Rethinking pathways: Comparing the career capital of knowledge workers in Australia and Singapore

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Introduction

• Policy significance of learners pathways in Singapore and Australia
  – Bradley Review (2008) in Australia
  – Singapore CET Masterplan
• This study rethinks pathways and contributes to conference theme (and knowledge) in three ways:
  – understanding movements of two samples in Australia and Singapore (in context)
  – investigating movement between educational sectors through life rather than transition from school (in focus)
  – interpreting the above through the lens of accumulating career capital (in conceptual framework)
• Research issue: how individuals in two different national contexts manage and leverage their career capital
Research significance

- Need for research on types of pathways other than transition from school to work
- Access to different forms of post-school education is critical especially in a society committed to lifelong learning and an economy requiring a knowledgeable, skilled and adaptable workforce
- Careers – increasingly the responsibility of individuals:
  - ‘career investment behavior’ (Greller 2006)
  - ‘career self-management’ (King 2004)
- ‘This paper focuses on learners in contrast to structural matters (such as articulation, sectoral blurring, accreditation)
Background information

• Singapore Workforce Skills Classification (WSQ)
  – national credentialling system that trains, develops, assesses and recognises adult workers for competencies to enhance their employability
  – covers six levels from certificates to graduate diploma over 26 industry frameworks

• Career capital
  – identify own career motivations, personal meaning and self-awareness (knowing-why capital),
  – develop occupational skills, knowledge and understanding needed for good performance (knowing-how capital)
  – acquire career-relevant networks and contacts (knowing-whom capital).
## Research process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey samples</strong></td>
<td>N=101, from 6 (of 26) WSQ frameworks</td>
<td>N=190, from TAFE institutes in SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
<td>N=30</td>
<td>N=22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brief description of samples</strong></td>
<td>79% male 61% over 40 years of age 59% employed fulltime</td>
<td>44% male 23% less than 25 yrs old, 36% 35-54 years old 55% employed fulltime</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Motivation for enrolling in vocational education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Enrolling</th>
<th>Singapore Study</th>
<th>Australian Study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>for personal interest, development or recreation</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to gain or improve my practical skills</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to improve my employment prospects</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to get a vocationally specialised education</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to improve my career prospects in my current field</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to retrain for a different career</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to get a broad education</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to update previous qualification</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my to refresh my study skills after a period out of education</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to get a prestigious qualification</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Motivations that showed major differences in level of agreement between the two groups:

- To update my previous qualification: Singapore Study 66.7%, Australian Study 71.4%
- To retrain for a different career: Singapore Study 41.4%, Australian Study 37.9%
- To get a broad education: Singapore Study 57%, Australian Study 32.2%
- To refresh my study skills after a period out of education: Singapore Study 58%, Australian Study 65.1%
- To get a vocationally specialised education: Singapore Study 82.1%, Australian Study 80.2%
- To improve my career prospects in my current field: Singapore Study 65.2%, Australian Study 65.2%
2. Ease in moving from academic to vocational sector (%)
Major differences of the two groups in ease of moving from academic to vocation sector
3. Perceived differences of vocational education from academic education
Knowing-why capital

- Refers to career motivations, personal meaning and self-awareness
- All of the reasons for enrolling in vocational programs are relevant to this type of career capital
- But 5 are particularly pertinent:
  - for personal interest, development or recreation
  - to improve my career prospects in my current field
  - to retrain for a different career
  - to get a broad education
  - to get a prestigious qualification
Knowing why capital

- for personal interest, development or recreation: Singapore Study 91, Australian Study 70
- to gain or improve my practical skills: Singapore Study 84, Australian Study 79
- to improve my employment prospects: Singapore Study 83, Australian Study 81
- to get a vocationally specialised education: Singapore Study 82, Australian Study 65
- to improve my career prospects in my current field: Singapore Study 80, Australian Study 65
- to retrain for a different career: Singapore Study 71, Australian Study 41
- to get a broad education: Singapore Study 67, Australian Study 38
- to update my previous qualification: Singapore Study 67, Australian Study 30
- to refresh my study skills after a period out of education: Singapore Study 58, Australian Study 32
- to get a prestigious qualification: Singapore Study 51, Australian Study 28
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Singapore Study</th>
<th>Australian Study</th>
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<tr>
<td>to be in a ‘niche industry’ (#111, Aerospace, male)</td>
<td>‘I have gained something from everything – everything is always an advantage’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because of the demand from the industry (#87, Security, male)</td>
<td>‘... strings to your bow – [you] encounter different situations and you are able to deal with them a little better than had you not had those previous experiences’ (#3151, Training &amp; Assessment, female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the need to start up a training academy in our company, so they needed someone to be familiar with the WSQ’ (#77, Training, male)</td>
<td>‘better interpersonal skills’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to pursue personal interest while not in unemployment</td>
<td>‘understanding myself – I have gained more with each move’ ‘growth in self-belief’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSQ course was such a good experience because it helped him to be a better person</td>
<td>‘Biggest gain ... confidence – to keep going... I have found it to be an enlightening experience in many ways’ (#72, Resource Management, male)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Knowing-how capital

- Refers to developing occupational skills, knowledge and understanding
- The learners clearly highlighted that they were enrolling in the vocational sector to build their knowledge and skills in order to improve their position in current employment or search for further career opportunities
Knowing-how (% agreement)

For personal interest, development or recreation: Singapore Study 91, Australian Study 70
To gain or improve my practical skills: Singapore Study 84, Australian Study 79
To improve my employment prospects: Singapore Study 83, Australian Study 81
To get a vocationally specialised education: Singapore Study 82, Australian Study 65
To improve my career prospects in my current field: Singapore Study 80, Australian Study 65
To retrain for a different career: Singapore Study 71, Australian Study 41
To get a broad education: Singapore Study 67, Australian Study 67
To update my to refresh my study skills: Singapore Study 58, Australian Study 32
To get a prestigious qualification after a period of qualification out of education: Singapore Study 51, Australian Study 28
## Knowing-how – from interviews

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<tr>
<td>Practical knowledge as the main gain in completing a WSQ course (N=12)</td>
<td>Completion of qualification ‘enabled me to gain employment’ or ‘got me a trade’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believed that the practical knowledge and skills that they gained would boost their confidence at work and result in better performance (N=9)</td>
<td>Refreshing of skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoped that the WSQ and the practical knowledge gained from it would open up opportunities for them (N=9)</td>
<td>‘More knowledge in the areas I was interested in’ ‘information that helped at the time’ ‘a lot of knowledge’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To upgrade their qualification (N=9)</td>
<td>Experience in the industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have more options or other career opportunities (N=7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Knowing-whom capital

- Relates to acquisition of career-relevant networks and contacts
- 35% of Singaporeans agreed they enrolled in a WSQ program to meet people and be with friends (cf. Australians 7%)
- Singaporeans: networking opportunities a key gain
- Australians highlighted also the relationships with staff
## Knowing-whom – from interviews

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<tr>
<td>‘I find the networking very enriching’ (#60, Training, male)</td>
<td>‘the closeness and connectedness with our lecturers and our classmates because there were only ten of us... so we did have that connectedness [and] we have been able to use that in the future’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘... where we can get to know more of our friends now’ (#85, Security, male)</td>
<td>‘... on a personal level, I have got friends that I made through that course’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Part of my goal was really to get to know more people in the training field, and I think I got that’ (#76, Training, male)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

- Intimate connections between the three types of capital - but accumulation tends to be more on knowing-how
- Knowing-why and knowing-how are mostly shaped by current economic needs (e.g. getting employment, having a contingency plan in case of retrenchment, demand from industry, upgrading qualification to obtain employment or promotion)
- Moving from the academic to the vocational sector is not difficult, but it is different
- There may be important differences between Singapore and Australia in terms of the tightness of the relationship between education and the labour market - but movement is vital, and both countries are exhibiting considerable policy interest in pathways and the degree of seamlessness between their academic and vocational sectors
- Opportunities for continuing education, moving between sectors (however different) and accumulating career capital act as essential escalators in the pathways of adult learners