Profiling Career Choice: The case of Business Management Technicians from State-run Technical Institutes in The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies

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Abstract

This present paper delineates the characteristics of prospective individuals who wish to choose their careers by use of empirical evidence drawn from a comprehensive study of how Business Management Technicians (BMTs) from State-run Technical Institutes (SRTIs) in The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies fared on the Labour Market. BMTs (500) from a population of 1170 were surveyed using semi-structured interviews, opinionnairs, academic records and a questionnaire to examine 11 key areas representing both worker and job characteristics. Females from five year high schools who opted for the business studies subject group at Cambridge General Certificate of Education (GCE) ordinary level or Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) basic or general proficiency level examinations were found to be the most suitable candidates for prospective BMTs. On-the-job training experience appeared important and work in the business and other sectors especially for the 20-29, 40-49, > 49 age cohorts was found to be an asset. An instructive career profile should address certain fundamental variables like resourcefulness, dedication, resilience, patience, management, personality orientation, critical thinking, assertive communication, divergent thinking, autonomy, independence, ethics, optimism, flexibility, planfulness, reliability, dependability, commitment to continuous learning, responsibility, high self esteem and self-efficacy, self-discipline and self -reliance. Evidenced-based knowledge of career profiles can facilitate students in their future choices.

Introduction

In the present information age where myriad opportunities abound, for the average individual, making the right career choice can be difficult. Globalization and mobility have caused job stability to be increasingly illusive, paving the path for informed career management (purposeful management of learning, training and work throughout life). There are many questions that surface in the minds of students preparing for the job market; such as: What does the current job market want from a prospective employee? How can I know if I am suited for the job of my fancy? Is there evidence–based research that could help me to decide on a career? An evidence-based career profile allows the prospective employee to assess his/her abilities, interests, and personality type to link him/her with appropriate career options. Information about these careers such as the growth rate, salary, training required, where to go to school and many other important characteristics can be useful in assisting the individual in making the most appropriate career choice. Hence, the purpose of this present paper is to provide empirical evidence that delineate the characteristics of prospective individuals who wish to choose a career in business management in The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Further, while career profiling is routinely studied in developed economies, there is a paucity of research in this area in smaller and more remote regions. It appears reasonable to regard vocational education and training as performing similar functional roles of linking employment to career profiling in The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, as it does in other parts of the world. All stakeholders like employers, recruitment agencies, outplacement organizations, schools, colleges, universities, career management professionals, psychologists, industry associations, executive coaches and aspiring professionals can benefit from the findings of this present study.

The present study is significant because it argues that evidenced-based knowledge of career profiles can facilitate students in their future choices. Consequently, with information before the fact, employers would have fewer mis-matches in their workplaces and employees would enjoy their work experiences. Hopefully, there would be a corresponding overall improvement in worker production that would have far reaching consequences on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country. For the purposes of this present study, career profiling was defined as an eclectic approach that develops a behavioral pattern of an individual who is interested in pursuing a particular career. Valuables of interest in career profiling include resourcefulness, dedication, resilience, patience, management, personality orientation, critical thinking, assertive communication, divergent thinking, autonomy, independence, ethics, optimism, flexibility, planfulness, reliability, dependability, commitment to continuous learning, responsibility, high self esteem and self-efficacy, self-discipline and self –reliance.

Literautre Review

Apart from professional guides, like the Osu-okmulgee assessment center (http://www.osu-okmulgee.edu/assessment.shtml) who can lead individuals through the job matching process and help them to tap into the resources that are critical in helping them select an appropriate career, readily available career profiles can help take

the guesswork out of one of one of the most important decisions that an individual would make. Pelsma and Arnett (2002) explain how all individuals may be equipped with the knowledge, skills and desire for lifelong learning. They use the analogy of a chair to discuss four strategies to assist clients in maintaining balance as they cope with uncertainty and change. Meanwhile, Scott (2002) affirms that information taught in graduate level career development courses may be successfully used by counsellors with a diversity of clients ranging from 16-year old to those in their sixties, making major career transitions.

When developing a career profile some important variables that must be considered include resourcefulness, dedication, resilience, patience, management, personality orientation, critical thinking, assertive communication, divergent thinking, autonomy, independence, ethics, optimism, flexibility, planfulness, reliability, dependability, commitment to continuous learning, responsibility, high self esteem and self-efficacy, self-discipline and self -reliance. Stufflebeam's (2000) CIPP (context, input, process, and product) model may be used to verify the suitability of a useful career profile. Interestingly, Cohen (2003) postulated a four-stage model of career decision-making based on existential themes such as freedom, responsibility, meaning, and authenticity occurring across an individual's life span. For him, career satisfaction and stability are obtained when the meaning and opportunities for *'authentic existence*' that the vocation provides corresponds to the vocation. He posits that a failure to acquire opportunities for meaning and '*authentic existence'* in an individual's occupations may result in an '*existential vacuum'* and '*existential guilt'*, respectively. For individuals making mid-career changes, the conceptualization of career decision-making from this perspective may be particularly useful. By determining the client preference about the structure and approach to group career counseling, Penney and Cahill (2002) proposed that intervention methods providing clients with either an action-oriented or self-reflective approach could be useful in assisting them. They developed an assessment tool that included work personality and learning style to determine the individual's preference for career counseling.

But having decided on career counseling, the question of career success surfaces. Neault (2002) in her research on career management (preferred to the term career development) found that optimism and flexibility predicted career success more accurately than other given variables like planfulness and continuous learning. Optimism, continuous learning and planfulness predicted job satisfaction more accurately than other variables like flexibility. The low variances accounted for planfulness and continuous learning (12%, 19% respectively) suggest that other variables may be responsible for the unexplained variance. Such variables included differences among individual work teams (conflict with immediate supervisors and peers) and other interpersonal variables like management style, and contextual variables like personal crisis (e.g. illness or death in a family). Correct choices could greatly improve an individual's chances of educational success and the potential for a career that is rewarding. Using research findings available from studies of this type, several assessment centers use the most advanced technology available, with specifically designed networked systems to streamline and simplify the experience and provide profiling needs customized to meet the specific requirements of the individual.

Job satisfaction with career opportunities by definition (as given on the questionnaire) indicated the respondents' perceived contentment with the career opportunities at their present job. Respondents were requested to rate on a four point Likert scale (highly, moderately, slightly or not at all satisfied) their perceptions regarding job satisfaction with career opportunities. For statistical analysis nominal values from one to four were used ranging from 'highly satisfied' to 'not at all satisfied'. Satisfaction with career opportunities offered at their workplaces may reasonably be regarded as a fairly given 'normal' circumstance. Clearly, there is an assumption here that the extent to which an individual is satisfied with career opportunities at his/her workplace is in some measure related to the math of his/her career choice profile. Whilst this may not necessarily be the situation this present study accepts this as one of its assumptions and limitations with respect to the generalizations that may be inferred. Lofquist and Dawis (1984) reported that 'the majority of problems presented to counselors stem from "discorrespondences" between the client and his or her environment'. They found that while the individual brings unique abilities to the given environment, s/he in turn has certain needs mandatory for success in that setting. Their Person-Environment-Correspondence (P-E-C) Theory equips the counselor with the tools necessary to assist the client in making changes that lead to "correspondence" between the client and the specific situation. Both 'objective fit" (does the client have the ability to do a specific job?) and "subjective fit" (is the client's perception of the situation accurate?) are factored in. Clearly, career profiling would provide useful information for determining both objective and subjective fit.

Career profiling must also take into consideration personality orientation. Holland's Theory of Modal Personality Orientation (1997) makes a theoretical connection between personality and environment that facilitates the use of the RIASEC classification system for both persons and fields of study or occupations. The RIASEC theory says that if a person and an environment have the same or similar codes, e.g., investigative person in an investigative environment, then that person will likely be satisfied and persist in that environment (Holland, 1997). In such an environment, satisfied individuals and other individuals who have the same or similar personality traits would be able to express their personality in an environment that is supportive. Holland notes that people or environments are combinations of all six types (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising or Conventional) and not exclusively one type. Essentially, their dominant type appears to be an approximation of an ideal, modal type. Like many inventories and career assessment tools that use the Holland typology to enable individuals to categorize their interests and personal characteristics in terms of combinations

of the six types, career profiling appreciates the significance of the interest/personal characteristics nexus.

Additionally, career profiling needs to be cognisant of several sociological factors of work, in particular Human Capital Theory relative to supply and demand in the marketplace. Because the supply of skilled labor is generally less than the supply for unskilled labor, then one may expect higher wages for skilled workers. However, a number of exceptions can and do occur. For example, when unskilled work is disagreeable, risky, or unsatisfying, the supply of these unskilled workers will likely be reduced and higher wages may be necessary to command an adequate work force. In a similar manner, when monopolistic controls prevent entry into less-skilled jobs, wages again may be higher than those of skilled workers. Additionally, when the supply of skilled workers is high relative to the demand for a particular occupation, monetary wages may not be significantly (if indeed it is) higher for highly educated workers. Despite this, generally one may typically assume that skilled workers should receive a positive return on their investments that they make in their human capital (http://faculty.washington.edu/jacoby/BLS345/%20HCtutorial.html).

To fully appreciate the context in which this present study was conducted it is important to note the introduction of newer educational policies in The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Originally education was available for the privileged few. However, with the advent of a national government, the policy was changed to give all children who completed their primary education three years of basic secondary education in the junior secondary schools and give a certain percentage of those leaving junior secondary schools at least two years at the senior secondary level (senior comprehensive schools). The senior secondary level was originally intended to include three types of schools, but as the plan was being implemented, several types of secondary schools could be identified in the public secondary school system. Among them were senior comprehensives, seven year, five year, private and 'other' schools. Private schools were run by organizations other than the government. 'Other' schools refer to those schools other than state-run or private schools, like trade schools or individuals who were on their own.

With a population of approximately 1.3 million, vocational education and training in the twin small island states of The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago was originally provided by two state-run technical institutes (Table 2). Technical and further education is viewed as a means of upward social and job mobility. Blaug (1970) posited that the economic wealth of developing countries depended on post secondary education particularly of the type offered by the state-run technical institutes under study. The business management technician program became popular in The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in the post oil boom period (1983-1993) as world oil prices plummeted. The business management technician program attempts to offer hands-on, practical simulations of real life job situations through exposure to workshops, seminars, roundtable discussions, plenary sessions, lectures, tutorials and site visits on office management, finance, accounting, business management, information technology and communication.

As explained earlier, the focus of this present study is to present evidence-based information of career profiles, obtained from the comprehensive study that would assist prospective students in their future career choices. Making the correct career choice based on accurate information could make the big difference to an individual's happiness and his/her usefulness on the job market. More productive workers will inevitably have positive consequences on the GDP of any country and its ability to sustain a reasonable standard of life for all its citizens. In essence, a career profile should address certain fundamental important variables that include resourcefulness, dedication, resilience, patience, management, personality orientation, critical thinking, assertive communication, divergent thinking, autonomy, independence, ethics, optimism, flexibility, planfulness, reliability, dependability, commitment to continuous learning, responsibility, high self esteem and self-efficacy, self-discipline and self-reliance.

Method

From the population of those who were in the BMT program at the time of conduct of this present study, this researcher obtained a random sample of 500 by use of a random number generator. The random sample, representing 43% of that population, was drawn from Business Management Technicians (BMTs) of state-run technical institutes (SRTIs) in The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (Table 2). Participation was voluntary and every effort was made to ensure confidentiality. This researcher administered a self-designed four-page questionnaire (available upon request from the author) that surveyed demographic details, academic background and the details of present employment (Table 3). Respondents were also asked to detail their career aspirations. This researcher assigned a three digit number beginning from 001 to each questionnaire. Information obtained from the completed questionnaires was coded and the data recorded. All responses were taken into consideration when demarcating categories. This researcher used an SPSS computer software package (Norusis, 2000-2005) for data analysis.

This researcher formulated a one page simple letter of transmittal to respondents explaining the purpose of the research, guaranteeing anonymity of respondents. Specific objectives to be achieved by the questionnaire were outlined. After research specialists thoroughly checked the questionnaire using the instruments the researcher formulated, the questionnaire was piloted on a sample of 200 subjects from a variety of departments of both SRTIs. This researcher made several changes using the feedback received. The final questionnaire therefore contained questions that were both of the closed form (only permitting certain responses) and also of the open form (responses made in the own words of the respondents). To minimise the perceived amount of work to be done by respondents in completing the questionnaire, the researcher ensured that as many questions as possible were structured in a manner that required ticked (√) responses. In addition to providing half of the last page of the questionnaire for 'Additional Information', the researcher provided ample

spaces within the body of the questionnaire for immediate comment to minimise omission of vital information. The specific question on the comprehensive questionnaire relating to this present paper was, 'How long (in months) did it take you to get your present job?'

Apparent repetition of requested information, for example 'courses pursued at institutions attended, diplomas received on graduation and the specific area of training at Technical Institute' served as a means of double checking the truth/validity of given information (Table 1). Sequencing of events, for example dates of attendance at secondary schools/SRTIs and date of assumption of present job also served the same purpose of double checking the truth/validity of information given. Comparison of answers to responses to questions for example, Status at State-run Technical Institute (full time/part time) and the date of assumption of present job were used for further validation (Table 1). Apparent request for details for example home/job telephone numbers served to check the validity of home/work addresses as well as to allow this researcher to call for further information in the event of omissions on the questionnaire. Finally, the researcher made instructions as clear and concise as possible.

This researcher thought it important to ensure that any instruments used were validated prior to administration by a carefully chosen group of research specialists. Ten such persons were selected on the basis of their proven track record in educational qualifications, research publications, teaching techniques, interest in the work, dependability and reliability. The selected persons represented a wide range of subject disciplines including English, Social Studies, Science, Modern Languages, Mathematics and Information Technology. Every attempt was made to ensure that instructions were clear, items were properly constructed and the length of the questionnaire was reasonably short. The level of internal consistency or stability of the instrument over time was measured. This researcher felt that the instrument should have a high reliability since only small differences between target and comparable groups on several variables measured by the instrument were anticipated. In particular, the coefficient of stability was investigated because it was felt that it was inadvisable to administer alternative forms of the same instrument. It must however be pointed out that initially the researcher designed several alternative forms of the instrument and allowed research specialists to critique them. All comments were carefully considered and used as input for the formulation of the final instrument ready for pilot testing.

In investigating the coefficient of stability (test-retest reliability), the researcher administered the pilot instrument to a sample of individuals. This was again done to the same sample of individuals after a delay of two weeks. This researcher used a random sample to ensure adequate account was taken of all possible variables for example mood,

Table 1

Reliability Checks on Questionnaire

Reliability Estimates	Reliability Check		Records/Questionnaire check	
Dependent/Ind. Variable Name	Pg	Qu.No.	Pg/Reference	Qu.No
Name	1	1	Aca. Records	Employer
Age	1	2	1	6
Sex	1	3	Aca. Records	Name type
Abode	1	4	1	5
Academic Background	1	6	2	9
Status at SRTI	2	7	Aca. Records	Comments
Area of Training	2	8	Aca. Records	Comments
Graduation Status	1	6	2	9
On-the-Job Training	2	10	1	6
Present Employer	2	11,12	2	13
Present Job	2	14,16	2	11,15
Previous Employer	3	16,18	1	6
Job Relatedness	3	20	Definitions	Comments
Job Preparedness	4	21	Definitions	Comments
Job Satisfaction	4	22	Definitions	Comments
Job Stability	5	23	Definitions	Comments
Remuneration	5	24,25	Definitions	Comments
Fringe Benefits/Perks	5	26	Similar jobs	Comments
Recommendations	5	27	Similar jobs	Comments
Academic Aspirations	5	28	Similar jobs	Comments
Fellow Graduates	6	30	6, Aca. Rec.	Comments

level of fatigue and attitude toward the instrument.

As indicated earlier, this researcher incorporated several validity checks into the body of the questionnaire in an attempt to minimise inaccuracies on the part of the respondents. Discrepancies in responses could be easily recognised and verified by the researcher. These are summarised in Table 1. Repeats within the questionnaire allowed for correlation of information given by respondents on their first response with information given on subsequent responses. Variables used as checks included secondary school attended and year of graduation.

This researcher and assistant performed several validity checks to guarantee a reasonable instrument (Table 1). Acquiescence was minimized by arranging the questions in such a manner that respondents were forced to provide a given answer from choices presented. Some of the instructions that the researcher gave to respondents included reading carefully the entire questionnaire before attempting to complete it, following the written instructions given on the questionnaire, answering as honestly as possible the questions posed and checking over answers before handing in the completed questionnaire.

Calculations showed that twenty percent of the responses arose from returns of mailed questionnaires, 10% from questionnaires completed through visits to private homes of respondents, 2% of responses came from visits to meetings of professional associations/social gatherings and the remaining 68% from questionnaires completed at the workplaces of the respondents. Several semi-structured interviews (available upon request) and opinionnaires provided relevant information that allowed this researcher to contextualize the data obtained. With permission, over a two month period, this researcher cross checked academic records from the SRTIs to verify that information provided by respondents was accurately recorded. In fact, respondents, especially those who had left the SRTIs for several years prior to the conduct of the study encouraged this researcher to check with the SRTIs for verification of the information they provided.

Results

Pertinent background information of the respondents is summarily presented in Table 3.

This researcher found that more five year high schools than any other school type provided students for entry into SRTIs, suggesting that a general rather than a specialized education at the early stage provided a sound foundation for future study (Table 3). Nevertheless, the business subject group was an excellent indicator of future academic performance for prospective BMTs since they obtained higher grades at SRTIs than their peers who had concentrated on other areas of study like sciences or modern languages prior to entry at the SRTI. Respondents with higher qualifications (advanced level subjects) obtained higher grades at SRTIs than their lesser qualified counterparts who had Cambridge General Certificate of Education (GCE) ordinary level or basic or general proficiency level Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) subjects only. More than half of the present BMTs were temporarily employed. Business and 'Other' (safety, security and administration) were the work areas of specialization found to be most popular for BMT workers. From results of semi-structured interviews, opinionnaires and confidential records checked, the business subject group area appeared to be a more accurate predictor for entry into the BM program, indicating the value of proper career guidance. Higher grades obtained by more highly qualified entrants of SRTIs in BM programs may indicate better ability, superior study skills and perhaps a more positive attitude.

Most industrial sub-sectors readily absorbed their BMT workers with on-the-job training (OJT) experience in their organizations. One compelling reason has to do with the challenge to recruit and retain workers for maximum efficiency of operations especially during a period of economic recession. OJT programs are extremely useful in affording persons practical experience and benchmarking skills needed for performing well at their jobs. The highest percentage of BMTs reported having their OJT experience in the petroleum industrial sub-sector, indicating that the petroleum industrial sub-sector in The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies was a major employer for individuals from BMT programs.

One may conclude that in keeping with the economic hardships experienced during the post oil boom period, referred to as the 'business studies boom' period, employers were trying to obtain as much as possible for as little as possible from their employees. Accordingly, it was significant that more

Table 2

Entrants by sex (M/F) by status (Full Time/Part Time) at SRTIs

YEAR	SRTIA				SRTIB			
	FULL TIME		PART TIME		FULL TIME		PART TIME	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1983	10	15	06	04	22	33	19	38
1984	08	05	05	09	06	14	11	37
1985	05	09	04	10	15	34	29	31
1986	05	09	04	21	03	24	31	30
1987	00	00	02	08	06	23	24	38
1988	11	05	01	08	11	19	11	15
1989	11	05	01	08	10	18	12	24
1990	07	12	09	15	14	14	19	10
1991	46	01	11	22	08	08	08	22
1992	03	11	08	05	09	17	28	00
1993	12	12	06	08	10	14	10	14

Source: Registries of SRTIA and SRTIB.

Table 3

Demographic characteristics of the random sample

Demographic		Number	Percentage	Cumulative %
Gender : Male		100	20	20
Female		400	80	100
Age Cohort/yr: Under 20		20	4.0	4.0
20-29		211	42.2	46.2
30-39		171	34.2	80.4
40-49		82	16.4	96.8
Over 49		6	1.2	98.8
Geographic Area: Tobago		41	8.2	8.2
North East Trinidad		132	26.4	34.6
North West Trinidad		58	11.6	46.2
Central Trinidad		66	13.2	59.4
South Trinidad		191	38.2	97.6
Abroad		10	2.0	99.6
High School Type: Senior Comprehensive		109	21.8	21.8
Five Year		134	26.8	48.6
Seven Year		132	26.4	75.0
Private		69	13.8	88.8
Other		35	7.0	100.0
O Level Subject Group: Business		110	22.0	22.0
Science		189	37.8	59.8
Other		109	21.8	81.6
A Level Subject Group: Business		28	5.0	5.0
Science		17	3.4	8.4
Other		10	3.8	12.2
SRTI : John S. Donaldson Tech		193	38.6	38.6
San Fernando Tech		307	61.4	100.0
Status at SRTI: Full Time		311	62.2	62.2
Part Time		189	34.6	100.0
Industrial Sub-sector of On-the-Job Training		7	1.4	61.8
Experience: Agriculture				
Communication		14	2.8	64.6
Construction		36	7.2	71.8
Finance		16	3.2	75.0
Government		21	4.2	79.2
Manufacturing		36	7.2	86.4
Petroleum		56	11.2	97.6
Other		11	2.2	99.8
Self				
Industrial Sub-Sector of Present Job:		4	0.8	0.8
Agriculture				
		53	10.6	11.4
Communication				
		46	9.2	21.6
Construction				
Finance		30	6.0	27.6
		62	12.4	40.0
Government				
		62	12.4	52.4
Manufacturing				
Petroleum		122	24.4	76.8
Other		82	16.4	94.2
Self		17	3.4	97.6
Present Job Status: Temporary		266	53.2	53.2
Permanent		234	46.8	100.0

than half of the BMTs on the labor market served on a temporary rather than a permanent basis at their jobs. Business and 'Other' (safety, security and administration) were the two work areas of specialization for BMTs. The category 'Other' was also favoured by those of the 20-29 age cohort and by persons in the 40-49 or >49 age cohort, indicating that there may be competition for space or a change of experience. Choice of employees based on interviews prior to employment led one to conclude that employers in the area of business management preferred females to males. This information has to be interpreted guardedly since there were many more (4:1) females than males in the comprehensive study.

Generally, graduates who successfully completed their BMT program were favoured over those respondents who did not successfully complete their BMT program for their first time employment, if little were known about the employee's job experience. The favoring of graduates who successfully completed their BMT program over those who did not successfully complete their BMT program for first time employment indicated employers' desire for educated persons for the labor market. Despite this, those respondents who did not successfully complete their BMT program who pursued part-time courses were not discriminated against in favour of graduates who successfully completed their BMT program where remuneration was concerned. These findings indicate some measure of customer satisfaction with the BM programs offered at SRTIs. Younger (20-29 age cohort) female BMTs were more readily chosen over other age cohorts, as evidenced by results from semi-structured interviews and opinionnaires with employers, suggesting employers' desire for staff trainability.

Full time attendance at the SRTIs did not appear to be of concern for placement officers at SRTIs in the procurement of employment. Employees accepted part time attendance at SRTIs to be sufficient evidence of exposure to the required skills and competencies needed to perform satisfactorily at the workplace. This perhaps explained why, on completion of the BMT program, many part time BMTs reported taking zero months to obtain their jobs.

Most industrial sub-sectors offering on-the-job training experience readily absorbed the workers in their organizations, confirming the fact that employers considered the possession of the on-the-job training experience important. The majority (77.0 %) of respondents felt that their training received at the SRTIs was moderately to highly related to their present jobs. Career aspirations for BMTs included 'managerial posts, owners of private businesses, accountants and for many (58%) 'any job that pays well'.

Table 4 indicates that generally, respondents were moderately satisfied (42.8 %) with career opportunities offered at their present jobs (Mode = 2). Less than a quarter of respondents reported no satisfaction at all (19%).

The frequency distribution was slightly positively skewed with more cases lying towards the right end of the distribution (Skew = 0.18, Standard Error Skew = 0.11). Compared to the normal distribution, fewer cases fell into the tails of this distribution (Kurtosis = 0.68, Standard Error Kurtosis = 0.22). Job satisfaction with career opportunities appeared to be most highly related to job satisfaction with the kind of work done ($r(499) = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$, significant for a two tailed test).

Table 4
Frequency distribution of responses on job satisfaction with career opportunities

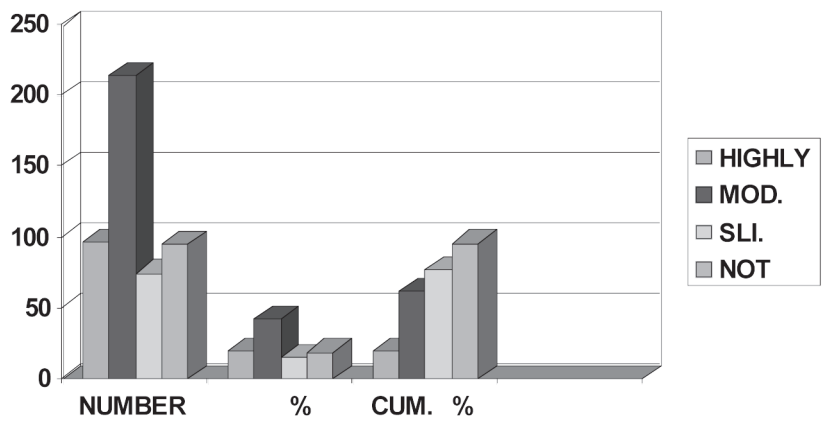
Job satisfaction with career opportunities	Number	%	Cum %
Highly	097	19.4	19.4
Moderately	214	42.8	62.2
Slightly	075	15.0	77.2
Not At All	095	19.0	96.2

Note. 3.8 % of the sample gave no response.

For the random sample of 500 respondents satisfaction with career opportunities was graphically represented in Figure 1. Approximately half of the respondents claimed that they were moderately satisfied with the career opportunities offered at their workplaces. An equal number of respondents reported being highly satisfied or not at all satisfied with the career opportunities offered at their workplaces (Figure 1).

Whilst Henderson (2000) claimed that career happiness was more important than job satisfaction, in this present study job satisfaction with career opportunities was linked to both age and sex (Table 5). The age cohort < 20 years recorded the highest percentage (67%) of respondents claiming that they were not satisfied with their career opportunities compared with 44 % in the age cohort 40-49 years. The age cohort 20-29 years recorded the least (20%) number of respondents claiming that they were not at all satisfied with their career opportunities and the most (30%) respondents claiming that they were highly satisfied with their career opportunities. The highest percentage of 20-29 year old BMTs (32.4 %) reported a moderate level of job satisfaction with career opportunities at their present jobs compared to 55.9 % of 30-39 year old BMTs. Weak and negative associations of job satisfaction with career opportunities and age cohort were recorded for all age cohorts except the 20-29 age cohort.

Figure 1
Frequency distribution of responses of sample to job satisfaction with career opportunities



Perceptions regarding job satisfaction with career opportunities appeared heavily biased by sex. Being not at all satisfied with career opportunities at their present jobs was 14.2 % more female than male BMTs (Table 5). There was evidence of a significant difference between male and female BMTs with respect to their perception of job satisfaction with career opportunities (chi-square (4) = 500) = 25.4, $p < 0.01$).

However, 19% of those respondents who completed their programs reported being highly satisfied with their career opportunities compared to 26% of non-completers (Table 5). Over one third of the respondents who completed their programs (43.9 %) from SRTIs considered themselves moderately satisfied with career opportunities at their present jobs whilst 44.2% of non-completers expressed the same sentiments. Only 20.8 % of respondents who completed their programs were not at all satisfied (Table 5). Statistical significance of these resultsare summarized as follows: age: chi-square (9) = 105.4, $p<0.001$; sex: chi-square (3) = 34.3, $p<0.001$; course completion: chi-square (3) = 3.41, n.s.).

The majority of 20-29 year old female BMTs (31.3%) recorded being highly satisfied with the career opportunities offered at their present jobs compared to 9.4 % of 30-39 year old female BMTs (Table 6). Whilst over one quarter of 20-29 year old female BMTs (29.0 %) reported being moderately satisfied with career opportunities at their present jobs 100 % of under 20 year old BMTs reported the same (Table 6).

The highest percentage of BMTs (54.4 %) working in the petroleum industrial sub-sector reported moderate satisfaction with career opportunities at their present workplaces compared to 100 % respondents working in the agricultural industrial sub-sector and 9.7 % respondents working in the government industrial sub-sector (Table 7).

More than one third of the temporary BMTs (39.2%) reported a moderate level of job satisfaction with career opportunities at their present jobs compared to 51.9 % of temporary BMTs (Table 8). Whilst there was a weak positive relationship of job satisfaction with career opportunities and present job status (Gamma = 0.19), the relationship of

Table 5

Respondents' satisfaction with career opportunities

Independent Factors	N	Highly satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Slightly satisfied	Not at all satisfied
Age					
<20 years	20	-	33	-	67
20-29	211	30	32	18	20
30-39	171	6	56	12	26
40-49	82	22	33	-	44
Gender					
Male	100	18	61	4	18
Female	400	21	31	16	32
Graduation status					
Completers	391	19	44	17	21
Non-completers	86	26	44	11	20

Note: N may not total 500 due to missing responses. All percentages rounded.

Table 6

Job satisfaction with career opportunities by age cohort by sex

Ag/yrs	<20 years		20-29 years		30-39 years		40-49 years		>49 years	
Job Satisfaction	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Highly satisfied	-	-	23.9	31.3	02.8	09.4	44.4	-	-	-
Moderately satisfied	20.1	100	47.3	29.0	77.9	31.2	55.6	11.1	-	-
Slightly satisfied	-	-	14.4	18.2	-	25.0	-	-	-	-
Not At all satisfied	79.9	-	14.4	21.5	19.3	34.4	-	88.9	-	-

Note. 12.1 % of responses yielded no valid answers.

Table 7

Job satisfaction with career opportunities by industrial sub-sector of present workplace

Job Satisfaction	Agric.	Comm.	Const.	Finance	Gov.	Mfg.	Petroleum	Other sub-sectors	Self employed
Highly satisfied	-	20.8	17.4	06.7	30.6	25.8	11.2	30.0	11.8
Moderately satisfied	100	49.1	39.1	63.3	09.7	41.9	54.4	45.0	47.1
Slightly satisfied	-	11.3	32.6	26.7	29.1	12.9	10.3	07.5	05.8
Not At all satisfied	-	18.8	10.9	03.3	30.6	19.4	24.1	17.5	05.8

Note. 17 % of responses gave no valid answers.

Table 8

Job satisfaction with career opportunities by present job status and by present work area of specialization

Job Satisfaction	Temporary	Permanent	Business Management	Other Areas
Highly satisfied	24.3	14.6	40.0	18.4
Moderately satisfied	39.2	51.9	46.7	45.3
Slightly satisfied	19.0	10.2	02.2	17.4
Not At all satisfied	17.5	23.3	11.1	18.9

Note: 6.2% of respondents gave no valid answers for present job status, 6.8% of respondents gave no valid answers for present work are of specialization.

Table 9

Job satisfaction with career opportunities by on-the-job-training

Job Satisfaction	Agric.	Comm.	Const.	Finance	Gov.	Mfg.	Petroleum	Other sub-sectors	Self employed
Highly satisfied	-	35.7	16.7	50.0	61.9	13.9	14.3	54.5	-
Moderately satisfied	67.1	50.0	38.9	-	23.8	50.0	62.5	27.3	-
Slightly satisfied	42.9	14.5	22.2	43.8	09.5	25.0	17.9	09.1	-
Not At all satisfied	-	-	22.2	06.2	04.8	11.1	05.3	09.1	100

Note. 60.4 % of respondents gave no answers.

job satisfaction (career opportunities) to sex appeared strongest at the slight level of satisfaction (Gamma = 0.47) and weakest at the moderate level (Gamma = -0.11). There was no evidence of a significant difference between temporary and permanent BMTs with respect to their perception of job satisfaction with career opportunities at all levels (Cramer's V = Highly: 0.23, Moderately: 0.12, Slightly: 0.27, Not At All: 0.38).

The highest percentage of BMTs (45.3 %) currently working in the area designated 'Other' reported being 'moderately satisfied' with the career opportunities at their present jobs (Table 8). A slightly higher percentage of BMTs (46.7 %) currently working in the area of business management reported a similar view. The association of job satisfaction with career opportunities to present job done appeared positive (Gamma = 0.34, r (499) = 0.34, $p < 0.01$). There was a 19 % certainty that an individual working in a particular area of specialisation would hold a given perception regarding job satisfaction with career opportunities (Kendall's Tau C = 0.19, $p < 0.01$). Two way prediction was found to be 23 % (Somer's D (symmetric) = 0.23).

Almost a third (62.5%) of the BMTs who had their On-the-Job Training experience in the petroleum industrial sub-sector reported being moderately satisfied with the career opportunities at their present jobs (Table 9). Only 5.3% of BMTs reported being not at all satisfied with the career opportunities offered.

Discussion and Conclusions

Whilst it may be argued that this present study appears to be country specific, the method may be replicated in different countries and states in order to provide more relevant information. Having used a sample of 43% of the BMT population (Table 2), with demographic characteristics as all inclusive as possible (Table 3), and having used reliable and valid instruments (Table1), this researcher is convinced that the conclusions formulated are 'grounded' in empirical evidence, worthy of careful consideration. The results of the present study could serve to provide the readers with invaluable information about the current labor market patterns in small developing countries in the Caribbean or West Indies. Being the first of its kind in the region, the present study arose

from a more comprehensive study that was done to evaluate the business management technician program offered at the tertiary level without a university degree.

Stufflebeam's (2000) CIPP (context, input, process, and product) model served to provide direction for an in-house evaluation of the business management technician program. The present study was conceived at a time when adults were convinced of the need for higher credentials as a means of job retention so it became necessary to investigate the career aspirations of the business management technicians. Respondents reported that the business management technician program was a fit for their purpose and allowed them to be collaboratively involved in learning thereby empowering them to self actualization and self-determination. They reported the training relevant for performance at their workplaces. Further, the training received had wider impacts on the respondents' perceptions of their careers and the learning they were undertaking.

In the broader study evaluating the business management technician program, a number of variables like time to obtain present job, job relatedness, job preparedness, job satisfaction, job stability and fringe benefits/perks were considered. Job satisfaction was examined with respect to physical environment, actual work done, salary received and career opportunities. Information about job satisfaction with career opportunities from that broader study was used for this present paper with the assumption that it was indicative of the accuracy of an accurate career choice profile. The majority (42.8%) of BMTs reported being moderately satisfied with career opportunities at their workplaces (Table 4, Figure 1). Whilst the majority of respondents who reported being highly satisfied with career opportunities at their workplaces arose from the 20-29 age cohort, the minority of respondents reporting being highly satisfied with career opportunities came from the 30-39 age cohort (Tables 5, 6). This observation may well be a reflection of changing policies by employers to retain a fairly stable workforce in the interest of maximizing profits, by creating additional attractive career opportunities. It may also be a reflection on the part of respondents of their honing of qualities like resourcefulness, dedication, resilience, dedication, patience, management, personality orientation, critical thinking, assertive communication, divergent thinking, autonomy, independence, ethics, optimism, flexibility, planfulness, reliability, dependability, commitment to continuous learning, responsibility, high self esteem and self-efficacy, self-discipline and self -reliance.

It seems that as the plateau levels off and employers in the 30-39 age cohort spend more of their time possibly concentrating on moving on while they are in a position to do so, they appear to think that career opportunities offered are only moderately satisfying to them. It is interesting to note that for older employees (40-49 age cohort) who may be preoccupied with raising a family and leaving an inheritance for their next generation, 22% reported being highly satisfied with career opportunities. For younger employees (< 20 years old), many of whom may have joined the workforce for the first time in their lives, whilst some appeared to be taking a cautious stance, (33%: moderate satisfaction), allowing themselves the privilege of more exposure, others (67%: not at all satisfied) may well be out of touch with reality (Tables 5, 6).

The interrelatedness of labor markets in the present information age, marked by globalization has mandated that world economies be cognizant of current events in countries outside their own borders. The geographical location of The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, between North and South America, is significant in terms of the kinds of inferences that may be drawn from a population that has been known to service job markets outside the region. Recognizing the career profile identified for a BMT from a SRTI in The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies, an individual who is contemplating choosing a course in business management or a career change may benchmark his/her gender, age, geographic area, high school type, entry qualifications, on-the-job training experience, industrial subsector of present job and present job status, with the findings from this present research report. This paper proposes that such comparison could provide the prospective BMTs with sufficient data to make an informed career choice in The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies. For instance, judging from the data of Tables 7 and 8, it may be worthwhile for prospective BMTs to secure jobs in the petroleum or government sub-sectors or perhaps in areas like administration or even security where attributes like resourcefulness, dedication, resilience, dedication, patience, management, personality orientation, critical thinking, assertive communication, divergent thinking, autonomy, independence, ethics, optimism, flexibility, planfulness, reliability, dependability, commitment to continuous learning, responsibility, high self esteem and self-efficacy, self-discipline and self-reliance appear to be greatly needed for success.

In a broader context, a myriad of factors have caused individuals from across the world to seek employment in countries other than their places of birth. With nations coming together in trade blocks and those in the Caribbean region currently deciding their status in the proposed Caricom Single Market And Economy, career profiling allows individuals from different countries to benchmark their skills, competencies and experience and compete fairly for the jobs available in the Caribbean region and indeed the world. Given different physical environments in different countries, person environment correspondence and modal personality orientation would provide the theoretical backdrop that could determine an individual's suitability for employment in any given country. The researcher is cognizant of this since she continues to have the opportunity of successfully working in the area of measurement and evaluation in several different countries. With an extensive experience and exposure, this researcher has found minimal difficulty in adjusting to the different protocols of different organizations in different countries. Instead of being an obstacle, supply and demand of human capital in the marketplace has become an opportunity. Clearly, those attributes characterizing career profiling appear to be internationally accepted: resourcefulness, dedication, resilience, dedication, patience, management, personality ori-

entation, critical thinking, assertive communication, divergent thinking, autonomy, independence, ethics, optimism, flexibility, planfulness, reliability, dependability, commitment to continuous learning, responsibility, high self esteem and self-efficacy, self-discipline and self -reliance.

One limitation of this present study is that it did not comprehensively investigate the interaction between factors (for instance age and sex may interact). The findings are limited by the fact that the cohort that is examined is one of the many groups from the tertiary institutions, and as often happens, students may exit the course without fully completing the program and yet are employable. Accordingly, the present findings do not allow for generalizations to other courses or to groups of individuals. Nonetheless, the present findings support the continual need for accreditation and upgrading of vocational programs especially in small countries that are heavily influenced by and are dependent on neighboring super powers. It should be noted that career profiling in The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is often related to political and sociocultural issues that is a reflection of the current situation in other areas of the world, particularly the United States of America. A useful focus for future research would be to compare the career profiles of BMTs from different countries, especially because globalization has mandated the easy flow of capital and labor around countries.

In summary, making correct career choices using current research-based information could positively influence an individual's future well being in terms of his/her overall happiness and his/her usefulness on the job market. Undoubtedly, more productive workers will have more positive contributions to the gross domestic product of any country that would have a ripple effect on workers' standard of living and that country's ability for sustainability in a world of increasingly scarce resources. Drawing data from a nationwide comprehensive study- the first of its kind-this present study aimed to provide evidence-based information of BMTs career profiles that would be useful in assisting prospective BMT students in their future career choices. With evidence outside the scope of this present paper, information on job satisfaction with career opportunities appears to be linked with certain variables. Consequently, an instructive career profile should address certain fundamental characteristics like resourcefulness, dedication, resilience, dedication, patience, management, personality orientation, critical thinking, assertive communication, divergent thinking, autonomy, independence, ethics, optimism, flexibility, planfulness, reliability, dependability, commitment to continuous learning, responsibility, high self esteem and self-efficacy, self-discipline and self -reliance. It is hoped that the theme of this work would provide valuable information about Caribbean or West Indian BMT programs and offer a diverse cultural perspective of what is happening in other parts of the planet.

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