

***Policy models, policy assumptions
and lifelong learning – reflections
on the UK experience***

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Singapore – Industry Transformation



Transforming sectors such as chemicals, electronics, construction, cleaning, security, logistics, healthcare, education, professional services and retail through:

1. Internationalisation
2. Innovation
3. Productivity enhancement
4. Skills

The Singapore skills policy context



SkillsFuture – 3 over-arching policy strands:

1. Strengthening educational pathways and enhancing interoperability
2. Focusing on skills mastery
3. Ensuring learning takes place throughout one's life.

4 objectives:

1. Help individuals make well-informed choices in E&T
2. Develop a high quality, integrated system of E&T that responds to industry needs
3. Employer recognition and career development based on skills and mastery
4. Foster a culture that supports and celebrates LLL

SkillsFuture initiatives:



1. Reform and closer alignment of different qualification pathways
2. Enhanced careers information, advice and guidance
3. SkillsFuture credits, \$500 initially – putting purchasing power in hands of individual
4. Use of educational technology to enable LLL delivery

Aims of this talk:

1. To reflect on what research and more recently policy developments across the four UK nations (England, Wales, Scotland and N. Ireland) can tell us about how to advance Singapore's mastery and LLL objectives.
2. I am going to suggest that job quality, work organisation and job design are an important potential 'missing element' that is finally re-emerging in the UK.

English policy context:

- Yet another attempt at reform of vocational qualifications, this time grouped around 15 pathways
- Chaos in IAG
- Public funding for adult and lifelong learning now just 2.3% of total E&T spend – large falls in adult learner numbers
- Sharp decline in adult, p-t students in HE
- Annual volume (training days) of employer-provided training between 1997-2012 fell by 40-50%

At a policy level there aren't too many positive lessons to take from us.

BUT.....

A new research base on skills, job quality and work organisation



- Karen Evans et al. 2006. *Improving Workplace Learning*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Michael Eraut & Wendy Hirsh. 2007. *The Significance of Workplace Learning for Individuals, Groups and Organisations*, SKOPE Monograph No. 9, Oxford.
- Alan Felstead, Alison Fuller, Nick Jewson, and Lorna Unwin. 2009. *Improving Working as Learning*, London: Routledge.
- Johnny Sung and David Ashton. 2015. *Skills in Business*, London: Sage.

This research suggests that skills mastery and LLL in and through work depend upon.....



- The job having sufficient variety of tasks, depth and breadth of skills and knowledge requirements, and discretion/space to innovate.
- Opportunities for progression (vertical and/or horizontal) to allow intellectual growth and new challenge.

To put it another way.....

Singapore's policies around mastery stresses "***excellence and innovation***", and suggests the need for 'passion' – "***to achieve innovation and skills mastery, we must be passionate and interested in what we are pursuing***" (Ng Cher Pong, 2016).

But do contemporary jobs offer good opportunities for passion, interest and innovation?

The way we configure work in the UK is sub-optimal



- Many workplaces continue to design work in ways that stresses routine and repetitive processes.
- This makes poor use of employees' skills.
- Bottom up workplace innovation is weak

Some findings from a Microsoft survey of 3,000+ UK office workers



- The average office worker will spend across a working lifetime 90,000 hours at work.
- Process driven tasks dominate many workers' lives. 71% thought 'a productive day in the office' meant clearing their e-mails.
- 51% of 18-25 year olds believe that attending internal meetings signifies 'productivity'.
- **When asked, 'when was the last time you felt you made a major contribution to your organisation?', 23% responded that they believed they had never managed this. Only 8% thought they had made a major contribution in the last year.**

Innovation absent

- Only 1 in 7 felt inspired by their job. 22% agreed that ‘I typically am not excited by my work – it is just something that I do’.
- 45% said they had less than 30 minutes day to think without distractions
- 41% did not feel empowered to think differently
- 42% did not think they had the opportunity to make a difference at work
- 38% said, ‘the business is very process-driven and spends little time on doing things differently or being innovative’.

SOURCE: Microsoft, 2013 *The Daily Grind*

How work is structured really matters



We know that certain configurations of work organisation, job design and people management practices support and embed:

1. Better on-the-job learning (expansive learning environments)
2. Better skills utilisation
3. More workplace innovation
4. Potentially higher levels of productivity

There is thus a potential for a win/win/win/win

Employee-driven innovation

“employee learning in the workplace – in terms of new knowledge, expertise and problem solving skills – constitutes the raw material for employee-driven innovation. Basically, employee initiatives and autonomy, on the one side, and the structure and conditions of work, on the other side, are important for innovation....innovation....is not conceptualised as separate units, but as embedded in daily work activities and job enactment and social processes in the organisation”

Hoyrup, 2012.

We need workplaces that allow discretionary learning, but...

Discretionary learning workplaces:

Portugal	26% of employees covered
Spain	20%
UK	35%
Netherlands	64%
Denmark	60%
Sweden	53%
Finland	48%
Germany	44.%

SOURCE: OECD, 2010

Instead the UK has a lot of 'lean' workplaces



These 'lean production workplaces' have lower opportunities for learning and innovation

UK	40.6% of employees
Netherlands	17%
Denmark	22%
Sweden	18.5%
Germany	19.6%

These figures raise the issue of who designs jobs, how and to what ends?



- Specialists consultants – external
- Organisational Development function within organisation
- Senior Management
- Line managers/supervisors
- Production managers/process engineers
- Cost control system/accountants
- Quality standards designers ISO9000/control and audit system managers
- HR function
- Health and safety system, rules and processes
- ICT and software systems designers/suppliers
- Plant and equipment suppliers
- Franchise management systems and the specifications they develop
- Historical precedent
- Customers – large ones and individuals
- Statutory regulation (e.g. in care sector)
- Professional bodies

For some workers.....

The incentives that would drive, and the conditions that would facilitate skill mastery are bound up with:

1. Hierarchy, autonomy and control levels
2. Discretion and problem solving elements
3. Depth and breadth of role
4. Depth and breadth of skills/knowledge needed
5. Style and values of people management systems and strategies

LLL – courses and what else?

- The vast bulk of learning that many adults (e.g. everyone in this symposium) undertake is in and through their everyday work.
- Courses can be important, but they are only part of the picture. Learning through work really matters. LLL strategies need to factor this in.

Learning in, at and through work

We know that learning at work occurs in three ways (Eraut and Hirsh, 2007):

1. Through work processes with learning as a by-product
2. Learning actions located within work
3. More formalised learning processes at or near the workplace

1. Work processes with learning as a by-product:



- Participating in group activities
- Working alongside others
- Consulting with colleagues
- Tackling challenging tasks and roles
- Problem solving
- Trying things out
- Working with clients

2. Learning actions located within work:



- Asking questions
- Getting information
- Locating people who act as sources of knowledge
- Negotiating access
- Listening and observing
- Reflecting
- Learning from mistakes
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Using data bases, spreadsheets, technical manuals, etc.

3. More formalised learning processes:

- Being supervised
- Being coached
- Being mentored
- Shadowing
- Visits to other sites
- Conferences
- Courses
- Working for a qualification
- Independent study

The overall key factors:

Research suggests that the allocation and structuring of work is central to determining the level and success of learning because it impacted on:

1. The difficulty or challenge of the job
2. The extent to which activity was individual or collaborative
3. The opportunities for meeting, observing and working with people who had more or different expertise, and for forming relationships that provide feedback and support.

The problem is:

- The bulk of learning takes place in Boxes 1 and 2
- Most attention has traditionally been focused on Box 3 (not least by policy makers)
- Courses are good, but learning embedded within work itself also really matters
- Many workplaces afford limited opportunity for 1 and 2. Re-design is required to support learning

Attributes of a 'learning workplace', where innovation is possible:



- Confidence and trust in managers and colleagues
- Mutual learning and support
- Giving and receiving feedback without blame
- Learning from experience, positive or negative
- Learning from colleagues, clients and visitors
- Locating and using knowledge from outside sources
- Attention to the emotional dimension of work
- Discussing and reviewing learning opportunities
- Reviewing work processes and opportunities for quality improvement

And.....

- Management that sees beyond a competitive strategy based on the delivery of standardised, low specification goods or services, and that wants to pursue incremental product, service and process innovation.
- A management that believes that workers at all levels in the organisation can contribute to this agenda, and which organises work and management systems in ways that facilitate this objective.

Re-designing work to enhance the space and opportunity for LLL



- Broader notions of service, process and organisational innovation
- Task de/re-bundling and role broadening/deepening
- Work scheduling/pacing
- Decision-making processes and devolution
- Progression routes (lateral and vertical), especially out of dead-end work
- E&T routes to match
- 'T' rather than 'i' shaped qualifications

Re-discovering work and job quality as an area for policy



Scottish Government's Labour Market Strategy offers a new policy context, one far in advance of anything found elsewhere in UK:

- Wages
- Job quality
- Work organisation, job design and skill utilisation
- Productivity
- Workplace innovation

All joined up

Concerted intervention around productivity, work organisation, job design and innovation:



- Manufacturing Action Plan
- Productivity Action Plan for food and drink
- Scottish Enterprise's workplace innovation service
- SE work on productivity; digital (Edinburgh), Health (Highlands), and manufacturing (W. of Scotland).
- FITWork – Strathclyde centre

Having ignored work and the workplace for 35 years

- Brexit vote and its expression of 'left behind' anger
- Scandals of exploitative employment practices (Sports Direct)
- Stagnant real wages and low paid work that requires state tax credits to subsidise the workers
- Low productivity
- Growing evidence of very poor skills utilisation
- The health (physical and mental) implications of bad jobs

Have all put work back on the UK policy agenda.

Lessons for Singapore?

1. Career and progression pathways are needed to support and power E&T pathways
2. Job quality and job design is critical to driving demand for LLL and enabling learning in and through work.
3. Enhanced workplace innovation and productivity is heavily dependent on models of work organisation and job design
4. In some sectors, the problems will be small. In others, huge. Employers will often need help to re-think work. **Workplace development alongside workforce development!**

For more detail, see:

- Karen Evans et al. 2006. *Improving Workplace Learning*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Michael Eraut & Wendy Hirsh. 2007. *The Significance of Workplace Learning for Individuals, Groups and Organisations*, SKOPE Monograph No. 9, Oxford.
- Alan Felstead, Alison Fuller, Nick Jewson, and Lorna Unwin. 2009. *Improving Working as Learning*, London: Routledge.
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- Keith Sisson. 2016. ‘Shaping the world of work –time for a UK jobs strategy’, *IRRU Working Paper* No. 105, Warwick Business School, Warwick University.
- Ewart Keep. 2016. ‘Improving skills utilisation in the UK – some reflections on what, who and how?’, *SKOPE Research Paper* No. 123, Department of Education, Oxford University.

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