organisational policies regarding study assistance entitlements</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>35.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open discussion with my manager and team regarding how I might be able to use my studies to add value to the team / organisation</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>30.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear communication from my direct manager / supervisor regarding what and how much study assistance I am entitled to</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>27.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from my colleagues / teammates regarding my studies</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>25.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A reduction in the amount of workplace training that I have to do whilst engaged in higher education studies</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents in the employee-student and workplace manager/HR professional cohort were then asked an additional two questions relating to the improvement of
ESHE, with each cohort asked a slightly different variation of the question. Employee-students were asked to indicate whether they felt that their direct manager could do more to support them with their higher education studies. Interestingly, whilst just over one third (33.72%, n= 58) of employee-students indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘overall, I feel that my direct manager could do more to support me with my higher education studies’, well over two-thirds (72.72%, n = 8) of those in the manager/HR professional cohort agreed with the statement ‘overall, I feel that managers in our organisation could do more to support employees with their higher education studies’.

Whilst this finding must be interpreted with a high degree of caution given the substantial difference in cohort response frequencies (n=172 and n=8 for employee-students and managers/HR professionals, respectively), for this question, it is a finding worthy of further investigation. Further, there was minimal variation between cohorts with respect to those who indicated that they were ‘unsure’ as to whether or not they agreed or disagreed with the abovementioned statement (23.84% for employee students and 18.18% for managers/HR professionals, respectively). Overall, however, a sizeable portion of employee-students, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the above statement (38.96%, n = 67) in contrast to 9.09% (n=1) of managers/HR professionals disagreeing, but not strongly, with the statement.

A variant of this question relating to whether the two cohorts felt that their employer/company could do more to support employees undertaking higher education, was asked. Whereas there was little variation in the manager/HR professional cohort responses for both variants; that is, those relating to manager/supervisor support and employer support, the distribution of employee-student responses relating to whether their employer could do more to support them, as contrasted with whether their manager/supervisor could do more to support them, was more distinct. That is, for employee-students, there was a slight preference towards disagreement with the statement that ‘my direct manager/supervisor could do more to support me with my higher education studies’ (38.95% disagreement versus 33.72% agreement), whereas when asked the question
‘overall, I feel that my employer/company could do more to support me with my higher education studies’, just under half of the employee-student respondents actually agreed with this statement (46.2%, n=79), with 18.13% (n=31) indicating that they were uncertain and 33% (n=57) indicating that they disagreed with the statement.

This is an interesting finding as it may indicate that employee-students feel that support should come from the top-down with overall responsibility for support coming from senior leaders in addition to their own direct manager. Given that senior leaders are the visible representatives of an organisation and are likely to be responsible for forming the organisational culture, including the commitment to staff learning and development, this may have implications for employee loyalty and engagement. Accordingly, in phase three of the data collection and analysis, questions around manager and organisational support were explored in further detail.

6.5.3 Learning Transfer and Return on Investment

Respondents in the employee-student cohort were asked to indicate how often their direct managers gave them opportunities to apply/transfer the knowledge/skills that they were learning in their higher education course to their current job role. Likewise, respondents in the manager/HR professional cohort were asked to indicate how often they provided their employees with opportunities to apply/transfer the knowledge/skills that they were learning in their higher education course to their current job role. The distribution of responses was very different across the cohorts, however, again this finding should be interpreted with caution as there were 172 respondents in the employee-student cohort and only 10 in the manager/HR professional cohort.

Specifically, just under half (43.02%, n=74) of the employee-student respondents indicated that their manager either ‘almost never’ or ‘only occasionally’ provided them with opportunities to apply/transfer knowledge and skills from higher education (28.49%, n=49 and 14.53%, n=25, respectively). Whereas, only 10% (n=1) of respondents in the manager/HR professional cohort indicated that they
‘only occasionally’ provide opportunities and no respondent indicated that they ‘almost never’ provide the opportunities. Rather, 40% (n=4) of these respondents indicated that they ‘sometimes’ provide opportunities to their staff, 40% (n=4) indicated that they ‘frequently’ provide opportunities and 10% (n=1) for an unspecified reason indicated that they thought this question was ‘not applicable’. Again, this is in stark contrast to the employee-students of whom 20.93% (n=36) indicated that their manager ‘sometimes’ provides opportunities with only 11.63% (n=20) indicating that they ‘frequently’ or almost always (9.88%, n = 17) do so. Lastly, 14.53% (n=25) of employee-student respondents indicated that this question was not applicable, however, unfortunately due to the survey design, respondents were not provided with the opportunity to indicate why they thought that this was the case. Indeed, this is considered a lesson learned for the researcher as this would have likely yielded further open-ended written data of interest.

Nevertheless, whilst the comparison between cohorts must be approached cautiously due to the large difference in sample size, the robust employee-student response (n= 172) to this question certainly indicates that managers may be providing opportunities for learning transfer inconsistently across organisations. They may also be underestimating the importance of both their role as facilitators of learning and the role of their organisation more generally, in supporting employee-students in higher education. A further survey question directed only at the respondents in the manager/HR professional cohort asked whether their organisation measured return on investment (ROI) or the business value of their current study assistance programs and found initial support for the likelihood that managers either ‘do not’ measure ROI (40%, n=2), are ‘unsure’ whether they do (40%, n=2), or believe that measuring ROI for study assistance is in some way ‘not applicable’ (20%, n=1). Certainty, these findings indicate a need to explore both higher education-to-workplace learning transfer and ESHE ROI in practice. To that end, both of these concerns were investigated further as part of phase three of the data collection and analysis.
6.5.4 Learner Responsibility

Both employee-students and those in the manager/HR professional cohort were asked to indicate who they felt was responsible for supporting individuals undertaking higher education / university studies alongside paid work. They were encouraged to tick all options that they felt applied. Interestingly, for the employee-student cohort, ‘the individual’ was the most frequently selected response (86.63%, n=149) whereas for the manager/HR professional cohort, ‘the individual’s direct manager/supervisor’ was the most frequently selected (54.55%, n =6) response. Further, after ‘the individual’, the most frequently selected employee-student responses were ‘university lecturers/teachers’ (32.56%, n=56), followed by ‘university support staff/administrators’ (26.74%, n=46) and the ‘individuals’ employer’ (26.16%, n=45). This is in contrast to manager/HR professional respondents, who ranked the ‘individual’s employer’ (45.45%, n=5) as the second most responsible, followed by ‘the [individual] employee’ (36.36%, n=4), the government (36.36%, n=4) and the individual’s family and/or social networks (36.36%, n=4), which were equally matched in terms of their frequency.

Whilst the variation across the two cohorts could be in part explained by the very low response rate for the manager/HR professional cohort, these findings may also reflect employee-students taking a large degree of ownership over their higher education and manager/HR professional’s growing recognition (throughout doing the survey) that perhaps they have a greater role to play in providing ESHE than they had previously considered. However, these are mere postulations that would need to be interrogated in more detail. To that end, asking participants where and who they got their support from was a key question that was explored in phase 3 of the data collection and analysis.

6.5.5 Equity

Respondents from both cohorts were asked to indicate whether or not they felt that study assistance was provided fairly, across the board, at their workplaces. Interestingly, results were mixed and almost evenly split across both cohorts. For respondents in the manager/HR professional cohort, just over one third of
respondents (36.36%, n=4) indicated that they felt it was fairly provided and the same amount of respondents (36.36%, n=4) indicated that they felt it was *not* fairly provided. A further 27.27% (n=3) were unsure whether or not it was provided fairly. For the employee-student cohort, the majority of respondents (47.37%, n=81) indicated that they were unsure whether it was fairly provided, with just under a third (30.41%, n=52) indicating that they thought it was fairly provided and just over a quarter (22.22%, n=38) indicating that they *did not* think it was fairly provided. It is therefore difficult to draw any conclusions from these findings, especially as participants were not asked to provide a written response justifying their forced-choice selection, however, in phase three of the data collection and analysis, this question was probed in more detail during the organisational interviews.

### 6.5.6 Barriers and Suggestions for Improvement

Both cohorts were asked to indicate whether there were any comments that they wanted to add regarding either how higher education was supported in their organisation (posed to managers/HR professionals only), or about any barriers to professional learning that they had experienced or suggestions for how professional learning, including *higher education*, could be better supported (directed to employee-student cohort only). Whilst there were no responses from the manager/HR professional cohort, the employee-student cohort yielded a large number of written responses (n=47) ranging from one word to 244 word comments.

As mentioned at the commencement of this chapter, this data, along with the rest of the written survey data, was analysed as part of the broader CGT analysis. Interestingly, the written survey data primarily added further support for the pre-existing codes generated in phase one, as opposed to generating many new codes. Three new codes did emerge, however. They were: ‘employer awareness of work involved in doing higher education’, ‘getting in – vicious circle’ and ‘government assumptions around finance and higher education’.

The first code related to the belief that employers were not fully aware of the time and work involved in undertaking higher education, the second code related to a
sense of frustration that was felt when students believed that they needed professional experience to obtain a suitable position of employment but that it was hard to gain an appropriate position without professional experience. As one participant explained, because of this ‘vicious circle’, ‘I feel that there is a strong divide between students and professionals’. The last code related to the feeling that the Australian government is out of touch with the financial realities and responsibilities of undertaking higher education, with several respondents indicating that the government does not make higher education accessible and either does not understand the financial difficulties that students face juggling work and study or does not care to understand them. Some examples of reported frustrations with government support for higher education are illustrated in the excerpts below.

Example 1.

As I am in a defacto relationship and she earns too much according to the government I am not entitled to study assistance payments (ausstudy). This makes it even harder to balance work and Uni as I have to work more to maintain my rent/electricity etc

Example 2.

Refusal from Centrelink to provide support for Doctoral students (and I believe Masters students as well?) combined with Doctoral students being denied access to concession transport has led to more stress then anything to do with work.

Example 3.

Support offered for distance learning. Monetary assistance is generally not offered to those undergoing correspondence training. The government should make any [support] more accessible and easy to understand.

Further, issues with gaining reliable internet access in regional and remote areas was listed as another barrier to higher education:
Example 4.

Coming from the perspective of someone who came from a rural remote regional area. The biggest challenge is getting suitable internet access to do effective research and being able to save money to make the necessary trips back to Uni for workshops etc.
6.6 Reflection in and on Action: Confounding Category Development

In this section, I will provide a brief overview of my key reflections as they arose in phase two of the data collection and analysis.

The first impetus that facilitated my initial reflections in phase two occurred shortly after I had distributed the online survey. I received feedback from several participants indicating that their specific course of study was not listed in the forced-choice options provided. Rather than select the closest discipline, there were a number of respondents that contacted me directly requesting that I add in their specific program of study as they felt that it was unique and too specialist to be included in what I had thought was a very comprehensive list of disciplines to choose from.

For example, one participant was unable to find ‘veterinary science’ as an option to select despite ‘applied sciences’ being an available category. Initially, I added ‘vet science’ into the survey as a response option as per his/her request thinking perhaps this was a one-off occurrence or perhaps out of lack of confidence in my ability to have comprehensively covered off on the range of disciplines (or perhaps an intrinsic need to be as obliging as possible to those that were giving their time to complete the survey). However, after receiving a number of further emails requesting specific variants of broader disciplines, I decided that rather than change the existing list, it would be better if I urged participants to select ‘the closest discipline’ from the list of available options. This decision was made extemporaneously as I was concerned about the time involved in constantly updating the demographic categories to suit every possible disciplinary specialisation.
However, I also made this decision after reflecting on the possible reasons why some respondents were so punctilious. I determined that perhaps this desire for acute disciplinary accuracy was tied more to the notion of identity and selfhood; perhaps too the need to highlight one’s uniqueness, as opposed to some sort of objective and benevolent desire to ensure that I had fastidiously covered off on an infinite number of disciplinary specialisations to represent the full spectrum of academic subjects that could ever possibly be available and undertaken. Indeed, the importance of identity, whilst having emerged as a backgrounded notion in the previous data collection and analysis phase, became more animated and complex as the written survey responses flowed in. That is, with the addition of practice.

Further, I was surprised not only by the sheer number of employee-students that took part in the survey and were willing to add short written comments alongside the forced-choice responses, but even more so, with the earnest and fervent nature in which participants shared detailed responses to the optional open-ended questions relating to barriers and suggestions for improvement. To me, this reinforced the notion that this was a topic which many employee-students felt strongly invested in and wanted to discuss, and for a reasonable proportion of them, reform.

However, I was surprised in the sheer diversity of experiences, opinions and beliefs that were candidly shared. There were some responses that were as I expected; they mirrored my own experiences and the confirmatory themes that emerged throughout the previous phase of policy analysis. Although, equally, there were responses that surprised and shocked me. In this way, as I reflected in action, I was forced to confront the inherent multiplicity of viewpoints, the limitations of my own worldview and consider the possibility that no clear patterns or codes would emerge, let alone a coherent developing grounded-theoretical model.
After the survey was closed and I began to code the written survey data, I realised that whilst presenting a challenge to my preconceived ideas as a researcher, the diversity and conceptual chaos that characterised my first impression of the survey data, was actually a vital step in the research process. It was an opportunity to challenge my preconceptions as a novice researcher and to problematise the seemingly ‘stable’ codes and categories which emerged in phase one of data collection and analysis. Reflecting at this point in time, I noted that whilst the survey data yielded three fresh codes, it primarily provided support for the large quantity of existing codes already gathered during the policy analysis.

However, it did not provide ‘support’ for them in the way I had anticipated. Rather, what seemed to be emerging was additional support for the existing codes characterised initially by an almost Derridean sense of binary opposition. For example, ‘low employee-manager trust’ in policy was sometimes ‘high employee-manager trust’ in practice. But then even more complexly it became ‘high employee-manager trust’ under certain conditions, in certain situations at certain points in time. Indeed, the importance of space and time to relational interaction in context, began to challenge and simultaneously develop my initial GT category formation.

Another example of this code strengthening yet simultaneous diversification, relates to the development of the code ‘individual learner responsibility’. This theme was originally coded as a response to the ways in which organisational study assistance policies tended to expect employees to do all of the footwork in terms of determining their study assistance entitlements by navigating red tape and decoding HR jargon, in addition to ‘proving’ their studies through the perpetual provision of enrolment ‘evidence’ etc. Whereas, during the pre-survey reflection, I had considered this code as another manifestation of the growing responsibility placed on individuals for ensuring their own lifelong learning and employability, this belief was challenged by the diversity of views presented by the survey respondents. It emerged that learner responsibility was actually internalised or externalised in unique ways by different survey respondents. It manifested in a way that was much more contested and complicated, in practice:
Excerpt 1

I think it's important to appreciate the access to education we have in Australia, and also to appreciate that self education [sic] expenses are all tax deductible. Sure I could say it would be nice if unit convenors personally tutored me around my work hours, or that work should give me a free Ferrari so I can get from the office to campus faster, however I think it's important to recognise the opportunity we have in HECS/HELP and the ability to offset expenses against income. We are heavily incentivised to pursue education, that's for sure.

Excerpt 2

I think there is a general disregard in the Australian workplace for individual's right to an education and little support for those who choose to undertake it. I never graduated from high school. I had little opportunities when I entered the workforce being emancipated from my parents at 15 years of age. The way the Australian workplace is headed – many young people are on casual contracts with little work rights or opportunities to advance. I've always tried to put my studies first because I know it is the only way out of a cycle of poverty I am a part of - however with more debt than income and no guarantee of a job tomorrow, I have to prioritise work to a degree in order to keep living. If my employer needs me to be at work at short notice, and I also have an assignment due, I have to go to work.
These excerpts challenged me to think more openly about how different individuals experienced and gave meaning to individual responsibility and higher learning. How did the excerpts represent the respondents’ internalisation of neoliberal values relating to individual responsibility and learning? In what ways did they reflect their upbringing and socioeconomic status? More particularly, how might the precarious nature of modern external and internal labour markets be affecting the employee-student in unique ways? Are they more vulnerable to this rapid change and destabilisation? What about their lived experiences and personality? It was frustrating that due to the research design, I could not ask them more probing questions. I was tempted to assume that the first excerpt represented either someone used to a comfortable middle class existence devoid of struggle or an extreme and oblivious internalisation of social and political lifelong learning ideology, but how could I be sure? Simply, without further investigation, I couldn’t.

Thus, it was the strengthening and contemporaneous challenging of the initial category formation that provided me with a much more open mindset as I entered phase three of the data collection and analysis. The conflicting viewpoints that emerged through an initial consideration of practice had prompted me to revise my interview questions to ensure that they were simplified and made more open-ended. I realised that the codes which emerge in grounded theory are not merely static puzzle pieces. Rather, they are complex and constantly shifting microsystems which are experienced and perceived differently across time, space and consciousness. To make any sense of them, I needed to explore them in much more depth through a probing and unguarded dialogue. In this way, I hoped that phase three would provide the necessary ingredient that would facilitate more conceptual coalescence and help me to locate more meaningful patterns in the data.
6.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, descriptive statistics and a selection of written data generated from the online survey, have been presented. This data was collected as part of phase 2 of the data collection and analysis which involved the distribution of an online survey to two key stakeholder cohorts: employee-students and managers/HR professionals. Specifically, data relating to the experiences and assumptions of employee-students and manager/HR professionals regarding the undertaking of higher education and concurrent paid work, as well as employee-student and manager/HR professional views of employer-supported higher education (ESHE) provisions, and their engagement with these provisions, have been presented and discussed. Key comparisons have also been made between the two chief cohorts that responded to the survey, which has yielded some interesting preliminary findings and informed the subsequent phase (phase three) of data collection and analysis. Response rates and participant demographics have also been reported.

Lastly, to situate myself as the researcher within this phase of the data collection and analysis, I have provided a reflection section on how my personal beliefs developed throughout and after the data collection and analysis, as I tried to make sense of the initial addition of practice to my existing policy-based findings.
Chapter 7. Agitating Practice: Cross-site Interview and Focus Group Findings

7.1 Introduction

This is the first of two combined data presentation and discussion chapters. In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings from the third phase of data collection and analysis: the cross-site in-depth interviews and management focus group, drawing on relevant findings from earlier phases of analysis, as part of the overall grounded theory approach.

Firstly, I have provided a brief reflection section on how category emergence informed my growing understanding of the topic. The key categories are then presented as conceptual clusters drawing on relevant vignettes from the interviews and focus group (and where relevant to the discussion, supplemented with survey and/or policy findings). As noted by Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 70), in grounded theory not all categories are considered ‘equally relevant’, and thus the ‘depth of inquiry into each one should not be the same’. Thus, in this chapter, only key categories and their relations are presented and discussed as they emerged through constant comparison of the data and my reflection in and on it. Briefly, and by way of clarification, a category in grounded theory is defined as ‘a conceptual element of the [nascent] theory’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.36).

These findings are discussed in relation to relevant theory including Bourdieu’s notions of habitus, doxa, illusio, field and capital, Foucault’s regimes of truth, power-knowledge and discourse links, Giddens’s work on self-identity, and a broader selection of adult learning literature.

In Chapter 8, I then explain how the core category (‘risk and uncertainty’) emerged and how the conceptual relations between the core and key categories coalesced to inform the nascent model of ESHE. It should also be highlighted that the present chapter primarily presents and discusses categories that were common across all organisations studied, except where otherwise stated. However, in the following
chapter, I address how these categories emerged in different ways and to differing extents within the individual organisations as a result of their unique constitutions; a finding which ultimately provided support for the reliability of the conceptual model.

7.2 A Reflective Precursor: Axial Coding as a Conceptual Agitator

Initially, the interviews and focus-group yielded an additional 116 codes. Through axial coding, however, many of these codes were later subsumed within key categories that had already emerged during earlier phases of analysis. Interestingly, prior to phase 3 data collection and analysis, the key categories emerged in contradictory, shifting and dichotomous ways. That is, after phase 2, I felt that the categories were fairly comprehensive in terms of breadth but still lacked the conceptual and contextual depth needed to provide a meaningful description of what was really going on in ESHE policy and practice without projecting my own lived experience of engaging in concurrent study and work on the findings.

The word ‘agitation’ is therefore used in this chapter within the guiding metaphor of an emulsion to represent how without the addition of a further element (the adding of both new codes and the challenging of existing ones through constant comparison across different types of data from different sources), the findings from phase 1 and phase 2 of data collection and analysis would have remained conceptually separated. They would not have coalesced to provide a meaningful understanding of ESHE policy and practice. Whereas, with the addition of in-depth interview data collected across a range of individuals, stakeholder groups and organisations, and critical reflection upon the inherent inconsistencies and contestations within this data (with reference to the previously collected data), a meaningful understanding of the phenomena emerged. Indeed, this deliberate challenging of codes is a hallmark of grounded theory (Glaser, 1965, 1978; Kolb, 2012) and achieving trustworthiness in qualitative research generally (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
7.3 Assumptions and Expectations as Shared and Unshared in Practice

7.3.1 Introduction

There were a number of assumptions and expectations that were shared across individuals and the organisational sites. However, these shared beliefs were often implicit, or not openly communicated (unshared), in practice. The key categories presented in this section thus reflect two broad conceptual clusters relating to assumptions and expectations:

- Private versus public benefits of higher education: a false dichotomy
- Taking the initiative: self-direction, knowledge sharing and peer support

7.3.2 Private Versus Public Benefits of Higher Education: A False Dichotomy

As discussed in Chapter 2, the extent to which higher education represents and/or should represent a public or private undertaking and a professional and/or personal need has been much debated (Giroux, 2011; Marginson, 2007, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). Likewise, the role of individual agency in the public versus private spheres is much contested (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991; 2004, 2011, 2015). The problem with trying to determine the public versus private benefits of higher education, however, is that unlike other purely economic affordances, higher education is inherently social and contingent in nature (Marginson, 2007). Moreover, exactly what is defined as public and private is contested (Gouthro, 2009; Marginson, 2007). It has thus been argued that the private/public divide in higher education is not representative of a ‘zero sum’ game; rather the public and private benefits of higher education are likely to be co-constitutive (Gouthro, 2009; Marginson, 2007).

In line with Marginson (2007), support was found for the contention that the traditional distinction between state-owned and non-market (public) and privately-owned market (private) products oversimplifies the creation and movement of social
and cultural goods, such as higher education, across different social spaces. The findings indicated that the outcomes of higher education were perceived as both public and private or had characteristics of both public and private goods, and such outcomes were not fixed but rather unavoidably in flux (Marginson, 2007). In practice, higher education was largely conceptualised by individuals not in terms of its role in facilitating neat, binary categorisations of benefits, such as public versus private or professional versus personal. Instead, perceptions of its value were manifested in Bauman’s (2000, p. 41) notion of ‘agora - the site of meeting, debate and negotiation between the individual and the common, private and public good’.

Specifically, in line with Billett’s (2001, p. 6) contention that ‘relations between ontogenies and social practice shape individuals engagement in the social practice of the workplace’, the findings indicated that beliefs relating to the public-private value of higher education emerged with reference to how they collided with various assumptions relating to current accountabilities (both work and non-work related), personal ideological agendas, and situational resources and constraints (including work and non-work relationships), as these evolved over time and space. Furthermore, as the following excerpts demonstrate, the expression of these perceptions varied greatly. It should be noted that all participants have been allocated pseudonyms in this chapter.

For example, at times, some participants explicitly and directly expressed an understanding of the professional and private benefits of undertaking higher education as influencing their decision to enrol in a higher education course alongside their paid employment:

Daniel: The way that I came to do it, it’s kind of like, it’s sort of a professional and personal mix

Robert: So it was yeah it was something I was passionate about, I thought was good for the profession…
Whereas for others, and at other times, the personal-professional division was less distinctly stated. For Stephanie, a masters by research program was chosen as she was motivated not only by obtaining the ‘credibility’ associated with achieving a postgraduate higher education credential and the assumption that the qualification would stand her ‘in good stead to get better jobs’, but because she felt strongly about not ‘ticking boxes’, an approach she felt was increasingly associated with undertaking coursework-only master’s programs. She mentioned that she had a strong internal motivation to continuously be learning something new: ‘I kind of feel like when I’m not studying I’m going stagnant’ and that the desire not to ‘tick boxes’ was because she genuinely wanted to improve her knowledge and skills as a personal goal, but also so that she could put these directly into practice:

Stephanie: I’m doing my Masters via research and I’m doing my research foundation topic, so I’m doing that on the teaching of non-technical skills to postgrad students. So, I’ve picked a topic that is very applicable to the role I’m in because I found that they lack that ability to escalate appropriately and communicate and I think that they’re the skills that we need to be teaching the postgrads as much as technical skills. So I’ve found all of the research of the lit review and things interesting and I think that is able to be translated to practice.

Stephanie held a multifaceted set of assumptions and expectations relating to higher education – both current and future, personal and professional. Given her role as a nurse educator working in the public healthcare sector, the extent to which her work could be viewed as public versus private, or professional versus personal represents a less useful form of distinction than accepting that for Stephanie, her involvement in higher education was firmly rooted in, yet transcended, these domains. Drawing on Houle (1961), her motivation for learning emerged not as ‘goal-oriented’, ‘activity-oriented’ or ‘learning-oriented’, but rather as concurrently oriented toward all three domains in different ways and to differing extents over time. She wanted to achieve a credential (goal), improve her teaching interactions with colleagues
(activity) and was genuinely motivated to avoid the mental ‘stagnation’ from not continuing to develop her mind (learning).

For others, the impetus to enrol in higher education began with an unambiguously personal set of motivations and assumptions. For example, for Vicky, her initial impetus to enrol in higher education stemmed from a strong personal desire to achieve a lifelong goal of finishing a university degree (‘or finish something’), the right ‘timing’ precipitated by a marital breakdown, and her children reaching an age where she felt that she could spend time on developing herself. She chose to study community development – an area that she was currently working in, wanted to continue working in and was very passionate about:

Vicky: …and then what happened was, I fell pregnant with our first child, and for 10 years I was at home looking after the children. And in those 10 years, I always did some voluntary work and stuff, but I always wanted to go back to Uni, and finish my degree, or finish something. And I didn’t know, and at the time I was married, and my husband at the time said to me no, I don’t want you to return to study because you need to stay home and look after the kids, and I’ll support you and the kids. And I always had this thing at the back of my mind – my God, I really want to go back. I think, staying at home and looking after kids is beautiful, and I loved that time that I was at home, however, I needed more. And so, that was it. And then afterwards, our marriage had split up, and then the first thing I did was thought right, this is my opportunity to enrol at a Uni for a course.

Yet despite the very personal nature of Vicky’s initial impetus for undertaking higher education, she was also motivated by the perceived requirements of the modern labour market. Specifically, her perception was that an undergraduate degree was no longer viewed as a bonus but rather an essential requirement for gaining future employment:
Vicky: I think in the near future the minimum requirement for most positions would need to be a degree. If anything now, they sort of want a double degree, yeah, or postgrad.

Like Stephanie, Vicky felt that it was important to obtain a degree to progress in her career - not just for the professional credential and for the personal satisfaction, but also so that she could actively apply the knowledge and skills from her degree to her current role in the community-focused public organisation in which she was employed:

I: …and, so in what ways do you feel that you’re transferring skills and knowledge that you’ve learnt in your course to your current job?

Vicky: Oh, in lots of ways. Lots of ways because I deal with the public and I deal with seniors, lots of things like for instance we’ve now incorporated once a month we’re having a community lunch. And what that community lunch is, is that we concentrate on a particular country of the world, and we’re going to cook food for that country…and that is because of my studies in community development. It’s all about different nationalities and accepting people for who they are and things like that. And also the indigenous, that’s something that I’m really strong about at work that we’ve even got a flag outside - an indigenous flag that we have up as well. So it’s all about that sort of thing, yep.

I: So you feel like it’s…even though it might be theoretical, some of the knowledge you’re using at university, you feel like it’s got a practical…

Vicky: Oh definitely, definitely. Yes.

Similarly, for Anastasia, the decision to undertake higher education was initially driven by a desire for personal fulfilment precipitated by the growing up of her
teenage children, but equally by the perception that she needed to stay up to date professionally and that higher education would provide a means through which to achieve this:

Anastasia: …so the timing wasn’t right for me. Whereas now that I’m looking more, it’s more about me and my career and not so much my kids, that having the qualification will update my skills and knowledge to today’s technology and today’s, today’s sort of systems and processes.

As she continued to study, the professional benefits emerged more strongly as she gained confidence in her ability to write professional documents. This comprised a large part of her employment role in the public sector:

Anastasia: …which has been really good because it’s taught me how to think differently when I’m writing. So as I’m currently writing policy and procedures and things that’s assisted me in getting terminology right and getting direct to the point.

Likewise, for other participants, professional interests as linked to public agendas were the driving impetus for undertaking higher education. Personal motivations emerged as less overtly stated but nonetheless important motivators. Certainly, in the following excerpts for Robert, a recently completed doctoral research student and senior manager working in public healthcare, the benefits of his research studies were uncontestably assumed to be both professional and public in nature:

Robert: Probably I initiated it [a doctoral degree] because an area of interest arose quite some time ago around pharmacists extending their scope of practice of prescribing. And, so I was always interested in that and I had been to the UK and had seen that in practice. And I had also, I think, written a little bit about it, and did something at a conference about it and so my interest was…and then I spoke to someone from Monash and they said oh well you’re doing the work why don’t you do the, do a
PhD…and I think it’s probably brought, a bit of, sort of recognition to [the town] around, we’re sort of the experts on [the topic] in Australia.

Further, in line with Barnacle and Usher’s (2003) research on part-time research candidates in full-time work, the findings indicated that the skills gained from Robert’s doctoral research were actively informing his future research projects. These projects formed a large component of his professional role and offered not only professional benefits but also highly practical advantages for the general public. However, despite these benefits, Robert’s motivation to undertake his doctoral degree was also extremely personal, demonstrated by his altruistic desire to contribute to his profession by helping the next generation. That is, his passion for research and mentoring junior colleagues was both necessarily professional and personal:

Robert: …and it was something I was quite passionate about and it was new to Australia and I think we could see that the UK had certainly moved ahead at that stage. So, it was something I was passionate about, I thought was good for the profession, it was good for young people.

Indeed, even if they did not fully understand the motivation underlying employees’ higher education studies, managers were usually aware of the multitude of public and private, professional and personal benefits that their involvement in higher education facilitated:

Linda: I’m just thinking of another one [employee-student]. Oh, we’ve got women’s health [employee-student] who’s doing subjects in international paediatrics. So, I’m just thinking there’s some refugee and international health basically. And she’s actually been involved in funding herself to go over to Vietnam every second year to work for a month, as a volunteer in that international health area, as paediatrics.
Another widely cited assumption associated with the undertaking of higher education that emerged across all organisational sites studied, was that it would facilitate the development of enhanced and efficacious critical thinking skills. Sometimes these skills were discussed specifically with reference to how they benefited the organisation in a professional, and in the case of the public sector organisations, directly public sense:

Mary: Higher education does benefit the organisation because you’ve got people who are going to analyse and critically evaluate things.

Jonathan: Having the accrued knowledge and understanding of research, understanding data, so that I can… I’m better adapted at, you know, critically analysing other articles and looking at best practice, is important.

Linda: …we don’t do enough research in this department yet, and that’s our big push, to try and get that happening. And it’s those who have been involved in postgrad studies who’ve, you know, read more and more articles and had to be really critical in reading their articles that are more likely to move towards research.

However, critical thinking skills were also viewed in ways that were less indicative of the conferral of professional or private, public or personal classifications, but rather in terms of the holistic development of the self, the global changing of mindset, or a renewed approach to seeing the world and operating within it:

Vicky: Oh look, it’s really changed my outlook on life, the way I see things. I’m critical about what I hear on telly and the media and I’m critical when I hear politicians talk.

Sarah: I think it’s the ability to critically think through certain situations and issues, I don't think that a lot of the stuff that I learn from a textbook,
that I retain years going forward, it’s more about how I learn to approach things, and then, have confidence to sort of go into situations, and know I can find answers for things.

Tamara: …but I think some of the stuff is just purely, it’s about critical thinking and that mindset piece that changes the way you, I guess approach problems and as well as the way you might I guess interact often with senior staff and managers.

In sum, as the preceding vignettes indicate, precisely how participation in higher education imbues public or private, professional or personal benefits to individuals, is a contested and complex question that rests on manifold assumptions and expectations relating to the nature of higher education and its perceived relevance to the individual at certain times and spaces in their life. Assumptions regarding its value relate to how and why different individuals seek to learn new knowledge and skills and how these motivations evolve in both personal and professional ways that present both public and private benefits over time.

It could be argued that in this research project, given that the majority of employee-students were working in the public sector, the public nature of the benefits of higher education were amplified. If we employ a more capacious definition of public and private, however, such as that recommended by Marginson (2007), then the case could be made for the benefits of higher education-facilitated learning in private enterprise. Indeed, this is plausible given that the undertaking of higher education had a significant influence on how the individual transferred their higher education-facilitated learning to their own specific job role whilst organically sharing related skills and knowledge with peers.

7.3.3 Taking the Initiative: Self-direction, Knowledge Sharing and Peer Support

Overall, both employee-students and managers assumed that if employees were undertaking higher education alongside paid work, they would be self-directed high
performers. It was assumed that they would take the initiative to apply their learning and proactively share knowledge with their peers:

Mary: …and they’re usually people who are in crucial positions that are often difficult to replace.

I: So would you say they’re the high performers? That are…

Mary: Yeah, absolutely.

Linda: First one who’s doing women’s health has moved from grade two and she didn’t have a great amount of experience in women’s health but was so keen. And was doing study already, I’d say she’s certainly high performer…next one doing the Royal Children’s, oh, is trying to do a children’s further study with Monash, definitely high achiever…we are aware that she has those…the enthusiasm, the drive, the on board runs now that she can organise herself and, you know, manage herself in a higher academic field…

Mary: …and my assumption was because of her own study and, and she did talk about this too she was able to more critically evaluate what they had actually written. So, I guess I would think that because she’s done postgraduate study, it’s quite appropriate for her to be actually supervising these students who are doing some research and she also was involved in an honours project, so we have honours students also. So, my assumption would be that if staff are currently doing postgraduate study or have completed postgraduate study, they’re going to be more appropriate supervisors for students who are doing research projects or honours projects.

Indeed, these manager assumptions and expectations were at odds with the study support policy documents studied (Chapter 5), which indicated that staff only had to be achieving a ‘satisfactory’ rating on their performance review. That is, they did
not state that to be eligible staff needed to be high performers, to consistently and proactively transfer higher education-facilitated learning to their work roles and share knowledge and skills with peers. Rather, there was an unstated, unquestioned expectation that this would be the standard of performance required *in practice*. Employee-students had thus seemingly internalised the assumption that the constant transferring of higher education-facilitated skills and knowledge to the workplace was expected:

Sarah: I’ve also built a lot of maths into some of the processes we do, and I learnt a lot from the statistics unit again. And the other side of it is probably with most units, and you would know, as a student yourself, you need to do a lot of research to find answers to things, and I think that’s a practical skill in the workplace as well.

Robert: I don’t think they give you any [learning transfer opportunities] It’s really just up to you. You’ve got to be self-driven.

Even when an employee-student had only recently enrolled in a higher education program and had yet to gain the requisite skills and knowledge to make a large difference to their workplace practice through higher education-facilitated learning transfer, they recognised the need and/or expectation to take responsibility for practising and applying these skills in their current roles, rather than waiting for an explicitly stated opportunity or instruction:

Tamara: So I think one of the things that I’m noticing is that I’m going to have to take it, I guess make an active choice, in terms of applying some of the practical stuff and yeah, I mean that’s the other side I’ve been thinking about over the last few, couple of months, I think, well if I don’t use it I’m going to lose it, and if I don’t put it into practical, into a practical space…
Matthew: At the moment, my current position doesn’t allow me to put much of what I’m learning into practice in terms of the MBA. But I’d like to change that, and I continue to you know, look for opportunities to do that…after you get the education…you feel like you can achieve more…and there’s more expectation to perform on a higher level…

Regardless of the management expectation to do so, employee-students were both eager and willing to share their new knowledge and skills with peers, as part of performing in their current employment role:

Sarah: My role at the moment is an HR analyst, so I did statistics unit last year - early last year and that was really great. There was lots of really practical Excel skills that I learnt in that, that I could not only learn and apply myself, but I’ve been passing them onto people I work with as well. So, I think we’ve kind of upped the team’s ability in that area so that’s been really good.

Daniel: I’m interested in the lectures and I talk about them with my colleagues. And a couple of my colleagues are actually really interested in it, so I feel good that I am able to transfer an amount of knowledge to my colleagues.

Likewise, employee-students’ peers in the workplace often provided substantive informal higher education learning support to employee-students. This finding reminded me of Beckett’s (2001) notion of ‘water cooler conversations’, whereby casual and chance meetings with peers enable staff to reflect on their educational experiences providing opportunities to both consolidate learning and catalyse new learning.

Anastasia: Having work colleagues to bounce off, like if it’s something that, you know, I’m trying to analyse something and how to present it, just to get different views.
Sarah: …having a whole network of people around me, like when I had issues with the finance stuff, I could go and talk to the guys in finance and they would explain something in real terms, that was kind of away from the textbook, and I think being off campus, that is really helpful.

However, it was not just the substantive knowledge and skill sharing or chance learning opportunities that participating in higher education alongside paid work facilitated. Additionally, peers undertaking higher education alongside paid work offered each other a strong source of more general emotional support, reassurance and camaraderie:

Tamara: So there’s a couple of other people who are doing their MBAs in the team and around the organisation, so that’s really good. And some of them are funded and some of them aren’t, but there’s sort of that camaraderie of, “Yeah, you’re going through it too”. You’re doing the study, you’re doing the hours, so that’s good and it can just be sort of that conversation in the lift or passing by, “How you going? What’s going on?” You’re not alone.

Stephanie: But yeah I think you’ve just got to be self-directed and I think that’s the theory of adult learning that’s on yourself to do it. One of the other nurses in ICU is doing the same subject as me this trimester so that’s been good. So it’s been a good support.

Jonathan: …there’s a lot of people studying through that support, camaraderie with the study.

In sum, the findings provided support for the notion that adults are self-directed learners (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Brookfield, 2009; Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1975). Further, the findings indicated that whilst they are ‘responsive to some external motivators (better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, and the like), the most
potent motivators [for adult learners] are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life and the like)’ (Knowles, 1990, p. 63). Moreover, by virtue of the co-constitutive link between individual agency and the social world (Billett, 2001, 2006b, 2008), these motivating factors are necessarily relational; ‘the process of generating, distributing and applying new knowledge turns out to be both social and dynamic (Boud & Garrick, 1999, p. 54)’.

However, in terms of the lived experience of undertaking higher education alongside paid employment, there appear to be a number of purported disadvantages and barriers in terms of undertaking study and work and the support (or lack of support) provided for it. Indeed, this is aligned with Tough’s (1979) contention that despite an inherent need to continue growing and developing through continuous learning and application of learning in practice, external factors often get in the way of adults’ inherent desire to learn. These intrinsic needs and external barriers emerged through a consideration of participant experiences of undertaking higher education alongside paid employment and how they engaged with the employer support afforded to them.

7.4 The Lived Experience: Mixed Feelings and Individual Differences

7.4.1 Introduction

It is acknowledged that an inherent limitation in seeking to interpret the participant’s lived experience, is that the researcher may tend to project interpretations of their own experience (Bourdieu, 1984). However, by carefully collecting and considering data as relates to participants’ lived experiences, in line with Charmaz (1990), I argue that the researcher can gain an understanding of how others interpret their worlds, provided that they constantly reflect upon their assumptions, revise their research questions and consciously avoid preconceived assumptions.
Like many of the other key categories, those related to the *lived experience* conceptual cluster, initially emerged as *loose dichotomies* and are therefore presented as two sections relating to both positive and negative lived experiences. It should be noted, however, that although positive and negative elements of the lived experience were reported by both stakeholder cohorts, like assumptions and expectations, they emerged in shared and unshared ways. Lastly, the third category presented within this section has been included as it relates specifically to how both research students and off-campus students may be systematically disadvantaged in terms of the ESHE afforded to them.

7.4.2 The Good: Self-confidence, Identity and Belonging

Undertaking higher education alongside paid employment was a lived experience characterised by changes in self-confidence and identity. Indeed, the relationship between confidence and learning has been much documented (Bloom, 1976; Cross, 1981; Dewey, 2004; Glaser, 1977). Likewise, the relationship between confidence and higher education involvement has been established (Astin, 1999; Chickering, 1969), as has the link between higher education and identity (Chickering, 1969; Michie, Glachan, & Bray, 2001).

Specifically, the findings demonstrated that by undertaking higher education *and* by applying higher education-facilitated learning to work practice, through self-directed learning transfer and knowledge sharing, participants experienced enhanced self-confidence. Some also experienced feelings of empowerment and belonging. In this way, many participants indicated that undertaking higher education had a profound influence on their identity, worldview and very sense of being. Like *critical thinking* skills, irrespective of the ‘relevance’ of discipline-specific course content, these factors emerged as important general outcomes of undertaking higher education alongside paid work. They also influenced how employee-students approached their immediate work tasks and relationships, and subsequent forms of informal workplace learning and knowledge sharing.

Whilst some participants discussed how the learning experiences associated with undertaking higher education influenced their identity directly, others expressed
how their higher education experiences had changed them in more gradual and implicit ways:

Robert: …it took you out of your comfort zone in some instances but I think that liaison with different people and sort of, the work, the challenges – sometimes you think you can’t overcome them, you’ve just got to find a way and I suppose where you start’s not always where you end up and if I was doing it again now then as I’ve said, you’d do it totally differently. So, it’s all part of the learning thing.

Anastasia: I think it’s just, you know, seeing that I can achieve. I hadn’t realised that I had the ability to write and to get the results I was getting.

Vicky: And the other thing, the underlying factor of all of this, is my confidence. I can actually talk to you or anyone about life, about anything, and not feel like my thoughts are not valued. Whereas that’s what Uni has done for me. My confidence.

Tamara: It’s about critical thinking and that mindset piece that changes the way you, I guess approach problems and as well as the way you might, I guess, interact often with senior staff and managers. I guess there’s a, there’s a confidence piece…

Given the links between power, knowledge and discourse (Fairclough, 1989; Foucault, 1980), unsurprisingly, confidence was also linked to empowerment which was related to the kinds of language or discourse associated with having undertaken either higher education generally, or a specific subject at a tertiary level. Thus, undertaking higher education alongside paid work enabled employee-students to try out an associated privileged discourse at work, and this was related to a sense of belonging or inclusion:
Tamara: …there’s value in just knowing the words and when [you] get, you know, three or four years down the track and someone uses, you know, an accounting term at me, I can at least sort of smile and nod and mostly follow the conversation.

Vicky: For instance last night, there was an event at St Bernard’s in Essendon about it’s okay to be different that…it’s all about, you know, accepting people for who they are and things like that, and the guest speakers actually used big words that I actually knew, from Uni, like neoliberalisation. Which I would not have known that if I didn’t go to uni.

For Vicky, despite mentioning that undertaking higher education was empowering and provided her with a sense of belonging, it is interesting that in the preceding excerpt she noted that this empowerment stemmed from using the very kinds of discursive techniques that may themselves generate disempowerment and exclusion. This contradictory relationship between the desire to accept people for who they are and yet simultaneously find ourselves wanting so badly to be something more than what we already are (Goffman, 1959), is firmly rooted in the complex and shifting nature of knowledge, power and discourse. As Foucault (1978, p. 101) argues,

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.

Furthermore, whilst participants were comfortable talking about how their self-confidence had increased, they tended to avoid words like empowerment or power proper, which was somewhat expected given the tendency for individuals to conceal elements of themselves that might indicate a desire to undertake higher education as a result of a desire to move forward socially by obtaining power over others (Goffman, 1959). That is, if the undertaking of higher education represents the
attainment of additional cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979), then concealing our perceivably competitive or less collegial motivations in favour of more socially innocuous and self-actualising ones, may be a means through which individuals engage ‘illusio’ or their feel for the implicit rules of the organisational game (Bourdieu, 1993). Thus, to maintain one’s employment requires the maintenance of good relations with others in the ‘field’. In the workplace this requires individuals to present themselves as team players striving foremost for the collective success of the business. By ensuring that they were perceived as being chiefly motivated by collective team and organisational goals, rather than individual power agendas, employee-students were able to maintain their position in the field.

Interestingly, however, Vicky provided a notable exception. She discussed animatedly about how higher education had imbued her with a sense of empowerment which she expressed openly and without affectation:

Vicky: I think I always had it in me, always, but I just didn’t realise and you know when I separated from my husband, I actually was really down and thought oh my god. But then I actually, within a year, I’ve actually turned it all around to say I’ve got power, I’m empowered, I can make my own decisions. And this is part of Uni too, that we can all make our own decisions. We don’t have to rely on other people to you know, to pay the bills and things like that, yeah.

Whilst it would be difficult to account for the precise reasons why Vicky was more open in sharing her experiences of becoming empowered through higher education than the other participants, the above vignettes illustrate that higher education represented not only a formative element of employee-students’ lifelong education trajectories but also a comprehensive shifting of their identity, sense of self and way of engaging with the world. Moreover, the findings tended to indicate that whilst higher education credentials provide individuals with ‘access to credit or confidence’ (Nock, 1993, p. 14), it is not merely the ‘getting of’ the credential that enables this access but also and importantly, it is the process of ‘getting it’. In this
way, as the more democratic outcomes of higher education have been pervasively subverted by neoliberal conceptualisations of lifelong learning (Bagnall, 2000; Biesta, 2006), higher education may still provide somewhat of an antidote to the ‘personal meaninglessness’ that characterises a fundamental ‘psychic problem in circumstances of late modernity’ (Giddens, 1991).

7.4.3 The Bad: Guilt, Pressure, Stress and Work-life (Im) Balance

Interviewer: So how do you maintain the work-life balance?
‘I don’t’ – Vicky

Despite offering a large number of professional and personal benefits, undertaking higher education alongside paid employment was variously described as ‘hard’ (Stephanie, Robert, Jonathan, Sarah, Tamara), ‘difficult’ (Tamara) ‘stressful’ (Robert, Sarah, Vicky) ‘tricky’ (Matthew, Jonathan), and characterised by feelings of ‘guilt’ (Stephanie, Robert, Matthew), ‘feeling isolated’ (Robert), ‘worn out’ (Robert) and adding ‘pressures’ (Sarah, Daniel). Likewise, managers described the process of managing staff undertaking higher education alongside paid work as ‘hard’ (Michael), a ‘struggle’ (Lisa) and ‘difficult’ (Lisa), generative of ‘pressure’ and ‘stress’ (Linda), and characterised by ‘mixed’ feelings (Mary) and ‘guilty’ feelings (Linda). This was a concerning finding given that guilt may affect self-identity in a deleterious and largely unconscious way (Giddens, 1991). It may undermine the more positive influences of undertaking higher education alongside paid employment on employee-student identity. Moreover, whilst participants expressed these feelings to me as an external researcher, there was also the expectation that in the workplace, this ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild, 1985) would not be publically discussed, but rather privately managed.

Managers were aware that oftentimes employee-students ‘struggled’ (Mary) and were under ‘a lot of pressure’ (Michael) to complete tertiary study alongside paid employment. However, they also felt hamstrung in their ability to provide additional time off or resources to help staff, despite all of the organisations studied purporting to be strongly committed to education and training, either as part of their publically-stated organisational culture or organisational values:
Linda: It would be great if there was cover and I would think that if the Red Organisation’s really going to support further into research and postgrad study then we’re up to the next level, which is needing backfill…to be enabling people to do that.

This disjuncture between the mission and values espoused by the organisation and what was actually provided in terms of support for higher education and research, in practice, was not lost on employee-students:

Stephanie: So I think that while it’s put out there that education is something that is supported by the organisation, there’s little funding put into it and I think that that’s something that needs to be addressed because we offer this course but I think we could do it better with offering more support to them through resources.

In terms of gender balance, employee-students of all genders reported making a large number of personal and temporal sacrifices to complete their studies. For example, in addition to taking academic leave and a proportion of annual leave to complete his doctoral studies, Robert also used up most of his long service leave:

Robert: but I took, you know, used up nearly all my long service. I took blocks so I found the PhD was very much stop start because I had about, you know, three or four sort of linked projects and you had to complete one and then go to the next. So, you had periods of quite intense activity and then there’d be a lull and you’d probably be a bit worn out…

Likewise, as a married, young father of three children, Matthew discussed how he often felt ‘guilty’ and found managing the expectation associated with raising children and helping around the house ‘tricky’, indicating that having study leave made a big difference in assuaging those feeling of guilt:
Matthew: You can go to the library - you’ve got the day off, when all of the other activities that my family is doing still continue on… I can sort of go away and sit down for an extended period of time without feeling guilty.

Similarly, Jonathan found work-life balance difficult to maintain but did not mention feeling *guilt* specifically:

Jonathan: So, when I first started the Grad Cert I guess I started at, as my wife got pregnant and then I finished it as we had a small baby. And now we’ve got a five year old so trying to balance having a family…that’s tricky.

Gender tended to have a notable influence on work-life balance only when the employee-student identified as both a female *and* a mother. As Mary indicated, one of her staff members has struggled with balancing work, study and family. She had, Mary believed, discontinued her studies as a result of the difficulty associated with balancing all these aspects of her life at the same time:

Mary: The staff member who dropped out certainly talked about juggling children and study and she… I think first enrolled about maybe three or four years ago and has, sort of put her study on hold at least twice now in that time and she works part–time so she certainly I know has really struggled in terms of the family, study and work balance.

Tamara also felt that although work-life balance was difficult, not having a family whilst working and studying provided temporal advantages:

Tamara: Yeah, that juggle’s difficult. I don’t have, you know, I don’t have a family that I’ve got to look after, anyone that I’ve got to answer to, so any of my time outside of work is up for grabs in terms of study or
what have you and that’s an active choice that I made to get sooner rather than later…but, yeah, it’s still a juggle…

Further, a respondent from the online survey indicated that there were more expectations on women to juggle treble roles of parent, employee and student:

Response 27, Q.36 Being a woman and a parent effectively means I have three jobs. I am most supported and productive when each of those sectors of my life is supportive of or makes room for the other two, when necessary. My family are great, but the wider network of parental expectations (from schools, day care, service providers other parents/social networks) fall disproportionately on mothers-as-default-parent, and don't provide as much support for women who are also undertaking higher ed./work in addition to caring duties.

Taken in conjunction with both Vicky and Anastasia’s decision to enrol in higher education only once their children had reached young adulthood and Mary’s anecdote regarding the employee that had discontinued her higher education course as a result of juggling too many responsibilities (paid work, child care and higher education), the findings indicate that for women raising families, undertaking higher education alongside paid work made study not only intractable but oftentimes entirely unachievable. As Gouthro (2009, p. 166) explains, women:

… are expected to meet the expectations of academe regardless of their domestic responsibilities, at the same time as they are expected to give priority to their relationships in the homeplace.

Coupled with the pressure of paid work and family responsibilities, it is perhaps unsurprising that the women with children in this study experienced such a high degree of difficulty in trying to continue higher education that they dropped out, waited until the children had reached adulthood or continued to struggle on feeling resentful about the burden of not just juggling trifold major responsibilities but the
societal expectation that they ought to do so without making a fuss. As Stalker (2001, p. 300) argues,

> Viewed as the stable centerpiece, women must ensure that the private sphere is unshaken by their absences. Thus, participation in educational activities requires not just motivation but an inordinate amount of preplanning, organisation, time, and energy.

Given the pervasiveness of employee-student guilt resulting from the temporal sacrifices associated with juggling higher education and employment common to all genders, it is therefore possible that the additional role of mothering intensifies this guilt which is counteracted by temporarily or permanently disengaging from higher education. This is a particularly risky undertaking in a society where higher education is seen as an important component of lifelong learning tied to neoliberal values of individualism and competition. It obscures the structural and systematic inequalities that women face in not only undertaking higher education, but in continually undertaking it (Gouthro, 2009; Müller, 2008; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010).

Moreover, employee-students not only experienced guilt resulting from the temporal sacrifices associated with undertaking higher education alongside paid employment and raising a family, but also from the temporal sacrifices associated with taking study leave as impacted upon their work colleagues. That is, despite employee-students having had study leave formally approved by their managers and being entitled to a specified number of hours or days off work, because they often felt guilty about ‘letting the team down’ (by virtue of their physical absence from work), they would often work unpaid overtime to complete additional work that they felt they had missed as a result of taking study leave. They would also try to lessen the perceived impact that their physical absence from work had on the team by minimising the travel time taken to attend on-campus classes. Undertaking this unpaid overtime and/or minimising travel time was one way in which employee-students attempted to assuage these feelings of guilt:

Daniel: [I] try to minimise the impact on the team in terms of like the time of day that I took courses that I took the subjects. And the amount of travel
time that I gave myself to get there…I could easily leave work a half an hour prior to where I, what I do, to sort of like ease the team into me leaving.

The concern is that this pervasive sense of guilt associated with undertaking higher education alongside paid employment may be tied to a sense of morality. As Giddens (1991, p. 153) explains, ‘guilt carries the connotation of moral transgression: it is anxiety deriving from a failure, or an inability, to satisfy certain forms of moral imperative in the course of a person’s conduct’.

Even though staff might have been entitled to a certain amount of study leave in the policy, in practice there were unspoken yet implicit rules around how and when that leave ought to be taken, so as to provide a favourable impression. This sometimes involved employee-students taking the bare minimum amount of study leave formally approved:

Daniel: you know… out of the four hours per week, I’m doing like two and a half right now. Which I think is pretty modest. So like if it needs to be like closer to the full four in a future semester, hopefully I will sort of like, have built up goodwill…

Indeed, I was reminded strongly of Bourdieu’s (1998, p.18) notion of ‘illusio’ here: Daniel had developed an acute understanding of and ‘feel for the game and the stakes’, the game being defined as that which was set by the parameters of the ‘field’ or governed social group (Bourdieu, 1993) in which he operated (his team and broader department). To ensure that continued positive relations with his manager and peers were maintained over the long term, in the short term, he decided that he should minimise his physical absence from the office to build up trust and provide the impression that he was more committed to his current position of paid work than to his higher education studies.

Whilst the feeling of guilt emerged more patently in the Red and Green Organisations, for participants in the Blue Organisation, employee-students still
indicated that oftentimes taking study leave simply meant that they would still have to catch up on work missed in their personal time. This meant a higher overall workload but ostensibly less guilt:

Sarah: I just worked longer hours and I fitted it all in, and I got a bit stressed about it, but had the view that it was only a short-term thing, and once the exam period was over it would be better.

Tamara: So I’m trying to keep work at work and study away. So I don’t study at lunchtime and that sort of stuff, so I try not to cloud that. I will occasionally stay back after work or come in on a weekend because it’s a good setup compared to home, but try and keep them distinct, because there’s too many balls, you know, to juggle and to be thinking about all of it.

In this way, study leave was less *negotiated* in practice than the policy discourse (Chapter 5) indicated. Further, negotiations depended not only on the decisions made by the employee-student’s manager but also the nature of the job role (e.g. shift work or non-shift work):

Stephanie: I think there’s a lot of disparity [relating to fairness in how study leave is allocated and taken] So I think I’m lucky that I can have it how I want to, but I think that’s the benefit of being a Monday to Friday worker. It also has its flip side when you end up doing longer days to make up for the fact that you’re not going to be there for a day. But I know clinically that students struggle. So the postgrads are fine - the critical care postgrads. That’s all organised that they get their 3.6 hours every week for 13 weeks, so that’s not negotiated. But, I know once you go into your Grad Dip and Masters that you have to negotiate how you get…take your hours, and they often have to take it two hours at the end of a shift or come in two hours late to a
I: So do you do a bit of unpaid overtime or …?

Stephanie: Yeah or I would do it at home like if I knew that I had some sessions to run or something like that and I hadn’t had time because my week had been cut short I’d end up doing a couple of hours at home trying to finish them off and put them together. I have tried to be better at that this trimester because I don’t think it’s sustainable. And I don’t want to get burnt out so I’ve tried to be better with it but yeah I think that you still end up doing a lot of unpaid, prep work.

Similarly, Linda, a manager in the same organisation, suggested that the nature of the role influenced how and when employee-students were able to take their study leave, with some clinical areas more readily able to support study leave than others:

Linda: And the third who’s doing women’s health was in cardiac surgery, and that was just becoming noticeable that she kept having to not be there, whereas now she’s in outpatients running the women’s health clinics and can just cross out appointment slots. So that’s particular clinical areas, it’s much easier to get that time off without feeling guilty and without the pressure of, you know, “Oh no, not more academic leave”.

Just as employee-students felt that they needed to be self-directed in terms of completing their studies and transferring higher-education facilitated learning to the workplace, managers tended to expect staff to self-manage any issues with work-life balance. As Robert summed up, in relation to the hypothetical situation of raising work-life balance issues with his manager:

Robert I think the response would be well you’ve taken it on it’s up to you if you don’t want to do it that’s fine. You know, I don’t think it’d be
any…I’m not sure… how sympathetic an approach there would be. I think the expectation is that you’d just manage.

However, this is not to say that the majority of the managers interviewed were not supportive or genuinely encouraging of their staff undertaking higher education in a general sense. Rather, they expressed that they were often themselves under extreme (and growing) time pressures and so supervising staff undertaking higher education was often viewed as an added source of pressure or stress:

I: What are your initial thoughts or feelings when an employee approaches you wanting to undertake higher education study?

Mary: Mixed. It’s one - that’s great that that persons taken that jump and they’re prepared to do that. Two is my god how will I, cover that gap? Particularly because there is no backfill and they’re usually people who are in crucial positions that are often difficult to replace.

Contrary to the policy findings which indicated that employers had a low degree of trust in employees (Chapter 5), in practice, both managers and employee-students indicated that managers had a high degree of trust in employee-students. Whilst on the surface, this could be seen as a positive element of practice, this high trust in high performers also meant that busy managers could more easily distance themselves from employee-students under the assumption that they would ‘just manage’ (Robert). They could minimise their own responsibility for overseeing study support, performing a minimal administrative-type role via the rapid signing of forms and occasional, insouciant ‘how is the study going?’ hallway conversations. This replaces taking an active role in ensuring that the employee-student was appropriately buttressed through appropriate work reallocation during study leave.

Further, it was through this climate of high trust that knowledge sharing and learning transfer was assumed to unproblematically occur as employee-students would continue to study and perform the responsibilities associated with their paid
work at a high level. As Giddens’s (1990, p. 31) argues, however, ‘trust presupposes awareness of circumstances of risk’, which considered in relation to the findings from the present study, suggests that managers and the employers they represent, are prepared to take a risk on allowing high-performing employee-students a degree of latitude in managing certain aspects of their study leave time, learning transfer and knowledge sharing. However, whilst this risk has noticeable payoffs for the organisation, it also manifests unseen corollaries such as employee-student guilt, stress and work-life imbalance which in turn may ultimately permeate employee well-being, motivation and engagement in less predictable and increasingly risky ways.

7.4.3 The Ugly: Compounding Disadvantage: Off-campus and Research Students

Just as the study support policies indicated that research and off-campus students were potentially disadvantaged in terms of the amount of study leave afforded to them. That is, they were consistently afforded substantially less study leave than their on-campus counterparts (Chapter 5), likewise, the surveys, interviews and focus group confirmed this finding in practice. Furthermore, it was revealed that those employee-students undertaking on-campus study scheduled outside working hours (i.e. evening classes) were also disadvantaged in terms of the amount of study leave provided to them. This is noteworthy given that all employee-students, irrespective of attendance mode or study mode, still needed to fulfil the same criteria to be eligible for study leave and satisfy the implicit management expectation of transferring learning and sharing knowledge in practice.

For example, despite the purported benefits of completing a research degree, Robert explained that the nature of doing research studies was different to coursework and thus the time commitments involved with research study were more sporadic in nature and difficult to manage. However, the organisational expectation was that if study was off-campus or did not require attendance at formal classes, it would be more easily managed, as the employee-student would require less time off work to study, despite having the same amount of formal learning requirements that needed to be completed:
Linda: …our manager finished her masters in some business direction at Monash, so that was more easily done and I think that had quite a bit of an online component.

Mary: And one of those staff members who did finish her masters a number of years ago…has two positions with, in [the Red Organisation] so one of her other positions more recently, I–she’s actually under my direction and I have at times, called on her in terms of her research background to assist say other staff in more service improvement type things, rather than extra study, or to actually get her to look at things related, to say research.

Sarah was completing an off-campus business course and received time off for exams but because her classes were online and after hours, the expectation was that she would not take study leave to complete course requirements such as assignments:

I: Okay, so two days off for exams. Do you get any time off to actually do the study, like, read, research?

Sarah: Not formally but I felt, if I needed it, I could probably ask for it and have it, I just haven't really needed to ask for it.

Likewise, Tamara indicated that in terms of study leave days, she had ‘always taken them for exams so far but was of the ‘understanding’ that ‘it’s not restricted to exams’. Without obtaining additional data it was difficult to tell whether employees taking time off for self-directed study such as reading, research and assignments was the exception or the norm. Certainly, the impression from Sarah and Tamara was that it was something of a last resort option in the Blue Organisation.
The notion that off-campus or online students should only take study leave time for examinations was shared across organisations, as Anastasia from the Green Organisation indicated:

I: …or do you take it for when you’ve got an, a big assignment coming up or something?

Anastasia: No.

I: You…just exams?

Anastasia: Just exams.

I: If you have to be somewhere physically?

Anastasia: Yeah, yeah. You have to provide evidence of it. If I was formally enrolled in a class, well that’s different. Where I have to provide evidence that I’m actually attending a class, but none of my online units… even the online collaboration sessions, they are in the evening. So…it’s self-guided pretty much.

Even on-campus students indicated that the focus on providing study leave exclusively for examinations, rather than for assignments or other learning activities such as research or assignment preparation, detracted from their ability to manage study and work. For example, Erica was completing her study on-campus in the evening so she did not receive study leave to attend her face-to-face classes. However, she felt that study leave would have been useful for her to attend other learning events relevant to both her course and employment role but that taking leave for these opportunities was not afforded by her organisation’s study support policy:
Erica: …I don’t have to go to classes during the day. But there’s other opportunities, like last year I was working part-time and I could take much more advantage of the [university], what it had to offer …in terms of [subject-specific] talks, or opportunities. And now I simply can’t. I just don’t have time, in the nine to five, to do anything but work. So that’s a shame.

Vicky was working for the same organisation as Erica and was receiving study leave to attend set classes because they were scheduled during the day time, but suggested the study leave could still be more expansive or applied more flexibly:

Vicky: What I would really, really love – and I know it’s not going to happen – is I would really love maybe at the end of every semester, or towards the end of a semester for us to get a day off or a day just to submit assignments and finish off work.

I: Yep. So maybe not a day off for a set exam but a day just to…

Vicky: hand in assignments. To finish off, so what would you call it, assignment leave or essay leave, yeah.

One explanation for why on-campus attendance was privileged in this way can be drawn from Foucault’s work on power, the body and surveillance. When employees were studying on-campus, they had to be physically present in a specific location at a specific time. The classroom has defined spatial and temporal boundaries. In this context, the body can thus be easily surveilled and monitored by employers. At any moment, proof of attendance can be verified by employers. Knowing this, the assumption likely made by both managers and employees is that employee-students with approval to travel to and attend face-to-face classes would attend all on campus classes to avoid the penalties that would ensue should they be caught *not* attending. Thus, ‘disciplinary power’ (Foucault, 1995) operates not only to control employee-student behaviour but to ensure that the individuals themselves are self-monitoring.
Conversely, the problem with off-campus students or research students is that the person undertaking the study is not required to attend a class at a specific place and time. Rather, they are free to study in and across undefined spatial and temporal boundaries which may be more difficult for the employer to surveil and therefore control. Because disciplinary power is mutually reinforcing (Foucault, 1995), the lack of manager surveillance means that employee-students may not self-regulate their behaviour as there are no obvious repercussions should they decide to deviate from the accepted rules associated with receiving paid time off work to study. Thus, the employer provides substantially less study leave for the off-campus student and the research student. Because regardless of the high level of trust between direct manager and employee, the business knows that the employee-student cannot be truly trusted to self-regulate the time it takes to complete their studies without appropriate surveillance.

Allocating study leave based on physical presence is problematic, however, as a) research students in Australia currently tend not to have a large number of mandatory and regularly scheduled classes to attend in person (Group of Eight, 2013), b) off-campus students (and on-campus students attending evening classes) still have to complete the same course requirements as on-campus students attending daytime classes but are not provided with the same study leave affordance as their on-campus counterparts, and c) the findings demonstrate that the majority of employee-students completing off-campus, on-campus evening and research studies tend to be high-performers, trusted by their direct managers and responsible for transferring their higher education-facilitated knowledge and skills to their roles and team without instruction. As Baranacle and Usher (2003, p. 356) argue,

> Research candidates who are already professionals should be recognised for the relationships that they embody and build between the university and industry, both during their period of enrolment and upon completion.

The assumption that study leave is not required (or is not as required) for off-campus, on-campus evening or research-based higher employees-students, means that these employee-students may be systematically disadvantaged as they receive less study leave as a vital form of employer support. This is an alarming
arrangement which may be creating cultures of mediocrity at best and systematic disadvantage at worst; an issue I revisit in more detail in Chapter 8.

7.5 Control and Decision-making: ESHE as an Axiomatic Practice

7.5.1 Introduction

In this section, I discuss the ways in which employers maintain control over higher education through decision-making practices that reinforce particular assumptions relating to employee-student motivation to undertake higher education. I also question the extent to which employee-student decisions to enrol in higher education reflect a truly agentic choice versus a socially-inculcated response to the intense social pressures of constant credentialing (Collins, 1979, 2011). Drawing on Foucault’s conceptualisation of ‘regimes of truth’, Bourdieu’s notions of ‘doxa’, ‘field’, ‘habitus’, ‘illusio’ and ‘capital’ and Giddens’s notions of self-identity, guilt and morality, I discuss the categories of credibility and career progression (protection). Specifically, I explain how they reflect the inculcation of hegemonic neoliberal discourses of lifelong learning disguised as personal ‘choice’ and how study relevance is used as a form of organisational control.

7.5.2 ‘Choosing’ Lifelong Education: Credibility and Career Progression (Protection?)

The rise of constant credentialing and credentialing inflation over past decades has placed additional pressure on the individual to undertake increasing levels of higher education, as competition within the internal and external labour markets has continued to intensify (Baker, 2011; Collins, 1979, 2011; Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015). As Billett (2010) explains, whilst lifelong learning is something that we organically do by virtue of existing as humans, lifelong education is a formal or institutionalised aspect of lifelong learning but not reducible to it. Further, involvement in higher education confers a range of both public and private benefits (Gouthro, 2009; Marginson, 2007). There is, however, a wealth of evidence to suggest that under the
present neoliberal regime, the responsibility for undertaking higher education has moved from the state to the individual (Giroux, 2004; Bagnall, 2000).

Under this regime, individuals are increasingly required to govern and fund higher education (Bagnall, 2000). Further, their engagement in it being already strongly tied to their identity (Chickering, 1969), becomes ever more tightly so, as they respond to changes in the ‘scholastic mode of production’ which result in the dominant classes of society changing the required benchmarks of educational attainment as a means of maintaining social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). As higher education credentialing has become more intense and perceivably more ‘necessary’ in the late-modern labour market (Collins, 2011), the nature of the symbolic and cultural capital afforded by engagement in it has changed. Ergo, the ‘habitus’ – our inculcation of these external social structures as they come to structure our own unconscious (Bourdieu, 1990b), duly responds by determining that higher education is more necessary for everyone. It does this whilst obscuring the notion that such necessity depends upon one’s existing levels of capital in relation to the ‘field’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979) and their sense of ‘illusio’ as they engage in it (Bourdieu, 1998) to both maintain and enhance their existing levels of capital.

Indeed, the increasing pressure on individuals to continuously undertake and manage higher education links closely to the notion of the ‘entrepreneurial self’ or the trend for increasing self-governance as individuals present themselves as marketable business propositions or personal brands (Bröckling, 2015). As Giddens (1991, p. 3) explains, this perpetual work on what has been similarly termed the ‘enterprising self’ (Rose, 1990), is a key characteristic of late modern, neoliberal societies: ‘the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made’. Moreover, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, p. 11) explain in their research on ‘choice biographies’, under the neoliberal regime, this making of the self is no longer a result of predictable, linear decision-making patterns characterised by the need to select from a narrow range of options, but rather a consequence of ‘increased freedom of choice’. As Dwyer and Wyn (2001) explain, however, despite being ultimately constrained by structural factors, this choice is nevertheless perceived as resulting from a sense of unproblematic and self-determined agency.
As demonstrated earlier in the chapter, and in line with Biesta’s research (2006, 2012), employee-students were expected to be self-directed and assume a large degree of responsibility not just for managing their higher education, work responsibilities and broader career trajectories, but also for actively consolidating this new knowledge by transferring higher-education facilitated knowledge and skills directly to their work roles. Oftentimes, however, this ‘choice’ resulted in increased workload and stress for individuals and negligible or uncertain rewards related to career progression. This therefore raises the question – how and why do employee-students choose to participate in higher education alongside paid work and to what extent is this ‘choice’ a reflection of personal agency versus an inculcation of organisational and broader societal pressures and values?

Two key categories that provided some insight into the notion of choice particularly in relation to understanding practice, were credibility and career progression (protection). As the following excerpts demonstrate, the rationale for undertaking higher education was driven in part by the desire to obtain a tradeable credential and enhanced credibility for the purposes of career progression. Overwhelmingly, however, the choice to engage in higher education was also about obtaining credibility for the purposes of career protection, or the assumption that the employee had to ‘be seen to be’ (Wendy) continually learning to simply maintain their current position of employment. Engagement in higher education was often viewed as a means through which to gradually and publically build credibility in the internal labour market (the organisation) in the present, over and above its role in affording a credential for use in the external labour market, in the future.

As Wendy, a manager that participated in the focus group explains, the position of manager did not exclude her from these pressures. Indeed, it could be argued that if anything, the public visibility associated with the seniority of her role, ensured that the sword of Damocles was placed as firmly, if not more so, over her own head:

Wendy: So I do think that there is that expectation of lifelong learning, it sort of puts people on notice a little bit. Like, you know, for someone like me, I haven’t studied for a few years now, I’ve done a couple of post-grads but I’m like, it must be time. You know, people are going
to start looking at me if I don’t do something again soon because I’ll start to lapse out of that pattern of lifelong learning. I won’t be seen to be actively engaged in my learning if I can’t sort of show that I’m doing further study.

The findings thus indicated that to move forward in one’s career à la the *traditional* notion of career progression now requires more than just undertaking a higher education qualification. Rather, multiple higher education qualifications are now required as the new *bare minimum*. For example, Stephanie, a young degree-qualified nurse who had just enrolled in a Master of Nursing by research program, explained that she felt her current postgraduate study was expected of someone in her position but that as soon as she had finished she would also need to complete a Master of Business Administration (MBA) qualification if she wanted not just to prove her worth in her current role (*career protection*) but also to position herself for future opportunities (*career progression*).

Stephanie: I kind of feel for the position I have at the moment I kind of need to have it or I should have it. But yeah also going on further career wise I think that it will be a really important foundation to have and I think there’ll be other forms of education I’ll need to do to progress within nursing to higher positions. I think there’s a lot of emphasis on finance and things like that in this day and age in healthcare and going into management positions, I think that’s the kind of education I’ll need in the future…so that’s what I’ve thought about going on to do my MBA after my Masters in Nursing…I did my Cert IV in Training and Assessment, and I’d always wanted to go on and do my Masters and with the position I have its kind of an expectation that you do go onto do your Masters.

As the above examples demonstrated, the *credibility* associated with undertaking the ‘right type’ and ‘right amount’ of higher education was often perceived as less of a requirement for *career progression* than for *career protection*. In this way, the ‘scholastic mode of production’ (Bourdieu, 1984) operated *in practice* to ensure that
postgraduate study was implicitly linked to higher levels of public credibility – both in the organisation and in the broader industry more generally:

Mary: You know the way healthcare is trending and if you look at the trends particularly overseas and in Australia, it’s important to have that higher qualification…I think it gives you more credibility.

Stephanie: Yeah I think so and in critical care there’s a lot of people who have done their Masters or are going onto do their Masters and yeah I kind of feel like it makes me more credible…

Drawing on Foucault (1980, p. 158), continuous engagement in higher education alongside paid work appeared to be operating as a kind of ‘panopticon’ whereby credibility was less an indicator of objective trustworthiness stemming from meeting a required standard of performance, than it was proof of being trustworthy by virtue of public compliance to the unstated and established rules of the modern learning organisation. As Foucault (1980, p.158) explains,

In the Panopticon each person, depending on his place, is watched by all or certain of the others. You have an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust, because there is no absolute point. The perfected form of surveillance consists in a summation of malveillance [emphasis in original].

The findings indicated that the pressure to be engaged in some form of higher education was required simply for ‘career protection’, whereas for ‘career progression’ proper, multiple and higher forms of the ‘right’ kinds of higher education (ideally at the postgraduate level combining either or both business administration and higher research qualifications) were considered the new benchmark. The need to continuously be engaged in higher education as a response to the perpetually shifting ‘scholastic mode of production’ (Bourdieu, 1984) was thus viewed as the way to progress one’s career. However, given the difficulty associated with undertaking continuous higher education in practice, feelings of employee-student guilt were unavoidable. Given that guilt is linked to morality (Giddens, 1991), the findings tend to support the notion that involvement in
continuous higher education as an exemplar of lifelong learning has become a ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1980). In this way, organisations use the notions of *lifelong learning* and *learning cultures*, as discursive mechanisms through which to maintain the status quo, whilst obscuring the manifold ways in which the relentless pursuit of higher education credentials becomes an effective form of social control (Coffield, 1999).

Therefore, ‘neo-liberal capitalism performs the dual task of using education to train workers for service sector jobs and produce life-long consumers’ (Giroux, 2004, p. 495). The inherent and natural desire or ‘choice’ to continuously learn and develop the self (Knowles, 1990; Tough, 1979), becomes subverted in much the same way that under a capitalist system the natural human proclivity to engage in labour is exploited (Marx & Engels, 1998). Drawing on Foucault (1980, 1995), the findings indicate that power and knowledge mutually reinforce each other in such a way that individuals are not patently forced to engage in continuous higher education. Rather, as this undertaking becomes tied to a social *norm*, they will organically assume responsibility of doing so to conform to the dominant mode. It is not so much the achievement of credentials that continuous higher education facilitates, but rather the being ‘seen to be’ (Wendy) continuously undertaking some form of higher education alongside paid work that becomes the new orthodoxy. This inculcation of social norms results in the individual self-regulating their own behaviour (Foucault, 1978), which allows organisations to maintain control over employee-students through a kind of ‘controlled-decontrol’ (du Gay, 1996, p. 141), sustained through the ‘misrecognition’ of study relevance as a sustaining element of practice (Bourdieu, 1984).

### 7.5.3 Study Relevance as ‘Doxa’: The Case for a More Capacious Classification Scheme

As shown in Chapter 5, ‘study relevance’ emerged as a key category early in the analysis. The organisational policy documents generally indicated that study relevance would be determined by the employee’s direct manager and sometimes an additional managerial or HR representative. Some of the more detailed policy documents implemented a quantitative sliding scale of relevance, with the ‘amount’
of relevance rated on a likert-type scale or categorical classification scheme, which was sometimes directly linked to the amount of study support leave or reimbursement affordances provided. In terms of the survey findings (figure 7.1), the written responses certainly tended to indicate that study relevance may function as a form of ‘doxa’ – a mechanism of control through which certain social bases come to be accepted as universal and ‘common-sense’ truths (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 471).

Figure 7.1: Survey Responses Indicating Perceived Reasons Why Study Support Was Not Received

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I am a contractor, not an ongoing employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I already got a degree through that scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Study expenditure is not in the budget.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I didn’t ask - my undergraduate degree is on me, however I do know the company has and probably would pay for my post-grad/MBA. I guess I didn’t ask because where I was before starting the degree the organisation didn’t have the buy-in to me and my future, whereas over the time they’ve developed that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Study does not relate to workplace. eg: not business related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>My course of study isn’t related to my job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>My study is not directly related to my job, nor is it part of my development plan as an employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>My PhD is not considered sufficiently relevant to my current position, even though it’s the same sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tenure with the company needs to exceed 12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>None are being approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I opted to work in a part-time role so that I could attend to my studies. I have not yet looked into what study leave I may be entitled to and no one is suggesting I apply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I am eligible but have opted not to take it up as I do not want to draw attention to my studies (potential conflict of interest) and I do not want to be beholden to my employer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>My manager says that since what I am studying doesn’t relate to the work I am doing the organisation will not assist me. He called my days off work as my “study leave”. My manager has no interest in my current studies and in fact is quite disparaging of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Process to apply is incredibly difficult, ultimate support is limited in my current position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>As I was already studying my degree when I received my position, my manager once removed informed me that I am not eligible for study assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Approval based on manager discretion. Not approved due to financial issues- too many other employees also studying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Employed in a casual capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I am on a short term contract. It is only available to people with 12 months of longer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked to indicate why they thought their manager or employer did not provide study support (Figure 7.1), the notion of study relevance was often accepted,
unquestioned or unchallenged, in practice. The study support approval process involved ‘forms of classification’ or classificatory schemes derived from expectations about ‘practical knowledge of the social world’ legitimated only by the mutually reinforcing assumptions of what could be considered ‘reasonable behaviour’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 470). Ergo, the language of ‘relevance’ may be accepted either more or less unconsciously as a condition of the social field whilst the power relations which sustain it are wilfully ignored (Bourdieu, 1984).

As demonstrated in this chapter, the findings indicated that in practice, the determination of relevance was much more complex and contested than the policy documents suggested, assuming multiple and dynamic forms – private, public, personal and professional, across both time and space. That is, the findings indicated that the undertaking of all higher education was considered relevant in the late-modern organisation on two accounts. The undertaking of higher education alongside paid work:

1. enhanced self-confidence, facilitated learning transfer and knowledge sharing with work colleagues, improved critical thinking skills, promoted supportive working relationships, engendered a sense of belonging, provided a sense of meaning and purpose and transformed self-identity

2. was less of a purely agentic personal choice than an inculcated personal-private-professional-public response to changing structural conditions and pressures in the internal and external labour markets that increasingly required individuals to demonstrate credibility as a means through which to protect their jobs and careers

Thus, the findings indicate that if organisations genuinely intend to move toward a commitment to supporting higher education, as a key component of lifelong learning, as opposed to one which acts primarily as a form of social control, a more capacious definition of ‘study relevance’ is needed. Specifically, one that questions the notion of relevance as ‘doxa’ and problematises the practice of screening out large proportions of employees keen to undertake higher education based on
narrow, traditional, and discipline-specific definitions of *relevance* rather than more expansive, progressive and cross-disciplinary conceptualisations.

The notion of study relevance as doxa was also useful in explaining how certain employees were not only denied access to study support provisions and accepted this denial as *common sense*, but how it functions to control those employee-students who *had* been granted study support by virtue of their higher education having been determined *relevant*. That is, *in practice*, managers were not always consistent with how they viewed or espoused the *relevance* of higher education. As the following excerpts demonstrate, Mary - a departmental manager, initially referred to higher education as forming a nominal or somewhat less relevant component of learning in the Red Organisation:

Mary: So, we very much believe that, you know, we follow that idea of that, is it the seventy twenty ten…educational idea? You know, the majority of your education should be around experience, rather than actually going off to some formalised education course.

Yet this view was later starkly contradicted as Mary explained that despite the organisation valuing informal learning (the stated seventy and twenty percent) over formal learning (10 percent), higher education was in fact directly related to the organisation’s publicly stated vision and strategic objectives:

Mary: And I guess also in terms of [the Red Organisation] we talk about our, our, our three pillars. I’m not sure if…in terms of *clinical, education, research*…so that higher qualifications links those three.

Further, in the following excerpt she explains how the generic skill of *critical thinking*, as inculcated in employees through higher education participation, is highly relevant to the organisation regardless of discipline and course level:
Mary: Higher education, does benefit the organisation…because you’ve got people who are going to analyse and critically evaluate things…hence it’s an advantage for the organisation to support them.

Mary also provided many examples of how employee-students’ higher education and research skills were used frequently and pragmatically to train other staff and share higher education and high-level research knowledge with peers. This inherent contradiction in how Mary perceived the organisation as valuing higher education and research – in practice and in policy rhetoric, as related to her own personal valuations of higher education, was glaring. The informal knowledge from work experiences was legitimated and yet simultaneously undermined. In this way, Bourdieu’s (1984) argument that informal knowledge is less legitimated than higher education-generated knowledge because of the latter’s association with increased cultural capital, therefore explains part of this contradiction but not all of it. Why was informal learning also privileged in this organisation in certain contexts?

Here, Bourdieu’s notions of ‘illusio’ (1993) and ‘field’ (1984) informed a possible explanation. Mary did not suggest that higher education was always more relevant in all contexts. Rather, her assumptions about study relevance constantly changed in line with the multiple, conflicting and competing personal and professional agendas that her ‘habitus’(1977, 1990b) was likely trying to mediate. On the one hand, she may have wanted to demonstrate how the organisation relied on a large amount of informal learning and that this was valued in certain situations. On the other hand, she was likely aware that higher education was itself sometimes the catalyst for this informal learning and that higher education and research were publically extolled by the organisation. As there was ‘minimal allocation in the cost centres for professional development for staff” (Mary), however, she knew that the policy rhetoric centred on the publicly-stated value of higher education and research did not match the support that was provided for it in practice. Thus, to maintain her position in the ‘field’, Mary’s sense of ‘illusio’ guided her to simultaneously legitimise and delegitimise the value of both higher education and informal education. ‘The habitus…is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions’ (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 52).
Providing further support for the need for a broader definition of study relevance, Stephanie explains that the credibility associated with undertaking any higher education degree was more important than the course content. She therefore made the choice between nursing and education largely based on the practical consideration of cost:

Stephanie: It was a decision between doing it in education or doing it in nursing and the reason I decided to do it in nursing was because I’d already done my certificate in nursing and so it was going to be cheaper to go on and do my nursing Masters and I didn’t think there would be a big discrepancy between the two.

For Erica, higher education was relevant to the extent that she thought it would help her in jockeying for management positions in her industry, which she described as ‘competitive’. Although, she questioned whether the discipline-specific course content would present much of an ‘intellectual challenge’:

Erica: But I mean, in reality, higher education now is pretty much a money-making machine…and with the influx of international students who have, many of who have challenges with the language spoken in the course. And who don’t have any knowledge of art in Australia. Or politics or history in Australia. The course is, you don’t get as much intellectual challenge...

In the above examples, Stephanie and Erica viewed all higher education as relevant to the extent that it is associated with a public perception of credibility. It was not the discipline or core content that was relevant but the being ‘seen to be’ (Wendy) doing higher education that protected one’s position of employment. By publically demonstrating compliance with the rules of the learning organisation and simultaneously internalising them, employee-students learn how to maintain their position in the ‘field’ through the sense of ‘illusio’. In this way, employee-students become both self-regulating and compliant which allows employers to maintain power and control over them.
In sum, *study relevance* acting as *doxa* was a mediator of orthodoxy and heterodoxy that enabled employers to control *how many* and *which* employees were eligible for higher education support, despite the practice-based findings indicating that *all* higher education was relevant to *all* employees wishing to undertake it regardless of the discipline or level at which it was studied. Further, in practice, what was deemed *relevant* study by both employee-students and managers was mutable. The definition was responsive to both the shifting nature of the workplace as the dominant field, but also the broader societal fields in which individuals operated. Through the *habitus*, by engaging *illusio*, individuals thus sought to protect their existing levels of capital by undertaking continuous higher education for *career protection*. By perpetually responding to the shifting benchmarks set by the *scholastic mode of production*, they also sought to obtain additional forms of legitimised capital to maximise their chance *career progression*.

### 7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented and discussed the findings from phase 3 of the data collection and analysis: the cross-site interviews and focus group, with reference to the broader research findings that emerged in previous phases of data collection and analysis. The findings were loosely grouped as conceptual clusters of key categories that emerged through the axial coding phase of CGT analysis and interrogated with reference to relevant critical theory. In the following chapter, I explain how the conceptual clusters and constituent key categories coalesced to form a nascent model of ESHE. This includes a discussion of how theoretical sufficiency was achieved through selective coding, resulting in the emergence of the unifying theme (core category): ‘uncertainty and risk’. Emergence of categories *across* organisations as a research quality indicator is also considered and the model is discussed with reference to relevant theory.
Chapter 8. Emulsifying Practice: Reaching Theoretical Sufficiency

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain how ‘risk and uncertainty’ emerged as the unifying theme of the research. This theme is discussed in depth, in relation to the other key categories and in relation to knowledge-power links. Firstly, that the unifying theme emerged through a careful process of reflection, reflexivity and retroduction is highlighted. Secondly, the notion of risk and uncertainty is introduced with reference to its positioning as the conceptual centre of the emergent model. A consideration of how variance across individuals ensured the model’s theoretical sufficiency is also offered. Thirdly, to provide support for the reliability of the model, the variation of perceptions and experiences observed across organisational sites is discussed with reference to the explanatory power of the model. Drawing on relevant theory, this is followed by a discussion of the important relationship between risk and uncertainty and knowledge-power links.

8.2 A Theoretical Precursor: Reflection, Reflexivity and Retroduction

Most grounded theorists agree that undertaking constant comparison to arrive at a unifying theme or ‘core category’ requires inductive-deductive reasoning, also known as abductive reasoning (Charmaz, 2006) or retroductive reasoning (Bhaskar, 2005), and reflection (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) (see Chapter 4. Methodology). Further, as Charmaz (2006) has stressed, a hallmark of engaging in a constructivist version of grounded theory is that the researcher must necessarily interpret the social phenomena in question with reference to a set of values. Researchers must ‘become aware of their presuppositions and to grapple with how they affect the research’ (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131). Thus, a third element of grounded theory, and one which distinguishes purely constructivist approaches from those which take a more critical theoretical tack, is the ability not only to engage in
reflection, but to engage in critical reflection through the notion of reflexivity (Charmaz, 2006; Kempster & Parry, 2011; Nelson, 2015; Oliver, 2012). This is defined simply as ‘self and social questioning’ (Edwards, Ranson, & Strain, 2002). These key processes, as discussed in Chapter 4, enabled the unifying theme of risk and uncertainty and the final conceptual model to emerge.

8.3 The Habitus of Employer-supported Higher Education

8.3.1 Introduction

In this section, I introduce the unifying theme: ‘risk and uncertainty’ and the emergent model or ‘habitus’ of Employer-supported Higher Education (ESHE). I explain how the ‘explanatory power’ (Glaser, 1978) of risk and uncertainty can be used to elucidate the other key categories and their relations; it emerged as a conceptual pivot around which all the other key categories were linked. Moreover, I argue that the model’s applicability across individuals and organisational sites provides support for its theoretical sufficiency and reliability, respectively. Further, the emergence of knowledge-power relations as these relate to how undertaking higher education alongside paid work is viewed, valued and supported is also discussed with reference to relevant theory.

8.3.2 Risk and Uncertainty: The Unifying Theme and Conceptual Model Emerges

In grounded theory, the core category is the unifying theme that unites all other key categories, can explain all other categories (Glaser, 1978) and can be applied most widely in and across different contexts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The unifying theme that emerged was ‘risk and uncertainty’, as it was the category that was best able to explain all of the other key categories and their conceptual relationships to each other. Whilst it could be argued that risk and uncertainty represent two discrete constructs and thus only one should be extracted as the core category, in line with Giddens and Pierson (1998, p. 105), I contend that the distinction between risk and uncertainty is ‘fuzzy’; they co-construct each other in such a way that they represent
two sides of the same conceptual coin and are meaningful precisely by virtue of this co-constitution. That is, when something is risky it is so because its action or effect is somehow or in some way uncertain and when something is uncertain, it must necessarily involve an unavoidable element of risk.

Specifically, as illustrated in the nascent conceptual model: The Habitus of Employer-supported Higher Education (Figure 8.1), the notion of uncertainty and risk was able to explain why 1) assumptions and expectations were not always openly communicated and 2) decision-making related to ESHE was not always effectively negotiated, in practice. That is, assumptions and expectations relating to the value of higher education, and the support that employers can or should provide for it, were influenced specifically by current organisational factors including accountabilities, resources and culture. This was in addition to the organisation’s ‘habitus’ or system of durable internalised dispositions and tendencies (Bourdieu, 1977). These assumptions and expectations were interpreted in different ways by individuals, but also in concurrently patterned ways by both employee-student and manager cohorts. Further, because assumptions and expectations guided ESHE decision-making, the lived experience of concurrently working and studying was influenced, but not determined by, the decisions that were made regarding ESHE in practice.

Thus, whilst the policy documents analysed suggested that employee-students and managers would unproblematically negotiate ESHE affordances (Chapter 5), both parties often failed to effectively do so in practice. The unifying theme of ‘risk and uncertainty’ was able to explain why this was the case; the policies failed to acknowledge the influence that competing employee-student and manager assumptions and expectations would have on open communication and decision-making. Specifically, that the open communication of assumptions relating to the value of higher education and ongoing employee participation in it, would be hampered by the inherent risk and uncertainty involved in this discursive exchange. That is, because of the risk that they were misaligned, assumptions and expectations were rarely openly or clearly communicated in practice and as a result both stakeholder groups remained uncertain of each other’s motivations.
This meant that employee-students and managers often made decisions regarding ESHE affordances, based on the absence of accurate information regarding the other person’s beliefs and expectations. Moreover, in practice, negotiation of ESHE affordances was often absent or minimal, as the decisions made by employee-students and managers were influenced not only by the relationship between risk and uncertainty, but also by the link between knowledge and power as related to risk and uncertainty – a finding discussed in detail later in this chapter.

For employee-students and managers, the decisions made regarding ESHE – both how it was afforded and engaged with, were guided by the lived experience of participating in higher education, in diverse yet patterned ways. For example, for employee-students, the extent to which the lived experience was made difficult or stressful, related to how well they were able to manage competing time demands (Chapter 7). When study leave (a key ESHE provision) could be flexibly engaged with in ways that allowed them control over how they managed their time, they could more effectively coordinate competing work, study and life responsibilities. This influenced the lived experience of undertaking concurrent paid work and higher education. Similarly, for managers, the lived experience of supervising...
employee-students is influenced by the decisions that they make regarding the provision of ESHE affordances in practice (Chapter 7). For example, by only allowing staff to take small allotments of study leave (several hours at a time) rather than full days, managers could better manage their own stress levels by putting the operational needs of the team ahead of the development needs of the individual.

8.3.3 Testing Sufficiency: Two Examples of Individual Variation

In grounded theory, to test a nascent conceptual model’s theoretical sufficiency, individual cases should be explained in terms of the model and its core category (Dey, 1999). This enables the model to be reconfigured in light of any negative cases that disconfirm or challenge its sufficiency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, because explaining how the model applied to each and every research participant is outside the scope of this chapter, I have chosen the following two examples to illustrate how the unifying theme of risk and uncertainty demonstrated its explanatory power as the conceptual fulcrum of the emergent model. The first example provides a useful example of how current approaches to ESHE communication and negotiation can result in potentially negative lived experiences for employee-students in practice. The second example, provides an illustration of how current ESHE approaches can be adopted in ways which facilitate learning transfer and knowledge sharing, whilst concurrently influencing the lived experience of undertaking higher education alongside paid work in potentially deleterious ways.

Matthew’s Vignette

Matthew, an employee-student from the Red Organisation, indicated that he felt that his direct manager did not genuinely value his higher education studies ‘but one or two up from that would’. Matthew’s direct manager had approved his MBA studies via the formal ESHE process. Matthew, however, explained that he felt there was a lingering ‘difference of opinion about where we’re going at this stage’. Even though ‘the boss above, and his boss seem to think we’re going in the right direction’. That is, at the time of the interview, Matthew was unsure why his direct manager’s view
of his studies was negative or had changed from being initially supportive to suddenly unsupportive: ‘I’m trying to figure it out still’, he laughed bemusedly. He postulated that it was ‘political’ and may have reflected ‘personal bias’. Having also been selected for, and having completed, a locally well-known but unaccredited management and leadership development program prior to enrolling in the MBA, Matthew was particularly puzzled about why his postgraduate studies in management would have suddenly been viewed as less favourable or unfitting by his manager. Interestingly, only weeks after his interview, Matthew informed me that he had left the organisation after obtaining a position elsewhere.

Applying the model to Matthew’s case, when the open communication of assumptions and expectations relating to employee involvement in higher education dissolved, the employee-student and manager both made ESHE decisions based on assumptions which were drawn from incomplete information. Matthew felt that his manager was not genuinely supportive of his studies. Although he was uncertain about why this was the case, he made the decision to obtain another position of employment. Certainly, this change in work role, employer and manager would have subsequently influenced his lived experience of concurrently studying and working. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to interview Matthew’s direct manager. Applying the model, however, it is possible that the manager’s failure to communicate his assumptions and expectations regarding Matthew’s involvement in the MBA program, meant that, like Matthew, he was denied access to important information that may have guided his decision-making in a potentially different direction.

In sum, Matthew’s case clearly provides an example of how the model can be used to account for situations whereby ESHE is not effectively negotiated in practice. The core category of risk and uncertainty explains why Matthew failed to discuss his assumptions and expectations relating to ESHE with his direct manager. Specifically, he was uncertain of his manager’s expectations regarding his MBA involvement and thus felt that any negotiation would be too risky. He therefore elected to opt out of his current position of employment and obtain a new role with
a different employer. Similarly, uncertain of Matthew’s assumptions and expectations regarding his involvement in postgraduate studies, Matthew’s manager may have taken the risk of Matthew becoming disengaged and/or leaving the organisation as he was uncertain of Matthew’s expectations relating to his involvement in higher education.

Although in this scenario, the manager did not appear to take any overt action or make any explicit decisions regarding the ESHE that was provided, his implicit inaction influenced the lived experience of both himself and Matthew. Whilst we cannot know his rationale for certain, it is in line with Billett’s (2006a, p. 33) important claim, ‘management may elect to either support or resist workers’ learning because of either the need for those skills or concerns about financial cost of loss of control’. The concern is that by resisting Matthew’s learning, however, Matthew’s manager was contributing to a culture of mediocrity founded on short-term managerialist agendas, rather than promoting an authentic learning culture aimed at maintaining long-term staff development and engagement.

**Sarah’s Vignette**

Another example of how the model was applied to individual cases can be drawn from Sarah’s experiences of engaging with concurrent part-time higher education and full-time employment. A young professional working in the Blue Organisation, Sarah was undertaking an undergraduate business degree alongside her full-time human resources role. Sarah was receiving full reimbursement of her course fees and designated study leave for examinations. Brimming with confidence, she presented as highly engaged in both her work and undergraduate studies. She explained how her manager provided her with ample freedom to practise her higher education-facilitated knowledge and skills in the workplace. She explained that when there was ‘a gap in the process’ or opportunities for her team to improve in some way, her manager provided her with ‘complete freedom to go and look at other ways of doing it…to explore things if I think they can be done differently’.
Not only was Sarah provided with ‘a lot of freedom’ to apply her higher education-facilitated knowledge and skills to her direct work role, but she was also provided with the ‘freedom’ to draw on the knowledge and skills of her work colleagues to assist her to understand her higher education course requirements. She explained that this made it ‘easy to understand ideas’ because she had ‘a whole network of people around’ to ‘explain something in real terms, that was kind of away from the textbook’. She felt being an off-campus student this was ‘really helpful’ as ‘it would probably be a lot harder to study off campus without having those resources to draw help from’.

In this way, Sarah explained that her internal peer networks were vital in facilitating her understanding of her formal higher education-related learning. She was also able to use the skills and knowledge generated from her involvement in higher education to improve processes in her direct role and team. The latter experiences gave her an opportunity to test out or practise her skills, the former a chance to consolidate them. Indeed, being an off-campus student, Sarah explained that her direct manager and colleagues provided more support for her studies than her university lecturers and student networks. She did not approach university staff for much support and whilst she was aware that she could use the learning management system - ‘Moodle’ to ask questions, she indicated that neither she nor many people in her course used it, unless there was ‘an issue with submitting an assignment’ or a ‘technical’ issue. For questions relating to course work, Sarah relied on her ‘manager and work’.

However, despite Sarah indicating that her manager was very supportive in terms of allowing her immense professional freedom to draw on the expertise of her colleagues, share knowledge with her team, and apply her learning to her professional practice, she indicated that communication regarding ESHE affordances – such as how study leave would be taken, was not as open and rarely negotiated. Rather, she ‘just worked longer hours’, ‘fitted it all in’ and ‘got a bit stressed about it’. She indicated that she did have ‘informal conversations’ with her manager but ‘didn't at any point say that [she] thought that [she] would need to let anything go’.
As the above excerpts from Sarah demonstrate, certain assumptions and expectations related to knowledge sharing and learning transfer were openly communicated between herself and her manager. Assumptions and expectations regarding workload and study leave, however, were not so readily discussed. Contrary to the ESHE policy rhetoric (Chapter 5), they were more accepted than negotiated in practice. In this way, the decision that Sarah would continue to perform all her work tasks without any work reallocation during her busy exam period was based on the implicit assumption that the employee-student may be given the freedom to practice or apply higher education-facilitated learning in the workplace, however, they are still expected to do this not instead of, but rather on top of, their existing work responsibilities.

Sarah’s experience highlights how certain assumptions regarding ESHE may be aligned and negotiated in practice and yet at the same time, others may not be openly communicated or negotiated in practice. That is, whilst Sarah and her manager spoke candidly about how she might transfer her higher education-facilitated learning to her direct role and to team projects, when it came to negotiating how study leave might be afforded, the conversations were closed-off and the support provided was not negotiated. Instead, Sarah accepted the amount and type of support offered to her and the assumption that she would unproblematically juggle work and examination preparation responsibilities with her existing workload. Because Sarah failed to negotiate additional support during the busy examination period and her manager did not reallocate any of her work responsibilities during this time, the expectation held by both parties was that Sarah would need to simply accept this arrangement. This caused Sarah to feel stress, whilst her manager likely minimised her own stress levels by not having to reallocate Sarah’s work to other staff during this time as she knew that Sarah would simply juggle it all.

In sum, these vignettes demonstrate how the model can be flexibly applied to explain the ways in which employee-student and manager experiences relate to the beliefs that are held regarding the value of higher education and ESHE.
8.3.4 Testing Reliability: Within-site and Across-site Variance

The emergent model of the habitus of ESHE was applied not just across individuals as discussed in the previous section, but also across all three of the organisational sites studied. This is because, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) have noted, one of the criteria by which to judge the ‘trustworthiness’ of qualitative research is transferability or the extent to which the findings from qualitative research might be applied to other contexts or situations. Although, it should be noted that whilst Lincoln and Guba (198) refer to qualitative research in a traditional sense, this recommendation has been applied to the present research as part of a triangulated, mixed methods research design. In a similar vein, Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to this transferability across contexts in grounded theory research specifically, as ‘modifiability’, or a gauge of the degree to which the emergent conceptual model is flexible and adaptable across contexts. In this section, I briefly explain how the nascent model was applied across contexts to ensure the trustworthiness and quality of the research.

For each of the organisations studied, there were a number of specific organisational factors that comprised its constitution, including accountabilities, resources and culture. These factors influenced assumptions and expectations relating to the value of higher education and the employer support provided for it (Figure 8.1). As mentioned in the previous section, whilst these differences influenced assumptions and expectations in diverse ways, there were also patterns of commonality that emerged across the organisational sites studied. Firstly, in the Red Organisation, many employee-students were employed in clinical health and/or medical roles that required engagement in continuous higher education for their formal professional development and accreditation requirements. Thus, for the Red Organisation, an undergraduate degree was seen as a minimum qualification and postgraduate studies increasingly viewed as essential for demonstrating adequate credibility. As Bourdieu (1984, p. 25) explains, ‘written into the tacit definition of the academic qualification [is the] possession of a general culture whose breadth is proportionate to the prestige of the qualification’. 
These perceptions are illustrated in the following excerpts from the managers of the clinical teams:

Michael: …a lot of people are doing master’s degrees in the background by correspondence…there’s a lot of pressure on junior medical staff to do further education so that they can actually get the specialty training programs they want to get.

…there is an expectation you are entering a life-learning process. It’s not a case of get your qualification and stop because it’s recognised that health is something that’s constantly changing. You constantly have to be up-to-date with and unless you’re doing lifelong learning to maintain yourself in that structure you cannot properly operate. So it’s a major culture within the health sector that we’re talking about and particularly it’s been a culture that’s been strongly developed within the Red Organisation over the last decade because the organisation wanted to move where it is now.

Kim: I think that most people would pursue further study in their clinical area, just to build on that, so it’s really about the clinical service provision that people want to advance their skills in.

The above excerpts show how in the contemporary labour market, ‘our thinking about thinking, learning and schools is, in turn, coming to be aligned with our thinking about businesses’ (Gee, 2000, p. 45). In this way, the undertaking of education is less about the fostering of private individual ‘smarts’, than with people who can demonstrate their ability to ‘work collaboratively in teams to produce results and add value through distributed knowledge and understanding’ (Gee, 2000, p. 48). Thus, the attainment of the ‘right’ kind and amount of higher education credentials becomes publically viewed as an indicator of the individual’s commitment not just to their private education but their public position within the business.
The issue with this is how the ‘scholastic mode of production’ (Bourdieu, 1984) organically operates to ensure that credentialing benchmarks are constantly shifting, allowing those with more inherited and amassed capital to maintain control over the value of credentialing a given space and time, leaving those with less inherited or amassed capital to perpetually chase after an ever-elusive credentialing goalpost. That is, the education which is considered ‘legitimate’ at a given point in time within a given field is in constant flux (Bourdieu, 1984). As Bourdieu (1984, p. 88) explains, the effects of domination ensure that ‘the products of the scholastic mode of production may be devalued as scholastic in the scholastic market itself’.

Indeed, managers from the clinical areas of the Red Organisation were eager to emphasize that continuous higher education was expected, which meant that at times there was intense pressure on staff to continuously be engaged in ongoing higher education. However, this expected higher education involvement was not viewed by managers and employee-students so much as competitive, but rather simply a part of the organisational culture. There was a commonly held belief that higher education engagement was somewhat ‘contagious’ in the Red Organisation; when employees observed their peers undertaking higher education, they felt more motivated and/or empowered to undertake it themselves:

Anne: I think that it’s a culture within teams that higher education is valued, then there is almost like, not an incentive but almost a, “oh well if I’m working in this team then I will undertake that postgraduate study”.

Lisa There are some teams that, it is a culture and a motivation and it’s not one-up-manship, it’s not like “oh my colleague’s doing their masters so I’d better”. It’s not a competition but it definitely breeds that, that culture…

Anne: It gives them that confidence to say “oh, you know, my colleague is doing it, look at what they’re doing, they’re okay, I’ll be okay”.
Perpetual engagement in higher education was an organic part of the organisation’s culture of ongoing higher education and research. It was recognised as central to the publicly stated core values of the Red Organisation. Also noteworthy, was the pervasiveness of this culture, from staff in clinical areas with mandated professional development requirements to staff in non-clinical, professional roles who did not formally require the incessant attainment of higher education credentials. These participants had strongly inculcated the more informal pressures to ‘fit in’, as prescribed by the dominant culture of the business. As Wendy, a non-clinical senior manager, explained, the pressure to be observed to be engaged in continuous higher education was palpable and unavoidable:

Wendy: Certainly education and research are...flagged at the strategic level, in our strategic plan and so I think that sends a message right through. So I do think that there is that expectation of lifelong learning, it sort of puts people on notice a little bit. Like you know, for someone like me, I haven’t studied for a few years now, I’ve done a couple of post-grads but I’m like, it must be time. You know, people are going to start looking at me if I don’t do something again soon because I’ll start to lapse out of that pattern of lifelong learning. I won’t be seen to be actively engaged in my learning if I can’t sort of show that I’m doing further study.

In the above excerpt, Wendy explains that she is uncertain whether it might be time for her to undertake further postgraduate study. Given the links between uncertainty and risk, it can be argued that it was therefore risky for Wendy not to undertake further postgraduate studies. A risk she seems to be aware of and concerned about. The Red Organisation’s culture and related constitutional factors shaped the assumptions and expectations that Wendy and other staff held regarding the value of higher education. Specifically, a very high value was placed on continuous higher education, especially postgraduate studies and research studies.

Borrowing from Bourdieu (1984, p. 176), engaging in ongoing postgraduate study alongside paid employment is a practice of attaining cultural capital ‘designated by
[its] rarity as distinguished’. Whereas, to not be engaged in this practice is ‘socially identified as vulgar’. To simply attain a degree qualification and not continue studying at postgraduate level is viewed as ‘both easy and common’. In other words, drawing on Bourdieu (1984, p. 291), employee-students in the Red Organisation needed to accumulate educational capital as a form of cultural capital but also as a form of ‘symbolic capital, that is, with the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability…easily converted into political positions’.

In the Red Organisation, the ‘habitus’, which operates as a ‘structuring structure’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170) is functioning to ensure that Wendy accepts that to maintain ‘distinction’(Bourdieu, 1984) within the ‘field’ of healthcare, she must continuously engage in legitimised forms of postgraduate study. In other words, she has developed a sense of ‘illusio’ or an understanding of the implicit laws of the organisational game and how to maintain her position within it (Bourdieu, 1993). The organisational habitus is such that it ensures Wendy is self-regulating her behaviour within the organisational field.

Engaging in perpetual postgraduate studies was increasingly seen as the norm, rather than the exception, in the Red Organisation. Therefore, the expectation was that staff would a) fund their own continuing higher education and b) accept that their study leave would need to simply fit in around their clinical and non-clinical operational duties. In this way, ideological considerations relating to the organisational habitus collided with more specific factors relating to the individual’s own perception of their accountabilities, available resources and sense of place within the guiding organisational culture. These beliefs were expressed and reinforced in dominant discourses relating to the role of continuous higher education in constructing a legitimate learning culture - not merely as conformance to a norm but ‘as a reproduction strategy, taking on its meaning in a system of strategies generated by the habitus and oriented towards realisation of the same social function’ (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 16). As Fairclough (1989) notes, ‘one might expect a high degree of ideological integration between institutional orders of discourse within the societal order of discourse’. It is through various discourses that
particular forms of knowledge and learning come to be valued and legitimised in modern institutions (Fairclough, 1989).

Having inculcated the notion that lifelong learning was a personal choice for which they should take full responsibility, one which was highly privileged as part of the Red Organisation’s culture, employee-students rarely negotiated ESHE provisions. Rather, they gratefully accepted the ESHE provided to them. They commonly experienced feelings of both intense guilt and stress stemming from the belief that in utilising the ESHE and non-ESHE affordances that they were formally entitled to, they were concurrently letting down their colleagues, manager and/or families (Chapter 7). This meant that many employee-students at junior, middle and senior levels regularly worked unpaid overtime, both before and after work and on weekends, to catch up on work tasks that were missed during their taking of study leave. The underlying intention in doing so appeared to be related to their desire to ameliorate feelings of guilt and stress. Inevitably, these feelings were still inescapably associated with the lived experience of undertaking higher education and paid work.

The ‘habitus’ and the ‘scholastic mode of production’ operate to ensure that juggling further higher education alongside paid work is a difficult process for those with less inherited and amassed capital to draw on (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). As Bourdieu (1990b, p. 97) explains,

… the relationship between economic conditions and symbolic practices’ is indeed practically realised, not in some ‘articulation’ between systems, but through the function that is assigned to indissolubly ritual and technical practice in the complex relationship between a mode of production and a relatively autonomous mode of perception, and through the operative schemes employed to fulfil that function.

In contrast, the habitus of the Blue Organisation and Green Organisation was less overtly ambitious, with many employee-students indicating that whilst their work roles had not specifically required an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification, they were undertaking higher education as a means to increase their knowledge and skills, enhance their performance in their current roles and/or further their career
generally. The assumption that higher education was becoming essential for both career protection and career progression, was present in both the Blue and Green Organisations. However, the pressure to participate in continuous higher education emerged to a lesser extent compared with the Red Organisation. For example, in the Green Organisation – the mid-sized community services organisation - employee-students often selected only one unit or subject to complete at a time. Indicating that whilst being ‘seen to be’ involved in ongoing higher education was important, there was less pressure to complete a higher education course.

Sarah (Blue Organisation): I have been studying my business degree for quite some time (approximately 6 years at the time of the interview).

Anastasia (Green Organisation): And I don’t, I don’t want to be stressed about, I don’t want to not enjoy it. So having more than one unit at this point, um, I think it would probably kill me [Laughing].

Vicky (Green Organisation): So maybe in a couple of years I’ll go back and do something…it might not happen because then I think it’s too hard. So I’m thinking maybe next year…I don’t know.

Certainly, another noticeable difference between the Blue and Green Organisations, as compared to the Red Organisation, was that employee-students in the former tended to take less annual leave and engage in less unpaid overtime to complete work requirements. They also mentioned experiencing feelings of guilt and stress less often. Although, when taking study leave, employee-students in the Green Organisation still carefully managed their impression in front of their team and attempted to lessen feelings of guilt by minimising 1) how much study leave they took, and 2) the travel time associated with attending on-campus classes. As Daniel from the Green Organisation explained, when he took study leave, he tried to ‘ease’
his team into his leaving for the afternoon and also took less study leave than the full amount which was formally approved with the aim of building ‘good will’ with his manager and team.

Thus, Daniel had internalised the organisational habitus as ‘a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). This occurred implicitly as Daniel engaged in the practice of undertaking higher education alongside paid employment and engaging with ESHE. The habitus both organised these practices and Daniel’s perception of them, acting as an effective ‘structuring structure’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). In this way, Daniel developed a feel for the game of ESHE within his field. In taking less time out of the workplace than he was officially entitled to, he demonstrated a sense of ‘illusio’ (Bourdieu, 1993). Daniel developed an awareness of the governing rules of the game and what he needed to do to adapt to the practices to conform to the organisational habitus and the doxa of ESHE.

Factors relating to an organisation’s habitus, including organisational and individual accountabilities, resources and culture, in addition to the habitus itself, therefore influence employee-student and manager assumptions and expectations relating to the value of higher education, ESHE and how individuals engage with this support. This occurs in patterned ways across institutions of similar and different constitutions and sizes. The variation across sites provided support for the modifiability of the emergent model (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Additional research is still required, however, to examine the transferability of the nascent model (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, the model could be applied in a wider variety of organisational contexts, especially within the private sector.

8.3.5 Knowledge-power Relations and Risk-uncertainty Links

The unifying theme of ‘risk and uncertainty’ is useful in uniting all the other key categories in the emergent model around a conceptual centre. However, the question of why employee-students and managers perceived the open communication of assumptions and expectations, and ESHE negotiation as risky and uncertain has hitherto not been addressed. Therefore, in this section, I explain how the key
category of ‘power and control’ initially emerged as a fierce contender for the unifying theme in the nascent model. As can be seen from its conspicuous absence in the emergent model, however, and contrary to my initially jejune expectations, it did not emerge as occupying a discrete or fixed position in the model. Rather, power was much more dispersed; it flowed in and across the categories in both hidden and overt, expected and unexpected ways (Foucault, 1980, 1995).

However, just as water flows yet finds its level (however temporary) in hollows and pits over time, power also emerged in ways indicative of being both employed through and in action (Foucault, 1995). Yet it was also concurrently kept and/or acquired by individuals, teams and organisations (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979; 1990). Power, however, cannot be too closely joined with agency without substantially weakening it (Clegg, 1989). The ‘transformative capacity’ of power must necessarily be and necessarily should be closely linked with the structure that precedes it (Clegg, 1989, p. 142). For example, whilst in the policy documents it was suggested that employee-students and managers have equal bargaining power in ESHE negotiations, in practice, employee-students’ bargaining power was related to their social positioning in the organisational structure and broader fields in which they operated.

Certainly, the relationship between social structure and individual agency is contested (Billett, 2006b). What is perhaps less contested, however, is the existence of a durable relationship between power and discourse. As Fairclough (1989) and Foucault (1995) maintain, power manifests in and is influenced by discourse, but is also reproduced by discourse, often in less direct and obvious ways in practice. Discourses of power may appear as a ‘hidden agenda’ within all social institutions aimed at reproducing power through the discourses inherent, albeit intentionally contained, within them (Fairclough, 1989, p. 40). Moreover, it should also be noted that because power and knowledge are intimately linked, the former plays a key role in the production and maintenance of privileged forms of the latter via organisational discourses (Foucault, 1972; 1982). The category of ‘power and control’ cannot be discussed without a consideration of its links to knowledge.
Indeed, ‘power and control’ emerged as a key category which was both embedded in all the other categories and their relations, and yet concurrently transcended them. It was also able to offer an explanation for why employee-students and managers failed to openly communicate or effectively negotiate ESHE affordances in practice. The relationship between power and knowledge can explain why in the face of purportedly trusting relationships between employee-students and their managers in practice, there was an inherent risk involved in openly sharing these assumptions and negotiating ESHE affordances. Specifically, power is both induced by discourse and contemporaneously generates it (Bourdieu, 1984; Fairclough, 1989; Foucault, 1980). Therefore, the nature of the communication and negotiation that occurs between employee-students and managers can be attributed to, at least in part, the role of knowledge-power relations as relates to risk and uncertainty. Indeed, as Crick and Joldersma (2007, p. 92) explain, communication is inherently uncertain and risky:

Listening means allowing what the other says to break through one’s own preconceptions and prejudgments. And speaking involves risking one’s own ideas by offering them to the group as a potential way to interpret truth or right action. Quality conversation is a dialogue in which each participant risks changing one’s mind or attitudes in the process of working towards mutual understanding.

Although, as Foucault (1982, p. 786) cautions, power-relations should not be confused with ‘relationships of communication’. Whilst communication ‘is always a certain way of acting upon another person or persons…the production and circulation of elements of meaning can have as their objective or as their consequence certain results in the realm of power; the latter are not simply an aspect of the former’. Foucault writes,

relationships of communication imply finalised activities (even if only the correct putting into operation of elements of meaning) and, by virtue of modifying the field of information between partners, produce effects of power (Foucault, 1982, p. 787).

However, individuals may not always be consciously aware of precisely how power and knowledge are co-constructing each other through discourse (Bourdieu, 1977; Fairclough, 1989). Although, the findings indicate that employee-students and
managers are aware, at least implicitly, that such relations exist. This research demonstrates their reluctance to openly communicate their assumptions and expectations or engage in ESHE negotiations in practice.

The policy documents indicated that managers had a high degree of control and power over the ESHE approval and related decision-making processes. They also indicated, however, that staff would unproblematically discuss or negotiate these affordances with their manager. What was absent in the policy discourse, however, was a consideration of how knowledge-power relations would obscure these relations of communication and influence this negotiation in practice. As the habitus of ESHE demonstrates, engaging in open discussion and negotiation in practice was influenced by the risk and uncertainty associated with this discourse exchange and this was related to the circulating influence of knowledge-power relations.

Communication and negotiation were risky not only because knowledge and power were inherent in this discourse exchange (and/or lack thereof) but also because as Foucault (1980; 1982) reminds us, the communication itself likely produced new effects of power. Thus, despite employee-student-manager relationships being characterised by ostensibly high levels of trust in practice, trust always involves the concurrent existence of risk (Giddens, 1990, 1991). Risk cannot be divorced from power relations (Beck, 1992, 2006, 2009). Thus, the communication between employee-students and their managers was risky in spite of trust, owing to the inherent power movements within these relations. In this way, organisations could ensure that employees self-regulated their desires, wants and needs with caution.

Moreover, because knowledge-power relations were rarely brought explicitly into the conscious awareness of employee-students and managers, ‘each agent, wittingly or unwittingly, willfully or willy nilly [became] a producer and reproducer of objective meaning’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 79). As Bourdieu (1977, p. 79) further explains, because the individual’s habitus is ‘the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices’, and is largely unconscious, the action in these relationships of communication is unavoidably the ‘product of a modus operandi of which he is not the producer and has no conscious mastery’. Therefore, he may
come to accept these practices as objective and common-sense elements of the external social world. This occurs as the employee-student accepts certain beliefs as ‘doxa’ and adapts their own practices to conform to the dominant view.

Thus, both broad sociocultural and sociocognitive factors, and more local organisational factors relating to the value of higher education, the role of the individual in pursuing it, and the role of the employer in supporting it, become inculcated via the habitus. This occurred in patterned ways as the habitus came to be characterised by an unavoidable sameness ‘within the limits of the group of agents possessing the schemes (of production and interpretation) implied in their production’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 80). Certain understandings, for example, which are really only common, became common-sense or ‘doxa’ based on their availability and accessibility in practice (Bourdieu, 1984). This explains why employee-students across all organisations accepted the way in which ESHE affordances were provided to them, even if this resulted in feelings of stress and/or guilt brought about by work-life imbalance. In practice, doxa ensured that study support negotiation ought to merely be acceptance.

Indeed, the nascent model indicates that risk and uncertainty may be operating as a more conscious manifestation of the more unconscious instillation of individual’s awareness of reproducing effects of power operating through knowledge-power relations. That is, drawing again on Foucault (1982), involvement in higher education alongside paid work, and the supervision of employee-students involved in higher education, is risky because individuals are aware that it will alter the relationship of communication between the manager and subordinate employee-student and in doing so change the flow of power in and beyond these relations. However, as Bourdieu (1977) explains, despite being somewhat aware of these relations, the individual may not precisely or consciously understand their properties or mode of operation in relation to the self. As Bourdieu claims:

… the objective homogenizing of group or class habitus which results from the homogeneity of the conditions of existence is what enables practices to be objectively harmonized without any intentional calculation or conscious reference to a norm and mutually adjusted in the absence of any direct interaction or, a fortiori, explicit co-ordination (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 80).
Indeed, this ‘harmonising’ occurs in ESHE practice, through the acceptance of common assumptions relating to study relevance as doxa. The notion that continuous higher education is a largely private undertaking for which the individual ought to take primary responsibility dominates (Bagnall, 2000; Biesta, 2006, 2012; Giroux, 2004; Holm, 2007).

These assumptions are reinforced in omnipresent discourses of lifelong learning that function as pervasive ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1980). Thus, despite the findings from this research indicating that ESHE decision-making influences the lived experience of undertaking higher education alongside paid employment in ways which may be detrimental to individual well-being and organisational learning culture. The data showed that ESHE is still viewed largely as a generous gift or employee benefit, with employee-students remaining reluctant to question or negotiate it, in practice. Therefore, because the organisational habitus is a ‘structuring structure’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170), along with the practices of ESHE, it must be disrupted to arrive at a revised understanding of study relevance and a reconceptualization of the private-public nature of the ‘benefits’ of higher education to ensure true equity of access.

To disrupt the existing habitus would, as Bourdieu counsels, require ‘intentional calculation or conscious reference’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 80). The unconscious acceptance of the status quo would need to be centralised consciously and patently making explicit reference to implicit knowledge-power relations in the dialogues which constitute practice. However, the inherent risk and uncertainty involved in doing so appears to have forestalled these ESHE conversations in practice. This is because employee-students and managers are never precisely sure of the levels of different types of capital each possess. Indeed, in all social rituals where an individual stands to lose or gain certain additional forms of capital, it is in one’s best interests to keep ‘one’s partner-opponent in the dark about one’s intentions’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 6-7). Higher education involvement and the cultural capital which involvement in it confers is therefore always subject to the ‘necessarily hidden opposition between the official and the unofficial’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 41). This might also be considered as the formal and informal power which both
manager and employee-student bring to their ‘relationship of communication’ (Foucault, 1982).

As Bourdieu (1990a, p. 136) argues, however, it is always the ‘official view’ articulated via ‘official discourse’ that enforces itself ‘as a legitimate point of view, that is, as a point of view which everyone has to recognise’. Further, individuals will accept risks but also rely on previous knowledge of the world to avoid them or minimise them as much as possible (Giddens, 1990). Thus, employee-students have avoided ESHE-related conversations and negotiations given the inherent risk associated with presenting an illegitimated point of view by challenging the ‘doxa’ as the accepted and common-sense position (Bourdieu, 1984).

For managers, despite being somewhat more secure in the knowledge that they are (or ought to be) presenting the legitimate or official view, their relationship with the employee-student is still one ultimately premised on trust which is always contingent or uncertain and thus inherently risky (Giddens, 1990, 1991). As Bourdieu argues, ‘the procedures of practical logic are rarely entirely coherent and rarely entirely incoherent’ (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 12) because practices by their very nature are characterised by ‘fuzziness’ and ‘uncertainty’. This is a result of practices deriving from:

… not a set of conscious, constant rules, but practical schemes, opaque to their possessors, varying according to the logic of the situation, the almost invariably partial viewpoint which it imposes (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 12).

Further, trust is ‘confidence in the reliability of a person or system’ and individuals that lack formal power in the organisation of their social worlds may elect to engage their ‘secret, clandestine, and private’ power (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 41). For example, in Matthew’s case, through the sudden deprivation of employee-student knowledge, expertise and service associated with his unforeseen resignation. The ESHE exchanges are not only risky for employee-students but also for managers and the organisations which they represent. It could be argued that Matthew’s case therefore provides support for the powerful transformation of practice through the exercising of agency over structure. Fairclough (1989) reminds us that power does not only operate through discourse but also through the extent to which the individuals as
subjects are themselves powerful in the discourse exchange. That is, ‘power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants’ (Fairclough, 1989, p. 45).

This includes not only the content of the discourse and the social relations involved in the discourse exchange, but also the specific social positioning of the individuals as agents struggling to maintain power within a particular social arena (Bourdieu, 1993; Fairclough, 1989). As Bourdieu (1990a, p. 130) explains, we ‘have an active apprehension of the world’ and ‘construct [our] vision of the world’, however, ultimately ‘this construction is carried out under structural constraints’. Thus, individuals must use their existing symbolic and cultural capital, including previous educational qualifications, to obtain the ‘profits of recognition’ to which they are entitled (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 135). Indeed, by using his existing higher education credentials and work experience to obtain alternative employment, Matthew used his existing capital in a new organisational field where he could once again reap the advantages of his existing knowledge and skills.

Further, a parallel can be drawn between Fairclough’s (1989) example of the relationship between the doctor and the medical student with the employee-student-manager relationship. Both associations are characterised by overt disparities in power relations. Like the doctor-medical student relationship, the subject positioning of manager and employee-student sets the expectation that the former will issue directives and pose questions, and the latter will fulfil those directives and respond dutifully to the questions which she is asked. There is neither room for open communication nor negotiation in such discourses, or if there is, it is severely limited. However, ESHE policy documents failed to mention the unequal role of power relations in manager-employee-student communication. Rather, the data showed that the role of ESHE policy documents is to publically obscure the influence of knowledge-power relations and the inherent risk and uncertainty involved in both undertaking higher education alongside paid employment and engaging with ESHE, in practice. This systematic shrouding of power through discourse enables those with the most power in both organisations, and society more generally, to maintain their dominance in the field (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984; Fairclough, 1989).
As Bourdieu (1993, p. 73) explains, ‘the structure of the field is a state of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle’ over the distribution of different forms of capital and this struggle necessarily occurs through the discourse influenced by the ‘specific logic of the field’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 113). However, what is unique about ESHE is that it concerns individual and collective action not just within one social field but rather two very distinct social fields – the workplace and the university, each with its own ‘specific capital which has been accumulated in the course of previous struggles and which orients subsequent strategies’ (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 73) (although it could be argued that increasingly these fields are now overlapping as universities have become increasingly corporatised).

Thus, drawing on Bourdieu (1993), the risk and uncertainty inherent in the ESHE exchange is not merely present for employee-students but also for their managers on two mutually-reinforcing accounts: 1) the nature and structure of the higher education field in which the employee-student is concurrently engaged, is inherently more uncertain than the workplace because managers cannot directly control its interests and 2) all individuals involved in the organisational field share basic interests that stem from the organisation’s existence. Thus, when an individual begins to move into and across fields, the extent to which those agendas may become unshared is uncertain, reinforcing the risk associated with managers supporting them in this engagement. As Billett (2006, p. 41) explains:

> Workplaces are contested learning environments in which relations among workers and support for learning are unlikely to be benign, because the learning and development of some workers may threaten others.

The challenge in reforming current approaches to ESHE lies in the candid communication and realignment of fundamental interests across both the workplace and higher education fields. For many individuals, the dominant expectation is that they will unproblematically assume the dual roles of employee and lifelong learner without sufficient support (Solomon, 2003). However, this presupposes that the modern workplace has a fundamental interest in promoting critical thinking, employee self-confidence, knowledge sharing, informal learning and employee wellbeing; a debatable premise in the current neoliberal climate. Especially as these
interests enacted at the individual and collective level may be shaped in part by issues of fear and control manifested in the workplace (Billett, 2006a). Indeed, it seems that any path forward would certainly require organisations and individuals to

… abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests (Foucault, 1995, p. 27).

I argue that by acknowledging the knowledge-power relations at play within and beyond the workplace, by centralising the inherent risk and uncertainty involved in the processes of undertaking higher education alongside paid work and engaging with ESHE provisions in practice, a new conversation regarding ESHE can commence. Specifically, one aimed at achieving more mutually beneficial arrangements for both employee-students and employers. However, ‘because conversation is the give and take of listening and speaking, it cannot be done effectively without a language within which to communicate’ (Crick & Joldersma, 2007, p. 92). Thus, a reformation of ESHE would need to be based on a new, critical dialogue of mutual awareness and understanding achieved via both the recognition of, and deliberate disruption of, the existing organisational habitus and associated ESHE practices.

Specifically, this would require managers at all organisational levels and employee-students, to challenge their assumptions and views relating to the value of higher education engagement alongside paid employment. For example, a practical starting point would be to contest the notion of study relevance as ‘doxa’ (Bourdieu, 1984). This could be achieved by interrogating the longstanding views of both workplace managers and employees regarding the ways in which they view the relevance of higher education, as contrasted with other forms of learning. As this research has shown, however, what makes this so difficult is that doxa is not only orthodoxy but ‘a politically produced relation, as are the categories of perception that sustain it’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 56). Therefore, the challenging of these views would require an appreciation of and commitment to critical reflection and action through reflexivity. As Edwards et al. (2002, p. 533) argue,
… cognitive conditions of risk, uncertainty and (dis)location imply requirements for individuals to access both codified and empirically founded knowledge and to be oriented to employ critical reflexivity.

However, it would also require, on both sides, an ongoing sense of ‘illusio’ or belief that engaging in this ‘social game’ is ‘worth the effort’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 77). This would necessarily include a common belief that ‘what happens matters to those who are engaged in it’, a keenness to participate and a belief in the stakes of the game (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 77). Certainly, given that this research demonstrates ESHE is an issue which has implications of all workplaces, and the realisation of the broader lifelong learning agenda, workplaces may benefit from agreeing to suspend the doxa. I argue that the model of ESHE (Figure 8.1), which has been generated from this research, may indeed catalyse such a dialogue about how this sense of illusio might be championed and maintained. This dialogue could then be used to change current practices at the local level through more agentive processes.

As this research has revealed, a new approach to providing and engaging with ESHE is justified. Specifically, findings from the current research suggest that organisations need to avoid fostering cultures of mediocrity and create more authentic learning cultures. To achieve this, the existing habitus of ESHE must be disrupted by ensuring that high-performing employee-students are kept appropriately motivated, engaged and recognised through a deeper understanding of intrinsic employee-student motivation, rather than focusing solely on extrinsic motivation, as relates to managerialist agendas. What is clear, is that the latter is contributing to a lack of employee-student and manager well-being and unduly disadvantaging certain employee-cohorts.

Employers need to recognise and centralise the lived experience that occurs as individuals increasingly learn in, but equally learn across, higher education and the workplace. They must also weigh long-term learning and development objectives alongside short-term financial and operational ones. Therefore, ESHE policy and practice should not just be interrogated within the field of adult education research, but equally within and across the fields of human resources and organisational development. Higher education is increasingly viewed as a central component of lifelong education, and lifelong education is a privileged form of lifelong learning.
Therefore, we must recognise that ‘the provisions of lifelong learning experiences and support for learning extend well beyond those provided in educational institutions’ (Billett, 2010, p. 406). Employer-supported higher education is one such support for learning which intrinsically crosses organisational and social boundaries. It represents a process with immense potential for pragmatic reform.

8.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained how ‘risk and uncertainty’ emerged as the unifying theme in my critical grounded theoretical analysis. This involved a discussion of how this concept developed through a combination of reflection, reflexivity and retroductive reasoning. The variation in category emergence observed in and across organisational sites was discussed with reference to the nascent conceptual model or habitus of ESHE to ensure its theoretical saturation and reliability. Finally, the habitus of ESHE and unifying theme of ‘risk and uncertainty’ was presented and discussed with close reference to how agentive communicative processes that acknowledge knowledge-power links may lead to ESHE improvement, in practice.
Chapter 9. Conclusion

9.1 Reconceptualising ESHE: The Challenges and Opportunities

Employer-supported higher education (ESHE) has hitherto escaped thorough research attention (Mason, 2014; Saar et al., 2014). As explained in chapter 1, ESHE is understood in different, sometimes competing, ways by employers and employees and in existing literature. Broadly, ESHE refers to the support (both financial and non-financial) that employers offer their employees that are undertaking higher education alongside paid employment. The lack of research into ESHE is problematic as the findings from this research indicate that individuals often hold competing, conflicting assumptions relating to the value of higher education. They also have different expectations regarding the support that employers provide for it and how this support should be engaged with.

In practice, these views manifest in somewhat patterned ways owing to the organisational ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1990b). Borrowing from Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, these inconsistencies have been explained in this research by using a nascent model of the habitus of ESHE. Specifically, the habitus of ESHE shows that because employee-students and workplace managers often fail to openly communicate their assumptions and expectations, the decisions that are made regarding ESHE tend to be based on partial and/or inaccurate information. Moreover, the habitus of ESHE demonstrates how owing to the pervasive influence of knowledge-power relations, ESHE affordances are often poorly negotiated in practice, as a result of the inherent risk and uncertainty associated with doing so. The ways in which employee-students and managers engage with ESHE influences the lived experience of undertaking higher education alongside paid employment and supervising employees involved in this undertaking can also been understood using this newly-developed model.

This chapter presents the key conclusions stemming from the research findings and their implications for ESHE policy and practice. Firstly, these conclusions and implications are discussed with reference to organisational culture. Specifically, I
argue that the findings indicate that current approaches to ESHE may be promoting \textit{managerialist cultures of mediocrity}, as opposed to \textit{learning cultures of innovation}.

Secondly, the findings indicate that the notion of \textit{study relevance} as it currently relates to ESHE, is extremely narrow. It obscures the depth and breadth of informal workplace learning which engagement in higher education alongside paid work facilitates. It limits the scope of personal-professional development which it catalyses. Specifically, it serves as a form of ‘doxa’ or unquestioned orthodoxy of ‘common sense’ rather than a disputable perspective (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, I argue that a more capacious definition of study relevance is required. Specifically, one which recognises higher education’s place in mainstream organisational learning and development discourse and its close relationship with informal workplace learning, whilst recognising the enduring nature of knowledge-power relations and structures.

Thirdly, I explore the possibility that whilst neoliberal values are enshrined in organisational structures and systems and cannot be overcome by individual communication or action alone, by acknowledging the inherent risk and uncertainty involved in ESHE discourse exchange and making \textit{shared} unshared assumptions relating to the value of higher education, knowledge-power links can be questioned. Even if this is only at the level of agentive processes within and across organisations. Specifically, the power imbalances that exist between employee-students and managers, \textit{and} between higher education and informal workplace learning, can be highlighted so that a more efficacious climate of ESHE negotiation can be realised.

Lastly, I have briefly discussed some of the limitations of the research and suggested some potential avenues for future research.

\textbf{9.1.1 Cultural Conversions: From Managerialism and Mediocrity to Learning and Innovation}

The majority of workplace managers indicated that their organisation had a ‘learning culture’ or that education and/or research was a key element of their
organisational vision and/or values. The policy data analysed, however, tended to indicate that to account for employee-student engagement in higher education alongside paid work, the majority of organisations privileged a kind of ‘formal rationality’ (Weber, 1978). That is, the policy analysis indicated that organisations were primarily concerned with quantifying and monitoring employee involvement in higher education via the careful measurement of course-fee reimbursement and study leave provisions. This managerialist preoccupation with controlling and examining ESHE affordances was also evident in practice. However, my findings indicated that, in practice, ESHE was driven by a more complex form of ‘substantive rationality’ (Weber, 1978). In practice, employee-students and managers drew on a range of assumptions and ideologies in making decisions about how affordances would be provided and engaged with, as opposed to focusing only on how much ESHE would be afforded.

The findings indicated that because employee-students were largely self-directed high performers, they neither sought nor expected, instruction or guidance from their managers to apply their higher education-facilitated learning to their direct work roles. Rather, they pro-actively and willingly shared newly-garnered knowledge with peers. Because the majority of managers assumed that employee-students would be self-directed, they tended to distance themselves from the ESHE process and the employee-student’s higher education studies more generally. The problem with this distancing, however, is that employee-students and their managers may be failing to clearly communicate their assumptions and expectations regarding the challenges associated with the lived experience of undertaking higher education alongside paid work. Moreover, as the individual’s unique ‘habitus’ collided with the organisational ‘habitus’, and the ‘doxa’ of study relevance that stemmed from the latter, both employee-students and managers were not always themselves clear or consistent in terms of these expectations (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1990b).

For example, the assumption that many employee-students and managers tended to make was that higher education was a chiefly private and personal undertaking. Thus, employee-students indicated that they were merely grateful for any study support provided by their employers, despite the findings also clearly indicating that
involvement in higher education conferred many professional benefits - not just to the employee but to the broader organisation and oftentimes to the wider public. These widely held yet implicit assumptions about the private-public and personal-professional nature of higher education, coupled with an internalised awareness that managers expected them to ‘just manage’, meant that employee-students often avoided negotiating or renegotiating ESHE provisions, in practice. They felt that it was ultimately their personal choice to undertake higher education alongside paid work. Thus, the modern neoliberal doctrine of learning as an individual responsibility was strongly internalised by both employee-students and managers. It became the habitus.

This inculcation of neoliberal values performed a useful function for employers. It enabled managers to easily control employee-students who were self-directed and high-performing. It embedded the notion that continuous engagement in higher education is an agentic personal choice, rather than an automatic response to the ‘scholastic mode of production’ (Bourdieu, 1984). Moreover, because these values were so strongly inculcated, of the small minority of employee-students that were offered ESHE, they tended not to negotiate the amount and type of ESHE accessible to them. Even if such affordances was grossly inadequate and resulted in extreme time pressures, stress and work-life imbalance. This resulted in pervasive feelings of guilt associated with the making of prolonged temporal sacrifices. Further, employee-students often felt that to assuage the guilt, the right thing to do was to continue to juggle work and higher education responsibilities without negotiating more effective study support. Indeed, guilt is tied to morality (Giddens, 1991). In this way, the undertaking of higher education alongside paid work represents an effective form of social control (Coffield, 1999). This is a concerning finding given that continuous involvement in higher education alongside paid work may have implications for employee-student well-being, academic performance, motivation and engagement.

Further, because ESHE was not obviously tied to work performance through succession planning or talent management strategies, but rather simply approved for all employees achieving ‘satisfactory’ work performance, employees were not incentivised or rewarded for undertaking higher education. Moreover, certain
employee-student cohorts such as research students, off-campus students and on-campus evening students were overtly disadvantaged in terms of the amount of study leave afforded to them. This is concerning, given that the majority of employee-students were actively applying their higher-education facilitated learning directly to their work roles, by sharing higher education-facilitated knowledge and skills with their peers in ongoing, albeit largely informal, ways.

In sum, the findings indicate that current approaches to providing ESHE in policy and practice are encouraging cultures of mediocrity, as opposed to cultures of learning and innovation. Specifically, the findings indicate that to move from an organisational culture that merely pays lip service to the notion of supporting lifelong learning through the provision of bare minimum ESHE affordances, to a culture that truly supports employee L&D, more funding and resourcing for ESHE is required. Both employee-students and managers indicated that this resourcing would allow for the recruitment and training of additional staff to provide ‘backfill’. This backfill would enable employee-students to take study leave to complete study requirements and/or to attend higher education-related events other than exams. It would also allow them to feel less guilt and work less unpaid overtime to account for study leave taken.

9.1.2: Understanding the Lived Experience: Towards a More Capacious Definition of Study Relevance

The findings indicated that the notion of ‘study relevance’ can be used as a tool to limit the number of employees that are eligible to receive employer-supported higher education (ESHE). Specifically, by functioning as a form of ‘doxa’ or common-sense truth, employees tend not to question management decisions relating to ESHE based on study relevance (Bourdieu, 1984). This ensures that employers can carefully control how and how much ESHE they provide. However, as the findings indicate, for those employee-students that do receive ESHE, the precise discipline in which they study appears to be less relevant than the extent to which any higher education study enhances self-confidence, promotes internal credibility, critical thinking skills, and knowledge sharing with peers. This is not to say that the substantive, discipline-specific course content did not emerge as relevant, but rather
In practice, it was considered only as relevant, or at times less relevant, than the other benefits aforementioned.

Indeed, it is this acceptance of study relevance as being a reasonable decision-making criterion, despite its concurrent function as a tool of social order, which ensures that staff are oppressed by managerialist agendas. It is a manifestation of what Bourdieu refers to as the ‘paradox of doxa’ (Bourdieu, 2001). In other words, despite the findings indicating that relevance was not actually defined by the discipline of study but rather by the various other personal and professional benefits imbued through the lived experience of undertaking higher education, employee-students acquiesced to the managerialist view of relevance, viewing it as not only reasonable but as almost ‘natural’ (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 1).

To that end, a more expansive definition of study relevance is required. Employers need to consider an alternative set of criteria on which to approve and/or allocate ESHE. The problem, however, is that this criteria must ultimately operate within the constraints of a neoliberal framework. It must therefore provide individuals with an enhanced ability to communicate and operate within it in a way that is genuinely supportive, not merely performative. As discussed in the previous section, employee-students currently receiving ESHE tend to be self-directed high performers. Therefore, more transparent criteria based on work performance and / or academic performance could be used to incentivise these employees. The concern with this approach, however, is that allocating ESHE based on performance alone does little to address the underlying structural constraints which may be preventing lower-performing employee-students from achieving sustained high performance.

Instead, given that the lived experience of undertaking higher education and paid employment is characterised by a range of positive and negative experiences, influenced by an individual’s unique life circumstances, a more equitable approach may be ensuring that ESHE is negotiated on an individual basis, rather than on disciplinary relevance alone. Specifically, this negotiation would need to centralise knowledge-power relations in a more open fashion, so as to challenge them in a way that acknowledges the different, and potentially conflicting, learning aims of employers and employee-students. This approach, though potentially uncomfortable
for both parties, would enable employee-students to obtain more supportive arrangements tailored to their unique life circumstances. In turn, this may improve the lived experience of undertaking higher education alongside paid employment, currently described by employee-students as ‘hard’ (Stephanie, Robert, Jonathan, Sarah, Tamara), ‘difficult’ (Tamara) ‘stressful’ (Robert, Sarah, Vicky) ‘tricky’ (Matthew, Jonathan), and characterised by feelings of ‘guilt’ (Stephanie, Robert, Matthew), feeling ‘worn out’ (Robert) and additional ‘pressures’ (Sarah, Daniel). It would also allow employers to ensure business needs are met through a more sustainable and human approach to supporting employee learning and development. Specifically, this approach may act to enhance employee motivation, engagement and well-being over the long term.

Furthermore, employee-students receiving ESHE tend to organically take responsibility for transferring the skills and knowledge learnt through higher education to their current employment roles. Therefore, relevance could also be determined in relation to how this higher education-facilitated informal workplace learning results in improved work performance directly. Employee-students could be allocated more strategic work projects requiring additional levels of critical thinking skills not in addition to their current work responsibilities but as an alternative to them, with their more transactional or operational tasks reallocated to other staff. In this way, a new definition of study relevance could be based not on work performance or academic performance, but rather on how the latter directly drives the former through the practical application of higher education-facilitated knowledge and skills to further workplace learning. Although, it should be noted that this approach would still need to be carefully considered as part of the aforementioned individual approach by paying close attention to structural issues affecting an employee-student’s ability to apply their learning in a practical way. By acknowledging these barriers to application, employers could encourage learning transfer in a way that is nuanced and human, not merely performative.
9.1.3 ESHE (Re) Negotiation: Minimising Risk by Acknowledging Knowledge-Power Links

This thesis has shown that ESHE is a phenomenon characterised by a great deal of risk and uncertainty. It is also influenced by complex knowledge-power relations manifested in the employer-employee relationship. In the present neoliberal climate, it is risky for both employee-students and managers to openly share their assumptions and expectations relating to continuous higher education involvement and the employer support provided for it. Therefore, they tend not to communicate openly with each other, and remain uncertain of each other’s assumptions and expectations. These assumptions influence decision-making relating to how ESHE is afforded and engaged with in practice. Thus, if assumptions are inaccurate, then the decisions that are made may be based on partial understandings of employee-student and manager expectations. Further, because of the enduring influence of knowledge-power relations, both in the workplace generally and between the employee-students and managers specifically, decisions regarding ESHE are poorly negotiated in practice. Negotiating ESHE is risky because it is uncertain and it is uncertain because it is risky. Thus, as Giddens (1998) maintains, risk and uncertainty co-constitute each other and stem from the complex and distributed nature of knowledge-power relations. This risk enables a habitus that does not enable effective ESHE for either employers or employee-students.

Specifically, both employee-students and managers must protect their own personal and professional agendas by maintaining certain resources and meeting their own set of unique accountabilities. Thus, unclear communication and faulty ESHE negotiations fail to acknowledge the pervasive influence of knowledge-power links that maintain the doxa. This is achieved through various mechanisms of social control which often operate implicitly via ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1980). The latter are related to valuations of higher education, such as those premised on neoliberal ideologies of choice and the personal benefits of higher education as relates to individual learner responsibility.

Thus, being in a subordinate position, employee-students are reluctant to negotiate more efficacious ESHE provisions because their sense of ‘illusio’ (Bourdieu, 1993)
is tied to the organisational ‘field’ (Bourdieu, 1984). The organisational ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1990b), however, is not necessarily aligned with the individual’s own habitus. Operating via the habitus, illusio thus guides the individual to avoid risky situations and make compromises which may jeopardise their existing levels of capital and position in the ‘field’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). It is illusio that ensures the employee-student is not perceived as acting too aggressively by vying for additional forms of educational and/or cultural capital through the negotiation of ESHE provisions. Broadly, negotiating or sharing assumptions related to the undertaking of higher education too freely is risky. Thus, it is an undertaking that both employee-students and managers tend to avoid.

Because participation in continuous higher education is no longer an exception but a social norm, employee-students really do not have a choice but to engage in these knowledge-power games. Because ESHE is poorly negotiated in practice, however, this often makes the lived experience difficult, especially for those that are undertaking their higher education studies by research, as they are systemically disadvantaged in terms of the amount of study leave afforded to them. Concurrently, this allows employers to maintain control over ESHE via the generative and durable nature of the habitus. This influences how knowledge and power are distributed in the organisation. This myopic mechanism of control may have a raft of implications for employee-student learning, engagement and well-being in the long-term. Specifically, these implications may involve the perpetuation of systemic disadvantage for off-campus and research employee-students, women and those from low-mid SES backgrounds.

I argue that an approach to ESHE that facilitates more transparency in the sharing of employee-student and manager assumptions and expectations, is required. An improved approach, however, must acknowledge and seek to challenge, rather than obscure, the pervasive influence of knowledge-power relations and structures. This recognition should be considered alongside a view of transparency which is itself recognised as a complex and socially-wedded notion.
9.2 Limitations and Avenues for Further Research

The organisations in which the interviews and focus group were carried out, were predominantly based in the public sector. Only one of the organisations was a not-for-profit, private company and only two interviews were conducted at this organisation – both with employee-students, as no managers elected to participate. Further, given that private firms rarely publically publish their study support policies and procedures, the majority of the policy documents were obtained from public sector organisations. This is likely to have implications for the generalisability of the findings to the private sector. Future research into ESHE policy and practice in the private sector is therefore a potential avenue for future research. Additionally, it should be noted that the organisations studied were all Australian-based, so further cross-comparative research could also be directed at other neoliberal contexts for the purposes of investigating international differences across nations and cultures. Especially those with both very similar and very different higher education funding structures to Australia, including both the United Kingdom and the United States and Canada, respectively.

This research has investigated the experiences of those undertaking undergraduate, postgraduate and research studies across various disciplines, study modes and industries broadly. Further research could focus more specifically on certain types of higher education study and/or particular employment sectors. In this way, the subtleties and nuances that exist in providing ESHE for specific types of employee-students, working within and across particular sectors and/or industries, could be more thoroughly investigated. For example, a cross-comparison of the experiences of those working and studying in sectors with extensive mandatory accredited professional development requirements could be compared with the experiences of those engaged in sectors with optional and/or less extensive accredited professional development requirements. This research was focused specifically on employer support for higher education. Therefore, future research could also investigate the parallels between employer support for higher education as contrasted with employer support for vocational education and training (VET) and/or other forms of formal, external, accredited training other than higher education.
A final limitation that should be noted is that whilst the conceptual model that was generated may provide a useful starting point from which to explore the topic in further detail, the reliability of grounded theory is always subject to the researcher’s interpretivist lens (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin, 1998). Thus, whilst the mixed-methods approach overcame this limitation to an extent, in the absence of inter-rater reliability and without applying the model in and across different contexts over time, the findings can only be considered as a provisional basis for further investigation and interrogation.

9.3 A Concluding Comment

As universities have become more corporatised, the line between higher education and the commercial world has become increasingly blurred (Giroux, 2002; Marginson, 2016b). It is important that higher education maintains its role as an independent facilitator of knowledge and learning, which imbues above all else, critical thinking skills and the democratic ideal of self-actualisation. As the findings have shown, the roots of higher education-facilitated learning and development are located in and across both personal and professional spheres. Their trunks and branches stem outward in manifold public and private directions responding to the changing needs and challenges of a rapidly-changing, globalised world. The workplace is one such space in this environment. It provides individuals with the opportunity to transfer, apply and practise the skills and knowledge facilitated through higher education involvement. Moreover, it provides employee-students with an opportunity to enact this practice relationally through the ‘hot action’ that characterises employee participation in dynamic contemporary organisations (Beckett, 2001).

Indeed, the research has shown that the learning nexus between higher education and informal workplace learning is organic. Employee-students learn through their participation in and across different learning spaces. Likewise, the self develops relationally through this participation, in ways that cannot be facilely compartmentalised in terms of disciplinary relevance to specific job tasks. Rather, it is by virtue of the lived experience of both higher education and paid work, and the
relations within them, that the individual learns to adapt and develop her practice over time. The roots of her character are transformed as she simultaneously transmutes all that is within reach of her branches. The relationship between individual and organisational learning is fluid (Finger & Brand, 1999; Hodkinson, 2005; Senge, 2006; Wang & Ahmed, 2002).

This research has broad, timely and significant implications for our understanding of the relationship between higher education-facilitated learning and informal workplace learning, especially given the dearth of current literature on employer support for higher education (Mason, 2014; Saar et al., 2014). The new conceptual model of the habitus of ESHE may inform a critical and pragmatic understanding of the relevance of higher education-facilitated learning to more traditional forms of organisational learning and development. By highlighting the ways in which neoliberal ideals have created a pervasive climate of risk and uncertainty, it may facilitate the reconceptualisation of the value of higher education in the modern workplace from merely an economic means of perpetual credential generation to a reformer of the presently beleaguered democratic objectives of lifelong learning (Bagnall, 2000; Biesta, 2006; Nicoll & Fejes, 2011; Shaw & Crowther, 2014). Higher education involvement is a contributor to the ‘common good’ (Marginson, 2016b). It must be understood, however, within a critical frame that acknowledges the pervasive influence of knowledge-power relations and structures within and across employment and educational contexts.

An approach to ESHE which recognises the long-term and wide-reaching benefits of a more human and less performative approach to ESHE may facilitate more mutually beneficial and sustainable learning and learning support outcomes as relates to achieving this collective agenda. The habitus of ESHE generated from this research provides a way forward in recognising and disrupting the current ESHE practices and processes which are preventing us from achieving this goal.
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Appendix 1. List of Interview and Focus Group Questions

Interview Questions: Employee-Students

1. Can you tell me what HE course you are currently studying and how you have come to be studying it? E.g. Self or employer-initiated?

2. And are you studying on or off-campus? Part-time/full-time etc?

3. Why did you choose a higher education / university-level course over other forms of education and training such as a Tafe program or short course?

4. Considering that, how would you describe the value of Higher Education / University Education today? E.g. What beliefs/ expectations do you have regarding your involvement in higher education – both now and when you finish your course? In terms of longer term or short term development?

5. In what ways do you feel that you are transferring the skills and knowledge that you are learning through your course to your current role?

6. What kind of opportunities does your direct manager give you to use your knowledge / skills on the job? In what ways do you see this changing in the future?

7. Overall, how would you describe your experience undertaking higher education alongside paid work? Major challenges and major highlights etc?

8. How do you maintain work-life balance with your studies?

9. In what ways are you supported in your studies? Who supports you and how? E.g. How do your university lecturers/administrations/family/friends/employer/manager/peers support you?

10. What formal (if any) study assistance / support provisions does your employer provide? How is study leave taken? Is your role backfilled? Who decides? Are decisions re: study leave made fairly?

11. How does this support (amount of / type of etc) help/hinder you in your studies and in your current job role? Could the organisational study support policy and/or process be made easier / clearer / improved in some way? How?

12. In what ways (informally and formally) has your direct manager supported you in your higher education studies? What about your colleagues / peers?

13. Do you talk openly with your manager about your HE studies and your work-life balance as related to your HE study etc?
14. How do your experiences undertaking other types of workplace training (e.g. short courses / on the job training) compare to your experiences undertaking higher education in terms of the support you receive from your manager/employer/peers?

15. Do you have anything that you would like to add about your experiences undertaking higher education alongside paid work or the support that you receive for your studies – from your employer, from anyone/anywhere else?

**Interview Questions: Managers / HR Professionals**

1. Can you tell me about your role in either supervising staff undertaking higher education OR about your role administering employee study assistance/support? Clarify role if needed.

2. Why do you think that your staff (those you supervise/administer to) have chosen to undertake higher education study?

3. What beliefs/expectations do you have regarding the value of higher education for staff? *How is higher education relevant to the knowledge and skill development of your staff? In terms of short-term vs long-term development of staff?*

4. How would you compare this (the value of HE) to other forms of adult education and training such as on-the-job learning, short courses and VET for example? More relevant/less relevant? Why?

5. What are your initial feelings/thoughts when an employee approaches you enquiring about undertaking a HE course and/or requesting study assistance/support for a university course?

6. What forms of support do you offer your staff undertaking Higher Ed studies? E.g. study leave, course fee reimbursement?

7. Do you have an employee study support/assistance policy? How does it work? Who drives it? Who makes the decisions about it? How are these decisions made? E.g. *Study relevance?*

8. How does the support that you offer for Higher Education differ to that which you offer for other forms of workplace training?

9. Do all staff receive the same amount and type of study support? If not, why? How do you know that it is provided fairly?

10. Do you talk openly with your staff about their HE studies and work-study-life balance?

11. How have things changed in your organisation/team with respect to the number of employees undertaking higher education whilst engaged in paid work? Are
more staff studying and / or applying for study support? Why do you think that this is the case?

12. Generally speaking, whose responsibility do you think it is to support employees undertaking higher education? Why?

13. Do you measure the effectiveness of your study support provisions in terms of ROI / learning transfer or some other measure? How do you know that they are effective?

14. (If applicable), did you receive any support from your employer for your university studies? How might this have influenced your current perspective on the study support / higher education that you provide?

15. Do you think there is room for improvement in terms of your study support policy or the way that it is implemented in practice? How and in what ways?

16. Do you have anything that you would like to add about your experiences supervising / administering to staff undertaking higher education alongside paid work or the support that you provide to your staff undertaking higher education with paid work?

**Interview Questions: Management Focus Group**

1. Why do you think that staff choose to undertake higher education alongside paid work?

2. How do you make decisions regarding study leave for staff? E.g. How do you determine what study is relevant / how staff can take their leave?

3. How do you know that the study support / leave that you provide to staff is effective? Is there room for improvement in the type and / or amount of study support that you offer staff?
Appendix 2. Survey Questionnaire Questions

Demographic / Background Questions
1. Do you give your consent to participate in this research?
2. What is your gender identity?
3. Please select your age group
4. Which racial or ethnic groups do you most identify with?
5. Please indicate your household/family status
6. Highest Level of Education Completed/Achieved (*not the level of education at which you are currently studying)
7. If your highest level of education was completed at university, in what discipline did you study? Leave question blank if it does not apply.
8. On what basis are you currently employed?
9. Which of the following best describes your current position level at work
10. In what sector are you currently employed?
11. Use the drop down arrow to select the industry in which you are currently employed
12. What size is your organisation?

Cohort Screening Question
13. Select the criteria that best fits your current situation. I am currently a/an
   - University / higher education student AND a paid employee
   - Manager that supervises employees undertaking higher education alongside their paid work OR HR professional that administers employee study assistance
   - Academic OR administrator working for a university / higher education provider

Employee-student questions
14. What level higher education course are you currently studying?
15. What mode of higher education study are you currently enrolled in?
16. What discipline are you currently studying?
17. How long have you been working for your current employer?
18. How long have you been working in your current position with this employer?
19. How long have you been enrolled in higher education studies whilst in your current position with this employer?
20. What are the top four reasons that you decided to enrol in a higher education course? Please tick only your top four reasons.
21. For you personally, what are the top four most difficult things about working and undertaking higher education studies at the same time? Please tick only your top four reasons.
22. Does your current employer offer study assistance for higher education / university studies?
23. In what form does your current employer provide study assistance for higher education / university studies? Tick all that apply.

24. Are you currently receiving this study assistance from your employer?

25. If you selected 'no' to the above question, do you know why you are not eligible? If possible, please explain briefly below then continue to question 29, otherwise leave blank and continue to question 29.

26. If you selected 'Yes, but probably not all that I am entitled to', please explain why you think that this is the case below. Otherwise, leave this question blank.

27. In your opinion, how useful is the study assistance that you currently receive?

28. Who suggested that you should apply for study assistance?

29. Outside of formal study assistance, how would you rate the level of informal support that you receive from your manager/supervisor? This might include things like genuine interest in your studies or words of encouragement, for example.

30. Regardless of whether you currently receive any study assistance from your employer, what forms of study assistance for higher education do you think would be most useful for you, personally? Please tick all that apply.

31. How often does your direct manager provide you with opportunities to apply/transfer the knowledge/skills that you are learning in your higher education course to your current job?

32. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: 'Overall, I feel that my direct manager could do more to support me with my higher education studies?'

33. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: 'Overall, I feel that my employer/company could do more to support me with my higher education studies?'

34. In your opinion, who is mainly responsible for supporting individuals undertaking higher education / university studies alongside simultaneous paid work? Tick all that apply.

35. Do you feel that study assistance is provided fairly, across the board, at your place of work?

36. Lastly, is there anything else that you would like to say about any barriers to your professional learning that you have experienced, or any suggestions for how professional learning, including higher education, might be better supported?

Manager / HR Professional Questions

37. In your opinion, what are the top four reasons why employees undertake Higher Education / University study? Please select your top four responses only.

38. If applicable, what would you say are the top four reasons that you, personally, decided to undertake higher education / university studies? Please select your top four only.

39. Regardless of whether you have ever undertaken higher education yourself, in your view, what are the top four most difficult things about working and undertaking higher education studies at the same time?
40. In your view, what are the two most important types of education / training for ensuring the short-term skill development of employees? Please select two responses only.

41. In your view, what are the two most important types of education / training for ensuring the long-term skill development of employees? Please select two responses only.

42. Does your organisation offer study assistance for employees undertaking higher education / university studies?

43. If you selected 'no' to the above question, do you know why it is not offered? Please comment below then skip to question 27.

44. Are you responsible for either administering or approving employee study assistance?

45. On what basis is it decided that study assistance will be approved? Please tick all factors that apply.

46. What are the main forms of study assistance for higher education / university studies that your organisation offers? Please tick all that apply.

47. Based on your experience, how often do managers in your organisation actively encourage employees to apply for study assistance?

48. In your experience, over the past 12 months, to what extent have the number of employees lodging applications for study assistance for higher education / university study, increased or decreased?

49. Does your organisation measure the return on investment (ROI) or monitor the business value of the study assistance that you provide?

50. If applicable, how often do you provide your direct reports with opportunities to apply/transfer the knowledge/skills that they have learnt in their higher education / university studies to their current job?

51. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: 'Overall, I feel that our organisation/company could do more to support employees with their higher education studies?'

52. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: 'Overall, I feel that managers in our organisation / company could do more to support employees with their higher education studies?'

53. In your opinion, who is mainly responsible for supporting individuals undertaking higher education / university studies alongside simultaneous paid work? Tick all that apply.

54. Do you feel that study assistance is provided fairly, across the board, in your organisation/company?

55. Lastly, if you have any further comments about how higher education is supported in your organisation, please provide details in the box below.
Appendix 3. Ethics: Letter of Approval

Memorandum

To: A/Prof Lyn Harrison & Dr Trace Ollis
    School of Education

G

cc: Miss Liz Stewart

From: Faculty of Arts & Education Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG)

Date: 18 February, 2016

Subject: HAE-16-008

Employer-supported higher education: challenges and opportunities

Please quote this project number in all future communications

The application for this project has been considered by the Faculty HEAG under the terms of Deakin University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (DUHREC).

Approval has been given for Miss Liz Stewart, under the supervision of A/Prof Lyn Harrison and Dr Trace Ollis, School of Education, to undertake this project from 18/02/2016 to 18/02/2020.

The approval given by the Faculty HEAG is given only for the project and for the period as stated in the approval. It is your responsibility to contact the Faculty HEAG immediately should any of the following occur:

• Serious or unexpected adverse effects on the participants
• Any proposed changes in the protocol, including extensions of time.
• Any events which might affect the continuing ethical acceptability of the project.
• The project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
• Modifications are requested by other HREC.

In addition you will be required to report on the progress of your project at least once every year and at the conclusion of the project. Failure to report as required will result in suspension of your approval to proceed with the project.

The Faculty HEAG and/or DUHREC may need to audit this project as part of the requirements for monitoring set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Kylie Koutrakidinhas
HEAG Secretariat
Faculty of Arts and Education
Appendix 4. Ethics: Plain Language Statement and Consent Form

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM

TO Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plain Language Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date:</strong> TBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Project Title:</strong> Employer-supported Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal Researcher:</strong> Associate Professor Lyn Harrison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Researcher:</strong> Elizabeth Stewart (PhD Candidate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Associate Researcher(s):</strong> Dr Tracey Ollis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You are invited to take part in this research project.

Please note that your contact details have been obtained from your organisation who has agreed to participate in this study. Participation in any research project however is entirely voluntary and you do not have to take part in the study if you do not want to. If you are a member of an organisation or business, and your manager (or another staff member) has asked you to participate, you can choose not to participate. This should not impact on your relationship with your manager or your employment relationship, as managers will be informed that participation by individuals and organisations is entirely voluntary. If you are a member of Deakin University deciding not to participate will not affect your relationship to the researchers or to Deakin University.

Once you have read this form and agree to participate, please sign the attached consent form. You may keep this copy of the Plain Language Statement.

The purpose of this research is to investigate how higher education is valued by key stakeholders (including employees, students, workplace managers, higher education professionals and administrators) and how these values relate to the ways in which employer-supported higher education (also known simply as study support or study assistance) is both provided and engaged with by both individuals and organisations.

The results will be published in academic journals and may be published in the media. No organisation or individual will be able to be identified in any publication. The possible benefits of the study include gaining a clearer understanding of employer-supported higher education provision which may allow for improved study support practices in organisations which may benefit employers, employees undertaking university studies and higher education providers.
With your consent, your participation in the project will involve either an interview and/or focus group of approximately one hour. Interviews can be conducted face-to-face, by phone or Skype. You may decide to stop the interview (or leave the focus group at any point). All of your responses will be kept confidential and your anonymity carefully protected. You may also ask up to the time of publication that any information collected at your interview be destroyed at not used for the research. Indicative interview / focus group questions include:

**For Employee-students**

- Do you feel that you are given adequate opportunities to apply/transfer the knowledge/skills learnt in your university course to your direct role? Why/why not?

**For HR Professionals / Managers**

- In what ways do you feel that higher education might be relevant to the day-to-day work that is done in your team?

We wish to voice record the interviews and focus groups. If you do not wish this to occur, we will take handwritten notes of the interview. Participants will be presented with the opportunity to verify their interview transcripts prior to interview analysis. To comply with ethical requirements all data will be stored securely for a period of a minimum of 5 years after final publication. It will then be destroyed. Please note that all organisations participating will receive a summary of the key research finding. Individuals participating in the study are also entitled to request a brief summary of the research project results from the research team.

Approval to undertake this research project has been given by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Deakin University.

**Complaints**

If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact: The Manager, Office of Research Integrity, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125, Telephone: 9251 7129, Facsimile: 9244 6581; research-ethics@deakin.edu.au. Please quote project number [2016-xxx].

The researcher has a Deakin University Postgraduate Research Scholarship (DUPRS) to assist with the funding of this research. If you require further information or if you have any problems concerning this project, you can contact either of the student researcher or the principal researcher. The researchers responsible for this project are listed at the top of this form.
TO: Participant

Consent Form

Date: TBC

Full Project Title: Employer-supported Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities

Reference Number: TBC

I have read and I understand the attached Plain Language Statement.

I freely agree to participate in this project according to the conditions in the Plain Language Statement.

I have been given a copy of the Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to keep.

The researcher has agreed not to reveal my identity and personal details, including where information about this project is published, or presented in any public form I understand that all responses to interviews and focus group questions will be kept confidential.

I understand that participation in this project may involve either a single interview and/or a single focus group and that is my choice whether I decide to participate in either only an interview, or a focus group, or both.

I understand that interviews and focus groups will involve audio taping.

I am allowed to request a copy of the interview transcript/s and/or my verbal contribution to the focus group/s to check that they accurately reflect my views and if I decide, I will ask the researcher to edit these after the interview and or/focus group.

I understand that data from this project will be kept private and stored securely for up to 5 years and may be used for future research analysis.

Participant’s Name (printed) ………………………………………………………………………

Signature ……………………………………………………… Date …………………………

Please return form to ejstewart@deakin.edu.au or alternatively to:

Elizabeth Stewart
Deakin University
Faculty of Arts and Education
Geelong Waurn Ponds Campus
75 Pidgons Road
Waurn Ponds VIC 3216
TO: Organisations

Organisational Consent Form

(To be used by organisational Heads providing consent for staff/members/patrons to be involved in research)

Date: TBC

Full Project Title: Employer-supported Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities

Reference Number: TBC

I have read and I understand the attached Plain Language Statement.

I give my permission for staff of [*name of organisation – TBC after initial policy analysis and online questionnaire phases have been completed] to participate in this project according to the conditions in the Plain Language Statement.

I have been given a copy of Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to keep.

I understand that the employees participating in this study are allowed to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time and that this will not impact their employment relationship, or result in any negative consequences relating to their employment with this organisation.

The researcher has agreed not to reveal the participants’ identities and personal details if information about this project is published or presented in any public form.

I agree that

1. The organisation may not be named in research publications or other publicity without prior agreement.

2. We expect to receive a copy of the research findings or publications.

Name of person giving consent (printed) ........................................................................................................

Signature ........................................................................................................... Date ..................................

Please return form to ejstewart@deakin.edu.au or alternatively to:

Elizabeth Stewart
Faculty of Arts and Education
Deakin University
Geelong Waurn Ponds Campus
75 Piggons Road
Waurn Ponds VIC 3216