

It Takes a Village: Meet the Singapore Career Development Tribe

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Abstract: Singapore is currently undergoing economic transformation (MTI, 2018) to keep up with the impact of technology on industries, businesses, and jobs. With the transformation happening rapidly, the Singapore workforce faces challenges in adapting to learn new skills and handling career transitions. Even fresh graduates face skills obsolescence within a mere few years of entering the workforce (The Business Times, 2018). Career practitioners in Singapore are seeing a greater need to help the existing workforce and fresh graduates make sense of these changes - the impact of technology disruptions and how it impacts careers. Through this paper, we want to share with fellow APCDA professionals about the various stakeholders concerned, the service providers available, and the beneficiaries involved within Singapore's career development scene. This paper was written through the lens of Dr. Roberta Neault's framework - "It Takes a Village". It seeks to give readers an understanding of the provision of macro-level career development services as well as the stakeholders who are involved with the career development practice in Singapore.

The Origins of Career Development Practices in Singapore

For many nations, the practice of career development originated from the field of counselling or university career services (Pope, 2000). For Singapore, the push for career development largely resulted from the Government involvement. The Singapore government adopted a Development State style, using government and policy interventions for both social and economic affairs to develop their only main resource – human capital (Low, 2001). This is also depicted through international lenses (Yulisman, 2018).

The Singapore Government first introduced career development through schools in the 1970s led by the Ministry of Education (MOE). MOE underwent several phases of development to create an implementation model, resulting in a national

career guidance curriculum (known as Affective and Career Education) across all national schools for children below the age of 16 by the late 1990s (Tan & Goh, 2002).

From the 1990s, career development continued to spread from schools into the workforce when the Public Employment Services (PES) was created. The earliest form of the PES was a Tripartite Committee composed of the labor movement, government, and private sector representatives to develop reskilling and employment support for retrenched workers affected by the 1997 Asian financial crisis (Monetary Authority of Singapore, 1998). In 2001, it evolved into a national Public Employment Service, or PES network – also named the Distributed CareerLink Network, or DCN. The DCN was comprised of 13 service centers across the nation in 2001, and allowed displaced workers to access and receive employment assistance within the

heartland areas. (National Archives of Singapore, 2001).

In 2003, Singapore faced economic crisis again due to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak (Chew, 2018). The Government formed a public agency – the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) to provide reskilling, employment support, and further develop the PES. Through WDA, the DCN was streamlined into 5 career centers and co-located together with a new social, community, and welfare hub, known as the Community Development Councils, or CDCs (Community Development Councils, 2018). The CDCs provided employment assistance services alongside social services, community initiatives, and welfare agencies.

In 2008, the PES was further strengthened when the labor movement, government, and national employer body supported the formation of the Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) to provide more employment support for workers displaced due to the sub-prime financial crisis (e2i, 2018).

These initiatives formed the backdrop of the early stages of career development services in Singapore. The WDA and e2i then turned their focus to the development of their officers to provide more forms of career support beyond training advice and job placement services. There was a need to help workers proactively plan and manage transitions. The introduction of the NCDA Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) course helped to equip the officers to do this.

There were two pioneers who brought the GCDF program into Singapore. Ms. Wong Sing Chee from Career Success Consulting was trained by the NCDA to deliver CDF training in Singapore (WSG, 2018). She was also the APCDA Country Director for Singapore between 2013 and 2018. Mr. Han Kok Kwang from Personal Mastery Resources was trained by the NCDA to deliver CDF training, and he was the first APCDA Legacy Partner Lifetime Member (APCDA, 2019). Between them, they equipped more than 150 officers from the

WDA and e2i with CDF training, with many of them moving on to earn their GCDF credential with NCDA.

While each certified GCDF was able to integrate what they had learned from the CDF course into their own practice, there was a need to infuse career development into national policies and the services provided by WDA and e2i. There was also a need to see career development from a holistic, whole life perspective, from school to work.

Career Development Practices as Part of Singapore's Economic Plans

In 2013, the Government had started to plan for the future of Singapore's economic strategy, and they did so through three public consultations which led to recommendations aimed at enhancing Singapore's future economic success.

The Education Ministry completed its review on vocational school career pathways under the initiative for Applied Study in Polytechnics and ITE Review, or ASPIRE, in 2013. The review recommended for formal education and career guidance to be implemented in all public schools for children aged 11 onwards. (Ministry of Education, 2014). Subsequently, the Manpower Ministry completed its consultation with the public on adult skills upgrading in 2014. Three key recommendations were proposed as part of the Continuing Education and Training review initiative named CET 2020 Masterplan (Workforce Singapore, 2014). One of the recommendations was to support the workforce in making informed learning and career choices.

In 2016, the Government formed a Committee for Future Economies, or CFE, to do extensive industry consultation on Singapore's future economy. Of the seven recommendations proposed (Ministry of Communication and Information, 2017), one was focused on career and skills planning for the workforce, to enable skills acquisition by workers to support growing industries.

A common theme across ASPIRE, CET 2020, and CFE was the need for better

preparation of workers, starting from schools, to support future industries and economies which the Government recognized will be VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous). Workforce preparation included continuous learning, skills acquisition, and career development, to prepare students and the existing workforce to make better study and work choices, and to take ownership of their career choices and development.

To implement the recommendations, the Government restructured the WDA (Ministry of Manpower, 2016) into Workforce Singapore (WSG), led by the Ministry of Manpower. Its ongoing mission is to facilitate enterprise development and growth, and provide career services to both the workforce and enterprises under the Adapt and Grow suite of national programs (Workforce Singapore, 2019a). Beyond the displaced workers, WSG also supports workers in employment to prepare for career transitions and career management.

The Government also formed a new agency, SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG), led by the Ministry of Education, and was intentionally named after the newly launched national movement called SkillsFuture. Its enduring goal is to sharpen the focus on lifelong learning and skills development, starting from pre-employment to continuing education (SkillsFuture, 2019). The SkillsFuture movement also serves as a strategic social, economic, and human capital integration mechanism and policy (Woo, 2017), enabling Singapore and her people to develop to their fullest potential, regardless of their starting points and junctures of their life-stages or careers.

Through these two new agencies, career development became infused into policies and the design of services. There are three key developments pertaining to the field of career development.

Development 1: Centralised Education and Career Guidance

In 2015, the Ministry of Education began the recruitment and career development training of the Education and Career Guidance (ECG) counsellors from the private

and public sectors. By 2017, a total of 97 ECG counsellors (Chan, 2016) were deployed to all secondary schools, junior colleges, and vocational institutes to deliver career development services to students and parents. (Ministry of Education, 2019). This development was shared at the 2016 edition of the APCDA Conference (Cheng & Tan, 2016).

SSG engaged a private service provider, Kuder Inc., to develop a national career development online resource, the MySkillsFuture.sg portal. The MySkillsFuture.sg portal is a national resource used to support self-help and guided services and interventions for all Singaporeans. It contains career exploration, profiling, and education pathways features to cater to students aged 11 and above. The same portal is also used by the adult workforce to allow them to do career assessments, explore training, and utilize public subsidies for learning.

Development 2: Enhancement of Public Employment Services

WSG went through a transformation after completing a review of the existing state of the PES, in consultation with Professor James P. Sampson of Florida State University. The result of the review was a re-branding and re-modelling of the PES. In particular, WSG revamped its structure and the delivery of PES services in 2017 (Workforce Singapore, 2017), which gave rise to Careers Connect, a service suite which committed to a different approach in the following areas:

- A shift from supporting the unemployed to active outreach to all workers

- A shift from a standard client service flow to a tiered service model

- A shift from discretionary career assistance to structured and personalized career programs

Development 3: Professionalization of Career Development Practitioners

An estimated 220 individuals are working in the area of career development as Education and Guidance Counsellors for schools or Career Coaches at WSG and e2i.

The WSG saw the importance in building up the competency and professionalism of the Career Development practitioners.

Building Local Career Guidance Competencies

In 2015, the Government partnered with the US Centre for Credentialing Education (CCE) to recognize a Career Development Facilitator (CDF) program customized for Singapore's context. The same CDF program was also recognized under Singapore's vocational framework (known as the Workforce Skills Qualification) as an Advance Certificate in Career Development Facilitation (WSQ ACCDF) (SkillsFuture, 2016). The WSQ ACCDF became the national program for career development training and was publicly offered to all private and public practicing and aspiring career practitioners. In 2018, the WSG continued the early work done and developed a local competency and credential framework (Workforce Singapore, 2018a). The framework allowed practitioners to identify the competencies required and offered them credentials at four levels, ranging from Certified Career Advisor, Certified Career Practitioner, Certified Career Clinical Supervisor, and the Certified Career Services Manager.

Infusing International Practices

The introduction of the local framework did not hamper the take-up of the international credentials such as those from the National Career Development Association (NCDA) or the Center for Credentialing and Education (CCE). On the contrary, it created more interests amongst the public who became curious about becoming a Career Development Practitioner. In Singapore, there continues to be easy access to many different forms of career development training such as, but not limited to: **Professional Credentials** such as the NCDA Facilitating Career Development program (FCD), **Formal Local Qualifications** such as the Specialist Diploma in Career Counselling, Graduate Diploma in Professional Life-Coaching, and

the Graduate Certificate in Career Development by institutes such as Republic Polytechnic, Singapore University of Social Sciences, and James Cook University, respectively. There are also various **Formal / Informal Assessment Tool Certifications** such as Strong Interest Inventory, Myer Briggs, Harrisons Assessment, Knowdell Card Sorts, and coaching credentials from the International Coaching Federation (ICF). There are currently about 300 certified coaches registered in Singapore under ICF and they specialize in different areas such as life, business, career, and executive coaching.

Creating a professional community

In 2017 and 2018, two associations for career development practitioners were formed to represent the practitioners as well as support the practitioners' practice and learning needs. The People and Career Development Association (PCDA) was formed in December of 2017, and it carried on earlier efforts by the Career Development Interest Group (CDIG) – an informal group that brought the career development community together to network and learn. PCDA is led by Ms. Wong Sing Chee and, under her leadership PCDA created a Code of Ethics for its members and worked with the government to jointly organize communities of practice, as well as the inaugural Career Practitioner's Conference in 2018 by Workforce Singapore (as cited in Wong, 2018).

The Career Development Association of Singapore (CDAS) was launched in September of 2018 after much planning and discussion among a group of career development practitioners since the end of 2016 (Career Development Association of Singapore, 2018). CDAS is led by Dr. Timothy Hsi, and in the short time that they have been established, CDAS has already held several learning and networking events and engagements with the local community.

Singapore’s Career Development Services Map

The definition of a tribe is a social community linked by a common trait or purpose, and it typically has a recognized leader. It is appropriate to describe the current career development scene in Singapore as akin to a tribe, where multiple stakeholders are involved in different areas of career development, yet all are working towards a common purpose, as defined by the Government for the nation’s economic interest.

Inspired by Dr. Roberta Neault’s work in “It Takes a Village - Building and Sustaining an Engaged Workforce”, the state of Singapore’s career development scene as of 2018 has been mapped in Table 1 on the next page. Singapore’s current career development landscape also reflects similar characteristics as Dr. Roberta Neault’s village model and

metaphor – having a variety of policies, programs, and services being co-developed by various actors in the spirit of Tripartism – the various Singapore government bodies, the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), Education Institutions, Employers, Private Providers, and the Professional Career Development Communities. All actors work together to form a continuum of career development services for its citizens across various life-stages. ‘The Village’, as Dr. Roberta Neault postulates, is an integrated and system approach model in which all actors in the country work together to enable individuals to access and actualize their careers, and this is exactly what the Singapore Village is currently observed to be doing as well. The map in Table 1 shows the career development services available for different populations; colour intensity highlights the level of differentiated influence for each population.

Table 1: Available Career Development Service by Population

Minimal	Negligible or no influence on career development		Moderate	Moderate influence on career development	
Basic	Some influence on career development		Intensive	Strong influence on career development	
Life Stage Influences	Early Years up to Secondary (age 13 to 16)	Post Secondary (age 16 to 20)	Adult (age 21 and above)		Retirement (age 65 and above)
Families	Parents provide career advice to their own children. Parents attend career talks at their children’s schools, and in turn, share relevant information with their children				
Public Schools	School Career Guidance Counsellors provide career guidance related services to both students and their parents Teachers are trained to use online career guidance resources		Schools focus on CET for adults Schools provide career transition support through reskilling		
Employers Businesses	/	Businesses offer apprenticeships,	Businesses provide talent development		Businesses offer reduced roles to extend

		internships, learning visits	for workforce and outplacement support	beyond the retirement age
Industry Agencies, Associations / Union		Union give career guidance directly to graduates and young working adults	Union provides public employment services Associations and union facilitate industry transitions Associations and union partner the Government to publish labor market information	Union also incentivizes companies to integrate technology and manpower to encourage longer careers
Career Services Providers		Service providers offer career guidance directly to graduates or alongside schools Service providers facilitate internships	Service providers offer career guidance directly to the workforce Service providers provide outplacement and recruitment support Service providers conduct career development certification and training	
Non-Profits / NGO		Specialized career services support for segments of the population, such as the disabled and seniors		
Government	Career and Education Guidance in all schools for children from age of 11 National online resource to support career guidance		Government provides public employment services Government funds work transition support and adult learning Government publish labor market information Government develops local career development framework for practitioners	Government implements active ageing policies to delay retirement, incentivize recruitment of the seniors, and promote active ageing

Schools

The Education and Career Guidance (ECG) services in Singapore’s schools aim to equip students with the necessary knowledge,

skills, and values to make informed decisions at each key educational milestone to transit well from school to further education or work. Through ECG, social emotional competencies and qualities of proactivity, adaptability, and resilience are developed to

prepare students for the 21st Century, to manage their careers and lifelong learning journeys (MOE, 2019a).

The goals of ECG are as follows:

1. Nurture students’ self-awareness, self-directedness, and life skills for continuous learning and training. (Skills)
2. Enable students to explore viable education and career options through the provision of accurate and comprehensive information. (Knowledge)
3. Inculcate an appreciation for the value of all occupations and how they contribute to the well-functioning of a society. (Mindsets)

4. Equip students with skills and means to positively engage their parents and other career influencers. (Engaging the Community)

Since mid-2015, the ECG services have been delivered by ECG Counsellors who are centralized under the Ministry of Education (MOE) and deployed to Secondary and Pre-University Schools, as well as the Post-Secondary Education Institutions (PSEI). To meet the students’ developmental needs, the ECG curriculum emphasizes different aspects as students progress from across the different education levels, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2: ECG Curriculum Emphasis

Primary School Emphasis: Awareness	Secondary School Emphasis: Exploration	Upper / Post-Secondary Emphasis: Career Planning
<p>To introduce students to the wide array of occupations, including new jobs created in this ever-changing world-of-work, through 11 hours of Form Teacher Guidance Period yearly.</p> <p>Students will develop an awareness in their:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interests, abilities, and career aspirations. 2. Relation of self to others and work. 3. Initial preferences in career roles assumed in play. 	<p>To deepen students’ understanding of self, and relate schooling to different education and career pathways through 4 hours of ECG lesson delivery yearly.</p> <p>Students will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explore the career world. 2. Understand the relevant courses of study. 3. Develop awareness of their skills, interests, and values. 	<p>To enable students to gather information from various sources to make informed educational and career decisions through a minimum of 9 hours of explicit ECG lesson delivery yearly.</p> <p>Students would learn to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clarify their career self-concept. 2. Develop skills in gathering information. 3. Develop decision-making skills.

In addition to guiding students, ECG Counsellors also collaborate with schools and a network of industry partners to organize activities for a holistic ECG experience. Over the past few years, ECG Counsellors have been engaging educators and parents in ECG discussions. For instance, most schools have Parent Support Groups where parents share their challenges and considerations in supporting the career aspirations of their children, whilst bearing in mind their children’s interests and aptitudes.

The ECG Counsellors are supported by a national online resource - the MySkillsFuture.sg portal. It is a one-stop portal empowering students on a journey of self-discovery, guiding them to make informed education and career choices. There are updated resources, information, and tools available to help students explore their role and plans amidst various education and career pathways.

Typically, students seek ECG counselling to increase self-awareness of their personal

and career interests before choosing their post-secondary, pre-university, and future career paths. Some of the difficulties they face include navigating the multiple educational pathways and the numerous possibilities available within the national framework of education. Furthermore, many students face increased pressure after the release of the national examination results as they must choose from a wide range of 250 education course options across the PSEI: five local polytechnics, three Institute of Technical Education Colleges, and 18 pre-university institutions. At times, students may lack self-confidence in identifying their career interests or accessing updated information about their options. As such, career guidance offers insights enabling them to make informed decisions by using various tools to help them recognize their potential and identify their work values in the future world of work.

ECG Counselling Centers have also been established at all five local polytechnics and three Institute of Technical Education Colleges in Singapore. Within each PSEI center, there are six ECG Counsellors trained to offer a variety of Student Career Services ranging from Career Interest and Profiling, Resume Writing, Internship and Scholarship Preparation, to providing updated Career Resources and information on University pathways.

Universities

Career services play an important role within the six independent national universities in Singapore. Unlike schools where the ECG service is centralized, the universities are given autonomy to build their career services based on their undergraduates' profile and fields of study. Across the six universities, there are generally five areas of career services provided.

Career Guidance Modules / Workshops

Most of the universities have included career guidance as a core module of the university program. The content covered includes self-awareness and exploration of

options, and it allows the undergraduates to be aware of the types of support and services offered by the university. The universities also conduct specialized or specific workshops to target common areas of need - for example, in personal branding, networking, resume writing, or interview skills.

Self Help Career Resources

Some of the universities have online job portals with features such as resume builders and article resources to help the undergraduates explore available opportunities and prepare for their job application.

Group / Individual Consultation

All universities have dedicated career services teams to provide one-on-one and group consultation sessions for undergraduates who need deeper intervention or guidance. This is usually seen as an intermediate level of service, beyond what the career guidance modules, workshops, and self-help resources provide.

Mentorship / Internship

All universities require their undergraduates to go through internships programs as a mandatory component of their undergraduate studies. The internship programs typically last between three and six months; in some universities, undergraduates are encouraged to complete more than one internship program to build up their exposure to the corporate world. In addition to mandating internship programs, some of the universities also tap on their alumni network to create a mentorship program to match undergraduates to industry mentors.

Employer Services, Job and Networking Activities

All universities have employer teams as part of their career services and these employer teams partner employers to bring job opportunities to the graduating students. The employer teams organize regular employer job fairs and networking events to allow the graduating students to be connected with work opportunities. The teams also work

with employers to increase employer branding on campus.

As suppliers of fresh and trained workers into the various industries within Singapore's economy, placement into employment becomes a key measurement of success for every university's career services team. Each year, the universities participate in an Annual Graduate Employment Survey, or GES where a nation-wide survey is conducted with graduates to find out about their employment status and salaries, six months after graduation. As the GES is commissioned by the Ministry of Education (MOE), all universities view the GES with great consideration.

Besides the GES, the business faculties of each university also work towards the renewal of their accreditation under the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB, 2013) and the EFMD Quality Improvement System (EQUIS). To renew the accreditations, the undergraduates' perception towards the career development services offered in the universities are heavily considered as well.

To facilitate placement of graduates into employment, the career services teams need to be a bridge between the employers and the graduates. In recent years, employers increasingly look beyond the usual Grade-Point Average (GPA), internship experiences, and co-curricular activities when it came to selection and recruitment of graduates. New approaches to selecting the best-fit graduates have emerged – such approaches include involving undergraduates and graduates in organization presentations, company visits, hackathons, as well as case competitions where undergraduates present solutions on business cases posed by the companies. Consequently, the career services teams also shoulder the responsibility of preparing the undergraduates well to participate, perform, impress, and ultimately, be considered for employment opportunities.

Besides adapting to new approaches of employment selection as adopted by companies, the career services teams also

need to mentally prepare the millennial generation in Singapore for the realities of the working world. The millennial generation in Singapore sometimes harbour certain expectations about employment packages, resulting in procrastinated decision making when offered employment, for fear of settling for a less-than-ideal employment package. Many of them settle for short term solutions without consideration for longer term career consequences. As such, the career services teams often need to take on a relational approach to guide the Millennials, to alert them to blind spots, and encourage them to make decisions and commitments.

Labor Movement

Since 1961, all the trade unions and union related associations in Singapore have been housed under a single trade union entity known as the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). Today, NTUC comprises 59 affiliated trade unions, five affiliated trade associations, 12 social enterprises, as well as six related organizations. There are 32 professional guilds in 22 sectors that partner with NTUC. NTUC strives to help working people of all collars, ages, and nationalities to achieve gainful employment through better jobs, thereby having better lives through better skills and wages. NTUC seeks to accomplish this by protecting the rights and advancing the interests of the employed and their families. NTUC also strives to help the employed remain employable for life, enhance the social status and well-being of its union members and the employed, as well as build a strong, responsible, and caring labor movement. As a representative of all workers, NTUC complements the Government's role in driving economic transformation by establishing several initiatives and touchpoints to serve the different segments of the workforce through Tripartism with Government, Unions, and Employers working together (National Trades Union Congress, 2019a).

Beyond championing for worker rights and well-being, NTUC plays an important role in workforce development. As a

representative of all workers, NTUC complements the Government's role in driving economic transformation by working with Singapore's Trade and Industry Ministry on their 23 Industry Transformation Map (MTI 2018), which was announced and debated in the Singapore parliament in 2018. One such effort is to form Company Training Committees (CTCs), with unions working closely with companies to help both workers and companies transform for the future. NTUC aims to have CTCs in 1,000 companies across all six industries, to benefit some 330,000 workers, in the next three years. (National Trades Union Congress, 2019b). CTCs' main goal is to help upskill workers to "Workers 4.0" in parallel with their companies' transformations and therefore remain relevant in a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) world economy.

To provide a one-stop service to equip workers with the right mindset, skills, and job opportunities to stay employable for life, NTUC, with support by the Singapore Labor Foundation (SLF) and Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), formed the Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) in 2008. e2i plays a key role in the employment and employability landscape by partnering Government agencies, training providers and employers to address manpower gaps, drive job re-creation, and collaborate on industry transformation projects. Since 2008, e2i has assisted more than 700,000 individuals through career guidance, professional development, and job matching services. With an extensive network of partners, e2i offers hiring, training, and productivity solutions to businesses. Across the nation, e2i operates two main service centers as well as multiple touchpoints in partnership with government agencies to provide job-matching services and professional career guidance to all locals. The services are free and delivered by trained career coaches.

Career Pit Stop

This self-assessment tool acts as a career-health check on four important factors

namely Drive, Influence, Focus, and Network in one's career to measure the motivation and drive of an individual to develop their career. The tool enables workers to be aware of the attributes required for adapting to new ways of work and responding to opportunities for career growth and progression. The Employability Coach uses the results as a conversation starter to help the individual focus on an important factor to start work on.

Career Navigator

It helps an individual plan better for their career through personality assessments followed by understanding and integrating the results with their career goals. This information is useful in their career development discussion with the employability coach further upstream.

Win the Interview

A bite-sized four hour workshop for job seekers on the latest interview techniques in preparation for challenging interview questions and to project a confident self during an interview.

Win the Search

A four hour interactive workshop that shares practical steps in crafting an effective resume and increase their chances of getting selected for interviews by gaining more visibility, explore new methods of job search, and cover all aspects of their job hunt.

Group Coaching for Professionals (GCFP)

Designed to support white collared workers who are at the crossroads as they embark on their career transitions. GCFP utilize new & hybrid approaches to support one's employability skills and will span over four weeks.

Career Fairs

Conducted with partners to match suitable jobseekers with vacancies. This enables job seekers to meet employers face-to-face and showcase positive attributes that may not be easily articulated in a resume. Some Career Fairs such as Industry 4.0 Career Fair has upskilling elements included.

Skills Training

Based on market demand, ei2 supports IT Literacy and emerging skills training as well as job-specific programs. These could come in the form of masterclasses, pre-employment training, or structured on-the-job training with industry partners.

Place and Train / Professional Conversion Program

Customize structured on-the-job training programs to address manpower shortages and to tackle skills-gaps of jobseekers.

Career Trial

Allows jobseekers without prior experience to try out a new job and for employers to evaluate their on-the-job performance before offering employment.

Job Redesign Programs and Inclusive Growth Program

Support transformation of companies to increase work efficiency and share productivity gains with low-wage-workers in the form of wage increase or bonuses.

Government

The Workforce Singapore (WSG) agency is the designated public agency for driving career development practices and the national competency framework for career development practitioners, as well as providing Public Employment Services. WSG seeks to benefit both the employed and the unemployed locals with its services.

Across the nation, WSG operates three service centers to provide job-matching services and professional career guidance to all locals. The services are free and delivered by trained career coaches. To support the service centers, WSG also operates a national jobs portal, the MyCareersFuture.sg portal, which aims to consolidate all job vacancies in Singapore and facilitate self-help efforts for job search.

Over the past few years, WSG has continued to progress in the fields of career development, career services delivery and modelling, and programs design. One major recent development was the remodelling of

its service philosophy, service model, and program suites. This resulted in the development of new services for job seekers, created under the 'Career CARE360' to improve service efficacy (Seow, 2017; Workforce Singapore, 2018), along with an array of other Career-Matching Providers (CMPs). The CARE360 comprises four structured programs and interventions catered for different career needs.

Career Catalyst

The Career Catalyst is a structured, comprehensive, and modularized one-to-one career coaching program which encapsulates several modern career development practices that aim to help jobseekers chart their career direction and/or transition and prepare them for the job search process.

Career Activator

The Career Activator is a workplace-based exploratory and learning journey, where jobseekers will be given an opportunity to immerse themselves in the employer's work environment to ascertain fit for the given role.

Career Energizer

The Career Energizer provides a slew of deep-dive employability and job search workshops, designed to help jobseekers quickly ramp up their job search strategies.

Career 360

Career 360 is a peer support and talent-employer engagement program, where ready jobseekers would meet with the employers.

To better engage and encourage locals to seek assistance from the WSG service touchpoints, WSG also remodelled and rebranded itself as 'Careers Connect' on the 19th of July, 2017 (Workforce Singapore, 2017). WSG also embarked on an online and offline marketing campaign to showcase the types of career development interventions and benefits experienced by past clients.

Private Career Services Providers

While the majority of the career services in Singapore are provided without charge by the Government, the schools, and the Labor

Movement, there are some private enterprises which provide a spectrum of related paid career services in Singapore. The services they provide augment the existing services, supporting Singapore's Career Development Services Map, by filling service gaps and providing specialized expertise in new areas such as information technology.

The private service providers in Singapore are usually unable to survive solely on a direct Business-2-Consumer model because, given the Asian context, many are unwilling to approach career coaches for help, and many are unwilling to pay for career guidance. Those willing to seek help can approach the Government, the schools, and the Union to receive free career services instead. As a result, many of the career service providers survive on Business-2-Business (for example, working with Human Resources and Talent Development) and/or Business-2-Government (for example, Government supported services) revenue models.

These services can be broadly classified into five areas.

Overseas Career Services Providers

These providers partner with the Government to strengthen the Public Employment Services, bringing in experiences and expertise from overseas. They conduct career guidance programs, impart job search skills, and provide job placement support.

Online Career Services

These providers provide online job / career platforms with specialized algorithms and artificial intelligence. Their services center around job recommendations and skills gap identification.

In-Employment Career Service Providers

These providers work with corporations to support their overall Human Resources functions, including recruitment, talent management, and outplacement.

Specialised Career Services Providers

These providers develop specialized / innovative career guidance methods and

conduct workshops, one-to-one guidance, and impart job search skills.

Career Coach Certification / Training Providers

These providers conduct training and certification of career coaches.

Moving Career Development Forward in Singapore

While Singapore's career development profession has gone through much development and planning, especially in the last five years, more challenges lie ahead for the nation.

Singapore's educational institutes currently face a challenge in keeping up with the rapid changes in the economy and the industries. The institutions struggle as they are uncertain if the current training delivered to their students will continue to be industry-relevant in the near future. Both the employers and the graduates are also equally concerned about the latter's job readiness and effectiveness. As such, the approach to education needs to be redefined – it has to move away from certification and towards constant learning, accompanied by real work experiences. The Ministry of Education has already changed some of the education policies and pathways to adapt to this shift. (MOE, 2019b).

The rapid pace of technology adoption and its disruption to businesses is slowly making employees realize the frailty of their employment. While many employees still expect Human Resources to prepare them for reskilling or transition to new roles, the onus of career management has slowly shifted to individual employees. Today, we see greater interest from the public in seeking answers and direction for their career and skills. These developments are also starting to reflect the concept which Patton and McMahon (2006) wrote about in their overarching framework where individuals do not exist in seclusion, but as part of a larger system. This is reflective of what the Singapore Government is observed to be doing here – a system which Patton and McMahon (1999) also coined as

‘Organisational System’ to ‘Environmental/Societal System’. In it, several entities such as governmental, non-government, and for-profits would provide support and services for a lifetime of career transitions, whether if it is voluntary or involuntary.

As talent mobility increases and the millennial workers’ expectation changes, HR professionals are starting to see greater value in incorporating career development interventions into various parts of the HR lifecycle, such as the recruitment and the talent management frameworks, in spite of the lack of expertise and experience.

With increased life expectancy, Singapore faces an ageing working population as baby boomers continue to work beyond the current stipulated retirement age of 62. Coupled with the likelihood of the Government increasing the retirement age further, baby boomers in Singapore will need policies, assistance, and initiatives to help them construct a new narrative for their careers, with greater focus on life and health, beyond work.

Lastly, the society, the corporations, and the Government will need to increase workplace inclusivity for the disadvantaged groups with behavioural, mental, and physical challenges. This may be done by creating societal awareness, changing employer and society mindsets, providing customized services, and implementing policies to enable these groups to have a meaningful career too. Today, services for the disadvantaged groups center around specialized or segmented tasks which the clients in these groups can successfully carry out and are largely dependent on a small handful of accommodating employers. Much of the career development interventions today are also catered to the mainstream population. The hope is for disadvantaged groups to be able to aspire for a career and receive adequate support to pursue those dreams.

To meet these challenges, the career development tribe comprising the government, labor movement, private sector, and associations in Singapore will need to continue to evolve and work with each other

more closely than before. New entities such as enterprise Human Resources and non-profit agencies may be included into the tribe to contribute their flavor of career development. Technology should become an enabler towards individual ownership of their career development, as well as provide data to support national workforce development. To support its economic plans, the Government can play a strategic role in developing a young-to-old national career development philosophy or blueprint as an intervention, where the best of private and public career service providers can partner with each other to provide services to benefit the public.

Given the cornucopia of influences and initiatives in the realm of career development in Singapore, the writers understand the need to elaborate and address culture issues such as cultivating and integrating Eastern beliefs of lifelong loyalty towards one single employer and the Western practices and beliefs towards constant learning and development through different organizations. More research and studies will need to be done to understand how these cultural issues influence the development of policies and services by the various actors within ‘The Village’ in Singapore.

As career development professionals in Singapore, perhaps the most challenging and pressing matter is to redefine ourselves beyond what we have always been doing. We must challenge ourselves to understand our clients better, break traditional formats of career development interventions, develop customized yet practical and effective solutions to help the clients, and see career development as a larger system than our one-to-one or group interventions.

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