

Job-seeking *strategies* in Trinidad and Tobago

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National levels of unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago have remained consistently high since the 1980s, because of the economic recession, subsequent structural adjustment arrangements and the diminution of traditional labour-intensive activities such as estate agriculture. Groups which had been dependent upon casual employment that was available in pre-recession times have been experiencing chronic unemployment. Combining extremely irregular casual employment with activity in the informal sector, they occupy a marginal and precarious position in the labour market. This study examines the way in which the characteristics and strategies of job-seekers differ in mainstream and in peripheral areas of the labour market. In analysis of the qualitative data, based on 45 in-depth interviews, Ragin's qualitative comparative procedures were used. This method of analysing qualitative data permitted scrutiny of different individuals' combinations of characteristics, and identification of those job search strategy components that led either to finding employment or to suffering long-term unemployment. The chronically unemployed showed a consistent lack of up-to-date knowledge of the labour market, whereas those who were successful in finding employment did have this type of information, through 'weak ties' based on family and previously established labour market links. The success in finding employment by individuals who lacked advanced secondary schooling and vocational training could be associated with their 'ties of merit' acquired from employment experience and a work record in the formal sector. The data suggest that while affiliation with the formal economy could strengthen an individual's position in the labour market, association with the informal sector did not seem to give any later advantages in finding employment.

I

Introduction

Work is inextricably woven into the fabric of societies, and indeed it is of vital importance in societies where the social security system is not extensive, for in such cases income depends on participation in the labour market, and households rely on the earnings of their economically active members. Although traditionally the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has shown a strong commitment to the provision of a basic safety net to cover the old, the disabled and female-headed households, 'able-bodied' citizens must rely on their links to the labour market, since they are not eligible for the traditional forms of welfare assistance and are not covered against the risk of unemployment. National unemployment levels have remained consistently high since the 1980s, because of the recession, subsequent structural adjustment arrangements, and the diminution of traditional labour-intensive activities such as estate agriculture. In a harsh economic climate, casual employment opportunities that were once abundant (in, for example, public and private sector construction) became scarce, and that part of the labour force which was dependent upon such periodic employment was left without a livelihood and has to seek out earning opportunities in the informal sector.

This qualitative study is an examination of the characteristics and job search strategies of unemployed groups in Trinidad. The in-depth interviews used in it produced rich data whose scrutiny reveals information on features of the job search which are highly relevant in this particular research context. A matrix based on these relevant features is used to organize or 'code' the

data about each individual's combination of characteristics and job search strategy components that have led either to success in finding employment or to a condition of long-term unemployment. Boolean algebra is used to facilitate identification and comparison of the different combinations of characteristics and strategies associated with successful or unsuccessful job search outcomes. The study was conducted in the lower-middle and lower socioeconomic levels of job-seekers. Among the latter, in particular, the educational background is weak.

The data collection targeted individuals in different positions vis-à-vis the labour market. The first group were those who were seeking work in the more dynamic areas of the labour market and were very near to finding employment. The second group consisted of individuals who had been unemployed for long periods and occupied a marginal position in the labour market. The research thus looks at the way in which the characteristics and strategies (henceforth also referred to as 'attributes') of job-seekers differ in the mainstream and in the peripheral areas of the labour market in Trinidad. The typology that emerges from this exercise can benefit policy and intervention planning for similar target groups which are in danger of marginalization from the labour force. A holistic perspective is sought with regard to the range of salient attributes and their interlinking processes. In the case of marginalized groups, problems often need to be addressed on several fronts in order to be dealt with effectively.

II

The labour market: the 'centre' and the 'periphery'

Trinidad and Tobago (population 1.4 million) is an island State in the Caribbean with a colonial past and a more recent era of independence beginning in the early 1960s. The history of settlement and development has given each of the Caribbean islands its own individual character, but Trinidad is distinctive because of its resources of oil and

natural gas. Oil exports are only a small fraction of the total world production, but they are the main source of national revenue, and the economy is heavily dependent on the production and export of petroleum and gas. This capital-intensive sector is very sensitive to fluctuations in world market prices (Rogozinski, 1994, pp. 275-279).

Oil 'windfalls' in the period between 1973 and 1982 made possible rises in income, expansion of jobs in the public sector and investments in infrastructure, and improvements in living conditions.¹ With the fall in international oil prices during the 1980s, there was a sharp contraction of the economy, so that high levels of government expenditure could not be maintained. Meanwhile only a small number of the jobs created were in the more long-term goods producing sectors, and even at the height of the oil boom the unemployment rate did not fall much below 10%. During the recession, and with the stringent measures required by structural adjustment, employment has been retrenched in the public sector. The public works infrastructure programmes on which many had come to rely as a periodic source of income were also cut back. In the construction industry, the decline in the private and public sectors meant a drop from the peak in 1980, when the sector employed 18% of the labour force, to a situation in which half of the labour force in the sector was unemployed by the late 1980s (United Nations, 1995; Ramsaran, 1992). The decreased income opportunities for the unskilled in both public works projects and in the construction sector have brought economic hardship to households which had relied on this type of work, and this situation is reflected in the living conditions of the less-educated unemployed in the target group.

The unemployment rate fluctuated between 16% and 22% in the 1990s. In the third quarter of 1995, according to Central Statistical Office data, the rate was 16.3%, the lowest since 1985. Unemployment is higher among women and young people. In Trinidad and Tobago, unemployment is very closely linked with economic and social inequality. Thus, Henry and Melville (1989) found the correlation between unemployment and poverty to be 0.88 in the late 1980s.

Over 75% of all workers are employed in the formal sector: 42% in the private formal sector and 33% in the public sector. The remainder of the labour force is located in the informal sector, and a significant proportion are own-account workers (self-employed). The agricultural sector accounts for less than 5% of the labour force. Occupations are not significantly different in rural and urban areas.

¹ Public spending and production subsidies increased, especially in the public administration and in transfers to alleviate the continued high rates of unemployment attributed to the capital-intensive nature of the oil sector (World Bank, 1995, pp. 11-32).

Certain growing areas of unskilled work, such as the domestic and security sectors (maids and security guards), have high levels of underemployment. The informal sector² is the area of the labour market to which individuals must invariably resort in search of an opportunity to earn income. There are two views on the informal economy: that it ultimately reinforces social inequality, or alternatively, that it serves to alleviate or dilute unequal conditions (see McKeever 1998)³. Informal sector employment involves personal services, artisan and craft production, and small businesses, including micro-enterprises. Wages in the informal sector are on average half of those of manual and non-manual workers in modern enterprises (ECLAC, 1997, p. 16).

The data collected show that informal social networks based on strong reciprocity, combined with intermittent income often from the informal sector, form the commonest subsistence mechanisms in circles lacking regular income. Households routinely have to struggle to meet even basic expenses, such as the cost of food, medicines, clothes, or transport fares for school-age children. Economic subsistence in informal networks has developed into a long-standing survival mechanism for the long-term unemployed and underemployed. Mutual assistance networks constitute the only ongoing 'safety net', occasionally supplemented by targeted welfare programmes such as that whereby the long-term unemployed in this target group were contacted for this study. Many unemployed individuals seek work in some capacity or other in the informal economy: peddling food and small articles, for example, or, among the rural-based, selling home-grown produce, are some of the ways to generate income.

² In keeping with the mostly widely held usage of the term, the 'informal economy' refers to otherwise legal forms of income generation that are not regulated by the legal and political institutions of society (Portes and Castells, 1989, p. 12). For example, workers may not pay taxes, workplaces may not comply with government regulations, or business owners may operate without required licences. This type of economic activity takes place, however, within the context of a dominant formal economy, rather than independently of that economy. Moreover there are generally links between the two: for example, materials, labour and finished products move between them (McKeever, 1998, p. 1211).

³ More recent studies present the argument that the informal economy comprises a wide range of jobs, offering opportunities to many who could not find them in the formal sector, yet at the same time exploiting the labour of others. In McKeever's (1998) analysis of national-level survey data from South Africa, it was found that success, in terms of occupational status and income attainment, follows patterns of stratification in the informal economy that are consistent with those in the formal economy.

III

Previous studies

The economic and structural dynamics of social inequality in the Caribbean have been dealt with in several studies, e.g., Ramsaran (1992) and Gafar (1998). Sociopolitical and race-related aspects of inequality have been researched by Ryan and Stewart (eds.) (1995). The characteristics of deprived groups within a framework of poverty and deprivation have been focused upon by Ryan, Mc Cree and St. Bernard (eds.) (1997), who used quantitative surveys and interview

data. These issues have also featured in Valtonen's (1996) study of immigrant integration in Trinidad and in Neil's (1987) in-depth study of one particular local community in urban Trinidad.

Research has not been carried out in the Caribbean region on employment strategies and the job search stage of labour market participation. This study looks at a preliminary but crucial stage on the threshold of the labour market, where individuals negotiate entry or re-entry into employment.

IV

Data collection and the target group

This study is based on qualitative data from in-depth interviews conducted in Trinidad⁴ during 1995-1997. Each interview lasted between one and one and a half hours. The interviews were semi-structured around issues that were approached through direct questions, as well as by the use of probes. Individuals were willing to participate in the study because the topic was a subject of concern, both for them and for others in the same situation.

The number of persons interviewed amounted to 45, aged between 17 and 45 years. Of the total, 22 were urban-based in Port of Spain and its environs, and 23 were rural-based, while 24 subjects had only primary-level education. Of the 21 subjects who had some secondary education, 10 had completed it to the O-level (ordinary-level) grade and two of them had gone on to complete their schooling to the A (advanced)-level, thus completing their high school education⁵. There was a

spread of educational attainment in the group, but the level of most of the 45 subjects was low (primary or lower secondary levels).

Following the procedure in the qualitative method, sampling was purposeful in order to reach individuals who would provide the best information on the research topic. The target group was drawn from two areas of the labour market, comprising individuals who were looking for work in the mainstream or dynamic part of the labour market and were close to finding employment, and individuals who had been unemployed for long periods and were without any immediate prospects of locating work. This sampling procedure allowed for differentiation of the target group by strategy outcome, and facilitated the comparison of attribute configurations.

Those subjects who were on the point of finding work were contacted through the State Labour Office⁶.

⁴ The majority of the country's population live in Trinidad, where the 'modern' industrial sector is also located. The study was conducted in Trinidad, to which the data mentioned in the course of the article refer. Only 3.3% of the population live in Tobago, where agriculture is the main occupation, with some diversification into tourism.

⁵ Grades 1-5 (age groups 5-11 years) correspond to primary-level schooling. The secondary level is made up of Forms 1-5 (age groups 12-16 years), culminating in the O-level exams in the Fifth Form.

The Lower and Upper Sixth Forms (age group 17-18) lead to matriculation (the A-level exams). It should be noted that 55% of the economically active population in Trinidad and Tobago have not gone beyond the initial years of secondary schooling.

⁶ The State does not maintain comprehensive labour exchange services, but conducts recruitment for specified areas of employment in the public sector and, less frequently, the private sector.

Some were at a pre-selection stage (shortlisted) for clerical work in the public sector and were likely to be called to fill vacancies at some point, if not immediately. Others were registering for employment in fruit harvesting in Canada, which is a seasonal recruitment activity organized by the labour authorities.

The individuals with more remote prospects of employment were contacted through an NGO Supplementary Feeding Programme that functions under State auspices. Eligibility for the programme is based on inability to afford the 'minimum food basket'.⁷ Food assistance is provided to eligible households for a period of three months. As participants of this highly targeted and residual-level social welfare

programme, these households had been experiencing economic difficulties and unemployment over a considerable number of years. The data were thus obtained from two groups in the job-seeking spectrum: one deploying an effective employment strategy, and the other a non-effective strategy.

The interview protocol was structured into the following sections: personal information (age, civil status, family and household type); education level (schooling and vocational education); employment history (types of activity, employers, length of employment periods, job search, channels, contacts); and own outlook on the future, plans, and suggestions for official interventions.

V

Conceptual framework

The theoretical and conceptual framework underwent some changes in the course of data collection and analysis, as is common in the qualitative method⁸. The developed theoretical frame is discussed in this section, together with the range of attributes and job-search strategies that emerged from the data as having an impact on the job seeking process in this target group.

Bourdieu's thesis on the effect of cultural transmission on later occupational success in the succeeding generation has relevance to this study. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that education reproduces the system of social stratification, since parents' economic capital can be turned into the children's 'cultural capital', which in turn determines the second generation's economic position and occupational success. According to Bourdieu, each class possesses its own set of meanings, or cultural framework, which is initially internalized through

socialization within the family. This *habitus* moulds perception, thought, taste, appreciation and action. It is at the same time a framework of meanings which the dominant class is in a position to impose on others (and on the education system) as the only legitimate culture. Thus, children of upper-class families are equipped with 'cultural capital' that fuels their academic achievement and eventual occupational success. This cultural transmission process, that underlies achievement-oriented activity, is generally assumed to be absent in the lower levels of the social structure, whose members are thus assumed to be disadvantaged vis-à-vis their 'upper-class' counterparts.

Although the target group was not from the levels generally associated with Bourdieu's cultural transmission processes, the data showed that the majority of subjects were nonetheless very aware of the value and utility of education. Their school career had often, however, been cut short prematurely because their families of origin had been too poor to meet the cost of books, transportation, uniforms, etc., which schooling entailed⁹. This was a prevalent feature among those who had started secondary schooling but had dropped out before the O-level exams. Their weak educational background was not so much due to being

⁷ It is estimated that 11% of the households in Trinidad and Tobago are 'extremely poor', i.e., unable to afford the minimum food basket (United Nations, 1995).

⁸ Ragin (1994, p. 82) states that 'qualitative research often involves a process of reciprocal clarification of the researcher's image of the research subject, on the one hand, and the concepts that frame the investigation, on the other. Images are built up from cases, sometimes by looking for similarities among several examples of the phenomenon that seem to be in the same general category. These images, in turn, can be related to concepts'.

⁹ Book and uniform grants that were formerly targeted at poor families were discontinued during the economic recession.

outside of circles where the cultural transmission is supposed to take place, but rather to material circumstances that inhibited the course of schooling. This finding corroborates that of Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980), who found in their study of pupils at a selective secondary school that material circumstances were a factor determining the length of school career.

Looking at the links between education and labour market status from a family perspective is useful in this group. Those subjects at the higher end of the educational scale who had actually completed their secondary schooling came from families in which at least one adult was in steady employment in the formal sector. Among those subjects whose education had been interrupted, family labour market links tended to be much more tenuous. Sustained educational achievement in this group seems to be linked overall with relatively stronger socioeconomic status. The cultural transmission theory may also have implications in the lower-middle and lower socioeconomic levels. Whereas in the upper levels of the social structure family background or 'cultural capital' and higher academic achievement leading to occupational success are presumably linked, the very attainment of basic education in the lower levels may correspondingly be the path out of economic dependence or subsistence conditions.

'Social resources' is a concept implying a range of tangible and intangible components. It is possible to select appropriate aspects that apply to this target group in which the educational and family background resources are at the weaker end of the scale. Social resources have been defined as the wealth, status, power and social ties of those persons who are directly or indirectly linked to the individual being studied. Lin, Ensel and Vaughn (1981) proposed that access to and use of social resources through one's network provide an essential transition between family background and education, on the one hand, and socioeconomic achievement on the other. Their study was focused on one aspect of personal contacts: the occupational status of the contact used in job-seeking. Taking into account the methodological constraints arising from the use of a single aspect of social resources, the data suggested that an individual possesses a substantial advantage in the occupational attainment process if he has access to and uses greater social resources (Lin, Ensel and Vaughn, 1981, p. 1176). Social resources are seen as intermediary attributes, mediating between personal resources and occupational status attainment. The model of Lin, Ensel and Vaughn (1981) proposes,

specifically, that (socioeconomic) characteristics of personal contacts affect variations in the level of occupational status eventually attained.

The present analysis is concerned with two aspects of social resources which the data indicate as being important for the job search process and its outcome. Two categories of social ties were identified: 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973) and 'ties of merit'.

Granovetter (1973) states that most network models deal with strong ties¹⁰, confining their applicability to small, well-defined groups, as a result of which all the important issues involving their content are ignored. Instead, he lays emphasis on 'weak ties' that function as outward bridging mechanisms, especially between groups. These are channels through which ideas, influences or information socially distant from the individual may reach him. The fewer indirect contacts a person has, the more encapsulated he will be in terms of knowledge of the world beyond his own friendship circle. The degree of overlap of two individuals' friendship networks also varies directly with the strength of dyadic ties (Granovetter, 1973, pp. 1370-1371).

In this study, 'weak ties' are understood as those that lack the characteristics of 'strong ties', but special emphasis is placed on their function as avenues of fresh information to which the individual job seeker would not normally have access through the 'strong ties' of his immediate, but generally limited, network of interaction. 'Weak ties' can include also ties 'once removed' that can be mediated through others, as well as loosely maintained direct ties, in which interaction is not intensively sustained.

Examination of the data brought out a category of social resources termed 'ties of merit', which refer to labour market ties that have been established through the individual's own efforts. Merit refers also to the value assigned by others. 'Ties of merit' are

¹⁰ Granovetter (1973) states that 'the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie'. Anthropologists associate with strong ties the quality of 'multiplexity' or multiple contents in a relationship (see Kapferer, 1969, p. 213). Marsden and Campbell (1984) found in a study of best-friend ties that the best indicators of an unobserved tie strength concept were measures of closeness or intensity in the sense that they were not contaminated by other measures. Duration tended to overstate the strength of kinship links, and frequency exaggerated the strength of ties to co-workers and neighbours. Frequency was quite weakly associated with both closeness and duration.

based on the individual's previous achievement or performance in some field. They reflect the recognition, reputation or merit engendered by such activity, and enjoy legitimacy in wider circles of the labour market. They have the quality of 'symbolic capital', which, according to Bourdieu (1986), is any social asset, tangible or intangible, that is regarded as legitimate in society. This category of labour market ties belongs to the 'constructed' type, i.e., links built by the individual with friends, co-workers, employers, etc. in the course of working life and other activity, as opposed to prescribed consanguineous and affinitive kinship ties (see Lin, Ensel and Vaughn, 1981). Since a large part of the research conducted on the link between personal resources (family background and education) and occupational status attainment is located in strata where it can be assumed that personal resources are strong, 'ties of merit', as an alternative form of personal resources, are especially relevant in

the context of the less advantaged socio-economic strata under study here.

Areas of human interaction are seldom discrete categories. 'Ties of merit' can also be information-generating and thus function as 'weak ties'. The latter are seen essentially as generating information -e.g., on current conditions in the labour market- which would not otherwise be socially available to the job seeker, while the former are understood as an asset enjoying legitimacy and symbolic value in society. 'Ties of merit' are understood here to be based on, for example, an individual's employment record with a reputable enterprise, or a history of steady work relationships, especially in the formal sector, that generate a feeling of 'trust' and confidence in potential employers. 'Ties of merit' could also be synonymous with, or signify, a desirable skill level that is maintained, or even possibly acquired and developed, in favourable working environments.

VI

Characteristics and employment strategies observed in the target group

Specific characteristics and employment strategies were initially selected from the data because they were considered to be most important for the outcome of the job search. These were transformed to nominal-scale measures to comply with Boolean algebra, which uses binary data. There are two conditions or states: true (or present) and false (or absent), which are represented as: 1, indicating presence, and 0, indicating absence of the following attributes:

- Family background (abbreviated to 'family'): the presence of 'family' indicates that one adult in the subject's family or extended family¹¹ is in steady employment, so that there is some regular source of income and possibly also contacts or 'social capital' in the workplace. Absence means that the

adult/s in the family is/are without any steady employment.

- Secondary education (abbreviated to 'secondary'): the presence of 'secondary' indicates that the individual has reached the secondary schooling level and obtained O-level qualifications. Absence means that the individual has had only primary level education and possibly the first years of secondary schooling.
- Vocational education (abbreviated to 'vocational'): the presence of 'vocational' indicates that the individual has had vocational training, thereby acquiring a skill that increases his employability¹². Absence means that the individual has not received such training
- Skill: the presence of 'skill' indicates that the individual has acquired some level of skill, through vocational education or other channels, that would

¹¹ Although the nuclear family is the predominant form in households in Trinidad and Tobago (40%), extended families nevertheless account for 21.4% of households and single parent families 13.9%.

¹² The masculine gender is used for pronouns in order to increase text readability.

- improve his chances on the labour market. Absence of skill means that the individual is basically competing for unskilled work in the employment market.
- ‘Ties of merit’ (abbreviated to ‘merit’): the presence of ‘merit’ indicates that the individual has established ‘ties of merit’ linking him with at least one socially recognized institution or employer. The link is a resilient one, based on an adequate period of participation or a good work record. ‘Ties of merit’ can also be a sign of employability, signifying that the individual has acquired some skill on the job, and function as a social guarantee of competence or worth. Their absence means that the individual lacks the social guarantee that backs up his job search initiatives at any level. The data suggested that ‘ties of merit’ were established chiefly through participation in the formal sector. Work activity in the informal sector did not seem to enjoy this type of value.
 - ‘Weak ties’ (abbreviated to ‘weak’): the presence of ‘weak’ indicates that the individual has information on at least two possible areas of employment opportunities through networking contacts (in this group these were generally once removed). The individual is thus abreast of current developments in the wider labour market and of possible opportunity areas, especially at the level appropriate to his capacity and potential. Their absence means that the individual’s job seeking activity was somewhat unfocused, diffuse and probably unproductive.
 - Urban: the presence of ‘urban’ indicates that the subject is living in an urban concentration, where problems of distance and transport costs in the job search stage do not generally arise. In the case of rural-based subjects, the job search was often hindered by lack of resources to cover transport costs.
 - Plan: the presence of ‘plan’ indicates that the individual has the objective of acquiring some type of training to enhance his/her employability. Its absence means that the individual is not considering alternatives to improve his capacity base.
 - Active job search (abbreviated to ‘active’): the presence of ‘active’ indicates that the individual engages in the job search very actively, has a high frequency of enquiry, and initiates direct contacts. Its absence means that job search activity is not of a high level, possibly due also to financial problems with transport.
- One characteristic initially expected to be significant was found to be common to all the subjects. Thus, all stated that they were willing to accept any type of work. This attribute is therefore not included in the matrix.

VII

Procedures and findings

Scrutiny of the combinations of characteristics and strategies was carried out using the qualitative comparative analysis method and the related Boolean algebra procedures developed by Ragin (1987 and 1994). The main features of the procedures are briefly described below, condensed from Ragin’s text.

Boolean analysis is combinatorial by design. This feature of combinatorial logic is consistent with the idea that cases –and especially their causally relevant features– should be viewed holistically. Thus, in Boolean-based qualitative comparison, causes are not viewed in isolation but always within the context of the presence or absence of other causally relevant conditions.

By identifying patterns of similarities and differences it is possible to identify causal links: i.e., how different configurations of causes produce different outcomes across the range of cases. The Boolean approach has several features that lend themselves to the analysis made in this study. It has the ability to address complex causal conjunctures, and it allows the researcher to investigate cases both as wholes and as parts. Organizing the findings in the form of configurations which can be juxtaposed makes it possible to present and ‘evaluate’ competing explanations.

A raw data matrix or ‘truth table’ was constructed for data on the whole target group. The truth table is

not presented here in full, as it is possible to summarize the configurations that exist in the raw data matrix, indicating the number of instances in which each occurred. Table 1 gives a summary of configurations. Each row in table 1 represents one configuration type, and the number of instances of occurrence in the target group is given in the last column.

In Boolean analysis, the number of instances of each combination of causal conditions does not enter directly into any computations. Frequency criteria are not as important as they are in statistical analysis. Instead, the focus is on types of situations (that is, rows of the truth table) as the basic unit of analysis.

For clarity, the configurations can be translated into upper case letters to represent presence of the condition, and lower case letters to represent absence of the same condition. Thus 'SECONDARY' indicates presence of this condition, while 'secondary' indicates its absence.

Table 2 shows all the identified configurations (those shown in table 1), translated into uppercase and lower case names. A multiplication sign (.) is used to indicate a combination of conditions.

At this stage, the first simple minimization step can be carried out. This involves combining rows when they differ on only one causal condition if they otherwise have the same output values. This step produces configurations which Ragin (1987) called 'prime implicants'. This simplification strategy follows the logic of an experiment. Only one condition at a time is allowed to vary (the "experimental condition"). If varying this condition has no discernible impact on the outcome, it can be eliminated as a factor (Ragin, 1994, pp. 124-125).

In rows 1 and 2, which both lead to success in finding employment, all features except one (secondary education) are the same. Individuals can seek work

TABLE 1

Summary of configurations

Row No.	Family	Secondary	Merit	Weak	Urban	Plan	Active	Skill	Vocational	Employment outcome	Instances
1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	7
2	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	2
3	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	2
4	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
5	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	5
6	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2
7	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	4
8	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	18
9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4

TABLE 2

The configurations^a and their outcomes

<i>Outcome: access to employment</i>	
1.	FAMILY.SECONDARY.merit.WEAK.URBAN.PLAN.ACTIVE.skill.vocational
2.	FAMILY.secondary.merit.WEAK.URBAN.PLAN.ACTIVE.skill.vocational
3.	family.SECONDARY.merit.WEAK.URBAN.PLAN.ACTIVE.skill.vocational.
4.	FAMILY.SECONDARY.merit.WEAK.URBAN.PLAN.ACTIVE.SKILL.VOCATIONAL
5.	family.secondary.MERIT.WEAK.urban.plan.ACTIVE.SKILL.vocational
<i>Outcome: lack of access to employment</i>	
6.	family.SECONDARY.merit.weak.URBAN.PLAN.ACTIVE.skill.vocational
7.	family.secondary.merit.weak.URBAN.plan.ACTIVE.skill.vocational
8.	family.secondary.merit.weak.urban.PLAN.active.skill.vocational
9.	family.secondary.merit.weak.urban.plan.active.skill.vocational

^a As explained earlier, upper case means presence of the condition and lower case its absence.

TABLE 3

An empirical typology of job seekers' attribute configurations

Configurations with successful outcome: employment access

10. FAMILY.merit.WEAK.URBAN.PLAN.ACTIVE.skill.vocational
 11. family.SECONDARY.merit.WEAK.URBAN.PLAN.ACTIVE.skill.vocational
 12. FAMILY.SECONDARY.merit.WEAK.URBAN.PLAN.ACTIVE.SKILL.VOCATIONAL
 13. family.secondary.MERIT.WEAK.urban.plan.ACTIVE.SKILL.vocational

Configurations with unsuccessful outcome: lack of employment access

14. family.SECONDARY.merit.weak.URBAN.PLAN.ACTIVE.skill.vocational
 15. family.secondary.merit.weak.URBAN.plan.ACTIVE.skill.vocational
 16. family.secondary.merit.weak.urban.active.skill.vocational
-

effectively, even in the absence of advanced secondary level education. Nonetheless it should be noted that the successful combination with the absence of secondary education is not common in the target group, and is almost an exception. Nevertheless, rows 1 and 2 can be paired, and if we omit the 'secondary' variable that does not affect the outcome, the minimized row reads:

FAMILY.merit.WEAK.URBAN.PLAN.
ACTIVE.skill.vocational

It is not possible to do further minimization among the successful combinations in this list, since there are no further pair combinations which differ only in one feature. Four configurations remain for describing the diversity of characteristics and strategies among the 17 individuals effectively looking for work.

In table 2, in the list showing negative results (failure to find work), rows 8 and 9 only differ in the presence or absence of Plan. The two rows can be paired and minimized by omitting the Plan variable, which does not influence the result. The minimized row will thus be:

family.secondary.merit.weak.urban.active.
skill.vocational

The prime implicants present succinct 'product terms' or configurations of attributes. The prime implicant combinations established from the data may be seen as configurations of causal conditions or simply as combinations of features which form the basis of an empirical typology. Since the main interest in this study was to describe diversity succinctly by determining the prime implicants, further minimization or computation procedures were not necessary. The final phase of Boolean minimization, the 'prime implicant chart',

which seeks maximum logical parsimony, was not the objective here and was thus not carried out.

The brevity of the minimization stage is not a disadvantage in this study, as the necessary clarity and economy of description are achieved by organization of the data according to Boolean procedures, which facilitates the identification of distinct combinations.

Boolean algebra is useful for the analysis of groups in which lack of resources may be just as influential in determining the outcome, because the components are considered in their presence as well as their absence as part of the statements of prime implicants. The method permits extrapolation of holistic interrelationships within the configurations. The use of rich data from which to select salient phenomena is an initial dimension of the 'holistic' treatment. Tracking the presence or absence of features and their interplay, and being able to look at configurations in juxtaposition, are procedures that add rigour to the analysis of qualitative data.

Table 3 shows the final four configurations (numbered 10, 11, 12 and 13) for successful job seeking, and the final three configurations (numbered 14, 15 and 16) for unsuccessful job seeking. These comprise an empirical typology of attribute configurations in the target group.

The successful strategy and characteristic profiles will now be discussed, after which they will be compared with the unsuccessful ones.

Row 10 describes the pattern of individuals for whom the presence or absence of secondary education did not affect the outcome. These individuals have the asset of 'weak ties': i.e. up-to-date labour market information and information on opportunities. They are urban based, able to sustain an active job search, and have plans to take up training of some kind in order

thereby to increase marketable skills and employability. As these individuals do not have vocational education or specialized skills, they lack 'ties of merit': a solid record or reputation that would otherwise serve independently to support job seeking efforts. They come from families with stronger ties to the labour market, since at least one adult has regular employment and income.

Row 11 shows a configuration similar to row 10 in most attributes. However, links of the family or household to the labour market are weak, as no adults are employed. The job seeker nonetheless has secondary education to O-level. Studies have shown that education begins, at the secondary level, to show an effect on employment (World Bank, 1990). This finding suggests that the presence of basic educational qualifications is decisive for individuals from families without strong ties to the labour market.

Row 12 is a configuration of those with good resources in this target group. Individuals have not, or possibly not yet, entered the labour market and established 'ties of merit', but they have a range of other resources: strong family background vis-à-vis the labour market, secondary education, vocational education and skill of some kind. They are urban based, have an information base ('weak ties'), seek employment actively, and have plans for further training. Their prospects look good.

Row 13 is the configuration that does not conform to the main features of the majority of successful configurations described above. This opens up an interesting perspective. Row 13 represents a type of job seekers who have strengthened their labour market position from what was originally a less advantageous starting point for the job search. They resemble the previous type in that they possess 'weak ties' or effective information channels, and their job seeking activity is high: a combination occurring across all successful patterns. These may also be mutually reinforcing attributes. Otherwise, however, there is a marked absence of other assets. This type has entered the labour market without having secondary school qualifications, and in the absence of other family connections with the labour market, their 'weak ties' were probably based on existing labour market relations. These individuals did not have any plans for further training, and they were also rural based.

The difference is that they now have 'ties of merit', i.e., they have established a record in the labour market, based on steady work relations. The type of connection made with the labour market has been decisive. It has

most likely given rise to their skill resource, since they have not had vocational training. Row 13 demonstrates that an adequate level of marketable skills can be acquired through productive employment relations even when the individual has not previously had the opportunity to obtain formal schooling and training. A well established labour market relation can carry enough weight independently to overcome the absence of formal qualifications and of the social capital represented by family relations. A combination of weak ties and a high level of job seeking activity is complemented by skill and established 'ties of merit' with the labour market: decisive attributes for labour market mobility and for avoiding long-term unemployment in this configuration.

From a practical perspective, row 13 would seem to offer a formula that could be copied by job seekers starting with fewer resources. However, the alternative approach would be to look at the range of successful configurations in juxtaposition with the unsuccessful and discover if it would be possible to respond with a wide range of interventions designed to address multiple 'absences' of resources. The patterns presented here represent different configurations of attributes that give rise to a variety of interlinking processes. In the case of patterns with a more generous range of resources, the interrelationships and interaction processes are likely to be mutually reinforcing and empowering. In more weakly resourced patterns, the multiple absence of resources and assets may jeopardize the effectiveness of singly occurring resources.

Scrutinizing the patterns of those who are chronically unemployed, we see that row 14 resembles row 11, except that, in contrast with that row, there is an absence of 'weak ties'. This suggests that without weak ties, the individual's planning and job search diligence could be unfocused and ultimately unproductive. This finding is significant in that it illustrates how the absence of one attribute ('weak ties') can cancel out, as it were, the effectiveness of a resource which is actually present (ACTIVE). In groups where social and personal resources are lower in an absolute sense, the particular configuration patterns, as well as the relationships between components, may have a decisive influence on the eventual outcome of the job search.

The presence of the urban-based factor seems to be consistently associated with the presence of high job search activity. The individuals in row 14 and row 15 are urban based and, as in the case of successful urban-based individuals in rows 10, 11 and 12, this

attribute seems to facilitate very active job seeking. In urban locations where residential and workplace concentration is higher, transport and transport costs do not constitute an obstacle to job seeking, as they might in rural locations. It can likewise be assumed that information networks are also denser in urban concentrations, giving the urban based a possible advantage over the rural based. Nonetheless, this finding suggests that the information generated by density of contact in urban locations may not be of the same quality as that generated by 'weak ties'. The

configurations with unsuccessful outcomes on rows 14 and 15 show a presence of urban location and high level of job search activity, but combined with an absence of 'weak' information-generating ties. This points to the importance of accurate employment and labour market information over the whole range: such information was consistently absent among the chronically unemployed who lacked 'weak ties'. The role of officially sponsored, more comprehensive labour exchange facilities to fill at least part of this gap would be important for individuals who do not have such contacts.

VIII

Conclusion

The four effective and three ineffective configurations discussed here constitute an empirical typology of job seeking in two areas of the Trinidadian labour market. From a policy and planning perspective, research exercises such as this can indicate where the weaknesses lie in resource configurations. The resources or resource deficiencies of individuals should be considered not in isolation but in the context of other impacting attributes which together, in concert, shape the job search outcome. Study findings illuminate several important aspects of the job seeking process. Being urban based is associated with having plans for further education or training. Such individuals were generally disposed towards acquiring marketable skills, possibly because of the proximity of facilities and denser information circuits. Being urban based is also associated with a high level of job search activity. In this target group that is not strongly resourced, a high level of job search activity may yield many indirect benefits, such as increasing the individual's awareness of labour market dynamics, its structure, or its unwritten rules. However, this activity has proven to be largely unproductive among those job seekers who lacked a source of more accurate information on current and developing opportunity areas on which to focus their search. 'Weak' information-generating ties occupy a pivotal role in any configuration of attributes. Among job seekers who lack initial resources such as vocational education, basic educational qualifications and 'social capital', acquired 'ties of merit' built incrementally on employment performance in the formal economy can be a

compensating asset guaranteeing a degree of acquired competence or skill.

Those attribute configurations featuring multiple absence of resources and labour market marginalization point to a situation in which the individuals concerned are in a subsistence pattern, depending heavily on informal networks and irregular income from the informal economy. In this target group, the outcome difference is marked between those who managed to establish links with the formal labour market and those who sustain activities at subsistence level without gaining entry into the formal sectors. It is possible to extrapolate from the data that association with the formal employment sector is more productive of resources -and not only financial resources- that promote social and economic mobility. Association with and activity in the informal sector, on the other hand, produces economic benefits that hover around the subsistence or safety net level but do not lead either to upward or lateral socioeconomic mobility. Configurations with vocational education and skills were markedly absent from this target group (with one exception). Those possessing such configurations would probably not linger long on the threshold of the labour market. Some measures to address the conditions in peripheral groups are obvious. Innovative approaches call for the identification of key attributes and the interrelations between these, in order to maximize programme effectiveness.

(Original: English)

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