

# TAFE Diploma Graduates: Personal Capital Investments and Returns.

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## **Abstract**

*TAFE currently uses the NCVER Student Outcomes Survey (SOS) to determine outcomes related to TAFE diploma programs. The SOS measures TAFE outcomes in terms of three major categories: skills development, employment and further study. This study introduces the notion of personal capital as distinct from human capital. It argues that, while valuable, the SOS data has an intrinsically human capital orientation and by its quantitative nature is not able to explore the personal capital investments and returns of TAFE diploma graduates. Consequently, while TAFE has some understanding of graduate outcomes, it does not have a fuller understanding of the range of outcomes achieved by TAFE diploma graduates. Moreover, it is beyond the TAFE system to have an understanding of the intrinsic reasons and motivations that bring an individual to decide to enrol in a TAFE diploma program.*

## **Introduction**

Technical and Further Education (TAFE) has been subject to many changes in direction and focus since its creation in the 1970s as a result of successive state and federal governments.

TAFE's standing within the general community and with federal and state governments, has been somewhat ambiguous as a result of what Kangan (ACTFE, 1974) noted was the trades and industrial focus of its educational delivery. In times of economic downturn or stagnation, federal and state governments have turned to TAFE with an expectation that funding and resources will contribute to local and national prosperity and employment, and consequently TAFE has found itself at the centre of government policy and

attention (Haynes, 1997). It is worthy of note that despite the frequent changes in direction, there has been little effort to evaluate TAFE outcomes other than by quantitative means.

### *TAFE and human capital*

The economic importance of TAFE in the policy agendas of the federal and state governments is linked with the concept of 'Human Capital' which has its origins in economic theory. Human capital is generally viewed as the combination of assets possessed by individuals and by the workforce of a company or organization (Abeysekera, 2005). Broadly speaking, human capital can be defined as the knowledge and/or skills possessed by an organization's workforce that assist that organization to maintain its competitive advantage (Widener, 2005). Human capital theory focuses on the educational level of employees as a source of labour productivity and economic growth (Carmeli, 2004).

Heckman (2005) maintains that human capital plays a major role in explaining economic growth and the differences in productivity among countries. Giddens (2000) claims that market competitiveness is necessary for success in a global economy and he states that in order to be globally competitive, governments need to make "an investment in human capital wherever possible" (Giddens, 1998, p 117). According to Wei (2004) one of the most important assets of a country is human capital, and education is one of the most important forms of investment in human capital.

Human capital theory therefore views the allocation of resources by governments to education as an investment that will produce future returns in the form of economic growth or productivity. Thus, human capital theory asserts that the economic value of education is assessed by the increase in the earning capacity or productive capability of individuals (Quiggin, 1999).

Most current federal and state government thinking about vocational education and training advanced through TAFE hold that it exists within the context of human capital theory. This is because TAFE has emphasised skills development as a charter for vocational education and training to meet present and future industry and economic demands. Human capital theory deems that the more skilled and productive individuals are, the more valuable those individuals are to industry and commerce and, by inference, the national economy. TAFE has been the subject of much government policy and intervention, as technical education has been deemed by successive federal and state governments to be critical to the Australian economy and global competitiveness.

Vocational education and training skills and employment outcomes thus are both key performance measures of the vocational education and training system

as outlined by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Ministerial Council (Dumbrell, 2000).

### *Student Outcomes Surveys*

Traditionally TAFE has relied upon quantitative data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) for information on graduate outcomes. The NCVER is a not-for-profit company owned by the state, territory and federal ministers responsible for vocational education and training and undertakes vocational education and training research. NCVER compiles a national quantitative Student Outcomes Survey (SOS) based on data supplied by vocational education and training providers who have a legislative requirement to comply in providing the data. It is noteworthy that the NCVER SOS is a short-term survey that records employment and education outcomes of graduates approximately six months after graduation.

The SOS survey is founded on three primary questions as outcomes and success measures. The results are used as a means for attempting to determine whether TAFE graduates achieved their desired outcome from the TAFE learning experience. The questions relate to whether:

- the students obtained employment upon completion of their studies
- the students changed their vocation as a result of their studies, and
- the students went on to further study (NCVER, 2002).

### *Limitations of the Student Outcomes Surveys*

Vocational education, training skills and employment outcomes are useful to policy makers and the vocational education and training sector as a whole. However, the focus on these macro outcomes fails to address the decision-making processes of the individual TAFE students in relation to their post-graduation choice of further education and employment. The SOS research is conducted within six months of graduation and only reflects the short-term educational and employment outcomes of the graduates surveyed. The findings of such research are limited in that the first choice of employment or study after graduation is not always indicative of a long-term vocational or educational pathway.

According to Dumbrell (2000) no ongoing process exists for determining whether any longer-term outcomes are achieved, and he identifies long-term

outcomes of vocational education and training as an area of limited study to date. Furthermore, Dumbrell (2000) claims that there is a need for more specific evaluation studies of TAFE courses rather than a reliance on wide ranging data collections. It is in respect of this position that this research sits, as there have been limited studies of the long-term educational and vocational outcomes of TAFE graduates and no research into personal capital in the context of TAFE graduates.

### *Personal Capital*

The purpose of this study was to consider the concept of personal capital investments and returns for TAFE diploma diplomates as a means to expand an awareness of TAFE participation. For the purposes of the research, an operational definition of the concept as it relates to TAFE graduate students was developed.

It is acknowledged that capital can be defined as being the productive resources or assets held by an individual (Baumol, Blinder, Gunther, & Hicks, 1991) and that, according to Tomer (2003), the term has been broadened to refer to intangible factors such as enhanced human capacities as a result of education and training.

This research defines personal capital as assets held by an individual that motivate that individual to undertake TAFE diploma studies. Personal capital assets are intrinsic and may not be negotiable in the economic marketplace nor have value to other individuals or organisations. Although these intrinsic assets may comprise McCarthy and Hagan's (2001) desire for economic wealth, Harkins and Fiala's (2002) and Cope's (2005) development of explicit and tacit knowledge, and Tomer's (2003) investment in psychological and spiritual functioning, their essential value is individually based and intrinsically driven.

For the purposes of the research, personal capital are those assets that the individual possesses, identifies, values and utilises to achieve a predetermined outcome, and includes the inherent impetus and values that individuals ascribe to their motivation to undertake a course of study (Van Der Linde, 2006). However, the intrinsic reasons, motivations and personal capital rewards for study are individually entrenched and as such, given the influences of individuality, are not quantifiable through the present human capital outcomes SOS assessment processes.

### *Research issue*

Appreciating the federal and state political influences associated with TAFE, the study was sited within a political environment where the SOS outcomes

associated with TAFE are currently situated within the context of human capital.

However, the SOS measurements are based on quantifiable outcomes that relate directly to employment and/or further study and subsequent measurable productivity, with no consideration of the value of individual motivations, aspirations, wishes and desires.

There is a gap in the current literature regarding qualitative evaluation practices for TAFE diploma student outcomes and it appears that this situation stems from the human capital quantitative endpoint focus required by government policy. Given the propensity to examine the outcomes of TAFE based on quantifiable data, the research advanced an alternative lens for examining the outcomes of TAFE. Instead of defining and investigating outcomes with respect to human capital theory, the study developed and investigated the personal capital investments and returns of TAFE diploma graduates.

The creation and development of personal capital theory emanated from influences arising from Kangan's (ACTFE, 1974) notions of the educated person. This concept of the individual as a discrete person allowed this research to move beyond statistical data from human capital into the realm of qualitative perceptions, observations and insights of TAFE diploma graduates and the subsequent outcomes of those personal capital investments that the diplomates achieved from their personal capital investment into TAFE study.

The intention of this research was to investigate the qualitative perceptions, observations and insights of TAFE diploma graduates in relation to the reasons and motivations that underpin why they undertook their program of study and whether, upon completion, those reasons had been fulfilled. For the purposes of this study those reasons and motivations were referred to as personal capital investments and returns.

Acknowledging the diverse range of programs and training offered in TAFE, this study focused on the graduates of a Community and Human Services program offered at one TAFE institution, the Brisbane North Institute of TAFE (BNIT), in Queensland, Australia. The research participants graduated in 2004.

Participants were selected from this group because the group is demographically diverse in nature, and a reasonable period of time had elapsed (two years since graduation) for the members to make longer-term decisions relating to the outcomes they anticipated from their program of study.

Given the time period that had elapsed between graduation and interview, this research has gleaned information from graduates who are more likely to be more settled or definitive in their choice of career or further education.

Personal capital was the paradigm chosen for the study as it was considered that the present quantitative outcomes assessment processes fail to consider the existence of a broader range of outcomes. The intention of this research was to examine the personal capital paradigm, which is seen as a more in-depth and qualitative investigation and provides individualized explanations and insights as to the learning outcomes of TAFE students. This data also allowed for the exploration of a range of further outcomes not addressed in the human capital approach, such as job promotion and/or change, personal achievement, family-work mix, and self-development. These additional research outcomes are valid within the construct of personal capital as they are tangible outcomes of the fundamental reasons, motivations, impetus and values that TAFE individual students ascribe in explaining their reasons for undertaking a TAFE study program.

Consequently this investigation, while acknowledging the influences of human capital, advanced and advocated the value and importance of personal capital as a major contributor to TAFE's position in technical and further education provision.

## **Discussion**

The research schedule had a two-fold role. In the first instance, it was designed to explore the participant's fundamental reasons for undertaking the course of study. That is: what they perceived to be the inherent impetus, attitudinal and behavioural drives and values that they ascribed to their motivation to undertake the course of study. It was also designed to delve into the participant's perceptions of the personal returns they obtained from completing the diploma. This meant a subjective exploration of what the participants determined were the benefits that they perceived that they had gained from completing the diploma.

### ***Participants for the study***

At the time of graduation the cohort comprised 18 students. However, of that 18, nine agreed to participate in the research project.

Participants were selected from the 2004 graduate group because a reasonable period of time has elapsed for the members to make longer-term decisions relating to the outcomes they anticipated from their program of study. In-depth interviews were used to gather data as they provide the best opportunity to determine what the respondent thinks or feels (Bouma & Ling, 2004), and a study that focuses on the individual lived experience of the subject usually relies upon an in-depth interview approach (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

In-depth interviews with the cohort of TAFE Diploma graduates allowed the researcher to explore and investigate various issues as, and when, they arose during the course of the interviews (Brannen, 1992).

### *Participant profiles*

As this was an interpretivist study which focused on the subjective feelings and experiences of people (Wisker, 2001; Crotty, 1998), a brief profile of each of the research participants is provided in order to restate and re-emphasise the humanist basis for the research project.

There were six female and three male participants in the study. At the completion of their studies in 2004, their ages ranged from 29 to 56. Each participant was ascribed a pseudonym in order to protect their anonymity. The graduates who elected to be involved in the research were:

*Shirley* – Shirley is a single woman who is 56 years of age. She had 15 years of full-time employment before being retrenched. She presently works part-time for a community-neighbourhood centre.

*Carol* – Carol is a single mother of teenage children. She is 46 years of age and had been a stay-at-home mother for many years. Carol is presently a part-time university student who also works part-time in a disability support agency.

*Larry* – Larry is a 58-year-old married man. He has previously held positions of responsibility within a large local government. Larry is a self-professed former long-term alcoholic. He is presently working part-time as a client support worker within the community and human services field.

*Alison* – Alison is 31 years of age and has two children from a previous marriage. She had undertaken university study in an area other than the social sciences, but ceased when her marriage failed. Alison recently re-married and works full-time for a federal government department. She is presently studying Social Work at university.

*Angela* – Angela is a 52-year-old married woman with school-aged children. She had been a stay-at-home mother for several years. She is presently volunteering for a community and human services organization that offers emergency financial and accommodation relief.

*Mark* – Mark is a 50-year-old single man with school-aged children from a previous marriage. Mark has a trade qualification and worked at his trade for many years before deciding upon a career change. He is presently employed full-time as a training officer for an employment agency.

*Frank* – Frank is 51 years of age. He worked for many years in the building industry until injury forced his retirement. Frank has been previously married and is about to re-marry. He is employed on a casual basis as a lifestyle support worker for the physically and intellectually disabled.

*Mary* – Mary is a 35-year-old single mother of two school-aged children. She is from a non-English speaking background. Mary had casual employment in a non-community and human services field after graduation, however she is presently unemployed.

*Lucy* – Lucy is 51 years of age. She is divorced and has school-aged children. Lucy was a stay at home mother for several years. She is presently working part-time in a disability respite centre.

Of the six female participants, four were single parents with school-aged children at the time of undertaking and completing the Diploma of Community Work. One of the female participants was single with no children and one was in a long-term marriage. Of the three male research participants, two were divorced with one of the two being a single parent subsequent to his divorce, and the remaining male participant was in a long-term marriage.

Although the research project was not a grounded theory project, it did draw on some of the analytical processes used in grounded theory research. Grounded Theory was developed by Glasser and Strauss (1967), and is a set of analytic methods that encourage inductive generation of sociological theory (Lester & Hadden, 1980). As an inductive methodology it does not test a hypothesis, instead, the researcher discovers concepts and hypotheses through constant comparative analysis of data (Glesne, 1999). This methodology is explicitly *emergent* in that the researcher enters the research situation with no prior theoretical preconceptions and subsequently develops, revises and refines theory in response to the data collected (Burns, 2000; Wisker, 2001).

The systematic techniques and procedures for data analysis that are fundamental to grounded theory research were invaluable in the data analysis process in that they guided the development of concepts. The research issue and operational definition contributed some broad categories in terms of personal capital investments and returns such as employment, job promotion/change, personal achievement, further study, work/family mix and self-development. Although these pre-determined categories were developed by the researcher, these were not intended to be exhaustive, nor were they intended to be limiting or restricting in the discovery of new understandings that may have emerged from grounded theory analysis.

The data analysis revealed emergent themes such as self-esteem, altruism, social relationships and job status/opportunities.



## ***Limitations***

The research participant's insights, feelings and attitudes are essential parts of the interview process that reveal the individual's subjective meanings (Neuman, 1994) however the researcher is generally not privy to the thoughts or intentions that sit behind the participant's responses. At any given time the interview respondent may hold an entirely different view or attitude to the subject under examination, and the response given in the interview can only be taken as 'truth' for that time and place.

A further limitation is the nature of the research itself, in that qualitative research findings can be subjective and cannot be generalised to other settings (Bryman, 2001).

The small size of the research cohort and the fact that the participants were drawn from a particular study program at one TAFE institute may also limit any generalisability to other study programs and other TAFE institutes.

Although Kumar (2005) claims that in qualitative research the issue of sampling is of little significance. The intent of the research was to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's personal capital investments and returns in their diploma program and consequently, in-depth investigations result in working with small samples (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

In terms of the research method chosen, individual interviews have their limitations concerning generalisability of their findings (Puchta & Potter, 2004; Fern, 2001; Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 1997). However, it has been argued that the intent of in-depth interviews is to report the views of the participants (Kitzinger, 1995) and that the themes emerging from individual interviews can be generalised to a larger population (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

## **Personal capital investments: operational and emergent themes**

The investigation consisted of predetermined categories or themes that arose from the research issue, and emergent categories or themes that evolved from the data analysis process.

In relation to the predetermined or operational themes, Shirley, Carol, Angela, Larry and Mary cited the need or desire for employment as being one of their primary motivators for enrolling in the Diploma of Community Work. Shirley and Carol had been unemployed for some time and enrolled in the diploma program in order to obtain formal qualifications that would lead to employment. Angela was in a position of feeling compelled to undertake a program of study

so that she might be able to assume the role of financial provider for her family in the event that her husband was made redundant.

For Larry, the diploma program was seen as crucial for the employment direction in which he wanted to go as he had discovered that life experience alone was not going to gain him employment in the field of community and human services. Mary had decided upon finding employment in a particular area of community and human services and enrolled in the program in the expectation that it would lead to employment in her chosen field.

Frank and Mark discussed their need for a job change as being the foremost incentive to undertake the diploma program. Both men had been employed in labour intensive industries for most of their working life and each had determined that they were at an age where a change to a less physically demanding occupation was needed. Frank also discussed his desire for promotion within his new-found career as being another one of his principal inducements.

In relation to personal achievement, Angela revealed that employment was not her sole reason for beginning the diploma program, as personal achievement was also a driving factor in her decision-making regarding enrolling in the diploma program. She expressed some regret at having passed up an opportunity to become a teacher some years ago when she took on the role of wife and mother. So for Angela, personal achievement was arguably equally as important as having to acquire a qualification in order to possibly have to provide for her family.

The only participant to nominate further study as the dominant reason for undertaking the diploma program was Lucy. On a private level Lucy indicated that personal achievement was also one of the motivators behind her decision to embark on her program of study. In the interview Lucy revealed issues of self esteem associated with her self-perceived level of intellect and how she thought others viewed her.

It is noteworthy that none of the research cohort nominated or discussed work/family mix as a reason for beginning their diploma studies. This is of note as four of the participants are parents with children residing with them, and of that four, three are single parents.

Carol, Larry, Alison and Shirley also spoke of their individual needs for self-development as being a key incentive for participating in the Diploma of Community Work. Carol felt that she needed to do something that mentally stimulated her, while Larry had lived through years of alcohol and drug abuse and had come to the realisation that he had to make some changes in his life if he was to progress. Alison had gone through some personal emotional turmoil

and felt that she needed to understand herself better. One of the reasons she enrolled in the diploma program was because she thought it would be able to assist her with that understanding. Shirley's self-development needs came from the realisation that she had potentially 30 years of productive life ahead of her and that she was not prepared to spend that time doing nothing.

In reference to the emergent theme of self-esteem, Shirley had self-esteem issues concerning her employability given her age. She had held the view that she was too old to be gainfully employed and thought that she would never be employed again. Alison's self-esteem had suffered as a result of her marriage break-down and one of the main reasons for her enrolling in the diploma program was out of a need to fit in somewhere and feel a sense of belonging. For Lucy, matters of self-esteem related to her self-concept and how she thought others perceived her in terms of her intellectual capacity to successfully complete tertiary studies.

In relation to the emergent theme of altruism, Frank, Mark and Alison talked about their respective altruistic drives as being part of their purpose in undertaking the diploma program. Frank expressed a desire to help people but realised that he needed a formal qualification to be able to do the kind of work in the field that he wanted. Mark's altruistic motivation stemmed from his desire to be able to help younger people and to give something back to the community. He wanted to be in a position where he could assist young people by passing on some of his life experiences and realised that he could not do that from within his trade. Alison's altruistic motivations stemmed from her negative experiences as a teenage mother and she wanted to be in a position where she could positively assist those who in a similar situation.

Alison also discussed social relationships as being of primary importance to her when considering her motives for enrolling in the Diploma of Community Work. Her marriage break-down had greatly impacted her psychologically and emotionally, and she was seeking to revisit the positive social relationships she had experienced in a previous TAFE program some years earlier.

The ambitions of Shirley, Carol, Alison and Lucy in relation to their main reasons for initiating their program of study were canvassed and their personal needs for some form of career opportunity as a personal capital investment in the diploma program were also identified. Shirley stated that she could not see herself in the role of a support worker, and one of her motivations for participating in the diploma program was that it offered more employment opportunities. Carol stated that one of her reasons for enrolling in the diploma program was that she needed a mentally stimulating occupation. For Alison and Lucy, a prime motivator for undertaking the diploma program was because it was important that they obtain employment of a high standard.

The intent of this research was to explore what the diploma graduates perceive

their personal capital investments in the Diploma of Community Work to be.

It can be seen from the foregoing discussion that, while a number of graduates cited a singular impetus for undertaking their course of study, closer examination revealed that there were often many other underlying drives of a more personal or intimate nature which motivated the participants to undertake the diploma program. A cursory analysis of the interviews could arguably have placed most of the participants within the predetermined categories that arose from the research question, however Maslow (1987) argues that an individual's explicit and apparent goals are not a sufficient underpinning upon which to classify the motivations of that individual. Thus, a deeper analysis revealed that the personal capital investment of all graduates was a more complex phenomenon for each of them.

From this deeper analysis, the personal capital investments of the diploma graduates can be seen to consist of the motivation to find employment, the impetus for personal achievement, the ambition of further study, the drive for self development, the necessity to meet altruistic aims, the need for social relationships, the desire to improve self-esteem and the personal requirement for opportunities to find meaningful job status and opportunities.

The existing paradigm of human capital, and associated quantitative research such as the SOS, does not allow for the identification and exploration of these inherent and intrinsic reasons and motivations that comprise the personal capital investment of graduates in their diploma program (Van Der Linde, 2006).

The personal capital investments section of this paper has explored the participant's intrinsic motivations and reasons for undertaking the diploma program. This section discusses what the participants perceived to be their personal capital return on their investment in the Diploma of Community Work.

In relation to the theme of employment, seven of the nine graduates have obtained some form of employment within the area of community and human services since graduating. One of the participants has a volunteer co-ordinator's position at a community agency which at the time of writing was awaiting conversion to a paid position, while the remaining participant was unemployed at the time of being interviewed.

Five of the participants, Shirley, Carol, Angela, Larry and Mary had discussed the need to find employment as being their primary impetus for undertaking the diploma program. Of the five, Larry is the only participant to be fully engaged in employment, albeit through working in a part-time capacity at two community agencies. Shirley is employed on a part-time basis with a community agency

as an administrative officer. Although her previous administrative background was important in her gaining her present position, Shirley believes that having gained the diploma assisted in her being appointed to the position. Carol has part-time employment within the area of disabilities, although she does not see this as a long-term proposition. Carol is studying a Bachelor of Social Science part-time and anticipates that on completion she will be able to use her degree in her future employment. Angela has a volunteer co-ordinator's position at a community agency that she hopes will become a paid position.

Larry is working at two part-time positions and attributes his present positions to having gained the Diploma of Community Work. At the time of being interviewed, Mary had been unsuccessful in finding employment within the field of community and human services.

It is noteworthy that, while Shirley, Carol, Angela, Larry and Mary have not gained full-time employment from their program of study, they all spoke positively of having participated in the diploma program. As discussed, four of the five participants stated that they would not be in their present employment position without having completed the Diploma of Community Work.

Although, employment status was not the only area in which four of the five participants considered they had obtained a return on their investment. Apart from helping her obtain her present job, Shirley talked about the other personal capital returns she has received from the diploma program. She spoke of her sense of personal achievement at completing the diploma program, her self-development and increased self-esteem, her job status, the skills she acquired in the program of study and the altruistic rewards Shirley gains from her present position. Carol spoke of her personal capital returns not only in relation to her employment, but also in relation to the benefits of the diploma studies to her further study, her self-development and the acquisition of important skills.

Angela is not engaged in full-time paid employment, although she is a full-time volunteer co-ordinator with a community agency. Angela saw her personal capital returns as comprising the sense of self-achievement she gained from completing the diploma program, her self-development, the altruistic rewards from her job and the value of skills she learned in the diploma program.

Aside from his personal capital return of employment, Larry spoke of the personal capital returns he obtained in relation to growth in his personal development, his sense of self-achievement and increased self-esteem at having completed the diploma program. He also referred to being able to fulfil altruistic goals through being in a position to assist others.

Although Mary had expressed her disappointment at not being able to gain employment within the area of community and human services, she spoke

about other personal capital returns in relation to the diploma program. Mary talked about the intense feelings of personal achievement that she received from completing the program of study and about how the diploma program assisted in her self-development.

Alison's initial investment in the Diploma of Community Work was for reasons of social relationships, and in her interview Alison stated that she had received the return that she had anticipated. Alison also discussed other returns she had received from her studies in the Diploma of Community Work. She talked about the benefit of the diploma program in terms of advanced standing in her further studies, her personal growth and self-development and the enhancement of her self-esteem. Alison also spoke about the value of the skills she had learned and being able to meet her personal job status requirements.

Mark's personal capital investment in the Diploma of Community Work was mainly concerning a career change. Mark had psychologically and physically tired of his manual trade and was looking to change to a less physically demanding occupation. On completion of the diploma program Mark was successful in obtaining full-time work with an employment agency. In his interview Mark stated that he had received a return on his personal capital investment in more than a career change. Mark also discussed his feelings of personal achievement at completing the diploma program, the increase in his self-development and the meeting of his altruistic objectives.

Frank's primary drive to enrol in the diploma program was also for a career change, although altruistic motives and ambitions of promotion were also driving factors. At the time of interview Frank was employed as a lifestyle support worker. In discussing his personal capital returns, Frank stated that he is achieving his altruistic goal of helping people and is enjoying his newfound career.

Frank has not pursued his desire for promotion, however he did talk about other personal capital rewards such as the personal achievement of completing the diploma program, the growth in self-development and self-esteem that he gained from the program of study, and the skills he acquired from the Diploma of Community Work.

Lucy's stated principal impetus for undertaking the diploma program was for the purposes of pursuing further study; however it was revealed in the interview that this ambition was also linked with issues relating to self-esteem. In terms of a personal capital return, Lucy spoke of how gaining the Diploma of Community Work had helped her secure employment that had a particular level of job status connected with it. Lucy also talked about personal capital returns of increased self-esteem and the acquisition of relevant workplace skills.

Of all the participants, there was not one who did not receive some form of personal capital return on his or her personal capital investment in the Diploma of Community Work. With the exception of Mary, all of the participants were successful in receiving a personal capital return on their stated personal capital investment in the diploma program. Moreover, all participants spoke of positive returns from the diploma program that encompassed such things as assisting with further studies, personal growth and development, feelings of personal achievement, increased self-esteem, altruistic rewards, job status and skills development.

## Considerations for TAFE

TAFE uses the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Student Outcomes Survey (SOS) to determine outcomes related to TAFE diploma programs. The SOS measures TAFE outcomes in terms of three major categories: skills development, employment and further study. This study has argued that, while valuable, the SOS data has an intrinsically human capital orientation. By its quantitative nature and situation within the human capital paradigm, the SOS is not able to explore the personal capital investments and returns of TAFE diploma graduates. Consequently, while TAFE has some understanding of graduate outcomes as a result of the SOS, it does not have a fuller understanding of the range of outcomes achieved by TAFE diploma graduates. Moreover, it has little understanding of the intrinsic reasons and motivations that bring an individual to decide to enrol in a TAFE diploma program.

At the time of the participant's enrolment in the Diploma of Community Work in 2002, TAFE's student recruitment marketing strategy was firmly positioned within the human capital paradigm. The advertising slogan employed by TAFE - *TAFE means jobs* - was clearly derived from the human capital outcomes categories. In effect TAFE was implying that by participating in a TAFE program a learner could acquire national and state recognised skills, find employment or go onto further study that would lead to employment.

TAFE's promotional campaigns do not address any of the additional intrinsic outcomes that this study has identified and discussed such as personal achievement, self-development and self-esteem.

It is noteworthy that while five of the nine participants in this study did cite the human capital outcome of employment as a motivator for participation, that was not their sole reason for undertaking the program of study. Furthermore, four of those nine, or a little less than half, cited other reasons for engaging with the program of study. This is of note because TAFE's employment focused advertising program has only been effective in relation to the enrolment of

approximately half of those who participated in the study. Moreover, the effectiveness of the emphasis on employment in TAFE's advertising campaigns comes into question when it is considered that those participants who stated that employment was a prime motivator also stated that they had other reasons and expectations regarding their enrolment in the diploma program.

The participants in this study came from diverse backgrounds and had varied life experiences. Some, such as Carol and Lucy, were single parents who needed to find employment in order to provide for their families. Angela, saw that she may need to abandon her traditional role as wife and mother to take on the responsibility 'breadwinner' for her family. Larry saw his life spiralling out of control as a result of alcohol and drug abuse and saw TAFE as a means of redemption. While others, such as Frank and Mark, saw TAFE as not only a way of changing their jobs but also a way of meeting personal needs. For Alison, meeting personal needs alone was paramount to her decision to enrol in the Diploma of Community Work. This diversity of needs, desires, motivations and drives is what constituted the personal capital investments of the diploma graduates in the diploma program.

From this multiplicity of personal capital investments in the diploma program, each participant derived more than one personal capital return. For most, the primary return was employment. For many, such as Shirley, Mary, Larry, Mark and Frank, it was also a sense of personal achievement, while all with the exception of Lucy stated that they had also attained some degree of self-development. Shirley, Alison, Lucy, Larry and Frank also stated that having completed the diploma program had contributed to improving their sense of self-esteem.

While current federal and state government policy has TAFE situated within the human capital paradigm of providing a skilled supply of labour, the success of which is determined by outcome measures such as skills acquisition, employment or further study, the personal capital investments and returns explored in this study reveal that TAFE's role is much more. The participants in this study have revealed that they came to TAFE with greater expectations than simply acquiring a skills-set for employment. They came to TAFE with deeply intrinsic and personal motivations and expectations and, what is more, not only did they find that those expectations were met, they found that they invariably received more personal capital returns on their investment in the diploma program.

TAFE needs to consider its role in meeting the personal capital investments that learners make in its programs. While skills development to meet federal and state human capital policy requirements is necessary, it is evident that more is expected of TAFE by the people who participate in its programs. Kangan was of the belief that TAFE should contribute to the development of the individual



as a person (ACTFE, 1974), and it would appear that it is doing that, albeit by default.

TAFE needs to acknowledge its role in this holistic development of the individual and begin considering developing program strategies that meet the needs of both the human capital and personal capital paradigms.

## Conclusion

This research investigation may be beneficial for TAFE organisations in that they are provided with research that identifies student motivations for undertaking a program of study. In addition, TAFE can now have an understanding of the wider range of graduate outcomes than are currently explored by the SOS research, as well as discovering long-term graduate pathways.

While it is claimed that the findings of qualitative research cannot be generalised to the broader population (Bryman, 2001), as discussed, Rubin and Rubin (1995) argue that the themes emerging from individual interviews can be generalised to a larger population. This study has indicated a number of themes that evolved from the paradigm of personal capital as well as themes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes related to both the personal capital investments and personal capital returns of the BNIT Diploma of Community Work graduates of 2004.

The researcher has determined that the findings of the research may be generalisable to other TAFE diploma programs as the themes that emerged from the personal capital paradigm and in-depth data analysis are constructed of intrinsic drives and motivations fundamental to many human beings.

Considering the findings of this research, if TAFE organizations are interested in a fuller understanding of diploma graduates participation in the programs that are offered to students, quantitative statistics such as the SOS should not be the only measure used to determine TAFE participation.

TAFE and research organisations should consider undertaking qualitative studies of diploma graduate outcomes as a means to gathering more detailed and significant data. Furthermore, it is held that a review of graduate outcomes that is limited to a few predetermined and limited categories only presents a small part of the human story behind why people take that initial step to enrol in a diploma program.

Given the intent of TAFE organizations are to attract participants to their programs to meet the skilling requirements of the human capital paradigm, there is a genuine need to have an understanding of the personal capital

dimension of potential student participants. 'TAFE means jobs' may have been an effective campaign during periods of high unemployment. However, TAFE enrolments have been declining over past years (DET, 2006) and it may be that TAFE now needs to consider not only simply offering skilling outcomes directed at employment as an incentive to attract participants, but to also look at meeting the personal needs of the individual in the promotion of its programs.

It is not inconceivable that TAFE could meet its human capital agenda of providing training and skilling to its participants while incorporating a return to Kangan's 'educated person' concept to some degree in the promotion and delivery of its programs.

While TAFE is subject to federal and state policy mandates requiring it meet the skills demands of the state and national economies, the research demonstrated that skills and employment alone are not what attract participants to pursue studies at TAFE.

Excerpts gleaned from each participant give some indication of the extent to which they value the Diploma of Community Work program at Brisbane North Institute of TAFE in terms of their individual personal capital returns on their investment:

*"It's been great for me. It's gave me huge opportunities that I wouldn't have had before."* (Shirley, 1:17)

*"Personal terms. Personally it put me back into the system."* (Carol, 2:10)

*"But it was worthwhile for me, not only myself ego wise, I suppose it was because I would've been dead by now."* (Larry, 3:23)

*"Um, and I think, yeah, from what I've invested, I've gotten so much more out of it personally. Absolutely."* (Alison, 4:13)

*"I don't have any regrets about doing it at all. I'm really happy that I did complete it and that I'm actually using it."* (Angela, 5:16)

*"So, yes, I think the diploma was the best thing I ever did. Or one of the best things I ever did."* (Mark, 6:20)

*"Academic, personal, you know, because I got a lot of personal growth out of it."* (Frank, 7:5)

*"Now when I think back it's like, I'm sitting here, I think, I really achieved something in life you know."* (Mary, 8:4)

"I've got the education to do it now and I've got the skills, you know, in that respect it's done great for me." (Lucy, 9:7)

These statements indicate that it is the many complex, intrinsically interwoven needs, wants and desires on the part of each individual that influence their interest, motivation or necessity for participating in TAFE programs. The nature and direction of the graduate's comments in relation to outcomes go beyond simply seeking career, further study and employment outcomes. Other personal capital outcomes such as increasing self-esteem, personal development, personal achievement, the development of social relationships were deemed to be equally important.

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