

Building employability and self-identity brick by brick

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In an increasingly digital educational landscape, a team from Liverpool Business School suggest that the answer to developing students' core skills for employability may lie within a pile of LEGO® bricks.

In a business education landscape increasingly shaped by digital disruption, global complexity, and changing employer expectations, developing students' self-awareness and professional identity is no longer “*nice to have*”; it's essential. As the World Economic Forum's latest Future Jobs Report outlines (World Economic Forum, 2025), motivation and self-awareness are the 5th most important core skills for employability in today's economy. Business schools must therefore ask: How can we equip students with these human-centred capabilities in a meaningful and scalable way - particularly in an educational setting that is becoming more digital?

One answer may be hiding in plain-sight, within a pile of LEGO® bricks.

Work and identity have long been intertwined (Gini, 1998). A well-developed sense of self supports motivation, risk tolerance, and career decision making (Mills and Pawson, 2012; Obschonka *et al.*, 2015). For business schools, which makes self-identity central to employability, entrepreneurship, and leadership education. Yet, despite this, most higher education curricula prioritise technical knowledge over personal insight. Lectures and case studies obviously remain important, but they often fall short of enabling deep, identity-driven learning. Helping students uncover who they are is not just beneficial, it's essential for lifelong success. Deep learning, a concept first explored by Marton and Säljö, (1976) suggests that students who seek meaning and relevance in what they learn gain better outcomes.

The case for LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in the business curriculum

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® (LSP) is a structured, research-informed method that helps students build metaphorical models using LEGO® bricks. Through action (building), interaction (sharing), and transformation (reflecting), students are able to externalise abstract ideas and articulate what matters to them. Instead of students merely being told what to think, LSP encourages them to explore how they think, and more importantly,

who they are. These phases allow students to externalise complex concepts and engage in meaningful dialogue about their personal values, goals, and identity (Roos and Victor, 2018; Shipway and Henderson, 2024).

When bricks speak louder than words: Student reflections

Recently, we conducted LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshops with 152 first-year university students to explore self-identity as future professionals. The results were striking. Students described the sessions as engaging, inclusive, and transformative. Facilitators were praised for creating safe spaces that encouraged creativity and open communication, critical conditions for psychological safety and deep learning (Edmondson, 1999).

Students reflected on their LSP experience with comments such as: *“It helped me focus more on how I see myself as well as how others see me,”*, *“It made me talk and consider my self-identity in ways I wouldn’t have thought about before.”* These kinds of insights are not easily extracted through traditional lectures or standard seminars. The creative and novel approach to learning was consistently commented on by the students and was summed up by one student who stated, *“Interactive session, made you think hard about yourself in the future”*.

These comments speak to a growing pedagogical need: business students must graduate not only knowing things but knowing themselves.

Identity-building as employability development

LSP’s value lies not only in emotional insight but in practical skill development. Participants demonstrated improved reflection, self-regulation and peer collaboration, all vital for graduate employability. These are not abstract soft skills, but tangible behaviours employers increasingly seek in areas like management, entrepreneurship, and client-facing roles.

Importantly, the creative and hands-on nature of LSP also supports inclusive learning, providing opportunities for diverse student voices to emerge, especially from students who may not typically speak up in a large group setting. This makes it a powerful tool for EDI (equity, diversity, and inclusion) within business school pedagogy. As education continues to shift toward more learner-centred approaches, LSP offers a unique and effective way to help students engage with their own identities and their peers.

Embedding LSP in business school practice

As business schools shift toward more active, authentic learning experiences, LSP offers a low-cost, high-impact tool for modules focused

on personal and professional development, enterprise and entrepreneurship, leadership and team dynamics, as well as onboarding and induction activities. It also aligns with the broader institutional priorities around graduate outcomes, student engagement and authentic assessments, key themes for business schools navigating OfS metrics.

Final thoughts: Constructing the future business professional

When students are supported in building their own identity, metaphorically and literally, they become more confident, motivated, and prepared for the realities of work beyond university. LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® helps move business education beyond passive consumption learning into an active, reflective, and deeply personal journey. And in doing so, it gives students the building blocks to construct the most important model of all: themselves.

References

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