Human Capital – General and Specific Competencies Exercise

Human capital – refers to the stock of skills and knowledge embodied in the ability to perform labor so as to produce economic value. It is the skills and knowledge gained by a worker through education and experience.

Global migration is a defining phenomenon of the early twenty-first century. Migration embraces every category of people — skilled and unskilled, family member and refugee, legal and illegal, permanent and temporary (Hawthorne, 2008). Temporary people movement is rising markedly. The relative accessibility of one immigrant-receiving country may lower the number of immigrants seeking to enter another. Given the dynamism of these trends, the few nations with active immigration programs are constantly obliged to modify their entry policies, while encountering "difficulties in harnessing their immigration programs to achieve diverse and often incompatible policy goals...to utilise immigration selection procedures to ensure positive outcomes in a diverse range of policy areas: economic development, human resource development, population and foreign affairs" (Stahl, Ball, Inglis and Gutman 1993, xiv).

Canada and Australia are global exemplars of nation building through government planned and administered economic, family and humanitarian migration programs. By 2005, Australia had the world's highest percentage of foreign-born residents (24.6 percent of the population, representing over 240 nationalities), followed by Canada at 19.2 percent and the United States at 11.7 percent (Miller 2005).

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While both Canada and Australia use points-based selection criteria designed to support economic category development and growth (based on a system devised by Canada in the 1970s), it is essential to note the sharp divergence in the strategies used that has emerged in the past decade. According to a recent paper,

> The human capital model…has dominated Canada's selection of skilled migrants —endorsed in its most recent migration review (2002), and standing in sharp contrast to Australia's intensification of screening for select employment attributes. While education level matters for principal applicants, field and place of qualification do not, in a context where labour market demand is seen as hard to predict and 'individuals can expect to have several careers over their working lives.' According to Hiebert (2006) the prevailing Canadian view is

that 'well-trained flexible individuals…who have experience in the labour force' should be able to 'adapt to rapidly changing labour market circumstances.' <u>In consequence 'general' rather than 'specific' competence is sought</u> — Canadian selection criteria admitting PAs with limited host country language skills, non-recognised qualifications, and in fields of minimal labour market demand on an equal basis to those with more immediately sought after attributes. (Birrell, Hawthorne and Richardson 2006; 130-1).

Debate Question:

Which is the best human capital perspective on immigration policy in the global age – Canada's 'general' competency approach or Australia's 'specific' competency approach?

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