Workplace integration: the lived experiences of highly skilled migrants in Australia

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore how highly skilled migrants to Australia integrate into the workplace, focussing on the factors that foster or hinder that integration.

Design/methodology/approach – An inductive method using an interpretive methodological approach was employed. In-depth interview data were analysed thematically.

Findings – Informal workplace practices, such as informal peer mentoring and having an "empathetic" supervisor, also assisted with integration, as did migrant self-help strategies. Factors hindering integration included structural barriers outside the organisation and workplace factors such as racism, cultural barriers and individual factors that centred on the migrants themselves.

Research limitations/implications – While the exploratory qualitative enquiry sheds light on issues of concern regarding workplace integration of skilled migrants, further studies with diverse migrant groups would be required to understand if the findings could be replicated. An industry or sector-wise migrant study would shed more light on the issues.

Practical implications – Fostering and hindering factors identified through the lens of four workplace integration theories can inform workplace integration strategies and related policy formulation.

Originality/value – Informed by four theories of integration, the findings shed light on the everyday workplace experiences of linguistically competent, self-initiated, highly skilled migrants from diverse ethnic/cultural backgrounds in Australian workplaces in a range of industries. While previous research has identified problems experienced by migrants at work, this paper explores factors fostering and hindering workplace integration through the lens of the lived experiences of skilled migrant workers.

Keywords Diversity management, Multiculturalism, Cultural awareness, Highly skilled migrants, Interpretive approach, Workplace integration

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

A globally mobile workforce offers opportunities for countries to make use of skills that are not locally available by attracting talent to accommodate skill gaps (OECD, 2012). Highly educated, trained and knowledgeable migrants are, therefore, becoming noteworthy drivers of economic growth in host countries. In Western economies, skill shortages drive the need to attract skilled migrants (International Labour Organization, 2006, p. 12). In Australia, the Commonwealth Government has put in place extensive programmes to identify, report on and redress shortages, thus providing the data for migration policy. Consequently, organisations are recruiting foreign-born talent to meet skill shortages and to help achieve competitive advantage. However, the integration of such migrant workers is an important aspect of their fit and effectiveness in the workplace.

Workplace integration requires that skilled migrants not only secure employment but also have the same opportunities for advancement and workplace outcomes as other workers. Integration is increasingly considered a "two-way process" (Zapata-Barrero, 2012), where the host society defines the precepts and norms for interaction. This can either enable or hamper the integration process (Penninx and Garcés Mascareñas, 2014). A successful (work) life after migration is contingent on the extent to which migrants adapt to the host society (and organisation) (Vergunst, 2008). Variously labelled "acculturation" (Berry et al., 2006), "assimilation" (Nesdale and Mak, 2000; Safdar et al., 2003) and "social integration" (Dalgard and Thapa, 2007; Reitz et al., 2009), the process alters migrants' attitudes, values, behaviours or identities when they interact with the host society in order to become part of that society (Garrido et al., 2012). "Integration", although a contentious term, may occupy the middle ground between multiculturalism and assimilation (Erdal and Oeppen, 2013). However, successful workplace integration cannot exist unless skilled migrants utilise their human capital, access suitable employment and advance at the same rate as non-migrant workers.

The OECD (2012) has stated that "the skills of migrants are not being tapped to their full potential, even though competition between destination countries to attract and retain talent is gathering pace" (p. 22). Such perceptions are driving the research agenda in this migration domain. Workplace achievements of migrants in the host country are often attributed to the initiatives taken by migrants themselves: for example, prudent career planning, optimising networking opportunities, seeking mentoring support and up-skilling through a host country qualification (Tharmaseelan et al., 2010). Since job availability influences the decision to migrate as a skilled person (Kaestner and Kausahl, 2005), the workplace is pivotal in skilled migrants' integration. Their distinctive profession is the "main anchor" (Colic-Peisker, 2010) that gives migrants an identity, a sense of belonging, status and self-worth.

Although studies that focus on skilled migrants are on the increase (Batalova et al., 2008; Gunasekara et al., 2014; Halvorsen et al., 2015; Magnusson, 2014; Massey and Parr, 2012; Wulff and Dharmalingam, 2008), and their contribution to productivity and development is recognised (e.g. Kaushal and Fix, 2006), the literature lacks a clear focus regarding migrants' personal or "lived" experiences of socio-cultural encounters in workplace integration and how these affect that integration.

Australia, like many other migrant receiving societies, such as Canada, the USA, the UK, Sweden and Germany, has a long history of migration, ranging from humanitarian migration to skilled, family re-union and business migration (Collins, 2013). However, limited research has examined how skilled migrants integrate into Australian workplaces (Gunasekara et al., 2014; Halvorsen et al., 2015; Mahmud et al., 2014), leaving under-explored the career experiences of skilled migrants at the micro-level (Al Ariss and Syed, 2011; Syed and Pio, 2010). That is, macro-level factors replace micro-level information that would answer complementary, useful questions about workplace integration after employment has been achieved. Given a lack of empirical investigation, this research seeks to identify how workplace integration is made sense of, and experienced by, a skilled migrant workforce.

Informed by four theories of integration, we explore how skilled migrants to Australia integrate into their workplaces in light of factors that both foster and inhibit integration. We emphasise the need for a fit between the creation and implementation of specific organisational inclusive workplace practices and the expectations of skilled migrants in achieving successful workplace integration. The next section provides an overview of integration theories and the theoretical background for our study, examining the migrant workplace integration literature. We then describe our research methods and present our findings, analyses and conclusions.

Literature review and conceptual framework
Diversity management and workplace integration of skilled migrants
The diversity management literature argues that a key role of top management in organisations is to commit to, support and promote diversity (Cox, 1991) by taking active steps to improve interactions between people of different backgrounds (Kirton and Greene, 2010). Facilitating information processing and learning between workers, which arises from harnessing that diversity, enhances the problem-solving capacity in organisations (Cox *et al.*, 1991; Gelfand *et al.*, 2007), and this is why better interaction between colleagues is important. Managers are expected to be culturally aware, sensitive, competent in and tolerant of unique cultural differences, and to promote cultural synergy in the workplace, because drawing on diversity this way benefits their organisation. Moreover, diversity pursuit is more visible if organisational leadership is also diverse (Day and Greene, 2008) and committed to diversity.

Chiswick (1977, p. 49) postulated that global migration often requires an occupational change and initial downward occupational mobility due to the lack of absolute transferability of language, job-related skills, labour market information and credentials, particularly in the short run. Chiswick argued that migrants would subsequently experience upward occupational mobility. This predisposition toward a U-shaped pattern of occupational change is likely to vary according to the skill levels the migrants bring to the host country. However, "such a U-shaped pattern of occupational mobility is more shallow for migrants from the English speaking developed countries that have labour market structures similar to those in Australia than it is for other migrants" (Chiswick, 1977, p. 63). That is, migrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB), or from countries with lower development levels and differing labour market institutions, will likely to experience greater difficulty in achieving that upward occupational mobility over the same period of time in Australia, too.

Skilled migrants are expected to possess English language skills, professional educational qualifications, job-related skills and prior work experience. Obstacles to workplace integration include limited local experience and lack of hands-on exposure to Australian workplaces (Colic-Peisker, 2011). Colic-Peisker (2011) contends that "the ethno-cultural minorities and especially those whose native language is not English have poorer employment outcomes" (p. 638). Although migrants may have been educated in English in their home countries, research strongly indicates that applicants for employment are often rejected based on their ethnicity (Booth *et al.*, 2009), despite their language competence, prior professional experience and qualifications (Tilbury and Colic-Peisker, 2006). Qualifications obtained overseas (Colic-Peisker, 2011), a lack of recognition of pre-migration job experience (Syed, 2008), a lack of Australian work experience and of local referees are additional factors hindering employment outcomes for NESB migrants (Esses *et al.*, 2006; Syed and Murray, 2009). The skill base on which selection as migrants substantially depends, however, does have a considerable impact on employment in the host country.

The 2010 Department of Immigration and Citizenship data on skilled migrant employment established that "skilled migrants have higher labour market participation than the overall population. Their unemployment rate is lower and their median full-time earnings are higher" (Hartwich, 2011, p. 3). However, disaggregating these 2010 statistics for other factors, such as citizenship attainment, gender and residency status, indicates that the picture is more complex. We also need to distinguish a macro factor like labour market participation from more individual and sectoral factors and outcomes, such as career advancement, human capital use and job satisfaction. A number of factors come into play here. Howe-Walsh and Schyns (2010) consider that skilled migrants expect to have successful career outcomes, yet their skills may not be perfectly transferable between

nations (Chiswick *et al.*, 2005, p. 335), while the migrants themselves expect – or hope – that over time their underlying skills will be recognised and upward occupational mobility will occur. Skilled migrants may also find themselves constrained by structural forces and they must often accept initial jobs below their qualifications (Ho and Alcorso, 2004; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007), even when those qualifications have been recognised by the Australian Qualification Recognition Board prior to migration. Researchers also continue to argue that a critical element of workplace success amongst skilled migrants is the ability to speak the dominant language of the host country (Akaresh, 2000; Dustmann and van Soest, 2002): Green *et al.* (2007, p. 430), for example, found that NESB migrants to Australia but with higher educational qualifications than the native-born population were, notwithstanding, less likely to be found in managerial and professional occupations. Given the general requirement for English language proficiency in migration policy (Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP), 2014-2017), there may be other effects at work that cannot be isolated in a simple manner, but rather operate interactively.

Other significant factors may limit the success of migrants in the workplace. One is varieties of bias. Many migrants have sought opportunities inside the workplace in order to better integrate into the broader work culture (Halvorsen *et al.*, 2015, p. 1309). Where this has not been successful, workplace racism has been associated with a variety of such adverse outcomes (Trenerry and Paradies, 2012, p. 12). Binggeli *et al.* (2013) argue that qualified migrants are likely targets of subtle forms of racial prejudice and discriminatory behaviours, including skill-related discrimination (see Turchick Hakak and Al Ariss, 2013), which lead to "ambiguous and nebulous racism" (Sue *et al.*, 2007, p. 272). Discrimination is often prevalent in multicultural workplaces and is also "often difficult to pinpoint" (Essed, 2002, p. 204), because discriminatory behaviour of personnel decision makers shows patterns of subtle discriminatory behaviour that devalue skills of the non-Western migrant but not those of a Western migrant (Esses *et al.*, 2006). While deliberate, interpersonal, discriminatory conduct often targets members of minority groups (Cortina, 2008; Krings *et al.*, 2014) and fosters workplace incivility (Cortina, 2008), such "blatant" prejudice and discrimination can move towards "subtle" or "covert" prejudice and discrimination that often "[slip] under the norm, unrecognised as prejudice" (Tilbury and Colic-Peisker, 2007, p. 114). A study of Chinese migrants in Canada (Sakamoto, 2007), for example, indicated that the complete assimilation of migrants is no longer applicable because, inter alia, there may be an unbridgeable socio-cultural gap between migrants.

The Australian Context

Australia has a long history of labour migration. Its migration policy has been demand-driven since the mid-1990s (Cameron *et al.*, 2011). Individuals can migrate if they accumulate sufficient "points", based on academic qualifications, age, occupational skills, outstanding talents or business skills, English language ability and family relationships (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). The Department of Immigration and Border Protection states that, from 2014-2015, there were 128,550 places for skilled migrants, including employer-sponsored, general-skilled and business migrants; of these, 34 per cent were allocated to self-initiated skilled migrants (DIBP, 2014-2017) based on the predicted skill shortage (to 2025) of at least 250,000 workers with higher-level qualifications (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 5).

Australian employers have, over time, generally preferred to recruit culturally-close, English speaking migrants or Australian-born workers (Birrell and Hawthorne, 1996; Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, 2008, p. 6; Parliament of Australia, 2013), at least for more senior positions (see AMES, 2014), a recruitment process that has been criticised as having a white European/Western focus (Al Ariss *et al.*, 2012). Linguistically competent, highly skilled migrants (Townsend *et al.*, 2012) comprise the largest group currently

migrating to Australia (Rynderman and Flynn, 2014) and, according to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's Migration Program Report (2012, 2013), the skilled stream of migrants represented 67.9 per cent (128, 973) of the total migration programme. Yet, recently, Maher (2014), reviewing the Australian rail sector, critiqued the workplace standards and practices that privilege "white" norms, revealing some approaches in which skills, knowledge and experiences of "non-white others" are undervalued (p. 91). Implicit in this critique is the importance accorded to language competence.

Skilled migrants bring required social and human capital (Ellis, 2012) and, thus equipped, are therefore expected to have a successful career outcome (Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010). However, workplace integration and accomplishments vary among skilled migrants, given the factors associated with migration. These appear as a range of effects in numerous studies. Parasnis *et al.* (2008) argued that possession of Australian qualifications was a poorer facilitator of labour market integration than were education level, labour market experience, marital status, country of birth and years since arrival. Mahmud *et al.* (2014) found that English language proficiency, technical proficiency and disparities in cultural practices contributed to mismatches in skills and attributes of migrants in Australian workplaces. While investigating how migrants are embedding in their jobs, Halvorsen *et al.* (2015) reported that there were migrants who embraced local culture, connected themselves to common values and cultivated direct relationships with Australians. Gunasekara *et al.* (2014) identified that language skills and years since migration contributed to overall life satisfaction in Australia. The adverse effects on migrants are thus attributed to numerous, interacting causes. In structural and institutional terms, however, Australian legislation places only limited obligations on organisations to manage cultural diversity (Syed and Kramar, 2010), which is implied in the migration programme, and there is little research emphasis on workplace and individual-level factors that help or hinder migrant workplace integration and how to measure these.

Theoretical perspectives
Bochner's (1982, p. 17) study on the identity transformation of migrants identifies "integration" as a strategy of migrants to preserve their cultural identity, whilst at the same time adapting some facets of cultural identity of the dominant group. Snel *et al.* (2006) suggested that the concept of integration can be used to explore structural and socio-cultural integration. The structural dimension of workplace integration comprises the more functional or easily measurable attributes of integration, such as how migrants are incorporated into the labour market. The socio-cultural aspect of integration is more complex and difficult to measure due to the inclusion of emotional feelings, such as sense of belonging and "being at home" (Snel *et al.* 2006). In light of such considerations, Portes (1997) considered that it is impossible to design one "Grand" theory of migration. Concurring, Van Tubergen (2006) thus proposed four theories that help to explain migrant integration into society: human capital theory; social capital theory; structural opportunity theory; and prejudice theory (p. 15). A brief overview of each follows.

Human capital theory
Human capital refers to the education, skills and knowledge that individuals bring to the workplace. Central to human capital theory is the understanding that "(1) people's life-chances depend on their human-capital; and (2) people are aware of this relationship between individual skills and their life-chances and therefore rationally invest in their own human capital" (Van Tubergen, 2006, p. 15). The theory proposes that individuals invest in education and training in the hope of getting a future higher income. These investments are not only "for the sake of present enjoyments but for the sake of pecuniary and non-pecuniary returns in the future" (Blaug, 1992, p. 207). Chiswick (1977) had used human

capital theory to explain migrant economic outcomes, arguing that migrants' human capital was not, upon arrival, equivalent to locals', but that over time migrants would outperform locals because, on average, they were more talented (Chiswick, 1977; see Magnusson, 2014; Van Tubergen, 2015). In the context of migrants' workplace integration, we propose that Australian migrants will show high levels of human capital, because the Australian immigration system attracts highly skilled people. However, noting Chiswick (1977), we would also expect that migrants may initially experience lower career success, followed by higher levels of achievement, if they have succeeded in crucial aspects of integration.

Structural opportunity theory

Structural opportunity theory assumes that "(1) people have a preference to interact with other people of the same social standing; and (2) structural characteristics of people's environment restrict their contact opportunities" (Van Tubergen, 2006, p. 22). In the context of migration and the social integration of migrants, social opportunity theory suggests that migrant integration relies on structured opportunities to mix with locals, which may then help them to integrate (Van Tubergen, 2006). We propose that the workplace offers such a structured opportunity for migrants to mix with locals (albeit with caveats associated with other factors, such as culture), and this will foster migrant integration experiences both into the workplace and into society.

Prejudice theory

Prejudice is the "tendency of an individual to think about other groups in negative ways, to attach negative emotions to those groups, and to prejudge individuals on the basis of their group memberships" (Healey, 2006, p. 26). For Van Tubergen (2006), prejudice theory assumes that people will be more positively inclined towards members of their own group (the in-group) and more negatively inclined to members of other groups (out-groups). This is complicated by the fact that usually people are simultaneously members of multiple groups and, depending on context, may be more or less positively inclined at any given time. Van Tubergen (2006) theorises that anti-immigrant attitudes affect migrant social interactions with locals, in turn affecting their acculturation and social integration. We propose that anti-immigrant attitudes do affect migrants' abilities to gain employment that is aligned with their human capital and that, once in the workplace, this may influence their experiences and any likelihood of career growth.

Social capital theory

Social capital is conceptualised in terms of network structure and social resources. The concept was introduced into social science by Loury (1977), and later elaborated theoretically by Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988). According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 119), "social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition". One's social capital consists of the resources that an individual can draw on from their social relationships. Coleman (1990, p. 304) states that "social capital is created when the relations among persons change in ways that facilitate action". Putnam (2002) highlights two exclusive dimensions: "bonding" (between family members and friends) and "bridging" (embracing people from diverse backgrounds and being inclusive). This bonding and bridging can either lead to more positive effects on cooperation, trust and mutual support, or to the display of less positive acts of ethnocentrism (2002, p. 22). Migrants depend on social capital to reduce the costs involved in their attempts to make their home in a new country. Social capital's role in social integration emphasises the formation of networks both within and

outside one's own ethnic population (Van Tubergen, 2006). For our purposes, social capital shared amongst colleagues in the workplace is a resource that migrants can use to enhance their integration.

This study considers the factors fostering and hindering migrant integration into the workplace. Together the four theories outlined enable the identification of workplace-and individual-level factors supporting integration (summarised in Figure 1).

The literature is relatively silent on the strategies that migrants employ to soften barriers and achieve workplace success. Furthermore, there is little theorisation on how migrants integrate into work. Consequently, we ask:

- What factors foster migrants' workplace integration?

- What factors inhibit migrants' workplace integration?

Method

The limited research on the migrant experience in Australia necessitated a qualitative approach to our study. We employed an interpretive methodology (Waller *et al.*, 2016) to provide a deep understanding of the phenomena studied, enabling insight into what people do and why they do it. In all, 12 semi-structured, in-depth interviews of 40-90 minutes were conducted with highly skilled migrants from seven countries. Recruitment, by purposive and snowball sampling techniques, ensured informant diversity and access to "information rich" cases of skilled migrants (Waller *et al.*, 2016). In-depth interviews are a well-established method to learn about migrants' experiences (Kennedy, 2007). Participants were recruited using social media, combining both the convenience and snowball methods, as argued by Waller *et al.* (2016), and were purposively selected to include representation from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds from a variety of professional backgrounds, which enabled enough variation to obtain a broad range of responses to the questions (see Waller *et al.*, 2016). Table I outlines participant profiles. Interviews were conducted from January-March 2014 in Victoria, Australia. Interviews were transcribed verbatim.

The data were analysed thematically to answer the research questions. Interview transcripts were examined and analysed by question and case. Themes were identified by comparing individual responses through open coding, where qualitative data are
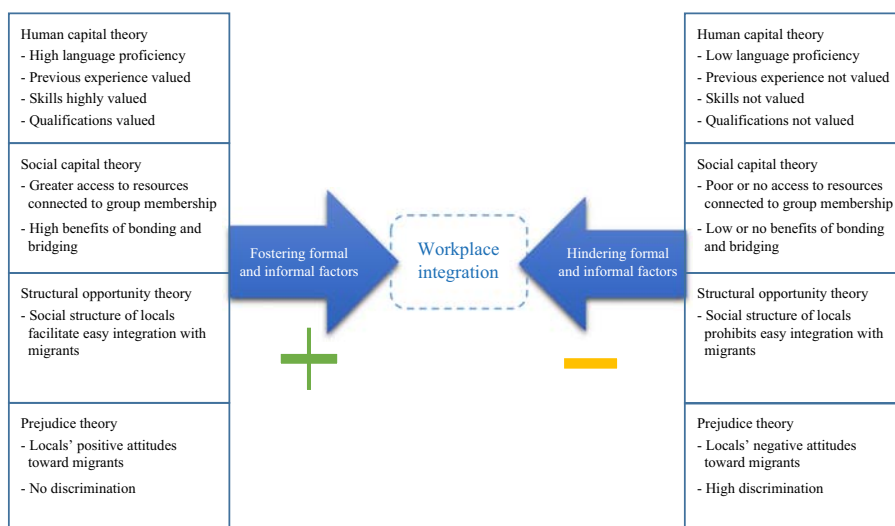

Figure 1.
Theoretical framework: making sense of fostering and hindering factors of workplace integration

Pseudonym	Country of origin	Profession	Industry	Years in Australia
R1-Ch1	China	Mechanical engineer	Oil and gas	12
R2-Ch2	China	Financial analyst	Manufacturing	13
R3-HK1	Hong Kong	Research scientist	Scientific research – public sector	22
R4-Ch3	China	Principal research scientist	Scientific research – public sector	18
R5-Br1	Brazil	Mechanical engineer	Public sector	20
R6-In1	India	Production supervisor	Manufacturing	15
R7-SA1	South Africa	Organisation development manager	Community services	14
R8-Be1	Belgium	CEO	Wholesale	10
R9-SA2	South Africa	Project Co-ordinator	Health services	7
R10-Ir1	Ireland	Maternal and child health nurse	Health services	5
R11-In2	India	Financial analyst	Financial services	8
R12-In3	India	Programme leader	Local government	11

analytically broken down while comparing events/actions/interactions of the informants. In answering the research questions, the authors made "intuitive decisions" to choose and incorporate some excerpts over others (see Gromm, 2004, p. 185), whilst seeking themes regarding workplace integration strategies and factors assisting or hindering integration of skilled migrants. Ritchie and Spencer's (1994) five-stage framework was adopted during the detailed thematic analysis of transcribed interview data by: first, reading through all the data to become familiar with them, and noting possible themes; second, re-reading the data to identify themes and create a thematic framework; third, systematically applying the thematic framework to the data; fourth, rearranging the data according to themes; and, finally, reviewing the thematically organised data by comparing and contrasting cases within themes, searching for patterns between themes, and then interpreting the data as a whole.

Findings
Our analysis identified factors supporting and hindering workplace integration in light of the four theories of integration. The analysis supported the proposition that there are simple strategies that assist new migrants to better integrate into the workplace and, by extension, into Australian society (as respondents themselves commented, particularly in regard to non-work life).

Factors that foster workplace integration
Participants identified formal and informal factors fostering integration. Informal factors included strategies implemented by managers, co-workers and, of particular importance, strategies implemented by participants. Broadly speaking, formal factors supported everyone but informal factors did not. This emerges from the comments that respondents provided.

Formal workplace factors
Formal integration strategies to integrate new workers, included: establishing a formal induction programme introducing organisational norms regarding workplace interaction to all new employees; establishing a diversity committee; and key skills development. One participant described the induction as a "[…] kind of comprehensive program talking about OH&S, diversity and equality, bullying and everything else" (R3-HK1). While not specifically aimed at migrants, this strategy appeared to be an effective tool for their integration.

Concerned with managing diversity, one organisation used a diversity committee to control bullying, signalling its support of its migrant workforce:

> We had a few sort of […] incidents about […] workplace bullying, so one of the reasons I think [is that] they try and use the diversity committee as a way just to report or to identify all of these issues, to resolve this issue of bullying (R4-Ch3).

On encouragement to upskill, one participant stated:

> We have […] lots of short programs to help us engage in […] programs for helping us, say, to learn language, you know, like English presentation, English writing and all that sort of things, yeah (R4-Ch3).

The respondents identified that most workplaces had few or no formal mechanisms to assist their integration. While all new employees have challenges when starting at a new job, newly arrived migrants may have extra challenges understanding the broader workplace norms and practices in a new context. The two participants quoted above suggested that formal strategies were beneficial in assisting integration.

Informal workplace factors
Informal workplace practices helping new migrants to fit in could be those initiated by a supervisor or co-worker or those initiated by the migrants themselves.

Workplace initiated. Key themes emerging from the data were: the concept of mutual help, a cohesive small group, mentoring each other, an empathetic supervisor, setting an example by the manager and mentoring through networking. Mentoring and informal support from supervisors and co-workers was part of the workplace culture in some organisations and this was identified by the respondents as helping new staff. An empathetic supervisor was critical in fostering this participant's workplace integration. The supervisor's key role was mentioned repeatedly. Informal information and support from supervisors and colleagues were both important and effective for participants' workplace integration. For example:

> The size of the company was so small; people know each other […] and look after each other as well… which made it much easier for me […]. [T]hey helped me a lot as I got a bit of mentoring from the other colleagues (R1-Ch1).

> Maybe I think I'm very lucky here. When I moved here my boss was pretty supportive. He is a very good gentleman. He was a chief scientist for our division, so yeah, it was good. He was very kind and sort of, you know, very knowledgeable and he was a very good mentor (R2-Ch 2).

Having a supervisor who was also a migrant was seen as particularly helpful:

> [M]y boss is not really a native Australian and he is an immigrant from [Europe], I think. But he came here about five or six years earlier than me […]. So, yeah, he told me how he adapted to here and he mainly tells me that academically mainly you start from the bottom and you go up, I think. […]. He explained mainly, you know, the sort of career path as a migrant mainly is you always need to start from the bottom (R4-Ch3).

Another participant related:

> My current boss, [Name], who is the CFO and he's from India […] has got lots of working experience from other countries as well. He's [a] really, really good supportive boss […]. He seems to me a migrant who's very motivated. I understand that his own experience is the reason that he [is] treating everyone well […] because he often says that he was treated like a mushroom in a farm or something by his other earlier bosses (R2-Ch 2).

In this case the supervisor had not been treated well in the past and had actively decided to support and develop their staff.

Migrant-initiated (self-help) factors. Migrants' self-help integration strategies included: deciding to make it work; actively seeking information and support; working hard to be valued as workers; and socialising with co-workers (and learning to do so appropriately) in formal and informal ways. Many respondents agreed it had been their choice to migrate, so they had to do all they could to succeed. Casual conversations in the workplace often centred on sport, politics and celebrity, and participants suggested that learning about some local cultural topics would be helpful in workplace integration. This strategy was not about the particular workplace, but rather about integrating into an Australian workplace more generally. Seeking information about local culture was part of learning how to socialise appropriately in the workplace. Socialising was both a source of stress and an opportunity for self-help. Participants identified formal and informal types of socialising. Formal socialising occurred at company-sponsored events, which some reported finding difficult. However, most socialising was more informal and involved things like going out to lunch or trying to engage in discussions about sport or politics. Many found this difficult. Thus:

> So it was difficult getting in, but obviously the way I treated it was always, "Yes! This is challenging for me". But I chose to come here, so I'm the one who has to adapt to the Australian way (R9-SA2).

> [A]t the end of the day it really comes down to, you know, it was my choice to come here, stay here, and to adapt to it. And you know, I've been fortunate that I have found the resources, you know. I've gone to see the psychologist and probably also I've [grown] a bit more, on the one hand, sensitive to these issues, but also more equipped to deal with them […] (R5-Br1).

A more concrete strategy was to identify an aspect of Australian culture that they could learn about and discuss with their colleagues:

> I would say, you know, just try to be as much adaptable as one can to others […] even the local society like the sports, like footy, although I didn't really do very well on that stuff. I'm okay with politics, then some sports like soccer and tennis. But some of the topics I'm not familiar with. I was a bit struggling. Like, you know, celebrities and footy and cricket (R7-SA1).

> I learned to watch a bit more TV, like, you know, the news, what's going on, the sports […] even a bit of politics, like, you need to know who's doing what […]. So know the topics therefore during the time, you know, we are having some social networking, at least you know some part of it. Not saying 100%, but if I know 50%, you know, at least I'm feeling a bit more involved. That's one of the most important things (R1-Ch1).

> Personally I wasn't very good at those formal events. Sometimes we have balls, yearly balls, or Christmas parties and we have a big group […] with different people that you may not be very familiar with and that's a part I found sometimes difficult (R1-Ch1).

Working hard and becoming valued was an important self-help strategy. Several participants stated that, once they got their foot in the door, their capabilities were recognised and they could move up the ladder:

> […] they have recognised my abilities and given me a supervisory role […]. We have been downsizing for a number of years and I'm still surviving. That's mainly because of what I contribute, nothing else (R6-In1).

In summary, while formal factors supported everyone, informal factors did not. Formal factors, while few, were experienced as effective in workplace integration. Formalising informal organisational factors would also be likely assist: assigning a peer mentor to new staff or incorporating staff integration into performance management strategies are easy steps to implement and complement participants' self-help strategies.

Practices hindering workplace integration
Respondents had clearly reflected on the range of obstacles they faced and they distinguished between those that were structural or systemic and those that reflected more subtle, difficult issues of cultural integration.

Government policy and general organisational factors hindering workplace integration
The main issues raised by participants were a lack of support for securing their first job and difficulties in getting previous experience recognised. The latter was particularly important at the organisational level, where a person might not be hired because their qualification was not officially recognised. Skilled migrants in Australia must already be highly educated and/or skilled in their profession and have a good command of English. However, they are not necessarily skilled in finding work in Australia, often took work well below what they expected their qualifications and experiences would command and many experienced difficulties in this regard:

> Probably the hardest thing for people who come to Australia as skilled migrants is the breaking into the market […]. I think sometimes, let's say it's probably harder for migrants, because they need to have the first step, getting the first job. Once you get the first job, there is somebody who can vouch for you and stuff like that, because, like, you know, on your CV of what you've done overseas, it never counts and no-one cares! (R10-Ir1).

> [Even] though I had a very strong CV, I was told constantly, 'You're overqualified and under-Australian experienced'. The fact that I didn't have experience working in Australia really counted against me (R7-SA1).

Lack of local links made it difficult to find employment. Some chose volunteer work to gain local experience and get a foot in the door:

> I know what skills I need and what challenge or experience I should have before I achieve some management role […]. So from a volunteer job, I know it [has] to be accounting-related, and when you have this experience that can be something first in your resume […]. That helped me secure my first job, which was temporary, but it was a five-day-a-week job (R2-Ch2).

The lack of local networks led some participants to study for an Australian qualification. Those who did found it helpful in securing employment, but some resented the need for local references when they sometimes had years of relevant experience overseas. They also noted the lack of government support for skilled migrants once they moved to Australia as an independent self-initiated skilled migrant.

Specific organisational practices hindering integration
Participants also recounted a number of organisational challenges on the job that hindered their workplace integration. Some were cultural differences; others were inequitable practices and experiences of racism in the workplace.
  Cultural differences. Cultural differences included different attitudes towards work in Australia and in the home country, different norms around socialising with co-workers in the workplace, and difficulties in communicating due to different communication styles and sense of humour. These cultural challenges were remarkably similar, regardless of migrants' origins. Even those from Western backgrounds found norms around communication and socialising to be very different from what they were used to.
  In the case of the work ethic:

> It's much more relaxed here? Very much. Very, very much (R9-SA2).

> I had to embrace the culture of work and the way they work here and the way it's sort of a laid, like, laidback, you know, or probably more office-focussed than we were (R10-Ir1).

These participants observed that the workplace culture was less formal than in their previous countries. Some noted that their managers were less direct and they tempered their own communication lest they appeared rude (cf. Colic-Peisker and Tilburym, 2007). Communication difficulties were a cultural theme, particularly learning to understand the Australian accent and to use "local" English. Several participants reported having to get used to asking people to speak more slowly and to explain the terminology:

> [The Australian accent is] really, really heavy and thick. I was used to the British accent and the American one and then, so, until you get your ears to the way pronunciation happens, it takes a little while (R5-Br1).

Others mentioned the local sense of humour as being very different: a South African participant had expected it to be "very similar" but found "that's not really [so] here" (R7-SA1).

Some found the Australian workplace to be stressful because of a norm that everyone had to be "nice" and get along. This participant found such a norm put them constantly on edge at work:

> [...] it's almost like walking on eggs all the time. You have to be so careful. Yeah, it's, I can't put it down to any specific event [...] it's just more about being nice. We've always got to be really nice with each other and never fight or disagree about anything (R7-SA1).

Several participants migrated from places where socialising outside work with colleagues was normal and expected. They were surprised this was not the case in their Australian workplaces:

> I think Australians, like, your work life is work life and normal life is different, so they are less likely to involve with their colleagues and consider them as friends (R2-Ch2).

> One thing I learned is that in Europe your colleagues become your friends. You socialise with them, you play tennis, you really become a group together. In Australia I've never experienced that, and I've been trying to ask this to everyone [...] and I believe now that it's apparently people are much less loyal here (R8-Be1).

They felt this made their transition to Australia difficult, as they were expected to find friends outside work. Many found Australians to be somewhat closed and standoffish in their relations, helpful at work, but not interested in pursuing anything beyond the workplace. Hence, while learning to socialise appropriately at work was a factor that fostered integration, different cultural expectations about socialising with colleagues outside the workplace also hindered integration into a new workplace and a new life.

Inequitable practices and racism. Participants recounted experiencing discrimination or racism at work. Racism took the form of overt racist comments, but also involved subtler undermining of their position and their work (cf. Essed, 2002). One person commented that, when she did the same thing as a male non-migrant colleague, she did not get the same positive reaction. For some, the racism was so pervasive that they could not complain about it. Thus:

> Racism? It is an everyday issue. And even as a supervisor it is an everyday issue. Every day I have to deal with certain people who simply don't like me taking the leadership role. So there are individuals who hate you for no reason [...]. [Racism] manifests in terms of resisting you in every way they can. They will cause you problems. There will be racial slurs. When it goes beyond a certain point of course you can take it to HR, but for petty things it's better to ignore such people. If you get insulted by every comment that's being made, that itself would trigger more from them (R6-In1).

> You can't expect a foreign country to actually embrace you and consider you as one of them (R12-In3).

They considered this issue to be intractable. Constant negative experiences of racism took their toll on some, affecting their mental health and their perceived workplace prospects.

Individual factors hindering integration
Participants identified individual factors hindering workplace integration regarding other migrants they knew: being unable to adapt to the Australian communication style at work; remaining within their own ethnic community and not putting themselves forward to network outside their own group; not taking the opportunity to learn about the organisation and workplace culture; having a poor attitude; and lacking knowledge of how to live in Australia, particularly regarding basic life skills, such as securing housing and transportation.

Factors hindering workplace integration included structural barriers at societal and organisational levels: difficulties in securing their first job and a lack of support structures within the workplace. Workplace factors included: experiencing racism; cultural barriers, for example, not understanding communication styles and practices regarding socialising; and individual factors regarding migrants' readiness to put themselves "out there", to consider obstacles as challenges and to seek support by asking questions.

Discussion
The four theories suggest that migrant workplace integration may be shaped by migrants' human capital, social capital, structural opportunities, and experiences of anti-migrant attitudes. Our findings support the application of this combination of theories to explain migrant workplace integration. Despite high levels of human capital, respondent migrants identified that they found it difficult to secure their first job in Australia, attributing this to their lack of local referees and local work experience. This confirms the work of Syed (2008), Syed and Murray (2009), and Tilbery and Colic-Peisker (2006). The respondents also initially accepted jobs not fully utilising their human capital. These findings, then, adduce current evidence from Australian workplaces to match findings by Ho and Alcorso (2004). Similarly, the "U-shape" that their careers demonstrated in Australia continue to support the observations of Chiswick (1977).

Although cultural diversity in the workplace makes it necessary for organisations to manage "the differences and similarities of employees" or the degree of "otherness" felt by individuals' (Fenwick *et al.*, 2011, p. 495), once in the workplace the respondents reported cultural hindrances to workplace integration and both subtle and less-than-subtle racism at work. This supports the observations of Binggeli *et al.* (2013) and Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007; but cf. Van Tubergen, 2006). Interestingly, the respondents experienced these hindrances regardless of their national origin or English proficiency. Indeed, an Irish participant (i.e. Western, European, English speaking – but differently accented) discussed experiencing racism, which suggests that these experiences can occur regardless of ethnic origin *per se*, in an obvious sense of difference, and can be initiated by more unexpected but sometimes deeply embedded prejudices against "out groups". As prejudice theory suggests, anti-migrant attitudes may hinder workplace integration (Healey, 2006; Van Tubergen, 2006).

While factors hindering integration are well-established, we found less information on the factors that foster integration. Diversity management research advocates implementing formal diversity management strategies, arguing that the organisation benefits, improving the bottom line, by introducing new problem-solving approaches and creating opportunities for new markets (Kaler, 2001). Our study identified a number of formal workplace factors fostering workplace integration, including an employee induction programme, a diversity committee with policies regarding bullying, and specific training for non-native English speakers. Only two were aimed specifically at migrants and could be considered as diversity management programs. Their perceived benefits support the argument made by the pro-diversity management literature that actively managing diversity leads to positive outcomes for the integration of migrants. These types of programmes can help to ameliorate

prejudice against migrants and may be considered as social structures that can facilitate integration through interaction with fellow workers from the host country (see Van Tubergen, 2006, p. 22). Some evidence in our study supported the positive aspect of Van Tubergen's account of structural opportunity theory. Other factors identified by the respondents as fostering integration were informal strategies, such as having a good manager and supportive colleagues, being "lucky enough" to have an empathetic supervisor and helpful co-workers, and, in particular, having a supervisor who was also a migrant and altruistic in motivation and behaviour. This aligns with Day and Greene's (2008) findings on support for similar structures.

Our findings regarding migrant-initiated factors included having a positive attitude, working hard, and trying to learn about Australian culture. These factors were identified by respondents as enabling smoother social integration at the workplace, providing skilled migrant with common topics of conversation with their colleagues. However, socialising at work offered both positive and negative experiences. Positive experiences were identified as helping participants to fit better into the workplace culture. There was a negative side, however, because respondents had found that societal norms around making friends at work were different in Australia, and contact did not continue in a social milieu outside of work, with the result that participants often struggled to bond with and develop new friendship groups.

In Figure 1 we proposed that the combination of the four theories (human capital, social capital, structural opportunity and prejudice) can help to explain the experiences of skilled migrants in the Australian workplace. We found that human capital, social capital, structural opportunities and anti-migrant attitudes can all explain a skilled migrant's experiences in workplace integration – good and bad. Positive structural opportunities, fewer anti-migrant attitudes, and the opportunity and ability to build social capital with acquaintances and co-workers all combined with a skilled migrant's human capital to foster workplace integration. A lack of structural opportunities, racism (overt or "submerged" or subtle) and generally anti-migrant attitudes, and the inability to build social capital with co-workers do hinder migrant workplace integration, despite the migrants' having high levels of human capital. Importantly, the theories appear work in concert; none can fully explain workplace integration on its own. If a migrant is afforded structural opportunities, for example, but encounters prejudice, their integration may be hindered. Likewise, structural opportunities may enhance the development of social capital, but if a migrant has low language proficiency they may not be able to benefit. This suggests that the integrated view of the four theories that we proposed for this study can offer a new understanding of the workplace integration process of skilled migrants.

Implications and concluding comments

Australia attracts numerous highly skilled migrants from around the globe. Their talents are assessed based on their human capital. This is the selection stage. At the integration stage, our findings suggest that few workplaces in the study had formal diversity support programmes, but there was some identifiable informal support that skilled migrants were able to access, albeit randomly. Moreover, informal workplace practices, such as informal peer mentoring and an "empathetic" supervisor, also assisted with integration, as did migrant self-help strategies. Factors hindering integration included structural barriers outside the organisation and workplace factors within, such as racism, cultural barriers and individual factors that centred on the migrants themselves. If organisations wish to improve the workplace integration of newly arrived skilled migrants, there are various strategies they could implement.

At the individual level, policies should focus on providing assistance in understanding the local workplace culture by providing transparent, clear and concise information on

expectations through formal induction and training programmes, including a module on social interaction, intercultural awareness and sensitivity at work. This will provide the entire workforce at various levels with the tools to develop and sustain positive workplace relationships. The formation of a diversity management committee with an authentic, committed and sensitive approach from top management will positively influence an awareness of intercultural understanding and help to assuage factors hindering workplace integration, perceived racial discrimination and prejudice. It is important to formalise informal practices in order to provide mentoring support, even in the early stages of migrants' employment, to help the migrants enhance their morale, become more resilient and to persevere in their upwardly mobile careers.

Our findings indicate a significant lack of leadership initiatives formally supporting diversity and valuing and respecting individuals from different ethnicities in workplaces in Australia. This complements findings by Thomas and Ely (1996) and Mor Baraak (2014). If multiculturalism is to be the way of life in Australia, then it should also be an organisational reality at the workplace level through the creation of an awareness of "multicultural sensitivity", through well-documented organisational policies that display genuine attempts to respect individuals for their skills, knowledge and experience, regardless of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Others, such as Pio (2005, p. 58), have mounted a similar case. In our study, the respondents explicitly and implicitly called for such action.

By capturing the lived experiences of highly skilled migrants through their own interpretations, our study is a platform for understanding the selective migration policy in Australia, but it also serves as a pointer to the significance of workplace integration that is itself evidence of the successful implementation of that policy. Given the limited research on the existence of formal diversity management strategies in Australian organisations, further research is needed to analyse in what ways institutional attitudes are critical in skilled migrants' workplace integration. While our exploratory qualitative enquiry sheds light on issues of concern regarding workplace integration of highly skilled migrants in Australia, further studies with diverse migrant groups are required to ascertain if our findings can be replicated and broadened. If generalisation of these findings is desirable, a large-scale survey could be administered Australia-wide, and the findings used to inform government, employer and workplace policy.

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