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Assessing the Impact of Career Development Practitioner Skill Policies, Training, and Practice in Singapore: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract: This qualitative, descriptive study examines the influence of career development practitioner (CDP) skill policies, training, and practices within Singapore's career development landscape. Focusing on Workforce Singapore's Career Development Framework (WSG CDF), established in 2018, the study draws comparisons with renowned international frameworks. It examines how CDPs from public, private, and union sectors perceive the relevance and alignment of existing skill policies with their professional roles, practice requirements, and workplace demands. Findings gathered from 15 semi-structured interviews reveal that CDPs train under both legacy and contemporary training programs—including the National Career Development Association's Facilitating Career Development training program, the Workforce Skills Qualifications' Advanced Certificate in Career Development Facilitation/Global Career Development Facilitator Singapore, and the more recent WSG Career Facilitation Program. The study investigates how these programs are applied and valued across various career service settings. Our findings indicate notable disparities in skill perceptions, the underutilization of skills, and a misalignment between policy goals and actual career development practices. The participants express concerns about the effectiveness and verification of skill utilization in delivering meaningful outcomes for clients, citing poor alignment with overarching policy objectives. Thematic analysis reveals systemic shortcomings in the ability of workplaces to assess skill utilization and integrate CDP skills effectively, raising critical questions about policy effectiveness, the purpose of credentialing, and the evolving professional identity of CDPs. Overall, this study contributes to the limited literature on career development policy in Singapore, emphasizing the need for cohesive alignment between policy and practice. Recommendations include improving skill utilization, implementing internationally recognized quality assurance practices and systems, and fostering international collaboration to support the development of a sustainable CDP ecosystem.

Introduction

In line with national and governmental efforts aimed at maintaining a competitive and adaptable workforce amid shifts in the global economy and labor market, this study examines Singapore's existing skill policy for career development practitioners (CDPs) and identifies the skills and competencies required to deliver a range of career services that support lifelong career transitions and growth.

The target group of this research comprises local CDPs who have received skill training under the newly launched Workforce Singapore's Career Development Framework (WSG CDF) and those who received training under other career development policies before WSG CDF was introduced in 2018. CDPs play a broad role in the labor market, primarily helping individuals manage lifelong work, learning, leisure, personal development, and career transitions. They are employed in pre-

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employment training institutes; continuing education and training (CET) institutes; institutes of higher learning; and corporate or business firms, including human-resource-related domains such as talent management and employment agencies. The central aim of this research is to investigate how WSG CDF has supported CDPs in acquiring skill training across the private, union, and public sectors. As a skill policy, WSG CDF provides a structured model for training and competency development among CDPs at various levels while also serving as Singapore's first dedicated policy for this profession. It is also reported to be aligned with international practices.

The skill policy is also reported to have been jointly developed by the main stakeholders of career development services in Singapore, namely the Ministry of Education, which operates more than 300 schools with education and career guidance counsellors (Teng, 2017); the National Trades Union Congress's Employment and Employability Institute (NTUC e2i), which operates two career centers; and WSG, which operates three career centers. Other non-governmental, sector-specific, and self-help groups—such as the North-East Community Development Council's Job Placement Centre (NECDC, 2020) and IBF Careers Connect (MAS, 2018)—also partner with WSG to deliver career services. Notably, WSG and NTUC e2i collectively employ approximately 150 CDPs (Tan, 2018). With support from these organizations, individuals at various life stages and with diverse career and job search requirements seek professional career advisory services, career coaching, career counseling, job search training, and job matching with employers.

Given the above contexts and the Singaporean government's deliberate positioning of its economy as a developmental state (Low, 2001), the government-designed model has successfully mitigated global headwinds through its brand of governance, policies, education, training, and politics over the past 55 years (Quah, 2018). What perspectives and intentions does the government hold for CDPs under this skill policy and design? While Singapore has transformed into a first-world nation and a knowledge economy in less than a century, the field of career development only began to gain national traction five years ago with the launch of the SkillsFuture Movement (SSG, 2020). The SkillsFuture movement is recognized as a socio-economic policy, an implementation mechanism, and a strategy for broader economic initiatives (Woo, 2017). Career development is positioned as both an enabler and a driver of human capital while also serving as a long-standing tool for mitigating unemployment through employment facilitation (Ministry of Manpower [MOM], 2007).

Given the strong emphasis placed on lifelong learning and employment facilitation through the SkillsFuture movement, what factors are considered in the training and skill development of CDPs? This study has the following objectives: 1) To investigate the effectiveness of the WSG CDF skill policy in comparison with established international models—an area that has not yet been explored due to the nascent stage of this sector's development. 2) To examine how trained CDPs apply their skills and assess the effectiveness of the skill policy for individuals and in the workplace.

Literature Review

Active International Career Development Policies

Our literature review identified patterns in the evolution of career development policies and practices across multiple countries, including Colombia, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, India, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Australia, Canada, the United States, and the European Union. These countries were found to share similar career policy developmental stages (Hutchinson, Maze, Pritchard, & Reiss, 2018): (i) the pioneering stage, (ii) expansion stage, (iii) institutionalization stage, and (iv) maintenance stage. Each stage represents distinct

advancements in skill policies, training programs, credentialing systems, and service delivery, all shaped by various 'career development entities.

The literature review also identified several international career development organizations (Hiebert & Neault, 2014), including the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG, 2019) and the International Centre for Career Development and Policy (ICCDPP, 2019). Both organizations have global reach and contribute to career and workforce development primarily through policies and research. Additionally, region-specific organizations, such as the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN, 2019, p. 23; Musset & Kurekova, 2018), support career development initiatives across 30 European countries. We also identified country-specific organizations, including the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA, 2020) and the Japan Career Development Association (JCDA, 2020; Mizuno, Ozawa, & Matsumoto, 2017, pp. 128–136), which define and regulate standards in the career industry of their respective countries. The Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC, 2019) focuses on education and training, advocacy, and research within Canada while also engaging with CDPs globally. The United States' Center for Credentialing and Education (CCE, 2019), historically affiliated with the National Career Development Association (NCDA), is a global provider of credentialing, assessment, and business support services. The CCE first issued the Career Development Facilitator (CDF) credential in 1997 and remodeled it for international application in 2001.

Various career development roles exist worldwide, providing professional services such as career guidance, counseling, coaching, and training. These services help individuals—who collectively form a nation's human capital stock—enhance their awareness, skills, potential, and overall well-being in a meaningful way. In this context, career development can be considered a key driver of human capital development, as outlined in Becker's human capital theory (Becker, 1964, 1993). In many countries and across different economic systems, career development associations and organizations operate alongside their respective governments. These entities are structured similarly to the NCDA in terms of role and function within their countries. Limited literature exists on Singapore's career development landscape. The available research primarily focuses on education, educators, and education policies, with fewer studies directly addressing workforce-related career development.

Career Development as a Workforce Lever

The importance of career development in Singapore cannot be overstated, as the nation's primary resource is its people (Becker, 1964). Given this, it is both logical and necessary for the government, stakeholders, and political actors to invest comprehensively in the development of its human capital. This perspective was strongly championed by the former statesman and founding Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew (PMO, 2010). In this context, career development should be viewed as an individualized human capital intervention and policy tool for broad implementation. This concept gained prominence in 2015 when the government launched the SkillsFuture Movement—a policy framework and structural redesign aimed at driving Singapore's next phase of economic growth (Woo, 2017; Ministry of Trade and Industry [MTI], 2019). This initiative was first outlined in the 2019 Committee of Supply (MTI, 2019) and further developed by the Future Economy Council (MTI, 2020). In parallel, Singapore's MTI led industry and economic initiatives aimed at developing a highly skilled workforce to support its long-term vision. SkillsFuture was positioned to support this vision by preparing workers to meet these evolving demands. Through its emphasis on

lifelong learning and informed career choices, SkillsFuture aims to help individuals adapt to continuous career transitions, pursue personal growth through learning, and shape their preferred future (Wong, 2013; Tan & Wong, 2016). This movement also reinforced the need for CDPs to support workforce development.

Genesis of Singapore's Career Development Skill Policy

Kong-Ho, Wong, et al. (2019, p. 36) reported that career development initiatives in Singapore were scarcely implemented before 1965, initially appearing in the form of career information booklets. Later, in 1984, a national productivity task force was established (Tan, 1998), focusing on introducing career guidance in schools. This initiative included contributions from human resource professionals employed by 20 selected companies, aiming to support graduating students through improved job-matching and thus contributing to a stronger workforce (Tan, 1998). The findings gathered by the task force sparked interest in vocational psychology, which led to the emergence of career counseling. Subsequent efforts to promote career guidance were channeled through pastoral care and guidance programs (D'Rozario, Jennings, & Khoo, 1999), and these efforts remained primarily within the Ministry of Education's pre-employment training initiatives (Tan, 1989, 2002). During this period, school educators were also trained to deliver early career guidance and share career-related information with students. In the same year, Tan and Goh (2002) published a report on career development and its potential impact on Singapore's pre-employment training landscape. Their research introduced new career guidance curricula, instructional materials, and computer-assisted career guidance tools. Tan and Goh also highlighted Singapore's inconsistent approach to career guidance between 1965 and 2002 and reported on research efforts in vocational psychology, including the validation of career development theories suited to Singapore's context. Cheng and Tan (2016) documented a breakthrough in Singapore's career development landscape with the implementation of SkillsFuture's Education and Career Guidance mandate. Similarly, Ismail (2018) drew attention to education-to-work continuity gaps and the need for policy reforms to better align with the objectives of SkillsFuture.

Outside the education sector, Kong-Ho, Wong, et al. (2019, pp. 37–39) reported that as early as 2008, two local pioneer trainers had trained at least 150 individuals through the NCDA's Facilitating Career Development (FCD) training program. These CDPs were trained to support the services provided by the then-Workforce Development Agency (WDA, now known as WSG) and the e2i, whose primary focus at the time was employment facilitation, job placement, and skills training (Kong-Ho, Wong, et al., 2019, pp. 40–48). The pioneer trainers adopted NCDA's skills and competency framework, with the CCE serving as the credentialing body. Over time, Singapore's Ministry of Manpower (MOM) implemented policy-level changes that transformed the public employment service (Staatlabor, 2019), aligning with emerging levels of career development expertise that had already begun to take root at the frontline (Kong-Ho, Wong, et al., 2019, p. 3; Choi & Wong, 2019).

During this period, only a limited number of formal, academic, and postgraduate career development training programs were available. These included Republic Polytechnic's Specialist Diploma in Career Counseling, launched in 2014 (Republic Polytechnic, 2020), and the Master of Guidance and Counseling offered by James Cook University (JCU, 2020). At the time, no formal career development skill policy or regulatory framework were available. The career development landscape remained fragmented and unregulated, unlike more established industries. While international career development training was available locally through the NCDA FCD, demand for this remained low, as the primary employers of CDPs were the then-WDA and the NTUC e2i.

In mid-2016, the then-WDA and its CET division—the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL)—collaborated with the CCE to develop a local version of the NCDA FCD training program. This localized version, called the Workforce Skills Qualification Advanced Certificate in Career Development Facilitation/Global Career Development Facilitator-Singapore (WSQ ACCDF/GCDF-SG), adopted the same 12 core competencies as the NCDA and CCE programs (IAL, 2016; CCE, 2019). However, its syllabus was adapted and integrated into Singapore's national skill credentialing framework (IAL, 2016; Singapore University of Social Sciences [SUSS], 2019, p. 5). To expand the pool of local CDPs, IAL trained its own instructors through NCDA's Master Trainer program. That same year, the WDA underwent a restructuring, resulting in its division into WSG and SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) on October 1, 2016 (Seow, 2016). Before the end of 2016, NCDA also launched its own credentialing initiative, introducing six global credentials tailored to different roles in career development services (NCDA, 2016). Around this time, the NCDA and CCE formally ended their partnership on the GCDF credential. Nevertheless, both organizations have remained on good terms and continue to maintain cross-compatibility of their competencies.

Following the split of the former WDA into SSG and WSG, the IAL had been offering the WSQ ACCDF/GCDF-SG program for nearly two years. During this transition, the mandate for the career development sector was transferred from the IAL to WSG. Subsequently, WSG launched the CDF in August 2018 (Gov.sg, 2018; WSG, 2019a). This new framework effectively replaced the training and credentialing program offered under the WSQ ACCDF/GCDF-SG, introducing four distinct training and credentialing pathways: the Career Advisory Program and the Career Facilitation Program (CFP), and two additional programs—the Career Supervision Program and the Career Management Program—which remain under development. While the specifics of the handover from the IAL to WSG were not publicly disclosed, WSG stated at the launch that its CDF skill policy was aligned with international practices in countries such as Australia, Canada, various European nations, and the United States. The WSQ ACCDF/GCDF-SG (WSG, 2019a) program was positioned at the same level as the newly introduced CFP. Although this program has since been discontinued, individuals who hold the WSQ certificate are still eligible to apply for the updated credentials.

While many countries require CDPs to undergo mandatory formal training, pass vocational exams, or obtain licensure to practice (ACA, 2019; NBCC, 2020; JCDA, 2020; CPC, 2020; CICA, 2020, p. 8), Singapore has not yet adopted such regulatory measures in its national policies (WSG, 2019b). In other regions, licensing and regulatory frameworks have been successfully implemented, although they also pose certain challenges (McIlveen & Alchin, 2018, pp. 14–19; Humphris & Koumenta, 2015, pp. 6–11). More commonly, these frameworks function as mechanisms for standardization, quality assurance, public protection, and the reduction of information asymmetries. They also help establish organizational structures and promote consistency in professional practices.

CDPs in Singapore

Over the past five years, the Singapore government has steadily increased its support for and attention to career development as a national strategic priority (Wong, 2013; MOM, 2014; Ministry of Education [MOE], 2015). This national emphasis on career development has been highlighted by the Minister of Manpower (Teo, 2018) and by the former Minister of Manpower, who highlighted the need to address mismatches between jobseekers and employers. Additional government support is evident in the establishment of two professional associations: the People and Career Development Association (PCDA, 2020) and the Career Development Association of

Singapore (CDAS, 2020). Both associations were established in August 2018, coinciding with the launch of WSG CDF. Currently, CDPs in Singapore are employed across various sectors. In terms of workforce deployment, it is estimated that the MOE employs close to 100 full-time education and career guidance counselors (Teng, 2017), while WSG and NTUC e2i collectively employ approximately 150 full-time career coaches (Tan, 2018). Additionally, the MOM estimates that there are around 40,000 human resource professionals in Singapore (MOM, 2017), many of whom fall within the scope of WSG CDF, as they also advise, guide, and engage employees on career development matters. Moreover, there are 3,894 private recruitment and employment agencies registered with the MOM (MOM, 2019). These include international firms such as Ingeus (United Kingdom) and Maximus (United States), both of which have been appointed by WSG to deliver career services to jobseekers in Singapore (National Archives of Singapore [NAS], 2017). Collectively, this extensive network highlights the strong ambition and broad intended scope of influence of the CDF as a national skill policy.

To date, no skill reports, academic studies, or papers have focused on the efficacy of skill development, effectiveness of skill training, or utilization of skills in Singapore from 2015 to the present. WSG has also discontinued its collaboration with the CCE and ceased offering the WSQ training program. This decision raises important considerations regarding its impact on CDPs in Singapore—both prior to and following the implementation of WSG CDF. Although WSG CDF is stated to be aligned with international practices, we could not locate evidence of external validation or collaborative development to support this claim. A limited body of literature, reports, and publications does exist; however, most are centered on the education sector (Kong-Ho, Wong, et al., 2019, p. 48). In particular, there remains a notable gap in research addressing the effectiveness of the broader career development ecosystem—referred to as the Singapore career development "village."

Summary of the Literature Review

In summary, there is very little local literature focusing on CDP skill policies in Singapore. Given this gap, we adopt a qualitative approach to examine both past and current skill policies and training practices relevant to CDPs. Notably, the lack of research in this area raises the following questions: How can the effectiveness of WSG CDF be evaluated when no published local research, reports, or studies on the career development skill policy exist? To what extent does skill training facilitate the effective transfer of occupational knowledge from the individual, to the job, and ultimately to the wider social system (Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2011)? How is skill utilization quantified, and are workplaces sufficiently supportive of this direction? Given the lack of studies on WSG CDF, how do we verify whether the framework is indeed aligned with international practices? Overall, although we identified international perspectives and policy frameworks from our literature review, we found no empirical research on the effectiveness, validation, or implementation of Singapore's career development skill policy, training, or professional practices.

Method

This section outlines our approach to addressing the abovementioned research questions and generating qualitative data and insights. This section begins by presenting the research objectives and questions, followed by a description of the research design, sampling strategy, and analytical approach. The section concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations relevant to this study.

Research Objective and Questions

The objective of this study is to examine how the local skill policy impacts the effectiveness of skill development and practice efforts among CDPs in Singapore, both before and after the introduction of WSG CDF. This research seeks

to address the following questions: RQ1: To what extent are the competencies articulated in the skill policy relevant and useful to CDPs in meeting workplace demands and role-specific requirements? RQ2: How do CDPs identify appropriate skill training opportunities that align with the policy and its stated competencies to meet their training needs? RQ3: How do CDPs assess the effectiveness of their skills in workplace settings? RQ4: What role does the workplace play in ensuring skill utilization among CDPs?

Epistemology

To prepare for this study and explore issues beyond the stated research questions, we sought to uncover meaningful data and insights into local CDP skill development. A qualitative research approach was deemed appropriate for this purpose, as published statistics on the effectiveness of CDP skills in the workplace are limited or nonexistent. Furthermore, given the nascent stage of the career development sector in Singapore, publicly funded research on the quantification of CDP competencies in this context remains limited.

CDPs have a variety of job titles. For the purposes of this study, we align these titles with the definitions provided by WSG CDF (WSG, 2019b) and the NCDA (2020), which encompass roles such as career coaches, career counselors, education and career guidance counselors, career advisors, career consultants, employability coaches, career service managers, and CDPs who operate their own career service businesses. To further clarify the scope of this research, the term "career development practitioner" is used instead of "career practitioner" to refer specifically to individuals who are trained in and apply career development and social science theories or models in their professional practice. However, we acknowledge that some career practitioners may not have formal training in such theoretical frameworks or may not have completed training programs under the skill policies discussed in earlier sections.

With this in mind, we adopt an interpretivist approach to capture firsthand experiences and gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Research Design

This study adopts a cross-sectional research design. Semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis were performed to examine the perspectives of a diverse group of participants who were trained either before or after the introduction of WSG CDF. This approach allowed us to explore shifts and draw comparative insights between past and current skill policies. Given the limited timeframe and available resources, a cross-sectional design combined with semi-structured interviews was deemed the most practical and appropriate method for investigating how CDPs develop and maintain their skills in the workplace. Interview data were collected concurrently during the course of this graduate study to explore relationships between skills, skills utilization, and the skills policy.

Method of Data Collection

Fifteen face-to-face, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with CDPs to gather qualitative data. Our research design allowed us to conduct both close and cross-case examinations even with a small number of cases, enabling in-depth exploration of each participant's unique experience. One advantage of using semi-structured interviews was the flexibility they offered in eliciting a wide range of perspectives, enabling us to acquire diverse insights from the CDPs involved in the study. The interviews were conducted in accordance with an interviewing guide, which helped structure the flow of questions and maintain focus throughout the conversation (Bryman, 2012), thereby generating rich qualitative data. Data were collected by presenting six interview questions, each accompanied by sub-questions designed to explore specific aspects of skill development and the skill policy. Each question

focused on a distinct theme and was structured to facilitate systematic and in-depth discussions.

We now discuss the design and thematic structure of the semi-structured interviews. Invitations for participation were sent via email prior to the scheduled sessions. Upon receiving confirmation, interviewees were invited to safe and private locations for the interviews. We began each session by building rapport, explaining the purpose of the research, and obtaining written consent to ensure participant privacy and confidentiality. We then collected background information and survey responses from each participant. As public servants, we remained mindful of professional boundaries—particularly when asking interviewees to comment directly on the skill policy or the organizations responsible for its development and implementation.

The interviews lasted between 35 and 65 min. All sessions were audio-recorded using a professional recorder, following which they were transcribed and analyzed based on the research questions.

Sampling Process

Potential participants for this study were identified from our professional network. Referrals were used to reach out to individuals who had completed the WSG CDF training program, particularly those outside our immediate contacts. All interviewees were formally invited via email and provided with details about the study. To avoid any conflict of interest, we did not approach our immediate colleagues. Precautions were taken when explaining the purpose of the study to private sector interviewees, particularly to avoid any misunderstandings that this research was a government-led survey. We were also mindful of concerns that, as public servants, we might disclose the identities of CDPs who expressed critical views of WSG CDF. Such perceptions could have jeopardized participants' willingness to speak openly or skewed the collected data.

Of the 15 interviewees, six were from the private sector, another six were from the public sector, and the remaining three were affiliated with the union. Among these, five participants were female, and 10 were male. Table 1 presents the detailed profiles of the interviewees. To incorporate both business and comparative perspectives, four CDPs who also served as career service managers and business owners—across both the private and public sectors—were included in the study.

Pilot Study

As part of this research, we also conducted a small-scale pilot study on two CDPs in the first quarter of 2019. This study explored the perspectives of these CDPs potentially influencing their ongoing skill development and their ability to meet the professional development requirements set by career development associations and relevant skill policies. Insights gained from the pilot study informed improvements to the design and sequence of research questions, the execution of semi-structured interviews, and the analysis and coding of interview data using relevant theories and models. The outcomes of the pilot study were used to refine and finalize the interview guide used for this research.

Table 1
Profiles of the Study Participants

Sector	No.	Participant	Gender	Career Development Role	Type of Career Service	Years of CDP Experience	NCDA FCD Training	WSQ ACCDF/GCDF-SG	WSG CDF/CFP
Private Sector	1	Sammy	Male	Leads a team of CDPs	Adult Career Services	3	-	-	1
	2	David	Male	Leads a team of CDPs	Adult Career Services	3	-	-	1
	3	Jason	Male	Leads a team of CDPs	Adult Career Services	8	1	-	-
	4	Danny	Male	CDP/Business Owner	Adult Career Services	5	1	1	-
	5	Howard	Male	Leads a team of CDPs	Adult Career Services	3	1	-	-
	6	Khloe	Female	CDP/Business Owner	Adult Career Services	3	-	-	1
	7	Brian	Male	Leads a team of CDPs	Adult Career Services	3	1	-	-
Public Sector	8	Edward	Male	CDP	Public Education and Career Guidance	8	1	1	-
	9	Stella	Female	Leads a team of CDPs	Public Education and Career Guidance	8	1	-	-
	10	Avery	Female	Manages a Career Centre	Adult Career Services	3	1	-	-
	11	Sharon	Female	Manages a Career Centre	Adult Career Services	3	1	-	-
Union Sector	12	Levi	Male	CDP	Adult Career Services	8	-	1	-
	13	Luke	Male	Leads a team of CDPs	Adult Career Services	8	-	-	1
	14	Gordon	Male	CDP	Adult Career Services	8	1	-	-
	15	Rebecca	Female	CDP	Adult Career Services	8	-	-	1

Data Analysis

Drawing on insights from the earlier pilot study and the full set of 15 interviews, we refined and clarified the overarching themes in the interview guide (Appendix B). These themes included policy intent and design; stakeholder engagement; and skill training and utilization across the individual, job, and broader work environment. To analyze the data, we adopted Bryman's thematic analysis approach for qualitative data gathered from interviews (Bryman, 2012, pp. 578–581), along with Braun and Clarke's (2006) methodology, which draws from psychology to connect CDP practice to the broader fields of career development and vocational psychology. We first transcribed the recorded interview data, following which we identified, analyzed, and reported language patterns related to the primary themes and sub-themes. We then familiarized ourselves with potential themes by reading through the transcripts multiple times to uncover new insights. To prepare the data for analysis, we applied the NatCen Social Research (2020) Framework method to refine and organize data into confirmatory themes. This approach aligns with the views of Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, and Snelgrove (2016), who describe thematic analysis as a process involving data preparation through coding and indexing, followed by comparative analysis across different themes shared by the interviewees.

We did not encounter major challenges in assessing participant responses or come across significant outliers within the data. We

proceeded by aligning participant responses to the interview questions and conducting manual text coding while applying relevant theoretical frameworks. Given the small sample size and dataset, we chose not to use any software for the thematic analysis.

Ethics in Research

Identifying potential risks and minimizing them throughout the research process is essential. To address the liability issues of both participants and researchers, all sensitive information related to the study was handled with strict confidentiality and care. Interviewees were informed prior to obtaining consent that any personally identifiable information would be anonymized. Despite these assurances, some participants expressed hesitation or uncertainty, given the interviewers' affiliation with the organization that oversees the skill policy. Few interviewees voiced concerns that their participation might be perceived as complaining or "talking behind the backs" of the policy owners or their employers. There were also concerns about potential identification, as well as a small risk of psychological discomfort—such as embarrassment or the possibility that participants' good intentions in contributing to the research might be misunderstood (Coleman, 2019; Atkins & Wallace, 2012). We addressed these issues in the interview guide as part of the introductory script drafted for each session. We reassured and encouraged the participants while also emphasizing that the research process upholds confidentiality, voluntary participation, and respect for each participant's voice. We also obtained approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Cardiff University, and all potential risks were disclosed prior to initiating contact and conducting interviews.

All interview information and collected data were transcribed and managed in accordance with Singapore's Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA, 2020). We also stored all data and research findings securely within a protected system provided by the university.

Summary

This section outlined our research purpose, design, data collection method, and analytical approach. In the next chapter, we draw on data from the 15 interviewees to present emerging themes, along with insights, arguments, and discussions.

Findings Derived from the Study

This section presents the findings derived from the 15 interviews conducted as part of this research. The first subsection explores local CDPs' perspectives on both local and international skill policies, focusing on those who were active before and after the introduction of WSG CDF in 2018. We then examine how CDPs select, align with, and adopt these policies in their professional development and practice, as well as the differences between local and international training programs. The second section discusses how skills are utilized and quantified in the workplace, particularly in relation to job performance.

Differences between Local and Global Skill Policies

Skill Training and Credentialing

CDPs who were active both before and after the introduction of WSG CDF were asked how they selected relevant skill policies, training programs, and competencies, as well as how useful these were to their professional practice. Howard, Edward, Danny, Brian, Sharon, and Jason shared common concerns, experiences, and perceived gaps between the newly introduced local skill policy and established international frameworks.

Danny, who trained under both the WSQ ACCDF/GCDF-SG and the NCDA FCD training programs, shared the following: "I think both were useful. When I first started, I came in with no prior knowledge of career development, so completing the WSQ ACCDF/GCDF-SG program at that time was quite helpful. It was eye-opening, and it gave me a way to develop a basic framework for delivering services. After

that, I completed the NCDA FCD training program, and I felt it went deeper. In my current practice, I rely more on the NCDA's framework because it is internationally recognized and is grounded in both research and practical application."

Edward, who trained under the WSG CDF, NCDA FCD, and WSQ ACCDF/GCDF-SG programs, shared the following: "Which professional framework do I currently use? I believe I apply a hybrid model, as I have been exposed to many. As a practitioner, my approach is somewhat of a mix—like *rojak* (a local term referring to a dish made of mixed ingredients). However, I lean much more toward the CCE and NCDA frameworks. Regarding WSG, as much as I would like to use it, I have heard that the framework serves more as a reference. I decided to pursue the NCDA FCD training program because it is internationally recognized. Since the WSG framework is not formally recognized, I also chose to obtain GCDF accreditation. However, if you ask me to compare the level of rigor in the training programs I have undergone, I would say that the NCDA framework is the most rigorous."

Sharon, who trained under the WSQ ACCDF/GCDF-SG program, shared the following: "I know that most of our career practitioners tend to prefer the GCDF, as they often refer to the NCDA as one of the more prominent career coaching associations. However, WSG CDF feels more like a national framework. I believe that in terms of international recognition, it is probably not quite there yet. In the career coaching world, people tend to prioritize international credentials. From what I have observed, most of our coaches would prioritize the NCDA program and even the CCE framework over WSG CDF."

Jason, who trained under the NCDA FCD program, shared the following: "With regard to WSG CDF, I took the extra step of reviewing its curriculum and associated competencies. In my view, it is neither a subset of nor comparable to the NCDA credential. To put it candidly, it feels like a watered-down version designed to meet minimum requirements. Having said that, if I were to choose a baseline for positioning myself in the global market, I would rely on the NCDA credential. First, it is globally recognized. Second, when we talk about the future of work, we must look beyond Singapore. We need a set of competencies that are internationally benchmarked and not only aligned with local standards. While we operate locally, we should always think globally. The NCDA credential offers that validation, as it is recognized worldwide. Even developing countries such as China adopted this credential in January 2020. Their first GCDF instructor recently obtained certification from the NCDA. This reflects the credential's global relevance and recognition. Furthermore, the NCDA is establishing key benchmarks and baseline standards that other countries who are interested in advancing career development can use as a reference or guide."

The findings above relate to RQ1, which examines the relevance and usefulness of skill policies in meeting workplace demands and job-level expectations. In this context, Danny, Edward, Sharon, and Jason did not find the local WSG CDF or its associated training program to be particularly relevant or useful. They also expressed concerns about the effectiveness of trainers operating under the framework. Sharon and Jason demonstrated awareness of international standards and recognition but found that the local skill policy did not sufficiently meet their professional needs. Danny and Edward conducted their own comparative analyses between local and international skill policies. Jason also highlighted China's adoption of an international framework for career development, a point subsequently verified during the research process. This further highlights the importance of ensuring that skill policies are relevant and that CDP competencies are aligned with international standards for global competitiveness. Brown, Lauder, and Ashton (2011), as well as Brown and Lauder (2012),

have addressed these issues in their discussions on high-skill strategies and the global competition for talent. The interviewees expressed a desire to position themselves within a globalized, high-skill environment, which they sought to achieve through the credentials and ecosystem offered by the NCDA. As noted by the interviewees, their goal aligns with the ideas discussed by Brown, Lauder, and Ashton, emphasizing the need to be both competitive and competent—not only for their own development but also to contribute to their organizations' success in a global market.

Skills, training, and credentials

The CDPs emphasized the importance of global recognition and internationally recognized credentials in building relevant skills. Such credentials also serve a signaling function, indicating labor market fit, the rigor of training, and the presence of key characteristics and competencies (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2010; Piopiunik, Schwerdt, Simon, & Woessmann, 2018). In contrast, the training and content quality associated with WSG CDF—as presented through the local skill policy—were perceived to be substandard by the interviewees.

Howard, who trained under both the WSG CDF-CFP and NCDA FCD programs, shared the following: "I would say that the materials covered in the NCDA's course were very extensive. They addressed every aspect of career development—foundational theories, practical tools, and the key people involved in the field. They were highly practical. We had to complete quizzes and assignments, conduct interviews, speak to people in the field, and observe real-world practices. However, I did not have the same experience with the WSG course I recently attended. I am afraid I have to say that it was not very useful for me, especially after being exposed to a global perspective. While some of the materials were somewhat similar, the WSG session felt superficial—more like a "touch-and-go" experience. The facilitator mostly went through the slides and often seemed to rely on participants to provide ideas. There was very little hands-on application or practice. For me, it simply was not as useful as my global-level training. Pardon me for saying this, but it felt like a waste of time."

Khloe, who trained under the WSG CDF training program, shared the following: "I would probably rate that a 2 out of 4, with 4 being the highest score, because I felt the class focused heavily on overviews. In terms of application, I did not get the opportunity to observe an expert in action or receive feedback from an expert based on their observations over the course of the entire coaching session."

Stella, who trained under the WSQ ACCDF/GCDF-SG program, shared the following: "I underwent WSQ ACCDF training about three years ago. I believe the university gathered a group of career coaches, and we completed six modules—I still remember that clearly. To be very honest, my colleague and I felt that the training was mostly about form filling. The WSQ ACCDF is likely very useful for someone who is new to career coaching. However, for those who are more seasoned or experienced, I found it to be somewhat basic."

Jason, who trained under the NCDA FCD program, shared the following: "The NCDA is the oldest career development association in the world. It is also the largest. About five years ago, they did not have their own credential. However, as the field of career development evolved, the NCDA recognized the need to establish its own credentialing system, rather than partnering with the CCE to launch the GCDF.

Brian, who trained under the NCDA FCD program, shared the following: "International frameworks, such as those from the NCDA and CCE, involve contributions from many thought leaders. These are helpful because they allow us to look beyond our local context and learn from what the leading figures in career development are doing. Through such international curricula, we stay updated on new research and emerging career development theories, which help us think differently and approach the evolving

world of work with a fresh perspective. When I compare local and international programs, I find that international frameworks are much more wide-ranging and comprehensive—especially when it comes to case studies. These case studies allow me to go beyond surface-level issues and consider the deeper challenges clients may be facing. They help me build empathy and better understand the clients' experience by putting myself in their position."

Howard and Stella expressed concerns about the low quality of both the content and delivery of skill training. Brian expanded on this by highlighting the absence of contributions from internationally recognized experts or "gurus" in the local training framework. He emphasized the value of research-informed practice and deeper, beyond-the-surface skills—elements he found lacking in the local training experience. These insights relate directly to RQ2, which explores how CDPs identify quality skill training. Participants viewed the WSG CDF training program as insufficient in both depth and practical application. For instance, Khloe rated this program 2 out of 4, emphasizing the importance of observing skill demonstrations and receiving feedback—both of which were lacking from her experience. Leson (2020), Savickas (2008), and Pope (2000) highlight the rich history and development of career development practices across local and international communities. They emphasize the importance of research publications, formal skill training, credentialing systems, and credible approaches to skill development. These are identified as key characteristics of an established skill development system—an observation also noted by Eddington and Toner (2012, p. 8). While the interviewees acknowledged the WSG CDF training program as a useful starting point for new CDPs, many found it lacking in depth and rigor when compared to the NCDA's offerings. While WSG (2020) indicated that its framework is aligned with international practices, no local studies have been conducted to validate the relevance of its skills and competencies. In contrast, NCDA's work has been applied and studied globally, including in Singapore (Tan, 1998; Soh & Leong, 2001; Chan et al., 2014; Chan et al., 2015).

Professional Community and Engagement

A global and interconnected professional community is essential for advancing career development. As highlighted in the literature review, such communities exist across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, each with its own standards, practices, and innovations (Hutchinson, Maze, Pritchard, & Reiss, 2018). What characteristics inform the decisions of CDPs regarding community selection and engagement style?

Howard commented the following: "Singapore is not a very big country. We do not have many career practitioners. In fact, to be very honest, career development itself is not yet very mature in Singapore. So, I was actually thinking that if I can learn the skills from a global perspective, then eventually I can, directly or indirectly, contribute to career development in Singapore. I would like to make a comparison between two continents. In order to do that, I need to find something at the global level."

Danny commented the following: "The NCDA includes individuals who are more seasoned and experienced in the field of career guidance, especially when compared to the local WSG framework. The latter is still in its nascent stage. While it meets the basic criteria to be considered a framework, I feel that there is not enough content or an active professional community to make it prominent or effective in current practice."

Brian commented the following: "I will give you an example. We attended the NCDA conference and were introduced to this new career intervention. Lo and behold, when I returned, I realized that a certain public agency had already started using it. They officially shared their experience with us about piloting the intervention, and later, because the pilot was

so successful, they decided to purchase a number of sets for continued use."

Khloe commented the following: "I noticed this through my professional connections—many of whom are career coaches. I observed that when they are coaching, their practice and presence follow a similar style. For instance, they put in a lot of effort. Moreover, the tone of their voice, their body language, and even the way they nod or blink are similar. I had not noticed these details before, but through my network and by observing them closely, I began to recognize these elements. These are also things I have been coached on, so now I understand what ingredients contribute to a good coaching session."

The above results offer further evidence substantiating the need for international professional communities to strengthen CDPs' skills and practice. For instance, Danny raised his concern that while the local skill policy is well-presented, it lacks substantive content and a skilled community to ensure practical relevance. Brian contrasted his own experience at an international conference with local practice. He also observed how relevant international practices and innovations were quickly adopted in Singapore, further reinforcing the importance of international communities and skill development. This answers RQ1 and RQ2. Howard presented his argument that Singapore is still in a nascent phase of career development, which led him to seek global-level skills and perspectives. This was because the local skill policy did not offer the level of guidance or framework he was looking for, answering the queries raised in RQ1, RQ2, and RQ4. Themes emerging from the data also show that CDPs value interconnected professional communities—both local and global—as well as the attainment of credentials, access to research, and engagement with global experts. Matyas (2017) and Marsick and Watkins (2001) reported that professional learning, whether informal or formal, yields the best outcomes when it extends beyond traditional learning environments and includes access to practitioners at the forefront of knowledge and skills. Interconnected professional communities are a boon for skills and innovation exchange. Jones, Stall, and Yarbrough (2013) elaborated on the importance and principles of such communities, highlighting key characteristics such as platforms for interaction, leadership, and productive relationships and a culture that values the sharing, utilization, and feedback of practitioner knowledge and skill efficacy.

From a labor market competitiveness perspective, Brown and Lauder (2012) reported that Singapore is an open, interconnected, and globalized economy. The quality–cost revolution, talent war, and digital Taylorism represent critical concerns about the future of Singapore's CDP skill development and its competitive edge in the global market. These concerns apply to factors such as the pricing of career services; quality of CDPs; and ease with which digital career services, content, and products can be exported elsewhere. However, we did not observe CDPs, their organizations, or the local skill policy actively leveraging Singapore's position as an open and globalized economy.

Skill Policy Design and Training Effectiveness

Skill Utilization and Its Quantification in the Workplace

Many international workforce entities—such as the OECD (2017) and SKOPE—as well as local institutions like the IAL, have advocated for skill utilization and its quantification. These are not just best practices; they reflect a public ethos and serve as accountability mechanisms in how policies are conceptualized, implemented, quantified, and evaluated for effectiveness (Grubb & Ryan, 1999, pp. 21–30). Such practices have a profound impact on the effectiveness of training investments, government decision-making, job design, work environments, productivity, and overall sector competitiveness. In this study, we looked for evidence of structured assessments, the use of

skill metrics, or the adoption of checklist-based approaches by firms under either of the existing skill policies.

Sammy, who trained under the WSG CDF-CFP, shared the following: “I do not think skills are being quantified. There has been no discussion or measurement framework. Sadly, I do not believe there is any real structure to it. At the initial registration for the WSG CFP course, it felt like the main goal was simply to get certified—so that when jobseekers ask, 'Are you certified?' we can say, 'Yes, we are, and this certification is connected with WSG.’ Being linked to the *Zeng Hu* (meaning 'government' in the local Hokkien dialect) gives the impression of credibility. People respond with, 'Oh, okay—it must be safe, then.’ I also raised this issue of skill quantification with my supervisor. We have been focusing so heavily on placements that I asked, 'Are we a placement company, or are we a career coaching company?’ To this, my boss replied, 'We are both.' But I mean—you cannot cook herbal chicken in three minutes. It is either one or the other. You either get instant noodles, or you take the time to make herbal chicken. I asked my boss, 'Why do I not hear questions like—How many lives have we improved? How many lives have we impacted, from negative to positive? Why is it always about the numbers? How many did we place?' I understand the business model, but it does not really align with what we learned in the CFP. It was a good course. I think there is room for improvement, but it is something I genuinely hope to apply. Yet, it feels like once we return to the workplace, everything falls apart. It is as if I cannot do much with what I learned from the course. The message becomes, 'Just focus on placements.’”

Howard, trained under the NCDA FCD and WSG CDF programs, shared the following: “I do not really know how they quantify skills. At the end of the day, they will just look at the result. Thankfully, so far, I have actually produced good results. So, my manager says, 'Wow, Howard has been actually doing great, and therefore, I believe he has been utilizing all his coaching skills.’ If, let us say, another colleague of mine—another coach—did not manage to generate results as good as mine, then of course my manager says, 'Wow, this guy, he is actually not really very good at coaching,' which is not necessarily true.’”

Stella shared the following: Quantify skills? They do not. For example, I had a student who committed a crime and had to be jailed. So, when he came out, he really could not find a job because his criminal record was quite serious. It took me three months—I went to 15 employers to really beg for him to get an opportunity to be interviewed. Then, when he finally got a job, I had to close the loop by updating our senior management, and they said, 'Oh, good job, Stella.' That is all.”

The above findings directly answer RQ3 and RQ4. Stella described a lack of connection between skills and the objectives of the skill policy. Her organization did not link skills and practice to student well-being or graduate career outcomes, indicating a mismatch between workplace skills and intended outcomes. Howard lamented the low level of skill utilization and the absence of reporting on the benefits and effects of skill use relative to specific roles and performance. He emphasized the distinction between CDPs "doing things right" versus "doing the right thing," noting that the former approach clearly undermines skill utilization in his experience, thereby diminishing the purpose and function of CDPs, their skills, and the broader objectives of the skill policy. Sammy echoed this sentiment, sharing that his workplace does not prioritize "doing the right thing" through skill quantification and output tracking. He added that his organization is not yet ready to take such steps, which serves as further evidence supporting RQ3 and RQ4. Consequently, skills and practice are reduced to mere public optics—signaling visible support for the local skill policy, its credential, and its training for career service delivery but not translating into actual career practice efficacy or utilization.

The three CDPs above reported poor levels of skill assessment in their workplace, and the skill policy appears to be caught in a tug-of-war between bottom-line business survival and the utilization of skills for creating opportunities and driving innovation in products and services (Warhurst & Findlay, 2012). However, this also signals broader issues involving policymakers and firm management, who do not recognize the value of high-level skills (Keep, 2016, p.10) but expect CDPs to both adhere to and contradict ethical codes by withholding interventions due to diagnostic findings or limitations imposed by the business environment (NCDA, 2015, pp. 12–13).

Levi, trained under the WSQ ACCDF/GCDF-SG program, shared the following: "I would say that a good 75% of my time at work involves using these skills when I interact with a client. My first interaction with the client is aimed at gathering information. Subsequently, I apply my knowledge—using different theories—to conceptualize the case. From there, I use that theoretical understanding to design interventions and follow up accordingly. I would say it is difficult to have a proper scale to measure how competent you are as a practitioner. So, if I were to use the scale you offered from 1 to 4 (with 4 being the highest score), I would actually give a '1' for how well I am able to assess my competence as a coach. Let me give you an example. I consider myself a 'good' practitioner, but someone who may not be as 'good' yet is skilled in public relations, interpersonal communication, and networking can show very different results. For example, that person might be able to place 20 clients in jobs within a month. In my case, because I take the time to design career interventions, I may manage to place only five clients within that time period. In this case, my manager will applaud the one who placed 20 clients. Why? Because, as simple as it is, there is a number, and that is how it works. Does this mean that the other employee is a better practitioner? It does not. It just means that, on paper, he has a higher number. That is why I gave a score of '1.'"

Luke, trained under the WSG CDF program, shared the following: "What percentage of all available tools have I used? I would say maybe 20 to 30%. Off the top of my head, I arrived at that figure because I am thinking of the subsequent modules in the WSG CDF–CFP program that I have accessed. They focused more on the development of training curricula."

Barring Levi—who reported a high level of skill utilization, albeit quantified through job placement as a proxy for skill utilization—the remaining CDPs confirmed low to poor evidence of skill assessment in their workplace, whether operating under the WSG, NCDA, or CCE skill policies. Sammy, Howard, and Levi revealed that although they possess knowledge of skills and interventions, these are neither assessed nor prioritized by their organizations' career services. Job placement outcomes remain the primary indicator, though this is a weak proxy—an issue identified by Warhurst and Thompson (2006, p. 792) as a misreading of occupational skills. Sammy's metaphor of "herbal chicken versus instant noodle" captures the cultural essence of how jobseekers often require CDPs to apply elaborate skills to address complex issues. However, business realities and challenges in implementing the skill policy have deterred such approaches due to bottom-line concerns. This mirrors the situation reported by CfE (2007), where efforts to promote effective skill utilization and create opportunities were obstructed by the so-called "black box of firms." Notably, business owners often have little to no incentive, under current skill policies, to examine or adjust their internal processes to better utilize workforce skills. Instead, they tend to prioritize immediate outcomes, operational efficiency, or short-term economic concerns.

Levi's workplace experience—specifically his comparison between using public relations for job placements versus designing career interventions for jobseekers—reveals a work environment that deprioritizes skill utilization.

This directly aligns with the concerns raised in RQ3 and RQ4. When jobseekers are placed by leveraging public relations for short-term gain, they may miss the opportunity to understand their challenges and develop sustainable coping strategies. Levi's account also supports the observations of Grugulis and Stoyanova (2011, pp. 518–526), who identified gaps in workplace skill utilization—where skills exist at the individual level but are not applied within the job role or social setting. Focusing on both local and global perspectives on professional ethics (Smith, 2003; Ow & Chong, 2003; NCDA, 2015), we raise a key question: How have organizational "black box" constraints stymied the delivery of meaningful career interventions for addressing clients' actual needs (Rao, 2017)?

Another theme that emerged during the interviews relates to how the role and requirements for career service managers—such as in Sharon's case—have been defined. She shared her views on the design of the skill policy, competencies, and credentialing, which answer RQ1, as articulated below.

Sharon, trained under the WSQ ACCDF program, shared the following: "I mean, 2,000 h of practice? That is approximately 200 days. This assumes I work for an entire year, accounting for leave. Essentially, 2,000 h works out to one full year of non-stop work after taking leave—it does not seem realistic. In any organization, beyond my core responsibilities, I will also be involved in other tasks, such as adjacent projects, which take up a significant amount of my time. If you want to be very strict about it and look at the competencies—specifically the WSG CDF Certified Career Services Manager (CCSM) competencies—these are all very high-level tasks. I have to be frank: On a daily basis, I am dealing with operational issues and trying to put out fires as they arise. I would not say that I am regularly evaluating and benchmarking career services, reviewing the effectiveness of the career development curriculum, or designing tools on a day-to-day basis. So, when I first saw the 2,000 h requirement, I was honestly shocked. I feel that there is no impact of this entire framework on my actual work. To perform my duties effectively, I need to understand operations, facility management, customer service, and program management—because as a center manager, I am constantly expected to offer input on program development."

Luke added the following: "It was covered in the WSG CFP, but it is not applicable to my current role. We learned it during the course, but it is not applicable to what I am doing now—unless I become a trainer."

Grugulis and Stoyanova (2011, pp. 524–525) reported that job design in practice can be heavily influenced by actual tasks and the relevance of skill training. They emphasized the importance of job analysis to identify the necessary skills and knowledge required to avoid training wastage and ineffective skill policies. Sharon and Luke's perspectives highlight a disconnect between their actual job roles and the expectations set out by the WSG CDF skill policy. Consequently, the CDP skills promoted by the policy—though well-intentioned—are effectively negated or wasted, as they are not integrated into job design or performance evaluation. This provides direct evidence supporting the focus of RQ3 and RQ4.

Lifting the Corporate Black Box Lid

Continuing on the topic of skill utilization and assessment, we now examine the perspectives of two career service managers, a local union's policy initiative to assess their CDPs, and two business owners' views on how skills are utilized and quantified.

Gordon mentioned the following: "There is this thing called the professional employability coach (PEC) framework. It has levels one, two, three, and four. These levels are based on the number of hours dedicated to coaching and skill development, as well as the number of clients coached and the hours spent with them. However, it does not include any measure of individual competency."

Rebecca stated the following: “There are four different levels in the PEC framework. We also hold a recognition ceremony, during which management presents certificates with name tags that reflect the achieved PEC level. These certificates formally acknowledge that you have reached a certain level in the PEC framework.”

Avery: “I am afraid... hmm (contemplating), it is not really measured in the WSG CDF (skills utilisation). Personally, I do think it would be helpful to have a way to measure that. WSG CDF is still very new, and I believe that with anything new, regular reviews are necessary. If individuals achieve good placements, they will likely be rewarded with a good grade. So, it is not really about assessing skills. It is more about outcome performance rather than whether the framework was actually applied.”

Avery reported no use of the local skill policy, noting its nascency and therefore its lack of usefulness or applicability for assessing skill utilization, as the same proxy measurement—job placement—is used to quantify skills. Gordon indicated a weak connection between skills and practice, pointing out that recognition is based purely on the number of hours, without identifying specific skills for each level or considering an individual's unique career identity, context, required processes, and interactions. Thus, interview data revealed inadequate proxies for skill assessment, relying either on the total hours logged by CDPs (Lee, 2017) or solely on placement numbers (Warhurst & Thompson, 2006, p. 792) as indicators of skill. These issues result from short-termism and business risk aversion, as described by Keep (2006, p. 5). They also represent market failure in local skill policies and their implementation, as trained CDPs within firms and their management are unable to effectively assess the alignment between required skills and those provided through skill policies and training. The current WSG CDF have also not been able to quantify skills in terms of outcomes, actual performance, and policy outputs.

Avery further added the following: “We use this new internal CDP framework as a guide. This framework was developed last year, and I personally find it useful, especially because a lot of effort has gone into creating it. In previous years, training was often done just for the sake of it. Sometimes, people repeatedly attended the same trainings, which, in my view, is not particularly helpful for career coaches. Now, with this framework, I think we can be more targeted. The framework itself is developed based on the NCDA framework.”

Sharon mentioned the following: “Of course, we have an outcome rubric, but it places heavy emphasis on outcomes, primarily job placement. The question I always have in mind is whether a successful placement resulted from effective coaching or if the person was simply lucky. Often, I observe coaching sessions directly to assess this. Beyond outcomes, I think what matters is case conceptualization—whether coaches have the capability and competency to thoroughly understand and explore the client's situation. Do they grasp the client's case as a whole? We have also started recognizing the importance of skills beyond placement alone. In recent months, we have begun implementing the new internal CDP skill framework. We use this framework as a benchmark to determine what a person can or cannot do and to identify if someone is lacking in a particular area. That is how we establish a baseline. I believe this new internal CDP skill framework is something we have invested significant effort in developing. We received extensive feedback and made several refinements. If you ask me, I think it looks good now. It is something I can relate to in terms of the work performed in my organization.”

Avery and Sharon reported facing difficulties in assessing skill utilization and performance, raising concerns about the value of training investments. However, the new structured competency-to-practice evaluation, providing greater clarity and structure in skill assessment, yields positive signs and evidence for the questions raised in RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4.

In contrast, other evaluations remain centered on hours as proxies for skills without assessing actual competencies. Avery and Sharon both explained that the new skill policy and framework have helped guide the identification and analysis of skill training, clarified practice effectiveness, and distinguished genuine skill from chance. Additionally, the new approach has addressed previously unclear skill assessments that relied solely on job placement as a proxy for ethical practice, enabling clearer differentiation of CDPs' performance. Sung, Loke, Ramos, and Ng (2011, p. 82–87) reported that to allow workers to flourish and fully benefit from skill utilization and increased value-added activities, job environments and management must reflect an understanding of job contexts and tasks. According to Keep (2016, p. 10), skill policies should encourage or incentivize organizations and workers to adopt specific practices and behaviors to foster innovation and competitiveness. These factors seem to be absent according to the above interviews.

Khloe mentioned the following: "In my company, we use a clinical supervisory framework as an in-house measurement tool. We have someone who is very skilled and experienced in this area. He developed the framework specifically for our company's CDPs. He also conducts in-house training sessions, which are highly beneficial—I personally learned a lot from them. The training sessions involve extensive practice and take place in a comfortable setting, allowing the person to closely observe our communication, tone, and interactions and provide precise feedback. This individual customized this clinical supervisory framework not only to meet our business needs but also to enhance client outcomes. When he meets with the company's CDPs, he provides reports and write-ups. As a business owner, these reports help me clearly understand the developmental stages of my company's CDPs."

Brian stated the following: "I think much of it comes down to our clinical supervision, which we are currently still fine-tuning. In Singapore, clinical supervision is not commonly practiced. However, we aim to ensure that whenever our company's CDPs serve clients, they meet the expectations outlined by the NCDA framework. We have a clinical supervisor who is trained to identify practice gaps, allowing our company's CDPs to improve. This is important because we believe basic certification, whether provided by the NCDA or WSG, only offers entry-level training. For us, the real training happens through clinical supervision and continuous professional development, enabling ongoing refinement in practice. To me, this is more important because relying solely on certification will only yield a level-one practitioner. If I aim to have CDPs who are highly competent and have effectively integrated our products into their practice, then practice supervision is crucial. Therefore, we want to emphasize clinical supervision more strongly, as it ensures that our services are delivered effectively and meet standards aligned with the NCDA's level."

Similarly, Khloe and Brian indicated the presence of a professional clinical supervision framework, including components from the NCDA, integrated into their firm's operations, services, and products. Specifically, the points highlighted by Brian align with internationally established clinical supervision practices (Butler, 2012; Cutcliffe, Hyrkäs & Fowler, 2011, pp. 8–10; Watkins & Milne, 2014, pp. 3–14). These practices involve using various deep-practice models to observe, develop, and assess CDPs' technical and non-technical skills across multiple supervision formats (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014, pp. 131–203; Hoppin & Goodman, 2014, pp. 9–21). The dimensions of assessed skills and abilities may range from what Perrone, Perrone, Chan, and Thomas (2000) describe as the CDP's self-efficacy to structured skill assessments such as the Counselor Competencies Scale (Lambie, Mullen, Swank, & Blount, 2017) and the Professional Disposition Competence Assessment (Garner, Freeman, & Lee, 2016; Miller et al., 2019). These instruments provide

in-depth evaluations of CDPs' self-awareness, personal characteristics, and various skill dimensions.

The natural outcomes and benefits of clinical supervision include skill utilization, measurement, and innovation, as demonstrated by Falender and Shafranske (2017, pp. 6–14) and Tate, Bloom, Tassara, and Caperton (2014). Clinical supervision is nurturing and reflective, promoting innovation and facilitating skill acquisition through the supervisor's adoption of various roles, including those of a "teacher," "consultant," and "counselor" (Wheeler & Richard, 2007, pp. 30–31). Consequently, clinical supervision enhances frontline competitiveness and supports employers' product market strategies by improving individual CDPs (Ashton & Sung, 2011a; Ashton & Sung, 2011b).

Continuous Professional Learning and Development

Continuous professional development (CPD) is a defining characteristic of the career development field, given its rich history and ongoing evolution related to the psychology of individuals and their careers. Skill policies and competency frameworks guide CDPs by offering continuous learning, engagement, training or practice, and professional supervision. However, challenges remain regarding the effectiveness of CPD for various stakeholders (Collin, Van der Heijden & Lewis, 2012), including issues with availability, quality of content, trainer expertise, and accessibility. We sought to examine how the local skill policy and career development organizations, including WSG, have supported CDPs.

Luke stated the following: "For example, the most recent course I attended was on career coaching for special needs clients. In terms of relevance, as someone who has practiced career coaching, I found that the skills taught align closely with what we actually do. My only complaint was that I expected the master class trainers to offer something new or different that would help me better address the needs of special needs jobseekers. However, in the end, the content felt nearly identical to what I had already learned through the CFP or the Specialist Diploma in Career Counseling. Therefore, it was not particularly special, and perhaps the quality was not quite there."

Edward mentioned the following: "However, if we look specifically at the local scene, I do not see any high-quality master classes available, and we clearly lack them. I am unsure how someone could meaningfully complete the required 75 h. Having recently attended a master class, I felt the content was not up to date. Again, we need to ask ourselves whether we are just clocking hours for the sake of it, or if we truly have current, relevant master classes that reflect the genuine purpose of CPD."

Rebecca stated the following: "I felt that two days were less because there was actually so much more to learn. We had many opportunities for role-playing during the class, and the more we practiced role-playing, the better we could apply what was taught."

Danny mentioned the following: "There was almost no support from WSG. From the NCDA, however, there was a bit more support because it is a community. WSG regularly sends out a newsletter called True North, which includes stories, practical tips, and the latest research. While this newsletter is useful, it is not quite at the same level as what the NCDA offers. You can clearly feel the difference."

All three CDPs expressed concerns regarding the quality of existing ongoing training, including the content of master classes and the quality of training providers. These concerns align with the findings of Kabouridis and Link (2001), who emphasized the importance of quality learning experiences for adult learners, as well as the effective translation of theories and knowledge into practice. Other factors identified by Kennedy's research (2005, pp. 237–246; 2014) highlight elements essential for ensuring that CPD courses are effectively delivered and supported, including inter-community mentoring/coaching, communities

of practice, and transformative models of practice."

Levi mentioned the following: "I know that not many career development courses are available in Singapore. They are not widely developed, likely due to the relatively small market here."

Gordon stated the following: ""I think the challenge is finding suitable courses and conferences that have a direct impact on me. I feel that the policy organization has not done enough to support my development. I would expect such an organization to play a role in raising professional standards."

Jason mentioned the following: "I think the biggest challenge is finding relevant local training to help me upskill or keep my skillsets relevant. A simple online search turns up very little—fewer than 10 options in the marketplace. If you are an experienced or even a seasoned practitioner with fewer than three years of experience, you would likely have already gone through everything available. The list is very short, and you run out of options quickly. We need more courses and content focused on career development. Right now, this content is lacking, and the reason is that its development depends on a foundation of research and knowledge. When that foundation is weak, the entire value chain breaks down. Workshops and training can be developed, but first, we need to build the upstream knowledge base."

The issues raised by Levi, Gordon, and Jason may stem from the earlier established premise that Singapore's career development sector is still in a nascent and underdeveloped stage. Parcero and Ryan (2016, pp. 1150–1161) identified four pillars of a knowledge economy, which together help create an environment that incentivizes the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge. These four pillars are (i) education, (ii) innovation, (iii) information and communication technology, and (iv) the economy—specifically how it interacts with socio-economic conditions, labor market dynamics, political climate, and the agendas of key stakeholders.

Summary of Findings

This study aimed to examine the perspectives of CDPs involved in active practice both before and after the implementation of the WSG CDF. The literature review was structured around the origins of local and global skill policies to help us understand the current context and explore possible causes of existing gaps, prevailing needs, and potential ways forward. Through semi-structured interviews, we engaged in first-hand, face-to-face conversations with local CDPs about their work and experiences with these skill policies. An analysis of the interview data revealed that CDPs in Singapore are currently unable to fully utilize their skills owing to a lack of recognition and assessment of those skills in the workplace. In many firms, these skills are not factored into performance evaluations, and poor proxies are often used to assess whether an employee is skilled. This has considerable implications for the effectiveness of local service policies, as well as the competitiveness and innovation potential of firms that have invested in training. CDPs who were already active before the introduction of WSG CDF have continued to grow and advance in their practice, but WSG CDF does not appear to have been useful for them.

CDPs participating in this study also expressed uncertainty and confusion about what policymakers aim to achieve through the WSG CDF skill policy, particularly in light of the sector's current state, its competitive landscape, and the policymakers' frame of reference. Several interviewees echoed similar concerns, noting that the policy and its content are currently too limited to effectively guide their work. Some also questioned whether the skill policy is short-sighted and focused only on short-term goals. Nonetheless, all participants agreed that WSG CDF represents an appropriate and necessary first step toward expanding and advancing the career development landscape. From the perspective of the research questions, we conclude that RQ1 is not addressed by the current suite of skill policies and training

programs (WSG CDF, NCDA FCD, and CCE–GCDF), as the intended outcomes for career services and CDP competencies have not yet been aligned with policymakers' goals. Therefore, it is challenging to determine the usefulness of the skills and the elaborated framework when the job role and design do not support their application. Only one participant reported approximately 75% skill utilization, while the remaining 93% did not find the skills relevant to their roles or outcomes. Although several participants acknowledged the meaningful intent and potential impact of the framework, these have yet to be realized and remain within a "black box." From the perspective of RQ2, we again observed that the current WSG CDF was not perceived as useful. The majority of participants reported a lack of quality in continuing professional development offerings, shallow course content, and weak alignment between skills and practice. They also acknowledged the early-stage development of Singapore's career development sector. The participants sought global policies—specifically the NCDA and its international experts and offerings. From the perspective of RQ3, the majority of participants (80%) reported no clear connection between their skills, training, job role, the skill policy, and workplace performance assessment. This disconnect resulted in what they described as skill and training wastage. A glimmer of hope still remains, as three participants (20%) reported implementing clinical supervision and comprehensive skill assessment frameworks to validate skills, conduct training requirement analysis, and assess performance. However, an equal proportion of participants (80%) shared that their workplaces did not engage in skill assessment practices or ensured that skills acquired through training were applied. Consequently, the intended strengthening of career services, enhancement of role meaningfulness, and positive impact on clients remain largely unrealized.

Limitations

Similar to all studies, the current one also has its limitations. First, the study is exploratory in nature and aims to provide early insights and preliminary evidence on the efficacy of the skill policy and training for CDPs in Singapore. With a sample size of only 15 participants, the findings are not representative of the entire CDP population. However, they are sufficient to support a reasonable basis for early research generalization. Each participant was interviewed only once, with the goal of capturing qualitative data for thematic analysis and pattern identification. Further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of career development training, skill application, and practice in Singapore, as the career development sector is still in its early stages. We hope that this study will support future research in the field.

Recommendations

Public Consultation on Career Development and Policy

Most CDPs involved in this study—including those from the public sector—expressed the need for globally recognized skills and credentials to enhance the competitiveness of Singapore's career development landscape. Access to international credentials and advanced knowledge is seen as a considerable advantage for CDPs, supporting entrepreneurship, service quality, product innovation, and broader progress in the sector (Wu, 2012, p.14). Consultations with representatives from both the public and private sectors, including CDPs, would help gather diverse perspectives and insights on the state of skills, practice levels, and the effectiveness of past and current programs. Such consultation would provide policymakers with a more comprehensive understanding of the sector. It could also involve local career development associates and human resource professionals to foster positive collaborations and promote integrated career development initiatives across stakeholders.

CDPs' Skill, Job, and Workplace Census

This study revealed that the definitions of skills and practice outlined by CDPs and WSG CDF do not align with internationally recognized standards across various sectors, including education, private industry, and public service. We propose conducting a census on job context, tasks, skills, and functions—similar to a job analysis—to better understand sector-specific needs and to validate the competencies and contextual relevance of the skill policy against internationally established benchmarks. Our findings also indicate that skill utilization and assessment in the workplace are currently poor. This has contributed to reduced productivity, limited innovation, and a lack of practical relevance—ultimately undermining the intended goals of the skill policy. Further studies are needed to assess these trends across the broader career development landscape.

We also recommend establishing a system of CDP practice standards and evaluation, such as clinical supervision or comparable models. This would support CDPs in more effectively integrating their skills into workplace practice, beyond the baseline training provided by the WSG CDF training program.

Connections with International Career Development Bodies

Local CDPs in Singapore value the international community, particularly opportunities to collaborate with leaders in the field and to access expert input and global partnerships, given the rich history and established practices of international bodies. While Singapore's career development landscape is still in its early stages, this should not discourage openness to learning and connecting with the global community. Connecting local CDPs with international collaboration initiatives can facilitate knowledge transfer, support research on local career development needs, and, over time, enhance the credibility of the profession in Singapore. This approach can help raise the overall quality of human capital, strengthen regional competitiveness, and foster the development of innovative products and services (Brown & Lauder, 2012). More importantly, it can contribute to delivering best-in-class career and employment services for the people of Singapore.

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